The Use of the Bible in Jacques Dupuis’s Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism:  
An Examination according to Chapter III of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s  
“The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology of the University of Saint Michael’s College and the  
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Doctor of Philosophy in Theology (Interdisciplinary)

Matthew W. I. Dunn

The University of Saint Michael’s College

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how theologian Jacques Dupuis uses the sacred scriptures of the Catholic Church throughout his argumentation for a proposed “Christian theology of religious pluralism.” Its examination follows along the path of the four characteristics of Catholic biblical interpretation outlined in chap. III of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 1993 statement, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.” This fourfold schema covers the following: the Bible’s interaction with its own data; the Bible’s use and interpretation within the church’s sacred tradition; the Bible’s interpretation according to the methodological conventions of “historico-critical” exegesis; and the Bible’s interaction with theology in general. Using these criteria, the thesis looks at whatever presuppositions may be lying behind Dupuis’s methodology and theory, and how these “preunderstandings” may have influenced his creative deployment of the biblical text. Five scriptural texts are abstracted from Dupuis’s writings which seem to have had a theological significance for him. Dupuis’s own interpretation of these scriptural texts is then analyzed according to the schema proposed above by the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document.

The thesis demonstrates that, while in some cases Jacques Dupuis’s appropriation of the Bible in his “Christian theology of religious pluralism” coincides with aspects of the commission’s fourfold schema above, in other cases it does not. Overall, he seems to have been more concerned with highlighting what he sees as continuities with his own argument for a positive appraisal of “pagan” religiosity. This leads him either to diminish or ignore what the biblical texts themselves say or how they have been interpreted in the sources he uses to support his theories.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I offer praise, worship and thanksgiving to the glorious and all-holy Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for having given me the life, love and grace to write and complete this doctorate. Second, I offer thanks and praise to the all-immaculate and ever-virgin Mary who gave birth to God the Son according to the flesh for having aided me with her prayers and assistance. Third, I offer thanks to my namesakes: to St. Matthew the apostle and evangelist and to St. William the abbot in whose names I was baptized in the Lord; to St. Ignatius Loyola under whose patronage I received the sacrament of confirmation. I also offer thanks to the guardian angel given to me by God for its prayers and daily assistance.

I am extremely grateful to my thesis director Rev. Dr. Harold G. Wells for all of the guidance and encouragement that he has given me, especially the time he has spent waiting for and reading the many pages of this thesis. Also, I thank him for his prayers. May Christ our true God risen from the dead bless him and save his soul!

I am also indebted to my brothers Sean and Seth for their support. May Christ have mercy on them and save them! Furthermore, I thank my father John (whom I have not known) for having given me life. May God repay him with his loving grace! I am especially indebted to and thankful for my mother Cynthia who has suffered with me throughout these several years of research and writing. Scripture says: “[T]he Lord . . . confirms a mother’s authority over her sons . . . [and] they store up riches who respect their mother” (Sir 3:2b, 4). May Christ through the prayers of his own blessed mother Mary remember my mother in his kingdom!

I have prayed often for the repose of the soul of the subject of this study, Fr. Jacques Dupuis, that Christ may remember Dupuis’s priesthood in his kingdom. May the reverend priest Jacques Dupuis rest in God’s mercy and peace! I thank Fr. Jacques for whatever prayers he has offered for me.

It is truly an understatement to say that this doctoral thesis is not a work solely of my own personal endeavour, for it could not have been written without the useful counsel, patient guidance and active involvement of a number of other people. Each one of those persons deserves my lifelong gratitude. I hope that I have remembered everyone who deserves thanks and credit for having helped me to complete this thesis. If I have forgotten to thank anyone, then please overlook it as the unintentional fault of my creaturely frailty. God knows whoever has helped me and will repay those persons with gifts overflowing (cf. Luke 6:38). That having been said, to all who have helped: Thank you!
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<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>Vatican II, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (<em>Ad Gentes Divinitus</em>)</td>
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<td>Béchard</td>
<td>Dean Béchard, ed. and trans., <em>The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings</em></td>
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<td>CCC</td>
<td><em>Catechism of the Catholic Church</em>, 2nd ed.</td>
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<td>CDF</td>
<td>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith</td>
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<td>CEWRCS</td>
<td>Karl J. Becker and Ilaria Morali, eds., <em>Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study</em></td>
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<td>CR</td>
<td>Jacques Dupuis, <em>Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Encounter</em></td>
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<td>CR-It</td>
<td>Jacques Dupuis, <em>Il cristianesimo e le religioni: Dallo scontro all’incontro</em></td>
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<td>DECL</td>
<td>Siegmar Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings, eds., <em>Dictionary of Early Christian Literature</em></td>
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<td>DI</td>
<td>CDF, “<em>Dominus Iesus</em>: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church”</td>
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<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and PCID, “Dialogue and Proclamation”</td>
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<td>DV</td>
<td>Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (<em>Dei Verbum</em>)</td>
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<td>EN</td>
<td>Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation <em>Evangelii Nuntiandi</em></td>
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<td>ES</td>
<td>Paul VI, Encyclical <em>Ecclesiam Suam</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>FEF</td>
<td>William Jurgens, ed. and trans., <em>The Faith of the Early Fathers</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (<em>Gaudium et Spes</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IBC</td>
<td>PBC, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMDW</td>
<td>Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins, eds., <em>In Many and Diverse Ways: In</em></td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCEWR</td>
<td>Jacques Dupuis, <em>Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions</em></td>
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<td>JCHS</td>
<td>Jacques Dupuis, <em>Jesus Christ and His Spirit: Theological Approaches</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Vatican II, Dogmatics Constitution on the Church (<em>Lumen Gentium</em>)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Middle Liddell”, [H. G. Liddell], <em>An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon</em> (1900)</td>
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<td>NA</td>
<td>Vatican II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (<em>Nostra Aetate</em>)</td>
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<td>NABRE</td>
<td>New American Bible-Revised Edition</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCE²</td>
<td><em>New Catholic Encyclopedia</em>, 2nd ed.</td>
</tr>
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<td>NCR</td>
<td><em>National Catholic Reporter</em></td>
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<td>NPNF²</td>
<td><em>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</em>, 2nd series, 1890–1900</td>
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<td>NT</td>
<td>New Testament</td>
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<td>OCB</td>
<td><em>The Oxford Companion to the Bible</em>, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan</td>
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<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBC</td>
<td>Pontifical Biblical Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCID</td>
<td>Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>RH</td>
<td>John Paul II, Encyclical <em>Redemptor Hominis</em></td>
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<td>RM</td>
<td>John Paul II, Encyclical <em>Redemptoris Missio</em></td>
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<td>SOC?</td>
<td>Francis Sullivan, <em>Salvation Outside the Church?</em></td>
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<td>ST</td>
<td>Thomas Aquinas, <em>Summa Theologiae</em></td>
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<td>Tanner</td>
<td>Norman Tanner, ed., <em>Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils</em></td>
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<td>TCTRPR</td>
<td>Jacques Dupuis, <em>Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism</em></td>
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<td>WDYSIA?</td>
<td>Jacques Dupuis, <em>Who Do You Say I Am? Introduction to Christology</em></td>
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INTRODUCTION
NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

I. Introduction

This introductory section introduces and explains the nature and purpose of this doctoral thesis, that is, to examine the use of the Bible in the theory of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism” proposed by theologian Jacques Dupuis (1923–2004).\(^1\) This will be done according to chap. III (i.e. “Characteristics of Catholic Interpretation”) of the 1993 statement by the Holy See’s Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) entitled “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” (IBC). It undertakes an explanation of the relevance of this question for theology, while also describing the methodology used from which the thesis’ conclusions will be asserted. An outline of the thesis’ several chapters is presented. Finally, the introduction formally introduces the thesis statement that is to govern the dissertation and is to be demonstrated. This introduction also offers a brief biographical sketch of Dupuis as well as a general overview of some of his major scholarly writings.

Unless otherwise indicated, all the dates cited throughout this thesis refer to the chronological period Anno Domini (i.e. A.D. or “in the year of the Lord [Jesus]”). Also, unless otherwise indicated all of my own citations of the biblical texts come from the New American Bible-Revised Edition (NABRE).

II. Description of the Thesis’ Contents

Chapter One presents an overview of the current “state of the question,” or status quaestionis, regarding the Roman Catholic Church’s view of other religions. The chapter contains a sketch of Catholic theological and magisterial opinions, which I have divided according to certain historical periods. (It is not intended, therefore, to offer an exhaustive study of the question, but to offer a glimpse of Catholic attitudes toward the religious “other”.) The last section—and perhaps, the most important—surveys some of the most recent official statements on Christianity’s relationship to other religions offered by the Catholic Church, highlighting in particular the teachings of the Second Vatican Council

\(^1\) He is not, however, to be confused with the French anthropologist and Indologist Jacques Dupuis (1912–97).
(1962–65) as well as a selection of important statements from the three most recent popes, namely: Paul VI (1963–78); John Paul II (1978–2005); and Benedict XVI (2005–13). This section also includes some recent statements from the Vatican’s bureaucracy which have been issued officially with papal approval.

Chapter Two summarizes the theory of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism” proposed by the theologian Jacques Dupuis. It opens with a general discovery of the various presuppositions and “preunderstandings” which lie behind and govern Dupuis’s theological method, leading into a fuller description of his theory. The chapter covers not only Dupuis’s treatment of the various paradigms and models used by theologians when discussing Christianity and other religions, but also his argument for a model called “inclusive pluralism” based ultimately on a Trinitarian and “Pneumatic” (or Holy Spirit-based) Christology. Next, it follows the plan basically laid out in Dupuis’s magnum opus *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. First, it treats Dupuis’s view of “salvation history” through the prism of the biblically-theological idea of “covenant.” Second, it sketches out his thought on both the nature and role of Jesus Christ in relation to the world’s other religions and religious figures. It addresses, for example, the following issues: the “fullness” of God’s revelation in Christ; the latter’s unique and universal mediatorialship of God’s salvation; and the salvific activity of a “Word as such” reaching out to all humanity throughout history. Further, it looks at Dupuis’s discussion on the relationship among the kingdom (or reign) of God, the church and non-Christians. Finally, the chapter offers Dupuis’s conclusions based on his own theological investigation. It discusses the following: Dupuis’s affirmation of the *de jure* status of the world’s non-Christian religions; his description of Christianity’s relationship to other religions as “mutual asymmetrical complementarity;” and his call for a “qualitative leap” in the church’s theologizing about the religious “other.” The chapter itself concludes with a general overview of some of the most important assessments of Dupuis’s ideas offered by colleagues. It also includes his responses to those evaluations.

Chapter Three delves into how the Bible functions in Dupuis’s argument for a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.” It starts with a treatment of how he does in fact view the nature and purpose of sacred scripture as well as its relationship to the writings of other religions. The chapter then identifies some specific examples from the scriptures which seem to figure prominently as *loci theologici* for Dupuis’s theory, namely:

- Genesis 9:8–17;
- Gospel of John 1:1–18;
- Letter to the Romans 1:18–23;
- First Letter to Timothy 2:4.
The text of each is provided along with a detailed examination of how Dupuis himself treats and interprets it as well as how his interpretation coordinates with his idea of “inclusive pluralism.” The scholarly exegesis on the Bible that Dupuis uses is presented wherever relevant.

Chapter Four discusses in general the 1993 statement of the Holy See’s PBC entitled “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” especially its third chapter, “Characteristics of Catholic Interpretation.” The thesis begins by explaining the character and function of the commission within the structures of the Holy See as well as the authority of its statements relative to the practice of Catholic theology. Certain statements touching upon IBC and the rationale for its publication made by authoritative members of the Vatican’s bureaucracy are described (viz. by Pope John Paul II and the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Ratzinger). The chapter contains a general survey of the document’s overall contents. Since it will provide the basis for analyzing Dupuis’s use of sacred scripture in his proposal, the contents of IBC’s third section (i.e. chap. III) receives a detailed examination. The PBC identifies four characteristics of Catholic biblical interpretation:

1. Interpretation according to Biblical Tradition;
2. Interpretation according to Church Tradition;
3. Interpretation according to Modern Exegesis;
4. Interpretational Interaction between Theology and Exegesis.²

The chapter ends with a brief summation of scholarly reactions to the PBC’s statement.

Chapter Five is (in a manner of speaking) “where the rubber hits the road.” It examines how Dupuis uses the Bible in his theological method according to the four characteristics of Catholic biblical interpretation outlined in chap. III of IBC. The chapter brings Dupuis’s use of sacred scripture into dialogue and comparison with each of the four principles mentioned above. By using chap. III of IBC, the thesis hopes to develop a detailed critique of Dupuis’s use of the Bible in his “Christian theology of religious pluralism.” Secondary literature is used to support its arguments where applicable.

The concluding section brings to a close the study proposed in the Introduction. It reiterates the thesis statement, explaining how the goals of the thesis have been met. Some avenues for future research are also suggested.

A. Relevance of the Question

The basic setting of this research field is my own personal interest in Catholic attitudes toward the issues of religious pluralism as well as interreligious dialogue. I have always had a keen interest in the

² N.B. The titles which I give above vary a little from those given for the four subsections on Catholic biblical interpretation in IBC chap. III. Nevertheless, they retain the same meaning.
multireligious nature of the world, actively seeking out and talking to followers of other religions throughout my life in order that I might understand them better. Investigating the differences between their religious views and my own has provided a fertile context within which my own theological opinions have been challenged, influenced and enriched. This dialogical search has raised personal questions for me not only about the theological status of other religions, but also about the significance of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church for their adherents.

As a member of the Catholic Church, another setting for me has been the influence of Vatican II. The Second Vatican Council has been widely perceived as a pivotal event for the Catholic Church concerning many theological issues, not the least of which was the topic of interreligious relations. In fact, the council encouraged Catholics to engage in dialogue with people of other religions on topics of theological and social concern—an approval that was supported at the highest levels of the church. Through their personal contacts and friendships with members of other religions, some Catholics came to feel that they could not deny that their non-Christian dialogue partners had already had an experience of the gracious and salvific presence of God. Moreover, they believed that that experience of God’s love had been mediated to them through the practice of their respective religions. Some theologians probed further asking whether the openness toward the religious “other” shown at Vatican II could not be extended as well to certain theological positions held by the church, such as the belief in Jesus Christ as humanity’s unique and universal saviour or in the church as God’s privileged conduit of salvation. Given the de facto (and, perhaps, de jure) nature of the world’s religious plurality, some theologians inquired from a theoretical standpoint how the Christian religion or, for that matter, Jesus Christ Himself could be claimed to have an exclusive role in God’s plan of salvation. Others questioned the continuing normativity not only of the official creeds and dogmatic statements proposed by the church in ecumenical councils and papal teaching, but also of the divine revelation found in the Bible itself. Such topics have become especially relevant from a practical point of view for Catholic theologians living in places like India or Japan, where Christianity is still very much a minority religion among other ancient religions.

Dupuis lived and taught in the multireligious and interreligious context of India for almost forty years. He was exposed on a daily basis to the practical and theoretical questions raised above, devoting

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4 In 1964 Pope Paul VI established the “Secretariat for Non-Christians” as a new and special branch within the Holy See’s administration. In 1988 Pope John Paul II changed its name to the “Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue” (or PCID).

5 By “religious pluralism de facto” one means the basic, concrete reality of the diversity of human religions (i.e. the fact that many religions exist and have existed throughout human history). By “religious pluralism de jure” one means not only that the world’s religions exist, but also that they exist in principle (i.e. they have been willed to exist by God for humankind’s salvation).
much of his career as a Catholic theologian to delving into the specific issues involved. He endeavoured to show how one could be faithful to Christianity’s traditional creeds and doctrines about Jesus Christ and the church, while also moving forward creatively within that tradition to recognize elements of God’s truth and grace in other religious systems. To that effect, he expounded his own theory of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism,” which he called “inclusive pluralism,” in such notable books as *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* and *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism.*

After publication of the latter work, Dupuis’s views came under the scrutiny of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). In 2000 the CDF intervened in the burgeoning discussion on religious pluralism with the document “Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church” (or *Dominus Iesus*). Directed against certain theological currents which the congregation felt were dangerous to the faith, it reiterated several key aspects of the Catholic Church’s teaching about the universality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ’s mediation of God’s plan of salvation for all humanity. It also treated several questions pertaining to the church’s soteriological role. Not only did the document address issues that had been expressly raised in Dupuis’s work, but it had also been drafted by two people who were directly involved in his investigation, namely, Joseph Ratzinger and Angelo Amato. In fact, Dupuis was shown an advance copy of the document before it was due for publication.

The importance, therefore, of writing a thesis on Dupuis’s thought should be evident. A final word should be said about why I am interested in studying how the biblical data function in Dupuis’s “Christian theology of religious pluralism.” Due to my lifetime practice of the Catholic faith as well as my desire (at one time) to be a priest, I have had a deep and abiding love for God’s revelation in the Bible. This devotion to the scriptures has only been enhanced by my many friendships with Christians of the Reformed/Protestant tradition who have edified me by their reverence for the presence of Jesus and His Spirit in the Bible. Taking to heart the teaching of Vatican II that the study of sacred scripture is “the soul” of theology, I want to endeavour as an aspiring Catholic theologian to make the Bible the source and foundation of my work and thought. Consequently, I have purposely attempted to integrate the scholarly, historico-critical study of the Bible into my theological studies at both the master’s and doctoral levels so that I might be able to pursue a theology that is both biblical and theological.

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7 Ratzinger was elected the bishop of Rome in 2005 taking the name “Benedict XVI.” In 2008 Amato was made prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.


Furthermore, in addition to being a matter of personal interest the question of Dupuis’s use of scripture is a valuable one for Catholic theology in its engagement with religious plurality. Given that he was a systematic theologian and not a biblical scholar, it is perhaps unsurprising that the scriptural angle of his theology—while noticed by some—does not factor as the main focus of discussion for many of those who have analyzed and critiqued his ideas. Still, the question has been raised in a limited fashion by a handful of scholars: for example, by biblical scholar Roland E. Murphy; by the Evangelical Christian scholar Harold Netland; and by fellow Jesuit theologian George Gispert-Sauch. These details should demonstrate: On the one hand, the subject of Dupuis’s use of the Bible has not been a central concern for many scholars in their discussions of his theology and hence should be considered an original topic for the purposes of this thesis; on the other hand, the issue has been raised, albeit briefly, by a few scholars and hence should be considered a question in the field to which this thesis can hope to make a contribution.

B. Purpose and Methodology

The methodology of this thesis comprises a systematic reading of Dupuis’s published and (as far as possible) unpublished works that are both currently available and pertinent to the thesis. Such reading will pay special attention to the question of how sacred scripture functions in Dupuis’s theological method, especially in regard to the question of his theory of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.” Furthermore, the methodology includes a systematic reading of secondary literature that is relevant to the understanding and analysis of Dupuis’s work. The thesis also discusses and attempts to clarify succinctly the status and role of the PBC and its documents within the magisterial structure of the Catholic Church. It does this through both a summary reading of IBC and a close reading of IBC’s chap. III, appealing to any relevant literature written on the document or the chapter under discussion. Furthermore, this thesis consults primary and secondary literature on a variety of topics that may be pertinent to the exposition of the thesis statement.

C. Thesis Statement


11 According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the church’s magisterium or “teaching office” consists of the bishops in communion with the pope of Rome. They have the task of interpreting authentically God’s revelation in scripture or tradition. That authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. The church’s magisterium is not superior to God’s revelation, for it can teach only what has been handed down to it as having been divinely revealed (cf. CCC, paras. 85–86, 890, 2032–40).
This thesis for the terminal degree of doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) in theology will discuss the following: It will examine how theologian Jacques Dupuis has used the Bible in his proposal of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.” It will do this in light of the four characteristics of Catholic biblical interpretation described in chap. III of the PBC statement “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.” By looking specifically at the presuppositions which govern his theological method as well as his model of “inclusive pluralism,” the thesis will show how these give a certain “thrust” to Dupuis’s creative employment of sacred scripture in his theory. By using the principles of Catholic interpretation laid out in IBC, the thesis will then identify both positive and negative features in Dupuis’s appropriation of the Bible in his ideas and argumentation.

III. Status Quaestionis on the Life and Work of Jacques Dupuis

A. Biographical Sketch

Jacques Dupuis was born on 5 December 1923 in Huppaye, Belgium. At the age of five he entered the Collège du Sacré-Cœur run by the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, where he spent the next twelve years of his life for schooling. This setting influenced Dupuis who felt a call to join the Jesuits as a priest. In September 1941 he entered the Jesuits. He spent two years of novitiate in Arlon, two years of classical studies in Namur and, finally, three years of philosophy in Louvain. It was during those years that Dupuis developed a wish to go to India as a missionary. He informed his superiors of his desire and “rejoiced greatly” when they gave their approval.

In December 1948 Dupuis left for the Society’s mission in Calcutta (Kolkata), India, where he was posted at St. Xavier’s College. The courses on religion and “moral science” (as it was called for the non-Christian students) were entrusted to Dupuis which gave him the opportunity “to try [his] hand” at...


13 Dupuis, “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” 168. Dupuis recalls: “I had been for a long time attracted to India because of its rich cultural and religious heritage, but without thinking from the beginning in terms of a missionary vocation. Gradually, however, I began to think that God was calling me to that precise vocation” (ibid.).
subjects that would become his life’s work later.¹⁴ Through contact with his non-Christian students, he was able to discover “the richness of human gifts as well as the depth of cultural and religious endowments that they carried in themselves and . . . had learned from their family education and . . . religious tradition.” These contacts contradicted “the trite negative ideas” still found in the west regarding the value of other religions.¹⁵

While in India from 1952 till 1955 Dupuis completed studies for the licentiate in theology. He subsequently travelled to Rome where from 1957 until 1959 he worked on and completed the doctorate. Returning to India he began teaching theology at St. Mary’s College in Kurseong, West Bengal. Dupuis remarks how his first years of teaching coincided with the preparation and convocation of the Second Vatican Council. The council, he writes, constituted “an enormous challenge in all spheres connected with theological training and teaching.” But more importantly there was exhibited a new attitude toward other religious traditions characterized by dialogue and collaboration. Dupuis decided to involve himself within the Indian Catholic Church at the national level, attending seminars and congresses as well as participating in the drafting of liturgical texts adapted for the Indian context.¹⁶ His life in India was “interrupted” by his “sudden transfer” in 1984 to the Jesuit-run Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome where he joined the theological faculty.¹⁷ While there he was involved as a consultor to the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), contributing significantly to its 1991 statement entitled “Dialogue and Proclamation” (DP)¹⁸

According to Jacques Scheuer, the publication of Dupuis’s magnum opus Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism sparked off a crisis which cast a shadow over his last years. A few months before receiving his status as professor emeritus at the Gregorian, Dupuis was informed of the CDF’s decision to open an examination on his book. It came, Scheuer writes, “as a painful ordeal” for him.¹⁹ It is not my intention to go into the full details of Dupuis’s investigation. Suffice it to say, despite

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¹⁴ Ibid., 168–69. Dupuis writes: “From the outset . . . I was determined to deepen my familiarity with the religious patrimony of [India] . . . and, later . . . to give special attention to the problem of the relationship between the Christian faith and the other religious traditions of the world. How could one make sense of the universal mission of Christianity . . . without having thereby to depreciate and undervalue the significance of the other religious faiths for their adherents? My vocation as a theologian of religions and of religious pluralism was already coming to the fore” (p. 169).

¹⁵ Ibid., 169.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. He was also given the editorship of the university’s journal Gregorianum (cf. Scheuer, 1220).


¹⁹ Scheuer, 1220–21 (especially p. 1221). Dupuis’s own account of the CDF’s contestatio of his work has since been published see: Dupuis, “CDF Process and Notification and My Perspectives on Them,” in Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces Inquisition, 74–102.
having had serious reservations about the ecclesiastical process involved and the way he was treated, Dupuis nevertheless acceded to his superior general’s request (at the time Peter Hans Kolvenbach) and in December 2000 signed the CDF’s notification on his book. The final version of the notification was approved by the pope and published in the Vatican’s newspaper L’Osservatore Romano in February 2001. A translation subsequently appeared in the newspaper’s English-language edition in March which is used here below. The notification consisted of a preface, five sections and eight articles. The CDF recognized that Dupuis had been trying to address hitherto unexplored theological questions within the bounds of Catholic “orthodoxy.” It found, however, that his book contained “notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points, which could lead a reader to erroneous or harmful opinions.” It continues:

The present Notification is not meant as a judgment on the author’s subjective thought, but rather as a statement of the Church’s teaching on certain aspects of the above-mentioned doctrinal truths and as a refutation of erroneous or harmful opinions, which, prescinding from the author’s intentions, could be derived from reading the ambiguous statements and insufficient explanations found in certain sections of the text. . . . Catholic readers will be given solid criteria for judgment, consistent with the doctrine of the Church, in order to avoid the serious confusion and misunderstanding which could result from reading this book.

Areas in which his thinking was considered unclear included: Christ’s sole and universal mediatorship of God’s salvation; the uniqueness and completeness of God’s revelation in Christ; the salvific activity of the Holy Spirit; humanity’s orientation toward the church; and the value and meaning of the salvific function of other religions. The CDF stated that Dupuis had accepted the notification and committed himself to assent to its theses and doctrinal contents. According to John Thavis of National Catholic

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23 Ibid., nos. 1–8 passim.

24 Ibid., Preface. Dupuis, however, disputes this. He writes: [W]hen sending [the signed notification] back, I attached a letter in which I explained the meaning which I was attributing to my signature. I wrote: “I understand that the meaning of my signature is that, in the future, both in talks and in my writings, I will have to take into account the text of the Declaration Dominus Iesus and of the Notification”. . . . [T]he CDF interpreted my signature differently (Dupuis, “CDF Process and Notification and My Perspectives on Them,” in Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces Inquisition, 75).
**Reporter** Dupuis declared to him following the investigation that, while he did not want “to brood over the past,” the Vatican’s investigation had nevertheless had a huge impact on his life.\(^{25}\)

Jacques Dupuis died in Rome in communion with the Lord and His church on 28 December 2004. He was eighty-one years old.\(^{26}\)

B. Overview of Major Writings

1. Books

   a. *Jesus Christ and His Spirit: Theological Approaches (JCHS)*

      This book is a collection of essays (most of which have been published previously) on the topic of “the mystery of ‘Jesus Christ and his Spirit.’” The various pieces are organized according to the following scheme: tradition, reflection and dialogue.\(^{27}\) The book ends with an epilogue written especially for it entitled “The Holy Spirit and Evangelization.” I am not aware of this last essay having ever been published anywhere else.\(^{28}\) According to theologian Francis X. Clooney, *JCHS* is the book “that is most explicitly rooted in [Dupuis’s experiences in] India.”\(^{29}\)

   b. *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions (JCEWR)*

      The first section of this book looks for “the stepping-stones to a christological theology of religions that reside in Hindu tradition” which will both furnish elements for dialogue and pose questions for theology. The book takes up “the classic question” of the purpose of the Word’s incarnation situated within the broader context of religious pluralism. Dupuis reviews the various perspectives on the subject represented in recent literature and then chooses among them, while also seeking to justify theologically his own choices.\(^{30}\)

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\(^{25}\) Thavis, 9. As Dupuis’s friend William R. Burrows put it to me in an “e-mail,” after the CDF investigation “Jacques was a thoroughly lacerated man” (William R. Burrows, e-mail communication to Matthew W. I. Dunn, 23 July 2012).

\(^{26}\) Scheuer, 1219.

\(^{27}\) Cf. *JCHS*, [vii].

\(^{28}\) Cf. *JCHS*, 245–58 passim.

\(^{29}\) Francis X. Clooney, e-mail communication to Matthew W. I. Dunn, 8 May 2008.

\(^{30}\) Cf. *JCEWR*, 9–10 passim.
The second section of *JCEWR* addresses the Christological and theological issues raised by religious pluralism and the praxis of interreligious dialogue. After discussing the salvific value of God’s various covenants with “the nations,” Dupuis asks if salvation is possible today for non-Christians without the gospel. If so, then what is those people’s relationship to Jesus Christ? The same kind of question is applied to the divine inspiration of other religions’ sacred books. Dupuis hopes to show that in a Christian theology of religions Christocentrism and theocentrism go together inseparably. Moreover, he discusses the work of the Holy Spirit in the single economy of salvation, showing that “the Christic mystery is indivisible from the trinitarian.” Dupuis devotes two chapters to the nature and role of interreligious dialogue in the church’s evangelizing mission.\(^{31}\)

In conclusion, he suggests “certain orientations calculated to promote an inculturated, contextual christology of religions.” He hopes “to have sketched an answer” to the question of how Christology may be contextualized from the vantagepoint of interreligious encounter and dialogue.\(^{32}\)

c. *Who Do You Say I Am? Introduction to Christology (WDYSIA?)*

N.B. Despite the general-sounding nature of its title, this book is actually an introduction to Dupuis’s own views on certain Christological matters. It is not an introductory text on Christology properly speaking.

It opens with a survey of recent approaches toward understanding the nature and role of Jesus Christ. The next two chapters address the matter of the “historical Jesus” and the risen Christ, showing the continuity which exists between the “functional Christology” of the early church’s *kērygma* and the “ontological Christology” of the later NT.\(^{33}\) He then proposes to look at whether the doctrines about Christ by the church’s councils have constituted a legitimate development of the NT and whether those doctrines themselves could be open to further enunciations. A chapter is devoted to Jesus’ human “psychology.”\(^{34}\) The final chapters cover issues dear to Dupuis’s own heart, namely, the status of Jesus Christ in relation to “the present reality of religious pluralism.” He hopes to offer his own proposal of an “Integral Christology” which holds together “in fruitful tension” complementary aspects not only of soteriology and Christology, but also of “functional” and “ontological” Christology.\(^{35}\)

\(^{31}\) Cf. *JCEWR*, 10–11 passim.

\(^{32}\) *JCEWR*, 11.

\(^{33}\) Cf. *WDYSIA?*, 11.

\(^{34}\) Cf. *WDYSIA?*, 11–12 passim.

\(^{35}\) *WDYSIA?*, 12.
d. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (TCTR)*

The book’s first section opens with an analysis of the main data from sacred scripture regarding the religious “other,” trying to show the factors that have brought about the Bible’s distinct attitudes on the matter. Dupuis then discusses the attitudes of the church fathers toward other religions using the “positive posture” found among some of the early fathers as “the first foundations” and “backbone” for a theology of religions. \(^{36}\) There follows a lengthy presentation of both the origins and the subsequent interpretations of the axiom *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (“Outside the church; no salvation”) as applied to non-Christians. He also discusses various theories regarding the possibility of salvific “substitutes” among non-believers, either for explicit faith in Jesus Christ or for reception of the sacrament of baptism. Dupuis then studies the “theological renewal” preceding Vatican II which prepared the way for the council’s openness to the religious “other” found in its documents. Furthermore, he examines Vatican II’s doctrine in order to show how its open attitude has been confirmed and developed by the church’s teaching authority. \(^{37}\) He ends with an account of the current debate in the theology of religions which, he hopes, will lead to a perspective that will serve as “the leading thread for an organic presentation of the main theological issues involved in a theology of religious pluralism.”\(^{38}\)

The book’s second section opens by showing how the world’s various religions represent distinct revelatory manifestations of God throughout history, followed by a further discussion of the presence of divine revelation in the sacred writings of non-Christian traditions. \(^{39}\) Dupuis takes up the issue of “the Absolute or divine mystery as the transcendental horizon of humans’ religious experience” and how this realization may throw light on God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. The next chapter “is crucial for our entire work,” since it shows the decisive and central role that “the historical event” of Christ plays in God’s salvific plan for humankind while also looking at the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in one economy of salvation. \(^{40}\) Dupuis passes onto the church’s role in the salvific economy. He investigates her relationship to “the reign of God” established in Jesus Christ as well as the relationship of non-Christians to God’s reign. He ends with a treatment of the nature and role of interreligious dialogue in the evangelizing mission of the church. \(^{41}\)

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\(^{36}\) *TCTR*, 21.

\(^{37}\) Cf. ibid.

\(^{38}\) *TCTR*, 21–22.

\(^{39}\) Cf. *TCTR*, 22.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Cf. *TCTR*, 22–23 passim.
This book is essentially TCTRP reworked and rewritten for a more “popular” audience. Dupuis, however, has integrated several clarifications of his positions as per scholarly reviews of his previous work. Unlike TCTRP the book skips over the biblical data from the OT and begins rather with the NT data, asking what sort of “stance” Jesus and the apostles took toward the religious “others” and their practices. Dupuis also shortens TCTRP’s lengthy historical portion in favour of focusing more on modern developments leading up to and following Vatican II. He addresses the question of whether God has made saving covenants with peoples outside the bounds of Israel and the church, and if these “cosmic” covenants still remain in effect today. He investigates whether “the Word of God as such” has acted salvifically beyond—and yet in union with—the humanity of Jesus showing that, despite the NT’s affirmation of Christ’s sole mediatiorship, “participated mediations” of God’s salvation by other religions are not per se ruled out. Other chapters deal (as in TCTRP) with questions about the church’s relationship to the reign of God and the place of interreligious dialogue in her mission. Dupuis adds a new chapter, though, regarding the issue of shared prayer between Christians and non-Christians. Dupuis concludes by making the case for the world’s religious pluralism as both a de facto and a de jure reality in God’s salvific plan for humankind, advocating a model of Christianity’s relationship with other religions which he calls: “inclusive pluralism.” A postscript to the book addresses, albeit very briefly and indirectly, some of the issues raised by the CDF’s declaration DI and its notification on his book TCTRP.

2. Articles

Many of Dupuis’s articles, essays and book chapters have been consulted in the composition of this thesis. The reader can consult the footnotes in the succeeding chapters as well as the bibliography at the end of this thesis whenever and wherever appropriate.

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42 Cf. CR, 1–2.
44 Cf. CR, 13–15 passim.
45 Cf. CR, 16.
46 Cf. CR, 260–63. Dupuis had subsequently prepared two articles: one a lengthy analysis and critique of the CDF’s declaration DI and the other a point by point response to the notification on his book TCTRP. He was not allowed at the time by his Jesuit superiors to submit either one for publication (cf. Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces Inquisition, 18–22).
C. Overview of Secondary Literature on His Work

The list below comprises some secondary literature offering scholarly critiques of Dupuis’s positions as stated in his books *TCTRP* and *CR*:


Except for limited portions of the articles by Elders and Gispert-Sauch, there is no sustained treatment of Dupuis’s use of the Bible in his argument for a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.” Also, except for brief excursi on Dupuis’s interpretation of the prologue to the gospel according to John in Gamberini, there is otherwise no detailed evaluation made of how he deals both exegetically and theologically with the text or with the four other biblical texts listed above. The other articles do cite various scriptures and examples from both the OT and NT in their review of Dupuis’s theory, but their references are tangential and generally undeveloped when compared with the overall theological thrust of their intended evaluation. Thus, I believe that the originality of the thesis topic is demonstrated.

Special note must be taken of the doctoral thesis by Gilles Courtemanche entitled: “‘Selon qu’il est écrit . . .’: Les appuis bibliques de positions théologiques contemporaines relatives au pluralisme
religieux; Examen critique.” Courtemanche is concerned to investigate the “scriptural foundations” underlying certain recent Catholic theological elaborations in regard to religious pluralism. He asks: Which passages of the Bible are principally relied upon in these assessments of the religious “other” (appliquée à comprendre ce dernier)? How are these passages read and exploited? How does their theological usage compare in respect to the work of exegesis?

Courtemanche gives priority in his study to the work of two scholars in particular—one of whom concerns us here—namely: Jacques Dupuis and Claude Geffré. He has made that choice based on the fact that their “researches” for a contemporary Christian assessment of religious plurality “is reckoned [comptent] without any doubt amongst the most elaborated, the most articulate and the most influential.” Among the most important and frequently cited passages of Sacred Scripture by both authors is: The affirmation of God’s universal salvific will and the sole mediatorship of Jesus Christ in the First Letter to Timothy (viz. 2:1–7, esp. vv. 3–5) and the opening prologue to the Gospel according to John (viz. 1:1–18).

Clearly there is some overlap between the subject-matter of Courtemanche’s thesis and my own, although I would maintain that there is not enough of an overlap to affect the relevance or originality of my proposed thesis. While Courtemanche does look at some of the same biblical texts (i.e., John 1:1–18 and 1 Tim 2:4), he does not cover others that I have deemed also to have had relevance for Dupuis’ theological proposal (i.e. Gen 9:8–17, Acts 17:22–34, and Rom 1:18–23). Furthermore, Courtemanche has chosen to bring Dupuis’ peculiar use of certain scriptures into dialogue and comparison with the interpretation of those same scriptures in the work of theologian Claude Geffré, which I do not do. Moreover, Courtemanche places both Dupuis’ and Geffré’s usage of certain scriptural texts within the broader context of how those passages have been used not only by authoritative organs of the Roman Catholic Church (like the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, bishops’ conferences and recent popes), but also by other contemporary Catholic theologians (like Paul Knitter, Walter Kasper, and Raimundo [Raimon] Panikkar).

For the most part, I do not do that below. Also, nowhere throughout Courtemanche’s admirably detailed and thorough thesis is a reference made either to the Pontifical Biblical Commission or to its 1993 statement “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.”

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47 Cf. Gilles Courtemanche, “‘Selon qu’il est écrit . . .’: Les appuis bibliques de positions théologiques contemporaines relatives au pluralisme religieux; Examen critique” (Ph.D. diss., Collège universitaire dominicain, Ottawa, 2011). I am very grateful to Dr. Courtemanche for having provided me with a copy of his thesis.

48 Ibid., 17–18. N.B. I am using a copy of Dr. Courtemanche’s thesis sent to me in Microsoft Word format (.docx) which I have converted to “Portable Document Format” (or PDF). The page numbers to which I refer, therefore, might not always coincide with those of the final, published version of Courtemanche’s thesis.

49 Ibid., 18.

50 Ibid., 18–19 passim.

51 Cf. e.g. his summation and concluding chapter in ibid. (pp. 452–84).
Furthermore, no part of the PBC’s document is mentioned in his thesis or used as a basis for analysis—as will be done in this thesis.\textsuperscript{52} Still, at certain points Courtemanche does touch upon the same scriptural texts and issues that I do in Dupuis’ hermeneutic of the Bible. Courtemanche’s research and opinions, therefore, have been consulted by me and are included wherever they are relevant.

\textbf{IV. Conclusion}

In conclusion, this introduction has presented in detail both the nature and purpose of this doctoral thesis. It has stated specifically the topic it will discuss, explained the relevance of that topic to theology and outlined the methodology by which it will reach its judgments. It has sketched out briefly the life and published works of Dupuis. Finally, it has demonstrated that no one else has written originally on this subject before in the same manner.

\textsuperscript{52} In fact, no document by the PBC is listed as a source in Courtemanche’s bibliography (cf. e.g. idem, 494).
CHAPTER ONE
THE STATUS QUAESTIONIS ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
AND THE RELIGIOUS “OTHER”

1. Introduction

This chapter will present a concise overview of the status quaestionis of the Roman Catholic Church’s relationship to non-Christian religions, sketching out (albeit not exhaustively) Catholic attitudes toward the religious “other” over the past twenty centuries. It will abide by the following chronological convention: “Early Period,” “Medieval Period,” and “Modern Period and Contemporary Attitudes.” Furthermore, the chapter will survey in a broad fashion some recent, official statements by the Catholic Church on interreligious affairs, especially those of the Second Vatican Council and the three most prominent postconciliar popes (viz. Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI). Finally, it will look at some official statements published on behalf of the papacy by the offices of the Vatican’s curia. The purpose and intent here are to place Dupuis and his work within the broader tradition ranging from the earliest Christian centuries to modern times.

The nature of this chapter is to review the status quaestionis of the Roman Catholic Church’s stance toward the religious “other.” The purpose of this chapter as stated above is to provide a concise and general summary (“a sketch”) of some of the theological and magisterial opinions which have influenced the Roman Catholic Church’s own stance and doctrine on her relationship to the non-Christian religious “other.” Thus, it helps not only in demonstrating the historical background as it relates to the contemporary question of the Church’s relationship to the world’s religions, but also in placing Dupuis’s theological work within its appropriate context. Since Jacques Dupuis is the subject of this thesis, I have thought that it would be fitting to follow in the main the outline of the historical background which he provides in his magnum opus TCTR, incorporating his comments on the sources to the extent that I have deemed them important and relevant. Furthermore, other sources have been consulted for the framework of this “sketch.”

propose to be in any way exhaustive; and that the history of Christianity—and, hence, of Christian thought—spans two millennia: I have of necessity had to be selective in what I have used from the wealth of sources available to me. In the end, the choices below are my own.

Recently a mammoth study has been published on the matter of the Roman Catholic Church’s attitude toward other religions. Edited by Karl Josef Becker and Ilaria Morali, it is entitled: *Catholic Engagement with World Religions*. The historical section of this book (i.e. pp. 23–150) is especially valuable; and the reader is referred to it throughout this chapter.

### II. Historical Sketch of Catholic Attitudes toward the Religious “Other”

#### A. Early Period

Conventionally, the period of the church fathers begins from the time of the Christian authors of the first century (e.g. St. Clement of Rome). The period ends for the church in the west with the death of St. Isidore of Seville (636) and for the church in the east with the death of St. John Damascene (ca. 749). We begin here with the efforts of the apologists who, in trying to present the Christian faith to both Jews and gentiles, were compelled to arrange and clarify their ideas about Jesus Christ.

Unless otherwise indicated, I will follow the dates given for each church father by William A. Jurgens in his *Faith of the Early Fathers* series. Also, unless otherwise noted all quotations of the church fathers in English have come from either the *ANF* or *NPNF* series.

1. Saint Justin Martyr (ca. 100?–ca. 165)

Born as a pagan in the near east, Justin was a follower of various philosophies before eventually becoming a Christian. He and some companions were executed later in Rome on account of their faith in...
Christ. We shall deal here with Justin’s teaching in the *First Apology* (1 Apol.) and *Second Apology* (2 Apol.) dated ca. 150 and later. According to Johannes Quasten, Justin’s writings reveal an open and honest character. He is the first ecclesiastical author who attempts to build a bridge between Christianity and pagan philosophy.

Justin evinces a generous perspective on the role of human reason in coming to know God. Christ, the firstborn of God, is the Word (Logos) of whom all races have partaken. Those who have lived in accordance with reason (meta logou) before the coming of Christ (e.g. Socrates and Heraclitus; Abraham and Elijah) have been Christians. Justin believes, therefore, that an intelligent person would be able to understand that the Word has become flesh in Jesus Christ. This, writes Jean Daniélou, contains the startling implication that all who have been following the Logos have actually been living in accordance with the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, albeit “obscurely” and “partially.” There is no difference in the truth known through Christ and that glimpsed through human reason: It is merely a matter of degree, fullness or clarity. Justin declares that “[w]hatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians.” This is so because only Christians worship the Word who is from God. He explains:

For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted word that was in them [dia tês enousēs emphytou tou logou sporas amydrōs edynanto horan ta onta]. For the seed and imitation imparted according to capacity is [sic] one thing and quite another is the thing itself, of which there is the participation and imitation according to the grace which is from Him.

Dupuis calls this section “the key to the whole system” of Justin’s theology. All people share in the Logos but, while others have received Him partially, those to whom He has revealed Himself in the incarnation are blessed with the complete manifestation. Dupuis explains: “In all persons a seed of the Logos (sperma tou logou) may be found, for the Logos-sower (spermatikos logos) sows in all; yet to [Christians] only the entirety of the Logos has been made manifest.” Chrys Saldanha, though, challenges this type of reading, arguing that St. Justin intends a qualitative difference between the good

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59 Vetten, in *DECL*, 357.
60 Quasten, 198.
61 1 Apol. 46. All references to the Greek text come from: Gerard Rauschen, ed. and trans., *Florilegium Patristicum*, vol. 2, *S. Iustini Apologiae Duae* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1911).
63 2 Apol. 13.
64 *TCTR*, 59.
pagan and Christian and not simply one of partial versus full or implicit versus explicit. The pagan and Christian are not in the same salvific situation because only the Christian has the grace of knowing Christ.  

2. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 140–ca. 202)

Originally from Asia Minor, Irenaeus eventually moved to Gaul where he became bishop of Lyons. His major work, *Adversus Haereses* (or “The Examination and Refutation of Falsely-named ‘Knowledge’”), was written against Gnosticism.

A notable trait of his theology is the elucidation of a singular “economy,” or plan, by God for humanity’s salvation which has been manifested through a series of particular covenants, culminating ultimately in the covenant of God’s Son Jesus Christ. As he explains, just as the living creatures before God’s heavenly throne are fourfold (see Rev chap. 4) and the gospel also is fourfold:

> [There] were four principal . . . covenants given to the human race: one, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel (emphasis added).

For Dupuis, then, St. Irenaeus can be said to be the founder of a “theology of history,” for he not only brings out the historical meaning of both the Mosaic and Christian dispensations, but he is also able to integrate the pre-Mosaic dispensation into the history of salvation and, thus, make room for the salvific value of prebiblical religions.

The fundamental principle of Irenaeus’ theology is the maxim: *Visibile Patris Filius* (or “The Son is ‘the Visible’ of the Father”). The Son is the manifestation, the revelation and the intelligibility of the Father. Throughout all of the economies, or covenants, the Father remains the unknown who is

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67 Originally written in Greek in five books, the only complete volume exists in an old—and slavishly literal—Latin translation. Happily, most of the original can be reconstructed through its numerous citations in other authors (see Hamm, in *DECL*, 301–02 passim; also González, 1:161).

68 González, 1:167–68.

69 *Haer.* 3.11.8. According to A. Cleveland Coxe, the Greek text differs here by proposing the following order of covenants: Noah; Abraham; Moses; and Jesus. Still, he thinks the Latin text represents the original more exactly (cf. *ANF*, 1:429 n. 3).

70 *TCTRP*, 60.
manifested only in His Son.71 In making those covenants, God does indeed appear to human beings. But Dupuis observes how Irenaeus applies all God’s appearances in the OT economies to the Logos or Word. They are theophanies because they are “Logophanies” (Dupuis’s word) where God the Word is present as a sort of rehearsal for His later appearance in the flesh. The OT’s prophetic words were not simply about Christ; they were in fact the words of Christ.72

Nevertheless, one should recall that St. Irenaeus’ importance for Christian thought and his reason for writing in the first place derive from his struggle against heresy and his concern to strengthen the faith of Christians.73 Unsurprisingly, he accents membership in the church for the assurance of correct teaching and salvation. Citing 1 Cor 12:28, he declares:

“For in the Church,” it is said, “God has set apostles, prophets, teachers,” and all the other means through which the Spirit works; of which all those are not partakers who do not join themselves to the Church, but defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions and infamous behaviour. For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every kind of grace.74

Here, according to Jerome P. Theisen, one already perceives the rigid view that salvation resides in the church alone and not outside of her.75

3. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–between 211 and 216)76

Titus Flavius Clemens converted from paganism to Christianity eventually settling in Alexandria, Egypt. He later became head of the Alexandrian church’s celebrated catechetical school. Clement’s major works covered here are the Protrepticus (Protr.; or “Exhortation to the Greeks”) and the Stromateis (Strom.; or “Miscellanies”).77

Clement assigns a positive value to pagan philosophy. Philosophy was necessary for the practice of righteousness among the Greeks, acting as a schoolmaster (epaidagōgei) that would lead them to Jesus in the same way as the law acted for the Hebrews. It functioned as a sort of preparatory training

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71 TCTR, 61. Cf. Haer. 4.6.6.
72 TCTR, 63–64.
73 González, 1:161.
74 Haer. 3.34.1.
75 Jerome P. Theisen, The Ultimate Church and the Promise of Salvation, with a foreword by Kilian McDonnell (Collegeville, Minn.: St. John’s University Press, 1976), 4.
77 FEF, 1:176. According to William A. Jurgens, the word strōmateis in Greek indicates the pieces of cloth which one might use to fashion a patch-work quilt (ibid., 181).
(proparaskeuazei) which would be perfected in Christ.\textsuperscript{78} In Dupuis’s view, Clement believes that philosophy not only comes from God, but also constitutes for the Greeks a divine economy that is “parallel, if not in all things equal” to the Jewish economy of the law. In other words, both were given by God to lead people to His Son. Indeed, he notes that Clement does not hesitate to call pagan philosophy a covenant between God and humanity, a stepping-stone (hypobathra) to Christ.\textsuperscript{79}

Clement writes that, while the river of truth is one, many streams flow into it from all sides. God Himself has enumerated many ways, both commandments and modes of preparation, by which the righteous person may be saved.\textsuperscript{80} In Protrepticus, he admits that some Greeks have received “scintillations of the divine word [ta . . . enausmata . . . tou logou tou theiou]” by which they have spoken “some utterances of truth.”\textsuperscript{81} Still, as Carlos Contreras points out: “Clement does not give a blank approval to all the philosophical schools. . . . [P]hilosophy is like the rain which all comes from God but in some cases promotes the growth of weeds and in others that of fruitful crops.”\textsuperscript{82} Like Justin Martyr, Clement appreciates the partial truths of the philosophers, while insisting that the fullness of wisdom and knowledge is found in Jesus.\textsuperscript{83}

4. Saint Cyprian of Carthage (+258)

Raised as a pagan, Caecilius Cyprianus (also sometimes called “Thascius”) converted to Christianity and eventually became the bishop of the North African city, Carthage. He died for the faith.\textsuperscript{84} The two sources consulted here are his work On the Unity of the Catholic Church (Unit. eccl.) and his letters (Ep.).

According to Dupuis, the axiom Extra ecclesiam nulla salus is usually traced back to Cyprian.\textsuperscript{85} For example, in a letter to Jubaianus bishop of Mauretania, Cyprian observes:

\begin{flushright}
\textit{...}
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Strom.} 1.5. All references to the Greek text come from the critical editions of Otto Stählin in \textit{Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte} (Leipzig and Berlin, 1897), vols. 17 and 52 (ed. Früchtel).

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{TCTR}, 67–68. Cf. e.g. \textit{Strom.} 5.5 and 6.8.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Strom.} 1.5.

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Protr.} 7. Cf. PG 8:184.


\textsuperscript{83} Theisen, 4. Cf. also González, 1:196.


\textsuperscript{85} \textit{TCTR}, 87–88 (cf. also \textit{SOC?}, 20). Though, the theological idea lying behind the axiom can be found even earlier: cf. e.g. the \textit{Letter to the Philadelphians} (i.e. 3.2–3) of St. Ignatius of Antioch (+ ca. 110).
But if not even the baptism of a public confession and blood [i.e. martyrdom] can profit a heretic to salvation, because there is no salvation out[side] of the Church \(quia \text{salus extra ecclesiam non est}\), how much less shall it be of advantage to him, if in a hiding-place and a cave of robbers, stained with the contagion of adulterous water, he has not only not put off his old sins, but rather heaped up still newer and greater ones! . . . And therefore it behooves those to be baptized who come from heresy to the Church.\(^{86}\)

Writing to a certain Pomponius about a group of religious women ("virgins") who had separated themselves from the church, Cyprian proclaimed that "they cannot live out of [the church], since the house of God is one and there can be no salvation to any except in the Church [\text{nemini salus esse nisi in ecclesia possit}]."\(^{87}\)

According to Sullivan, if taken out of context St. Cyprian’s comments could be seen as excluding everyone from salvation who was not a member of the church. He alleges, though, that in each case Cyprian is addressing himself to heretical and schismatic Christians. Sullivan writes: “There is no instance in his writings in which Cyprian explicitly applied his saying ‘No salvation outside the church’ to the majority of people who were still pagans in his day.”\(^{88}\) Nevertheless, Theisen thinks the adage was a badly conceived idea. He writes:

Since the days of . . . Cyprian this axiom has elbowed its way into countless theological writings and magisterial decrees. It has been used as a wall, dividing those within from those without the church. It has been employed as a club to beat into salvational non-existence those who found themselves outside the camp of the church. It has been promoted as a means of exhortation, both to confirm those within and to attract those without the church.\(^{89}\)

Cyprian’s formulation, based on a rigid and (in Theisen’s view) wrongheaded notion of the church, had—and continues to have—an enormous influence on theology and doctrine.\(^{90}\)

5. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430)\(^{91}\)

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\(^{87}\) \textit{Ep.} 61.4 (see \textit{Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum}, 3/2:477). Cf. also Cyprian’s letters to: Magnus (\textit{Ep.} 75.4), to Antonianus (51.29), and to Pope St. Cornelius I (56.4).

\(^{88}\) \textit{SOC?}, 22–23. Sullivan admits, however, that “if asked” Cyprian and other church fathers who mentioned the idea would have possibly applied the axiom to Jews and pagans as well (p. 23).

\(^{89}\) Theisen, xi–xii.

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 11.

\(^{91}\) Cf. Carola, in \textit{CEWRCS}, 42–45.
It is perhaps safe to say along with scholar John C. Cavadini that no other theologian has exerted such a decisive influence on western theology, either Catholic or Protestant, as Augustine.\footnote{John C. Cavadini, “St. Augustine of Hippo,” in \textit{HCEC}, 113.} Aurelius Augustinus was born in North Africa to a Christian mother (St. Monica) and a pagan father (Patrick; later a convert). Initially, Augustine was a follower of Manichaeism, but was later baptized into the church by the bishop of Milan, St. Ambrose.\footnote{Cf. \textit{FEF}, 3:1–2 passim (cf. also W. Geerlings, “Augustine,” in \textit{DECL}, 61–64). Manichaeism was a religion based on the teachings of the Parthian ascetic and sage, Mani “the living” (216–77 A.D.). It was a form of Gnostic dualism with syncretistic tendencies. Cf. the article “Manichaeism” in \textit{Encyclopedia of Religion} (2nd ed.), 8:5650–70.} While visiting the North African town of Hippo Regius, the local congregation prevailed upon Augustine to remain and be ordained to the priesthood, which he accepted. Later, he was ordained a bishop for the community. Augustine died while Vandal barbarians were sieging Hippo and just before he could receive the invitation to attend the Council of Ephesus (to be held the next year).\footnote{W. Geerlings, “Augustine,” in \textit{DECL}, 64.}

According to Theisen, Augustine continues the tradition among the church fathers of maintaining a strict connection between membership in the church and salvation. Neither the Holy Spirit nor the forgiveness of sins is given outside the church.\footnote{Theisen, 13–14. Cf. e.g. \textit{Sermon 71, Ep.} 141.5 and \textit{Baptism} 3.16.21.} He outlines his position with uncompromising exactitude in his \textit{Discourse to the People of the Church at Caesarea} (\textit{Serm. Caes. eccl.}):  

\begin{quote}
A man cannot have salvation, except in the Catholic Church. Outside the Catholic Church he can have everything except salvation. He can have honor, he can have Sacraments, he can sing alleluia, he can answer amen, he can possess the gospel, he can have and preach faith in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; but never except in the Catholic Church will he be able to find salvation.\footnote{\textit{Serm. Caes. eccl.} 6; cited in \textit{FEF}, 3:130.}
\end{quote}

Augustine is obviously talking here about Christians contemporaneous with him who are living in separation from the church.

But what about those living before the church? Since membership in the Catholic Church is so critical to humanity’s salvation, Augustine solves this dilemma by asserting that the church has actually existed from the beginning of the world—indeed, from the time of the first just man Abel. Thus, every just and righteous person who has lived previously has belonged in some way to Christ and His church.\footnote{\textit{TCTR}, 81. Cf. e.g. Augustine’s \textit{Corrections} 1.13.3.} He declares in a letter to a certain Deogratias that, from the beginning of the human race, anyone who has known Jesus Christ and lived justly and piously by His commands has undoubtedly been saved by Him,
no matter when or where that person has lived. Nevertheless, as Sullivan notes, while St. Augustine believed salvation was available to just persons who lived before Christ, he still held that none of them was saved without explicit faith in Jesus. As to how that was possible for someone who had lived before Christ, Sullivan remarks that Augustine “does not give a very satisfying explanation.” Augustine concludes that the offer of faith must have been made to them somehow by God. After Jesus Christ, though, the situation was different; and Augustine shared the common assumption that the gospel had been preached and the church established everywhere. Therefore, Jews and pagans could not hope to be saved unless they now believed in Jesus and accepted baptism.

According to Sullivan, Augustine was firmly convinced that anyone outside the church by lack of faith or baptism could not be saved. In *Nature and Grace* (*Nat. grat.*), St. Augustine maintains that Christ’s grace is given freely and without human merit. Since all human beings have sinned (as per St. Paul in Rom 2:23), whether in Adam’s “original sin” or through their own sinful actions, anyone who does not receive liberation through Jesus’ blood before death will be justly condemned to hell. Augustine gives his list of those condemned: those who have never heard the gospel; those who have heard it, yet refused to obey; and those who have heard it, yet died without baptism. In the cases of infants or those living in faraway places without the opportunity to hear the gospel, Augustine reasoned that those to whom the true religion was lacking must not have been worthy of it and anyone who had died without hearing the gospel must have been foreknown by God as someone who would not have believed it anyway. Moreover, the stain of original sin itself was sufficient to justify God’s judgment of eternal damnation on humankind, for the guilt of that sin had made the whole human race a *massa damnata* which deserved condemnation to hell. If anyone was spared damnation, explains Sullivan, it was due solely to God’s “sheer mercy.”

As Wilhelm Geerlings observes, no theologian has left as deep a mark on western Christianity as St. Augustine, setting the course on decisive points. He writes: “In ecclesiology, sacramental doctrine, 

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100 *TCTR*, 90–91.
101 *SOC?*, 37–38.
102 *Nat. grat.* 4.4.
103 *Ep.* 102.15. Here we touch upon one of the most controversial aspects of St. Augustine’s theology, namely, the idea of “predestination” or God’s foreknowledge of the salvific destiny of each human individual (cf. John R. Sachs, “Predestination,” in *HCEC*, 1043–44). During incautious moments, Sullivan writes, Augustine can seem to come “awfully close” to teaching that God has effectively willed in advance for some people to be damned to hell (cf. *SOC?*, 40).
104 *SOC?*, 37–38. Cf. e.g. Augustine’s letter to Optatus (i.e. *Ep.* 190.3.9).
theology of history and anthropology and not least in the doctrine of grace, western theology has simply nuanced the positions taken by [Augustine].” Be that as it may, his “gloomy” anthropology and “Manichean mood” have also placed a heavy burden on the western church. Despite his admittedly enormous influence on Christian thought, Sullivan states that not all of St. Augustine’s ideas prevailed in the church. For example, the church did not receive his teaching that, based solely on their participation in original sin, unbaptized infants and adults who had never had a chance to accept the gospel were justly condemned to hell by God.

6. Saint Prosper of Aquitaine (+ ca. 455)

Not much is known about Prosper Tiro of Aquitaine, except he was a layperson from Gaul with decidedly monastic interests. His major work The Call of All Nations (Voc. omn. gent.) is the first treatise of ancient Christian literature to have been devoted specifically to the issue of the salvation of non-believers.

According to William A. Jurgens, Prosper of Aquitaine stresses God’s universal, salvific will more than his mentor, Augustine of Hippo. For those who have never heard the good news of redemption, “a time of calling has been appointed, when they will hear and accept the Gospel.” Until then, they receive “that measure of general help” which God has always bestowed on all humanity. He states:

105 Geerlings, in DECL, 79.

106 SOC?, 43. Augustine’s opinions on predestination were accepted by the sixth-century Council of Orange (529) only with some modification (cf. Sachs, in HCEC, 1044 and “Orange, Council Of,” in HCEC, 934–35).


109 Hamman, 557.

110 FEF, 3:195.


Coincidentally, De Letter was not only a colleague of Jacques Dupuis at St. Mary’s College in Kurseong, but he was also the rector of the seminary there (cf. G. Gispert-Sauch, e-mail communication to Matthew W. I. Dunn, 22 May 2010).
We believe with complete trust in God’s goodness that He wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth [1 Tim 2:4; italics in original]: this we must hold as His changeless will from eternity, which manifests itself in the different measures in which He in His wisdom chose to augment His general gifts with special favours (emphasis added).

Those who reject God’s gift of grace are guilty of their own malice; those who accept it have received it from the Lord and cannot glory in their own merit. This passage, says Prudentius De Letter, contains St. Prosper’s special contribution: the distinction between a “general grace” for all people and a “special grace” for those (called “the elect”) who will accept the faith. For Prosper, the proof of the universality of God’s saving will is found in His offer of the general gift of grace. Thus, God shows “that He did not refuse to all mankind what He gave to some men [viz. special grace], but that in some men grace prevailed and in others nature recoiled.”

According to De Letter, St. Prosper teaches that God wills the salvation of all without exception meaning that God gives grace to all, albeit not in the same degree. De Letter explains: “All receive a general grace and only some a special grace; and these alone [who receive God’s special grace] actually attain salvation.” Sullivan, however, contends that Prosper teaches that the “general grace” given to gentiles is also sufficient for salvation. If anyone is condemned, it is due to his or her malice in rejecting it and not to the inherited guilt of original sin. Jacques Dupuis follows Sullivan in this opinion. Yet Sullivan’s interpretation contrasts with other parts of Prosper’s doctrine wherein he is exceedingly clear, for instance, that because of original sin unbaptized children go to the “unending misery” of hell. Due to humanity’s concupiscence, Prosper furthermore denies that non-believers who have tried to resist vice through the practice of natural reason have really acquired true virtue and eternal happiness. Without worship of the true God, he claims, what appears to be virtue is really sin! As to why God has left the

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112 Voc. omn. gent. 2.19.

113 Ibid.

114 De Letter, 204 n. 173 (cf. also p. 15).

115 Voc. omn. gent. 2.25.

116 De Letter, 209 n. 225 (cf. also pp. 15–17 passim). In De Letter’s opinion, though, Prosper’s concept of divine election comes very close to Augustine’s concept of predestination. Therefore, Prosper’s assertion of God’s universal, salvific will can sound at times like nothing more than a good intention on God’s part (cf. pp. 17–18).

117 Cf. SOC?, 42 and TCTR, 91–92.

118 Voc. omn. gent. 1.16 (cf. also 1.22, 2.20 and 2.22). In fact, he entitles a whole section: “God Is Just When He Rejects Unbaptized Infants Both in This Life and in the Next Because of Original Sin” (Voc. omn. gent. 2.21; italics in original).

119 Voc. omn. gent. 1.7. Cf. also Prosper’s compilation The Book of Theses Gleaned from the Works of St. Augustine, no. 106.
gentiles unenlightened for centuries and even now allows them to die and be lost, he replies that it is not for humans to question.\textsuperscript{120}

Dupuis seems correct when he writes: “Prosper seriously toned down Augustine’s rigorism which excluded from salvation all those living after Christ who had not heard and received the Gospel message.”\textsuperscript{121} Prudentius De Letter agrees, writing that by its incomparable stress on God’s universal, salvific will \textit{The Call of All Nations} represents “an evident desire and an effective attempt” to tone down Augustine’s rigid views.\textsuperscript{122}

B. Medieval Period

Conventionally, the “Middle Ages” have been dated from the collapse of the western half of the Roman empire ca. 476 until the birth of the “modern” period during the Renaissance (ca. 1300–1550).\textsuperscript{123} It is this period that we will consider now.

1. Saint Fulgence of Ruspe (ca. 462–ca. 527 or ca. 467–ca. 532)\textsuperscript{124}

Questions surround the life of the North African churchman Fulgence (or Fulgentius) of Ruspe. Some details are known with certitude: the day on which he died; his age at death; the length of his term as bishop of Ruspe. But since not one of those facts can be tied to any firm date, uncertainty reigns. Fulgence is considered the greatest North African theologian after St. Augustine.\textsuperscript{125}

His most well-known work is \textit{The Rule of Faith} (\textit{Fid. Petr.}), a compendium of dogmatic theology composed for a certain “Peter” wanting to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{126} It is here, according to Dupuis, that one finds the axiom, \textit{Extra ecclesiam nulla salus} (“Outside the church; no salvation”),

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{120} V\textit{oc. omn. gent.} 1.21.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} \textit{TCTR}, 92.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} De Letter, 18. According to De Letter, while no one denies that Prosper softens St. Augustine’s rigid expressions, there is no general agreement that he interprets Augustine’s ideas any more leniently. Still, De Letter thinks there is a real change in viewpoint—a “veering away” from Augustine—by his stress on the mystery of humanity’s salvation (see p. 168 n. 67). Prosper’s attempt to tone down St. Augustine’s views is verified not only by his conspicuous avoidance of the word “predestination,” but also by his incomparable stress on the universal, salvific will of God (p. 18).
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Cf. William J. Dohar, “Middle Ages,” in \textit{HCEC}, 862–63.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Cf. Morali, “Religions and Salvation,” in \textit{CEWRCS}, 58–59 passim.
  \item \textsuperscript{126} Eno, 59. Cf. also \textit{FEF}, 3:294.
\end{itemize}
applied in its rigidest form, since Fulgence excludes from salvation not just Christian heretics and schismatics, but Jews and pagans as well. He writes:

Hold most firmly and never doubt that not only all pagans but also all Jews and all heretics and schismatics who finish this present life outside the Catholic Church will go “into eternal fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels” [Matt 25:41].

Fulgence states more or less the same position in another treatise entitled The Forgiveness of Sins (Rem. pecc.), proclaiming:

Anyone who is outside this Church, which received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is walking a path not to heaven but to hell. . . . And this is the case not only if he remains a pagan without Baptism, but even if, after having been baptized . . . he continue as a heretic.

As Jacques Dupuis notes, Fulgence of Ruspe and Cyprian of Carthage are “the two main artisans” of the adage, Extra ecclesiam nulla salus. It is they and their interpretations which will serve as reference-points for the doctrine as it finds its way eventually into the church’s official pronouncements.

2. Other Notable Developments

We now turn briefly to two episodes relevant to the medieval Church’s view of the religious “other.” First, there is the letter of Pope St. Gregory VII (1073–85) to Anzir, the Islamic ruler of Mauritania Sitiphensis in North Africa. In that letter, Gregory VII thanks Anzir for his gifts as well as for having freed some captives. God, the pope writes, who wishes everyone to be saved (here citing 1 Tim 2:4) also commends that human beings should love both Him and one another. The pope writes further that he and Anzir must show that love to the world, since they profess to believe in and confess one God, albeit in different ways. Gregory VII also notes that many of the Roman nobility have praised

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127 See TCTR, 92.

128 Fid. Petr. 79 (cf. also nos. 78, 80, 81). The English citation of this work comes from Robert B. Eno’s translation above. Since the numbering system in Eno is confusing, however, I have chosen to follow the enumeration found in PL, vol. 65.

129 Rem. pecc. 1.19.2; cited in FEF, 3:292.

130 TCTR, 93.

131 Gregory VII, Ep. 21. The letter is cited in ND, no. 1002. N.B. The Islamic ruler’s name is also variously given as: “Anazir” or “Nacir.”
Anzir’s goodness and virtues. Dupuis finds the most significant portion of the letter to be where the pope concedes that Christians and Moslems worship the same God.

Next, we consider a statement of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). Convened by Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), the council was an attempt at church reform. In its first constitution, the council declares:

There is . . . one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved.

According to Theisen, this is the first instance of an ecumenical council citing the axiom. Given its location in a passage on the sacrament of the holy eucharist, however, he argues that the axiom itself is merely being recorded and is not the subject of an official definition or promulgation. But, Sullivan appears to disagree with that assessment: He calls the axiom as stated by Lateran IV “a dogma” of the church, although adding immediately that modern Christians do not understand the dogma in the same way as medieval Christians did.

3. Saint Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–74)

Born to Landulph of Aquino (hence “Aquinas”), Thomas grew up in Roccasecca in central Italy, later joining a new Catholic religious movement called “the Order of Preachers.” The church’s early judgment on Thomas and his work was surprisingly ambiguous: After his death the bishop of Paris,

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132 Ibid.

133 *TCTR*, 102. One of the few analyses of the letter can be found in: Julius Basetti-Sani, “For a Dialogue between Christians and Muslims (First Instalment),” *Muslim World* 57/2 (April 1967): 126–37.


135 Constitution no. 1 (*De fide catholica*). The English citation comes from Tanner (i.e. 1:230). This constitution is often simply referred to by its first word, viz. *Firmiter*.

136 Theisen, 18–19 passim.


The Order of Preachers, also called “Dominicans,” was established by St. Dominic de Guzmán (ca. 1170–1221) in 1216 as a counterforce to heretical groups which were spreading throughout western Europe. The group’s foci centred on the active preaching of the gospel and practice of contemplative prayer (cf. Benedict M. Ashley, “Dominican Order,” in *HCEC*, 428–29).
Stephen Tempier, issued a condemnation of some of Thomas’ theological positions. Eventually the church decided in Thomas’ favour declaring him a saint and a “doctor of the church.” Thomas is acknowledged today as one of the most important and influential theologians and philosophers of the Middle Ages.

In his *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (“On Truth”), Thomas maintains that there are some matters of faith to which everyone in every age is bound by explicit belief, namely, the belief that God exists and that He exercises His providence over human affairs. With “the time of grace” after the coming of Christ, however, Thomas maintained that everyone was bound at a minimum to have explicit faith in the following doctrines: “that God is triune, that the Son of God was made flesh, died and rose from the dead and other like matters which the church commemorates in her feasts.” In the case of heretics, Jews and Moslems there was no doubt for St. Thomas that they knew enough about Christianity to be guilty of the sin of disbelief and the wilful rejection of the truth. Thomas assumed as did other medieval theologians that practically everyone in the world had had an adequate opportunity to hear the Christian message. According to Sullivan, Thomas believed that a person could have been ignorant of the gospel message only in the rarest of situations: for example, if someone had been raised in the wilderness alone or among wild animals. Yet even in those cases Thomas surmised that God Himself would intervene in order to provide that person with the opportunity to arrive at explicit faith. Thomas writes:

[I]t pertains to divine providence to furnish everyone with what is necessary for salvation, provided that on his part there is no hindrance. Thus, if someone so brought up [e.g. in a forest] followed the direction of natural reason in seeking good and avoiding evil, we must most certainly hold that God would either reveal to him through internal inspiration what had to be believed, or would send some preacher of the Faith.

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140 Cf. Wallace et al., in *NCE*², 14:21 and 22. In 1325, Bishop Stephen Bourret of Paris rescinded the decision of his predecessor insofar as it touched upon the person of St. Thomas himself. The condemned theological positions, though, were referred back to the University of Paris for further debate (cf. Torrell, 324).

141 Wallace et al., in *NCE*², 14:22–23.

142 Ibid., 13.


144 *De verit.* q. 14, art. 11 responsio. Aquinas repeats this position in *Summa Theologiae* (cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 2, art. 7 responsio).


146 *SOC?*, 51–53 passim.

147 *De verit.* q. 14, art. 11 ad 1.
One of Aquinas’ most important works was the *Summa Theologiae*, a large compendium of theology which he—regrettably—never completed. In that later work, he concedes that a non-Christian who has never heard the gospel might still be saved even without receiving a direct revelation from God. Nevertheless, no salvation is possible for that person without faith in a mediator. This belief in a mediator, he continues, need not include an explicit act of faith in Jesus Christ; rather it would suffice for the non-Christian to have implicit faith in divine providence, which would thus imply belief in God as his or her deliverer. For Thomas, an unbeliever’s disbelief did not by itself bear the mark of a fault (*rationem peccati*) for which that person could be damned. On the contrary, the unbeliever’s damnation was the consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin. Furthermore, the unbeliever also stood condemned before God on account of his or her own personal sins for which there was no forgiveness without explicit faith.

Thomas is clear that no one can be saved without faith in Jesus Christ. Since baptism is the sacrament whereby a person is “reborn” and made part of Christ, its reception in order to be saved is therefore an obligation for all people. Indeed, it is the most necessary of sacraments because not only can adults not receive the full forgiveness of their sins without baptism, but children also have no other way than baptism in order to be spiritually regenerated. Nevertheless, Aquinas argues that some people can receive God’s salvation without having received visibly the sacrament of baptism. This idea of a substitute for the sacrament is called “baptism of desire,” or baptism *in voto*. Thomas describes two ways in which the sacrament of baptism might be lacking to someone: First, a person might lack the sacrament both in reality and in desire (*et re et voto*), meaning that that person has neither received baptism nor desires to receive baptism. In that case, Aquinas is clear: Such a one cannot be saved. Thomas, however, notes a second case wherein the sacrament is lacking in reality, but not in desire (*deesse re, sed non voto*). This means someone who desires baptism, but dies before receiving it. In that case, he writes:

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149 *ST*, II-II, q. 2, art. 7 ad 3.


151 *ST*, III, q. 68, art. 1 responsio.

152 *ST*, III, q. 67, art. 3 responsio.

153 *ST*, III, q. 68, art. 2 sed contra. Cf. also *ST*, III, q. 66, art. 12 responsio.
Such a person can attain salvation without actually being baptized because of his desire for baptism which comes from faith working through love [Gal 5:6], through which God, whose power is not restricted to visible sacraments, inwardly sanctifies a man (italics in original).\textsuperscript{154}

As long as someone has this “baptism of desire, explicitly or implicitly,” he or she can receive forgiveness of sins before baptism.\textsuperscript{155}

According to Dupuis, Thomas distinguishes between explicit and implicit kinds of “baptism of desire”: In the former, he means someone who believes in Jesus Christ and wishes explicitly to be baptized, but who dies before receiving the sacrament. In the latter, Aquinas means someone who, while not knowing about Jesus Christ, nevertheless wishes to conform his or her life to God’s will. This attitude contains not only an implicit disposition of faith in Christ, but also an implicit desire for baptism.\textsuperscript{156} In my opinion, this does not appear to accord fully with my own reading of what Aquinas says above. Aquinas seems to present only two scenarios regarding “the unbaptized”: First, he mentions those who have neither received baptism nor want to receive it because they do not believe in Christ; second, there are those like catechumens who do believe in Christ, who have expressed a wish for baptism—either explicitly or implicitly—and who nonetheless die before receiving the sacrament. I cannot find any place where Thomas associates the idea of an implicit desire for baptism (as per Dupuis) with someone who does not already have faith in Jesus Christ. Sullivan writes:

\textit{[W]}\textit{hen St. Thomas speaks of an implicit desire for baptism . . . he has in mind . . . that the dispositions of faith and charity which a person possesses conform his will to the will of God. . . . [E]ven though he does not know that the will of God includes his baptism, his disposition of soul implicitly embraces that object also.\textsuperscript{157}}

Here Sullivan seems to be drawing out the implications of Aquinas’ theology above for the alternate situation of the salvation of a person who does not even know about the requirement for baptism. Although Thomas is aware of the possibility—at least theoretically—of a person trying to live righteously according to natural reason without knowledge of Christ or the gospel, I cannot find where he connects that scenario with his doctrine of “baptism of desire.” On the contrary, Aquinas seems to argue that a situation as described by Sullivan would require a special intervention by God in order to bring that person to explicit and salvific faith. While Sullivan’s development of Aquinas’ thinking here may be constructive, his use of the expression “implicit desire for baptism” is perhaps inadvisable, since it fails to

\textsuperscript{154} ST, III, q. 68, art. 2 responsio.

\textsuperscript{155} ST, III, q. 69, art. 4 ad 2. Although, Thomas notes that a full remission of sins as well as a greater abundance of God’s grace and virtues will be received when that person has actually received the sacrament (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{156} TCTR\textit{P}, 115–16.

\textsuperscript{157} SOC\textit{?}, 59–60.
account for why whenever Thomas uses the phrase he never seems to have in mind someone who has not already heard and accepted the gospel.

4. The Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence-Rome (1431–45)\(^{158}\)

The main point which concerns us here is a statement contained in the council’s “Bull of Union with the Copts” (1442). The decree states:

[The Roman church] firmly believes, professes and preaches that all those who are outside the catholic church, not only pagans but also Jews or heretics and schismatics, cannot share in eternal life and will go into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels [Matt 25:41], unless they are joined to the catholic church before the end of their lives (italics in original).\(^{159}\)

The council continues that no one dying outside the communion of the church will be saved, regardless of how many “works of piety” he or she may have done—even if that person has shed his or her blood for the name of Christ.\(^{160}\) Dupuis believes this to be the first church declaration which connects both Jews and pagans to the axiom, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Although the decree’s solemn formulation is certain, he asks nonetheless whether the council intended actually to pronounce on the salvific relationship existing between the church and those outside of her. He concludes that the council did not so intend since the teaching itself was never in question.\(^{161}\)

According to Sullivan, the worldview of Catholic theologians in the Middle Ages was “practically co-extensive with Christian Europe.” They assumed that the known world’s non-Christian peoples had heard enough about Christianity so that, if they remained unbelieving, they were guilty of having wilfully rejected the gospel.\(^{162}\) The discovery of North and South America in 1492 by the navigator, Christopher Columbus, shattered their assumptions. Catholic theologians asked: How could unbelievers be adjudged guilty of wilful disbelief when countless numbers of human beings had lived and died in the “new world” without any (apparent) knowledge of Christ or the gospel? If God willed the

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\(^{159}\) Tanner, 1:578. It is also sometimes called, the “Decree for the Jacobites.”

\(^{160}\) Ibid.

\(^{161}\) *TCTR*, 95–96.

\(^{162}\) *SOC?*, 63.
salvation of all, how could He have left all those people without the means of salvation, like the church?  

We will look here only at the opinions of one theologian, a Spanish Jesuit and cardinal teaching at Rome:

5. John de Lugo (1583–1660)¹⁶⁴

Regarding those who have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel, John de Lugo follows the line of thought of his fellow Jesuit theologian, Francis Suárez (+1617), who argued that, if non-Christians kept the natural law, then God would somehow enlighten them further and thus lead them to an implicit desire for Christ sufficient for salvation.¹⁶⁵ De Lugo reasons that, even in the case of heretics and non-Christians who have heard the gospel, they too may be excused from the sin of disbelief and saved if they are “invincibly ignorant” of their situation. A heretic, he maintained, may know and believe some articles of the faith, but be unaware of others; an unbeliever, like a Jew or Moslem, may be overwhelmingly mistaken in his or her understanding and non-acceptance of Christianity. Providing that their errors were incorrigible, they may nevertheless come to supernatural faith and salvation through the truths they do believe.¹⁶⁶ Sullivan says that De Lugo’s novelty is contained in his position that some of those who have heard the church’s preaching—and even rejected it!—may still not be guilty of the sin of disbelief and, moreover, may even find salvation through the sincere practice of their faith in God and contrition for their sins.¹⁶⁷ Thus, with De Lugo, Jacques Dupuis thinks that one has reached the theory of salvific, implicit faith “in its more comprehensive form.”¹⁶⁸

After De Lugo and until the nineteenth century, there was not much movement on the issue of the salvific status of non-Catholics amongst theologians or within the institutional Catholic Church. The only notable doctrinal advance, mentioned here briefly, came during the Council of Trent (1545–63) which had been called to address intra-ecclesial issues raised by the emergence of the Protestant Reformation.¹⁶⁹ In

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¹⁶³ SOC?, 69.


¹⁶⁶ Cf. Disputationes scholasticae et Morales de virtute fidei divinæ, disputatio 12, nos. 50–51 (Léon ed., 3:286); cited in SOC?, 95.

¹⁶⁷ SOC?, 97–98.

¹⁶⁸ TCTRP, 120.

its “Decree on Justification” (issued in 1547), the council accepts the view that a person can be removed from the state of original sin and placed in the state of grace either through the reception of the sacrament of baptism or through one’s desire (eius voto) for it.\textsuperscript{170} Despite the backdrop of the Catholic Church’s theological disputes with Protestant thinkers and the fracturing of western Christianity, the council never resorts to the maxim, “Outside the Church; no salvation.” Sullivan explains the absence of the saying in the conciliar documents from the fact that—paradoxically—neither the bishops of Trent nor the Protestant Reformers actually disputed the principle.\textsuperscript{171} (Although, the nature and extent of “the church” was defined differently by each.)

C. Modern Period and Contemporary Attitudes

1. Pope Blessed Pius IX (1846–78)\textsuperscript{172}

In August 1863 Pope Pius IX addressed an encyclical letter, \textit{Quanto Conficiamur Moerore} (“On the Promotion of False Doctrines”), to all the bishops of Italy.\textsuperscript{173} In that letter, he took note of “a very grave [gravissimum] error” into which some Catholics had fallen, namely, the belief “that it is possible to arrive at eternal salvation although living in error and alienated from the true faith and Catholic unity.” The pope censured this opinion as greatly opposed (\textit{vel maxime adversatur}) to church teaching.\textsuperscript{174} Pius IX states in regard to non-Catholics:

There are . . . those who are struggling with invincible ignorance about our most holy religion. Sincerely observing the natural law and its precepts inscribed by God on all hearts and ready to obey God, they live honest lives [\textit{honestam rectamque vitam agunt}] and are able to attain eternal life by the efficacious virtue of divine light and grace [\textit{divinae lucis et gratiae operante virtute}].\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{170} Cf. Tanner, 2:672.

\textsuperscript{171} \textit{SOC}?, 82–83. Cf. also Theisen, 30.

\textsuperscript{172} For the history and accomplishments of his pontificate see: R. Aubert, “Pius IX, Pope, Bl.,” in \textit{NCE}^2, 11:384–87.

\textsuperscript{173} An encyclical is a letter directed by the pope to the universal church and typically concerned with doctrinal, moral, or disciplinary matters (cf. Michael O’Keefe, “Encyclical,” in \textit{HCEC}, 465).


\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Quanto Conficiamur Moerore}, no. 7.
This is because God in his great kindness and mercy who searches “the minds, hearts, thoughts, and nature of all” does not allow any person “who is not guilty of deliberate sin [voluntariae culpae] to suffer eternal punishments.” Nevertheless, he adds that “the Catholic teaching [catholicum dogma]” is well known that outside the church no one can be saved (neminem . . . extra catholicam Ecclesiam posse salvari). In this regard, the pope mentions “those who oppose the authority and statements of the . . . Church and are stubbornly separated from [her] unity . . . and also from the successor of Peter, the Roman Pontiff.”

This is not the first instance where Pius IX has utilized the idea of the possibility of salvation for non-Catholics due to their subjective, insurmountable ignorance of the faith. As Dupuis observes, the first “official” appearance of the idea came almost a decade earlier in an allocution (or speech) by Pius IX to the Roman cardinals. Regarding the principle Extra ecclesiam nulla salus, Theisen thinks that in his encyclical above Pope Pius IX “reject[s] a rigid interpretation of the axiom . . . condemn[ing] outright those who live beyond the pale of the Catholic Church.” Still, he sees a “tension” between Pius IX’s reaffirmation of the traditional axiom and his acknowledgement of God’s goodness toward non-Catholics, such that the pope feels “constrained” (Theisen’s word) to qualify the maxim as “dogma”—something which to Theisen’s knowledge was the first time that the axiom had been so endorsed in a statement of the Catholic Church.

2. “The Leonard Feeney Affair”

Jesuit priest Leonard Feeney (1897–1978) came into conflict with the cardinal-archbishop of Boston, Richard J. Cushing, over the interpretation of the saying Extra ecclesiam nulla salus. Feeney construed the axiom in its strictest possible meaning saying that only Roman Catholics could be saved.

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176 Ibid.

177 Ibid., no. 8.

178 TCTR, 123–24. In that allocution, given by the pope in December 1854, he declares:

It must . . . be held as of faith [ex fide] that no one can be saved outside the apostolic Roman Church. . . . Yet . . . it must likewise be held as certain [pro certo] that those who are in ignorance of the true religion, if this ignorance is invincible, are not subject to any guilt in this matter before the eyes of the Lord (Singulari Quadam; cited in ND, no. 1010).

The Latin text comes from Denzinger and Schönmetzer, no. 2865i.

179 Theisen, 32–33 passim. Let the reader recall that Theisen already disclaims any dogmatic value to the usage of the axiom by Lateran IV (cf. pp. 18–19).

The Vatican’s “Holy Office” (the precursor to the CDF) eventually became involved in the matter writing a letter to Card. Cushing. Calling *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* an “infallible dictum” of Catholic teaching, the Holy Office nevertheless explained that the “dogma” must be understood as the church herself understands it. It is true that no one can be saved who, while knowing that Jesus Christ established the church, yet refuses to join her or to obey Christ’s vicar, the pope. But the letter continues, it is also true that:

[to gain eternal salvation it is not always required that a person be incorporated *in reality* . . . as a member of the Church, but it is required that he belong to it at least *in desire and longing* . . . . When one is *invincibly ignorant*, God also accepts an *implicit desire*, so called because it is contained in the good disposition of soul by which a person wants his will to be conformed to God’s will (emphasis added).]^{181}

The letter mentions Pope Pius XII’s encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, in which the pope taught that there are non-Catholics who are by no means excluded from eternal salvation, since they are ordained to the church by a kind of unconscious desire, though their overall salvific condition is insecure. The relevant section of that encyclical reads:

[F]rom the very beginning of Our Pontificate, We have committed to the protection and guidance of heaven those who do not belong to the visible Body of the Catholic Church, . . . [F]rom a heart overflowing with love We ask each and every one of them to correspond to the interior movements of grace and to seek to withdraw from that state in which they cannot be sure of their salvation. For even though by an unconscious desire and longing [*inscio . . . desiderio ac voto*] they have a certain relationship [*ordinentur*] with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church.\(^{182}\)

Dupuis thinks that the church’s condemnation of Leonard Feeney demonstrates that the dictum understood in its rigid interpretation is “untenable today” and in need of being reinterpreted.\(^{183}\)

### 3. Jean Daniélou (1905–74)

A French Jesuit, cardinal-bishop and scholar, Jean Daniélou wrote extensively on the topic of Christianity’s relationship to the other world religions.\(^{184}\) He maintained that God had revealed Himself

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\(^{181}\) Cited in ND, nos. 854–55. When Feeney refused to amend his position in line with the Holy Office’s letter, he was dismissed from the Jesuits and excommunicated from the church. He was rehabilitated later to the church in the 1970’s without—interestingly—having been required to retract his position (see *SOC?*, 3–4).


\(^{183}\) *TCTR*, 99 (cf. also pp. 127–29).
successively to the human race throughout history. Any and all elements of truth found in the non-Christian religions were derived from human beings’ experience of God’s “cosmic revelation” in the created world and the practice of conscience. Furthermore, Daniélou proposed that not only had some people who had lived according to this “cosmic revelation” been pleasing to God, but they could also be called “pagan saints.”

Though the visible world functioned for pagan humanity like a “book” speaking about God, this cosmic revelation was nevertheless imperfect and incomplete, comprising a past phase in God’s revelation to humankind which would be infinitely surpassed in His revelations to Moses and (especially) through Jesus Christ. While Daniélou recognized the world’s non-Christian religions as “touching and often very beautiful attempts” to search for God, they were in the end human creations. Only the Catholic religion represented the opposite movement, namely, God’s response to humanity’s search by descending to earth in His Son, Jesus. The world’s religions (with their good and bad elements) were not so much false as they were superseded. They were pre-Christian survivals whose good elements were fulfilled and perfected in Christianity.

While recognizing that “[t]he opinion that became the fulfillment theory” had already been suggested at the beginning of the twentieth century by missiologists like John Nicol Farquhar and P. Johanss, Dupuis nevertheless calls Daniélou the first western exponent of the “fulfillment theory” of non-Christian religions. Daniélou’s own distinctive propounding of that theory would exercise a great influence upon other Catholic theologians and on the Catholic Church’s magisterium.

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185 Daniélou, *Faith Eternal and Man of Today*, 49.


187 Ibid., *God and Us*, 16–18 passim.

188 Ibid., *Salvation of Nations*, 8.

189 Ibid., *Advent*, 15–16.

190 TCTR, 133–34.

191 TCTR, 137.
4. Karl Rahner (1904–84)

Rahner was a German Jesuit and one of the most prominent and influential Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. For Rahner, God had placed a hunger for intimacy with Him in the human heart which could only be filled by the gift of Himself. This “hunger,” writes Margaret O’Gara, stands at the center of his theology. Rahner’s theory, writes Dupuis, is founded on his view of humanity in its concrete, historical condition as created by God and destined for union with Him. According to the supernatural order of reality, human beings are concretely and actively oriented to the realization of their self-transcendence by union with God. The “supernatural existential” is the fundamental structure of human nature by God’s grace; and the “transcendental experience” of God in human acts is destined to become historically concrete, for example in human religion.

Rahner argued that Christology was the beginning and the final end of anthropology. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ was fundamental to his theology overall and to his teaching on grace:

For [Rahner] the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the great gift offered to the human family; in response to the openness of human creatures, their unfinishedness, their hungering and thirsting after fulfillment, God has offered God’s very self as a gift. If human beings are a question in Karl Rahner’s thought, then Jesus Christ is God’s answer.

In Jesus, God’s Word, God gave not only the possibility of salvation, but also the actual salvation itself. Therefore, valid and lawful religion was not simply humankind’s interpretation of its own existence; rather God Himself had provided the interpretation of His relationship with humanity through His Word,

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193 Margaret O’Gara, “Openness and Gift: Themes from Rahner’s Theology,” Revue Science et Esprit 59/2–3 (May-August 2007): 373. I consulted with Prof. O’Gara when I was considering my choices for thesis director. Later she was one of my initial choices to serve on the thesis reading committee. In 2012, however, I learned that she had succumbed to her battle with cancer and died. With sadness—and yet hope—I pray that Jesus Christ our true God may have mercy on her soul and bring her into the peace and joy of His kingdom. May her loved ones be consoled by God’s grace!


196 O’Gara, 376.

Jesus, thus constituting Christ and Christ’s “continuing historical presence,” the church, as the religion binding humanity to God.\textsuperscript{198}

Still, humanity is not religious apart from its religions. It is not surprising that humans, whose innermost decisions are acted out both concretely and socially, would establish structures and rituals to enshrine and foster their religious beliefs. Rahner views this process positively.\textsuperscript{199} The religions are where God’s offer of supernatural grace shows itself, where humankind’s relationship to the absolute becomes “an explicit theme.”\textsuperscript{200} Given the social nature of humanity, it is unthinkable to Rahner that human beings’ salvific relationship with God—which must be made possible by Him for them in order to be saved—would exist “in an absolutely private interior reality” apart from the religion in which a person finds himself or herself. On the contrary, men and women cannot “escape” their religion: If they have had positive, saving relationships with God, then they have had them through whichever religion has been at their disposal in their particular sphere of existence.\textsuperscript{201}

By virtue of God’s desire for humankind’s salvation, the presence of the “supernatural existential” and God’s continual offer of grace, all men and women—even the unbaptized—are in a “Christ-determined situation.”\textsuperscript{202} As Dupuis describes it, Rahner thinks that a non-Christian can still unknowingly open himself or herself to God’s self-gift in Christ. That person would then be a Christian unaware or “anonymously,” rather than an explicit Christian and could be saved.\textsuperscript{203} Be that as it may, Dupuis recalls that Rahner teaches Christianity alone can and does reveal to humanity that its openness to God has come to a climax in Jesus of Nazareth. Apart from Christianity, God’s offer of grace in Jesus remains veiled, though it may be partially thematized in the world’s religions. Still, it remains unfinished and ambiguous: its “anonymity” can only be lifted by the gospel.\textsuperscript{204}

\textbf{5. Paul F. Knitter (1939–)}

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 118.


\textsuperscript{200} Rahner, “Christianity and Non-Christian Religions,” 127 (see especially pp. 121–31).

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 128.


\textsuperscript{204} \textit{TCTR}, 145.
A former Catholic priest with the Divine Word Missionaries who currently teaches part-time at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Paul Knitter advocates a pluralist paradigm of religions which he calls the “mutuality model.” He proposes a “multinormed, soteriocentric” approach based on global responsibility for “eco-human” well-being. He explains:

Rather than searching for the common God dwelling within different religious communities . . . and rather than presupposing a common core for all our individually wrapped religious experiences . . . I am now following the lead of those who hold up the “salvation” or “well-being” of humans and earth as the starting point and common ground for our efforts to share and understand our religious experiences and notions of the Ultimately Important.

According to Harold G. Wells, Knitter judges all religions on how they serve the “kingdom” of justice, peace and ecological well-being. As a praxis-oriented liberationist, that service is where the truth is found. Wells writes: “[t]o help remove the suffering of the world is [for Knitter] the central goal and point of true religion.” Dupuis thinks that Knitter’s model based on the reign of God has the merit of affirming that non-Christians are already members of the kingdom in history and are destined to meet God at the end of time. Yet he disputes whether Knitter’s proposal necessitates a paradigm shift from a model based on Christ. For, God’s reign has broken into history in the Christ-event; and it is through the risen Christ that members of other religions share in the kingdom both now and at the end of time. Thus, Dupuis maintains that a “kingdom-centred” perspective and a “Christ-centred” one go hand-in-hand.

Knitter, writes Wells, speaks about Jesus “with great love and devotion” and accepts Him as Christianity’s foundation and focus. But while discipleship and fidelity to the NT compel Christians to proclaim Jesus as God’s true and saving presence, Knitter argues that they need not insist on Him as God’s only saving presence. Instead, Christians should proclaim Jesus as: universal, decisive and indispensable. God’s revelation in Jesus has a universal significance, since Christ’s message is intended for all peoples and times, rather than just a particular group. Furthermore, God has spoken decisively in Jesus Christ and following Him makes a difference in a person’s life that will sometimes cut

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208 *TCTR*, 194–95.

209 Wells, 205.

210 Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, with a foreword by Harvey Cox (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 76 and 79. Knitter writes that, while God is revealed in Jesus and Jesus defines who God is, Jesus does not confine who God is. While God’s presence is truly available in Jesus, it is not found only in Him (p. 37).
him or her off from other perspectives and ways-of-life. Further, Jesus has an indispensable quality, since, on account of the fact that His message has enriched and transformed people’s lives, it follows that they would expect it to do the same for others. For Christians, Jesus’ message is experienced as something that is necessary for seeing God’s activity in the world.

However, whereas Christians have traditionally seen Jesus as unique and standing alone, Knitter recommends a “relational uniqueness”: Jesus does not possess a solitary uniqueness that pushes out all others; rather He has a distinctiveness all His own that nevertheless needs to be brought into relationship and conversation with God’s other possible “Words” to humanity. Moreover, while Knitter speaks about Jesus as the incarnation of God, he believes that God may have been incarnated in other human natures as well. Not only could there be other divine revelations, but there could also be other revelations on the same level. Knitter accepts that the fullness of divinity dwells in Jesus (see Col 2:9) but, while Christians have truly encountered the fullness of God’s salvific love and power in Jesus, they cannot say that that fullness is found only in Jesus. How, then, to understand the NT’s language about Jesus’ preeminence? Knitter agrees with Krister Stendahl that the NT’s cascade of praises and superlative speech about Jesus are “love language,” the language of discipleship and devotion. Such exclusive titles about Christ are not dogmatic definitions, rather Christianity’s way of professing its discipleship or following of Jesus. Wells summarizes Knitter’s Christology:

Jesus is essentially one who brings a message from God, that is, a prophet. He may be said to embody or incarnate the message. . . . [Knitter] may even say that God is present and active in Jesus. But Jesus is not the Word of God made flesh in the full trinitarian sense in which Christians have usually proclaimed it. . . . Jesus (among others) represents God’s revealing and saving activity, but is not the triune God’s own self-revealing self-gift. Jesus, like many others, is representative of God’s love, but is not constitutive of God’s own self-giving (emphasis in original).

6. Roger Haight (1936–)

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211 Ibid., 76–77 passim.
212 Knitter, Jesus and Other Names, 78.
213 Ibid., 80.
214 Wells, 205.
215 Knitter, Introducing Theologies of Religion, 156 (cf. also p. 157).
216 Ibid., Jesus and Other Names, 67–68.
217 Wells, 206–07. Knitter prefers the title “Spirit-filled Prophet” for designating Jesus’ identity (cf. Knitter, Jesus and Other Names, 93).
Jesuit priest and (until recently) professor at Union Theological Seminary, Haight seeks to use “symbol theory” in his reinterpretation of the Christian message for a postmodern audience. For Haight, Jesus of Nazareth offers the central, concrete symbol of God for Christians and is a medium of God’s self-communication to humanity. But whereas Jesus is the primary mediation of God’s presence and salvation for Christians and is, therefore, normative for them, He is not necessarily so for others. This is what Haight calls, a “normative but non-constitutive” Christology: Jesus may mediate salvation for Christians, but He is not necessarily salvific for those of other religions; nor is He a universal or unique saviour.

Haight believes that the “causal connection” between Jesus of Nazareth, who is the basis for Christology and God’s salvation, which goes on outside of Christianity, needs to be broken. To do this theologian James L. Fredericks explains how Haight proposes a “Spirit Christology” which conceives Jesus’ divinity in terms of the activity of the Holy Spirit dwelling within Him (which Haight prefers to call “empowerment”). The Spirit has descended on Christ and raised Him up as saviour of the world. But the Spirit blows wherever He wills (cf. John 3:8) and Jesus is not necessarily the only mediation of God to humanity who has also been empowered by the Spirit. A proper Christology should help Christians realize the presence of other empowering mediations in other religions. Because Jesus reveals a loving God whose will for humanity’s salvation must be mediated through historical symbols and religious institutions in order to be effective, Christians should perforce expect a diversity of religions without (however) any one of them being able to claim to be absolute.

After a lengthy investigation and in consultation with both Haight and his religious order, the Society of Jesus, in December 2004 the Vatican issued an official notification on Haight’s book, Jesus, Symbol of God. It found that the work contained “serious doctrinal errors regarding certain fundamental

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According to Clatterbuck, since direct access to the transcendent God is inaccessible to human beings, Haight believes that symbolic language offers a way to mediate that reality. But while symbols truly participate in their reality, they are nevertheless distinct from it (p. 274).

219 Haight, Jesus, Symbol of God, 196.

220 Ibid., 415.

221 Ibid., 422.


truths of faith” as well as “erroneous assertions” that could cause harm to the Christian faithful. Since Haight’s writing was contrary to “divine and catholic faith,” the CDF decided that he could no longer teach theology.224 As for Jacques Dupuis, while he himself had held serious reservations about Haight’s book, he told reporter John L. Allen, Jr., of NCR that he did not voice them publicly as an act of solidarity with Haight who was going through (what Dupuis felt to be) the Vatican’s unjust process for investigating theologians.225

### III. Current Positions of the Catholic Church on the Religious “Other”

#### A. Second Vatican Council (1962–65)

Convened by Pope John XXIII (1958–63), this council is recognized as the twenty-first ecumenical council of the Catholic Church.226 According to Richard P. McBrien, it is considered by many to be the most significant religious event since the Protestant Reformation.227 Dupuis highlights the following statements from the council as important for appreciating its teaching on the salvific status of other religions: *Lumen Gentium*, nos.16–17; *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, nos. 3, 9 and 11; and *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2.228 I will add to his list *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22, and *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, no. 7.

Unless otherwise noted, the Latin and English texts of the conciliar documents below come from Tanner vol. 2.

1. *Lumen Gentium*

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The Vatican has subsequently clarified its notification saying that Haight cannot teach theology at all, in any institution. Nor can he publish on the subject. Apparently, the action was taken in response to Haight’s continued promotion of his views (cf. John L. Allen, Jr., “Vatican Levels New Censorship against Haight,” *NCR*, 23 January 2009, 8–9).


226 For a general history of the council, see footnote 3 above. For a review of the council’s doctrine on non-Christian religions see: Morali, “Salvation, Religions, and Dialogue in Roman Magisterium,” in *CEWRCS*, 125–32.


228 *TCTRP*, 162.
The official title of this document is the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.” Therefore, it stands at the highest level of authority among the other conciliar documents.229

The bishops acknowledge in Lumen Gentium that various groups of non-Christians are related (i.e. ordinantur) to Christ’s church, although these groups have still not accepted the gospel. They continue:

There are those who without any fault do not know anything about Christ [evangelium Christi] or his church, yet who search for God with a sincere heart and, under the influence of grace, try to put into effect the will of God as known to them through the dictate of conscience: these too can obtain eternal salvation. Nor does divine Providence deny the helps that are necessary for salvation to those who, through no fault of their own, have not yet attained to the express recognition of God yet who strive, not without divine grace, to lead an upright life. For whatever goodness and truth [boni et veri] is found in them is considered by the church as a preparation for the gospel and bestowed by him who enlightens everyone that they [sic] may in the end have life.230

Dupuis observes that this passage only attributes positive value to the dispositions of the individuals themselves and not to their particular religions per se.231

By preaching the gospel, the council continues, the church draws non-Christians to the faith. Her preaching disposes them to receive the sacrament of baptism, thus drawing them out of their bondage to error and incorporating them into Christ. In that way the “good seed” which has been sown in a people’s hearts and minds or in its rituals and cultures is saved from destruction: It is cleansed, raised up and completed “to the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of humanity.”232 As Dupuis notes, the church looks kindly on the rightful dispositions and positive endowments of humankind, but she is also aware that they need to be fulfilled through the gospel message.233

2. Gaudium et Spes

229 Canon lawyer Francis G. Morrisey records four types of documents prepared by the council ranked according to the following levels of authority: constitutions; decrees; declarations; and messages. He explains: [T]he constitutions (such as the dogmatic and pastoral ones) are fundamental documents addressed to the Church universal, while the decrees, which build upon the constitutional principles, are directed more specifically to a given category of the faithful or to a special form of apostolate [e.g. the media and social communication]. The declarations were policy statements giving the teaching of the Church on certain more controverted matters and thus are more liable to be revised with time. The messages are exhortations addressed to various categories of persons at the conclusion of the final session of the council (Francis G. Morrisey, “Papal and Curial Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the 1983 Code of Canon Law,” The Jurist 50 [1990]: 111; emphasis added).

230 LG, no. 16.

231 TCTRP, 162.

232 LG, no. 17.

233 TCTRP, 162–63.
The next document is the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World [in mundo huius temporis].”

According to the bishops, only in Christ’s incarnation has light been shed upon the mystery of humanity. As “the last Adam” and perfect man, Jesus has fully manifested both humanity and its calling to itself, restoring the divine likeness from the deformity of sin and, through His incarnation, uniting Himself in some way with every human being. Referring to the paschal mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the bishops continue that this mystery applies not only to Christians, but also “to all people of good will in whose hearts grace is secretly [invisibili] at work.” Since Christ died for everyone and God calls everyone, the bishops “are obliged to hold that the holy [sic] Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery in a manner known to God.”

Dupuis argues that this is where Vatican II gives the clearest explanation of how the salvation of non-Christians takes place, namely, through the universal working of the Holy Spirit.

While Vatican II’s references to the Holy Spirit’s action among non-Christians are scarce, according to Dupuis in GS the Spirit’s universal economy begins to stand out plainly. He notes the paradox that whenever the pastoral constitution mentions the Holy Spirit’s operative activity among humankind, the direct context of its statements is not primarily the context of the world’s religions, rather the secular context of humanity’s universal endeavours and aspirations (cf. e.g. GS nos. 26, 38–39, 41, 45). Only at the document’s conclusion (i.e. nos. 92–93) does the council even begin to speak about the Spirit’s activity within an interreligious context. These comments by Dupuis, however, seem to

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234 Since there was some confusion among the bishops as to what in fact a “pastoral constitution” was, the following official explanation was attached at the beginning of GS:

The constitution is termed ‘pastoral’ because, while dependent on principles of doctrine, its aim is to express the relationship between the church and the world and people of today. . . .

In the first part the church develops its doctrine about humanity, the world in which human beings live and its own relationship to both. In the second it concentrates on several aspects of modern living and human society and specifically on questions and problems which seem particularly urgent today (Tanner, 2:1069 n. 1; italics in original).


235 GS, no. 22.

236 Ibid.

237 TCTR, 161–62.

conflict with his analysis of *GS* presented in other writings: In *JCEWR*, for example, he claims that *GS* does indeed say that the Holy Spirit is active and present in non-Christians and their religions.\(^{239}\) Since he never acknowledges the difference, it is not clear how he could have held both positions.

3. *Ad Gentes Divinitus*

Entitled the “Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church,” the council fathers refer to God’s “all-embracing plan . . . for the salvation of the human race” which is not just accomplished secretly in human beings’ rational capacity (*in mente hominum*), but also in their multifarious efforts—even religious ones—by which they seek out God. Though needing guidance and correction, those efforts can be viewed either as leading to Him, the true God, according to His loving and provident plan or as paving the way for the preaching of the gospel (*praeparatione evangelica*).\(^{240}\)

The council affirms that by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, in the flesh God has entered human history in a “new and definitive way,” so that through His Son Jesus “[God] might snatch human beings from the power of darkness and of Satan and in this Son reconcile the world to himself.”\(^{241}\) This then is the fundamental reason for the church’s missionary activity, namely, (citing 1 Tim 2:4–6 and Acts 4:12) God’s will that all people be saved through Christ, the one and only mediator of salvation, and come to the knowledge of the truth. The bishops declare:

> It is necessary . . . that all should be converted to [Jesus Christ], made known through the preaching of the church and that through baptism they should be incorporated into him and into the church, which is his body.\(^{242}\)

Consequently, no one can be saved who, though knowing that God has established the Catholic Church as necessary through Jesus Christ, yet refuses either to enter or remain in her.\(^{243}\) While “through ways known to himself” God can lead people who are inculpably ignorant (*sine eorum culpa ignorantes*) of the gospel to such faith as without which no one can please Him, the church’s missionary activity still retains

\(^{239}\) He declares that *GS* “makes constant reference to the activity of the Spirit in the world outside of the church,” both in humankind’s “religious initiatives” as well as in humanity’s cultures and “universal aspirations, even secular” (*JCEWR*, 158–59). He writes later: “We cannot doubt that, in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, [the council] has brought out the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the members of other *religious* traditions” (p. 162; emphasis added).

\(^{240}\) *AG*, no. 3.

\(^{241}\) Ibid.

\(^{242}\) *AG*, no. 7.

\(^{243}\) Ibid. The document cites here the doctrine found in *LG*, no. 14.
its full meaning and necessity and she still has the obligation and right to preach the gospel. The bishops proclaim:

Whatever truth and grace are already to be found among peoples—a secret presence of God, so to speak—[the Church’s missionary activity] frees from evil infections and restores to Christ their source, who overthrows the dominion of the devil and wards off the manifold malice of evil-doing. Accordingly, whatever good is found to be sown [boni . . . seminatum invenitur] in the minds and hearts of human beings or in the particular rites and cultures of peoples, not only does not perish but is healed, elevated and perfected, to the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of humankind (emphasis added).

Theologian Avery Dulles strikes a cautious tone in interpreting this passage, stating that the council is not implying that non-Christian religions are “adequate substitutes” for Christianity, since in some respects they may hinder the salvation of their adherents. “To that extent,” he writes, “the council’s attitude toward them is one of qualified approval and toleration.”

So as to give fruitful witness to Christ, the council encourages Catholics to associate with non-Christians respectfully and lovingly and to be involved in the social and cultural life of their own communities. The bishops continue: “They should be familiar with their national and religious traditions; they should with joy and reverence discover (detegant) the seeds of the Word which lie hidden in them.” Imitating Jesus who tried to lead people to the divine light through “a genuinely human dialogue [colloquio],” Christians should through sincere and patient dialogue (dialogo) come to know the riches that God has distributed among the nations.

4. Nostra Aetate

The full name of this document is the “Declaration on the Relationship [habitudine] of the Church to the Non-Christian Religions.”

The bishops note various spiritual and philosophical questions that pose themselves to humankind as well as humanity’s attempts to address those questions in and through its religions. The bishops declare:

The catholic church [sic] rejects nothing of those things which are true and holy in these religions. It regards with respect those ways of acting and living and those precepts and teachings which, though often at variance with what it holds and expounds, frequently reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens everyone (emphasis added).
The church, add the bishops, is bound nevertheless to proclaim without ceasing that in Jesus Christ—who is the way, the truth and the life (as per John 14:6)—God has reconciled all things to Himself. Also, it is in Christ that one finds the fullness of religious life. The section ends with the following admonition:

[The church] therefore calls upon all its sons and daughters with prudence and charity, through dialogues [colloquia] and cooperation with the followers of other religions [asseclis aliarum religionum], bearing witness to the christian [sic] faith and way of life, to recognise, preserve and promote those spiritual and moral good things as well as the socio-cultural values which are to be found among them [quae apud eos inventiuntur].

Dupuis thinks that the council’s location of authentic values in the religious traditions themselves is expressed more forcefully here than in the other texts cited above, especially in its explicit mention of God’s truth existing in their ways of conduct and teachings. Yet by affirming the presence of spiritual and moral goods and socio-cultural values “among them,” one may ask whether that statement by the council intends to refer to the religions themselves (as per Dupuis’s statement) or to something else. It would seem, though, that Dupuis based this interpretation on his reading of the text’s English translation (which, due to that language’s grammatical idiosyncrasies, is indeed ambiguous). The official Latin text of NA no. 2 given above, however, is not ambiguous: It locates whatever goods and values are to be found “among them [apud eos]” among the followers (i.e. asseclis) of other religions. It does not link those goods and values to the religions themselves. That much is clear from the text’s usage of the masculine gender for the pronoun (i.e. is). The word religio takes the feminine gender in Latin; and if the declaration had meant to refer any goods and values to the religions themselves (as per Dupuis’s assertion), then one would have expected to see: apud eas—not apud eos.

On the other hand, theologian Reid Blackmer Locklin writes that there is much the declaration does not say. For example, it does not say explicitly that followers of other religions are solidly within the realm of God’s grace and salvation. It does not explain precisely how other religions and their followers may possess spiritual truths that are worth preserving and encouraging. The tenor of Nostra

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249 Ibid.
250 Ibid. (cf. Tanner, 2:969).
251 TCTR, 164.
Aetate, he writes, is deliberately laconic and restrained: “It points a way beyond exclusivism, but it falls short of charting a course to another harbor.”254

In assessing Vatican II’s teaching, Dupuis identifies two main issues: the individual salvation of those who belong to non-Christian religions; and the salvific role that those non-Christian religions might play in the life of their adherents. Regarding the first issue, he believes that the council’s innovation consisted in the optimistic way in which it viewed the world, especially the salvation of those outside the church. What had been formerly taught as a possibility was now being taught by the council “with unprecedented assurance.”255 James L. Fredericks agrees that, whereas in previous statements the church had been tentative, Vatican II is “clear and unambiguous” about the possibility of salvation for the followers of other religions. But in regard to the way in which such people are saved, the council maintains “a studied ambiguity and restraint.”256 As to the second issue: Although the council’s doctrinal assessment and evaluation of other religions have a positive ring to them, Dupuis feels that the conciliar teaching ultimately suffers from a certain vagueness. Still, due to the council’s excessive emphasis on the church (his opinion), Vatican II did not explicitly venture to call the non-Christian religions ways or mediations of salvation.257 In fact, in his last book before his death Dupuis noted the council’s silences and limits in its teaching on non-Christian religions, remarking that he felt a “certain disillusionment and dissatisfaction” upon rereading some of the conciliar texts forty years later. Obviously, Dupuis asserted, the council did not have the sensitivity toward other religions which had since developed in postconciliar theology.258

Avery Dulles writes that the conciliar documents do not teach that other religions are divine revelations, paths of salvation or acceptable alternatives to Christianity. Vatican II espouses a “very high Christology”: Jesus is the source of salvation for the world; He is the Goal of human history and the Answer to the longings of the human heart. Consequently, the bishops took great care to insist on the uniqueness of His mediatorship and the importance of the church’s missionary activity. If one word could characterize the church’s modern attitude toward other religions, it would be “tolerance.”259

B. Recent Papal Statements

254 Ibid., 107.
255 TCTRP, 161.
256 Fredericks, 226 and 227.
257 Cf. TCTRP, 164, 169–70 (cf. also, p. 314).
258 CR, 66.
Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the papal and curial documents in this section below come from the PCID volume Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963–2005), or IDOT.

1. Pope Paul VI (1963–78)

Pope Blessed John XXIII died in 1963 between the conciliar sessions of Vatican II. His successor as pope of Rome was the cardinal-archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Battista Montini, who took the name “Paul VI.” At the beginning of the second session of the council, the new pope gave an allocution to the gathered bishops. Although recognizing religions which teach a proper concept of God and offer principles of moral and spiritual life through their beliefs and practices, he declared that the church—with regret, yet without question—still perceived in them “gaps, disparities and errors [lacunas, defectus et errores].” Still, whatever is true, good and human in them she holds with respect.

Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical, Ecclesiam Suam (“On the Church”) shortly before Vatican II’s third session in 1964. The pope speaks at great length regarding “the dialogue of salvation,” which God’s charity has begun through the sending of His only begotten Son and about the church’s mission to announce the truth, which is indisputable and necessary for salvation. He describes the church’s relationship with her dialogue partners as a series of concentric circles. Regarding the “circle” of the non-Christian religions, he states:

Obviously we cannot share in these various forms of religion [or] . . . remain indifferent to the fact that each of them . . . should regard itself as being the equal of any other and . . . authorize its followers not to seek to discover whether God has revealed the perfect and definitive form, free from all error, in which he wishes to be known, loved and served. Indeed, honesty compels us to declare openly our conviction that there is but one religion, the religion of Christianity. It is our hope that all who seek God and adore him may come to acknowledge its truth.


262 See ES, nos. 73–92 passim.

263 ES, no. 111.
After the 1974 Synod of Bishops, Paul VI published his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (“On Evangelization in the Modern World”). He acknowledges that the non-Christian religions have given “valid expression” to humankind’s spiritual life and echo the voices of those whose search for God, albeit imperfect, has been, sincere and upright. Through their religious writings, moreover, they have taught people how to pray. The church’s respect for these religions, however, does not deter her from proclaiming Jesus:

> On the contrary she holds that these multitudes of men have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ. . . . It is in these, we believe, that the whole human family can find in the most comprehensive form and beyond all their [sic] expectations everything for which they have been groping . . . about God, about man and his ultimate destiny, about life and death and about truth itself.

It is the church’s special function to bring men and women into contact with God’s plan, with His living presence and with His care for the human race: “[B]y virtue of [the Christian] religion a true and living relationship with God is established which other religions cannot achieve even though they seem . . . to have their arms raised up toward heaven.” It must be admitted “squarely,” according to Dupuis, that Paul VI presents the other world religions in “a clearly negative fashion which did not correspond to many opinions expressed on the synod floor.” In his teaching, “[t]he ‘fulfillment theory’ is . . . exposed in its rigid form, without the refinements by which it has been softened in recent years thanks to much theological rethinking.”


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264 As its title suggests, an apostolic exhortation is meant to be persuasive (cf. Morrisey, 106–07). The Synod of Bishops is “a consultative assembly drawn from the whole Catholic episcopate to discuss matters of concern to the Church universal and to provide opportunities of collaboration between the Bishops . . . and the Bishop of Rome” (“Synod of Bishops, World,” in *HCEC*, 1234).

265 *EN*, no. 53.

266 Ibid.

267 Ibid.

268 *TCTR*, 171–72.


According to journalist John L. Allen, Jr. of National Catholic Reporter, while Vatican II offered a cautious step forward in recognizing the value of other religions, John Paul II “took this ball and ran with it.” He observes:

From the efficacy of non-Christian prayer to the role of other religions in the economy of salvation, [John Paul II’s] has . . . been a bold teaching pontificate, endorsing the theological status of other religions as no pope ever has.271

Dupuis himself writes approvingly of the pope’s “prophetic gestures” and “remarkably open words” in regards to other religions. Those gestures and words, in his opinion, encouraged “a broader theological opening and more courageous concrete stances” toward non-Christians.272

In his first encyclical, Redemptor Hominis (“Redeemer of Humanity”), Pope John Paul II validates “the treasures of human spirituality” found in other religions which are the effects of the Holy Spirit’s truth operating outside the visible bounds of the church.273 In Jacques Dupuis’s appraisal, John Paul II’s singular contribution to the “theology of religions” can be seen in his emphasis on the operative presence of the Holy Spirit in the religious life of non-Christians.274 The pope continues in RH that Vatican II rightly saw in non-Christian religions reflections of the one truth (viz. seeds of God’s Word). These attest to the fact that, though the routes may be different (etsi variis viis), there is only one goal toward which the aspiration of the human spirit is directed, expressed in its search for God and the full dimension of human life. Yet it is in and through Jesus Christ that God has fully and definitively revealed Himself to humankind.275

In his 1990 encyclical, Redemptoris Missio (“On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate”), John Paul II proclaims Christ as the only mediator between God and humankind: “No one . . . can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit.” While other forms of God’s mediation are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value only from Christ’s one, universal mediation and are not parallel or complementary to it.276 For those who do not know the gospel or have not been able to enter the church, the pope reassures them that salvation is still available through the grace of Christ which, while not making them formal members of the church,

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272 CR, 259.


274 TCTR, 173.

275 RH, no. 11. The Latin text can be found at the Vatican’s website: <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis_lt.html>.

276 RM, no. 5; cited in ND, no. 1166. Cf. also LG, no. 62.
has a mysterious relationship to her, enlightening them according to each one’s spiritual and material situation.\(^{277}\)

While the Holy Spirit reveals Himself in a special way in the church, He is present and active universally, without limit to time or space, constituting the source of humankind’s existential and religious questioning. The Spirit’s presence and activity affect individuals as well as “society and history, peoples, cultures and religions” (emphasis added). The risen Christ is in fact made present in human hearts through the Spirit who sows the “seeds of Word” found present in various customs and cultures and prepares them for completion in Christ.\(^{278}\) The Holy Spirit, though, is not an alternative to Christ: Whatever He brings about in human hearts and history, in cultures and religions, serves as a preparation for the gospel and can only be understood in reference to “the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit.”\(^{279}\) Dupuis seems slightly disappointed here, describing \textit{RM} as “inconclusive” about whether the Holy Spirit’s presence in peoples and religions also implies a positive significance and saving value to the religions themselves. The most the pope will say is that salvation in Christ is possible outside the church (see \textit{RM}, no.10) and that participated forms of mediation in the order of salvation are possible. But it is not clear to Dupuis that he includes the religious traditions themselves among those mediations.\(^{280}\)

John Paul II attests that interreligious dialogue forms part of the church’s evangelizing mission to those who do not know Christ or His gospel: In Christ, God calls all people to Himself. Recalling Paul VI’s statement above about non-Christian religions’ deficiencies, he nevertheless states that God makes Himself present to people in many ways, either individually or through “their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression.”\(^{281}\) Due to the church’s deep respect for whatever the Holy Spirit has brought about in humankind, she engages in dialogue seeking not only to discover the signs of Christ’s presence and the Spirit’s activity, but also to examine herself and bear witness to the fullness of revelation.\(^{282}\) As James L. Fredericks points out, nowhere in his theology of the Holy Spirit does John Paul II suggest that other religions are salvific in their own right. Instead, he speaks of participated forms of mediation by which other religions are connected to Christ’s saving mystery presented fully in His church.\(^{283}\)

\(^{277}\) \textit{RM}, nos. 9–10; cited in ND, nos. 1167–68.

\(^{278}\) \textit{RM}, no. 28.

\(^{279}\) \textit{RM}, no. 29.

\(^{280}\) \textit{TCTR}, 177.

\(^{281}\) \textit{RM}, no. 55.

\(^{282}\) \textit{RM}, no. 56.

\(^{283}\) Fredericks, 236.
In preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000, Pope John Paul II wrote his 1994 apostolic letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. He takes the opportunity to state what he believes is the essential difference between Christianity and other religions: In the religions, humankind seeks God; in the former, God comes in person to humanity and shows it the path by which He may be reached:

In Christ, religion is no longer a ‘blind search for God’ [cf. Acts 17:27] but the response of faith to God who reveals himself . . . In him all things come into their own: they are taken up and given back to the Creator from whom they first came. Christ is thus the fulfillment of the yearning of all the world’s religions and as such, he is their sole and definitive completion.

Dupuis thinks one sees here the resumption of the fulfillment theory, for the pope’s attitude seems to leave no room for recognizing other religions as “a first divine initiative toward human beings” with a positive, salvific value for their followers.

Perhaps, the high point of Pope John Paul II’s “prophetic gestures” (according to Dupuis’s phrase) toward non-Catholics was his convocation of a series of interreligious prayer conferences at Assisi, Italy. The first meeting called the “World Day of Prayer for Peace” was held in October 1986. A couple of months later (and, perhaps, due to some criticisms raised), the pope offered a lengthy reflection on the Assisi meeting—an “exegesis,” he called it—to members of the Roman curia.

According to Dupuis, “[t]he overall fabric” of John Paul II’s talk concerns the unity of humankind not only in its creation and redemption by God, but also in its origin in God and destination toward Him. John Paul II emphasizes humankind’s mysterious unity over and above any distinctions that might exist between the world’s peoples.

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284 An apostolic letter is addressed by the pope to a particular category of person (e.g. bishops in a certain country or area) or on the occasion of a specific need (cf. Morrisey, 106).


286 *TCTR*, 177–78.


288 John Paul II, “Address to the Roman Curia at the Exchange of Christmas Wishes,” 22 December 1986, no. 2. Dupuis notes the presence of “misgivings” and “reservations” expressed about the event by some, although without naming names (cf. idem, “World Religions in God’s Salvific Design in Pope John Paul II’s Discourse to Curia,” 30 and 37; cf. also *TCTR*, 175). According to reporter John Allen Jr., it was no secret within Vatican circles that the CDF prefect, Joseph Card. Ratzinger, while never voicing anything publicly against the pope on the matter, had nonetheless disapproved of the Assisi meeting, fearing that its meaning would be misinterpreted (cf. e.g. John L. Allen, Jr., “Doubts about Dialogue,” *NCR*, 27 August 1999, 14; idem, “Pope Calls for Peace Gathering, Fast,” *NCR*, 7 December 2001, 6; and, idem, “Reformulating the Spirit of Assisi,” *NCR*, 15 September 2006, 10).

289 *TCTR*, 175. For instance, the pope maintains: “Accordingly, there is only one divine plan for every human being . . . one single origin and goal . . . The differences [among human beings] are a less important element,
is the God-man Jesus Christ in whom God has reconciled everything and in whom humanity finds the fullness of religious life. Just as all human beings bear the mark of their divine origin, all humanity is also included in the work of Christ who died to save the whole world (cf. John 4:42).\footnote{290} John Paul II explains that “the real and objective value of [humankind’s] ‘orientation’ toward the unity of the one People of God [i.e. the church] could be seen at . . . Assisi,” for in the acts of prayer by the representatives of various other religions was discovered “the profound communion which already exists between us in Christ and in the Spirit, a communion that is living and active even if as yet incomplete.”\footnote{291} He continues:

> At Assisi, in an extraordinary way, there was the discovery of the unique value that prayer has for peace. . . . the prayer of all, each one in his own identity and in search of the truth. . . . [O]ne must see in this another wonderful manifestation of that unity which binds us together, beyond the differences and divisions which are known to all. Every authentic prayer is under the influence of the Spirit [citing Rom 8:26] “who intercedes insistently for us . . . because we do not even know how to pray as we ought,” but he prays in us “with unutterable groanings”. . . . We can indeed maintain that every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person (emphasis added).\footnote{292}

Dupuis sees here an acceptance by John Paul II of “the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the religious life of the members of other religious traditions.”\footnote{293}

\section*{3. Pope Benedict XVI (2005–13)\footnote{294}}

Though pope for several years now, Benedict XVI has not produced much official teaching on interreligious matters. There have, however, been some notable episodes.

In 2006, he gave a lecture at the University of Regensburg, Germany, where he had once been a professor. Looking back on his experiences, he recalled the atmosphere in which nobody seemed when confronted with the unity which is radical, fundamental, and decisive” (John Paul II, “Address to Roman Curia at Exchange of Christmas Wishes,” no. 3, emphasis in original; cf. also nos. 8 and 9).

\footnote{290} John Paul II, “Address to Roman Curia at Exchange of Christmas Wishes,” no. 4.

\footnote{291} Ibid., no. 7.

\footnote{292} Ibid., no. 11.

\footnote{293} \textit{TCTR}, 175.

\footnote{294} Revealing that his health had deteriorated to such a point that he was no longer able “to adequately fulfill the ministry entrusted to [him]” as pope, in February 2013 Benedict XVI formally announced his resignation from the position of bishop of Rome (cf. Benedict XVI, “Declaratio,” 10 [?] February 2013; available from the Holy See at: <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2013/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20130211_declaratio_en.html>. N.B. The Vatican’s website gives February 11th as the date). In March 2013 the cardinal-archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, was elected as the next pope taking the name “Francis I.”}
troubled by having faculties in the university which used reason in the context of faith. Benedict XVI then quotes from a series of dialogues held between the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaeologus (+1425) and an Islamic interlocutor:

In the seventh conversation . . . the emperor touches on the theme of the holy war . . . [He] addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness that we find unacceptable, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: “Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the Faith he preached.” The emperor . . . goes on to explain . . . why spreading the Faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul (emphasis added).

The speech’s apparent, overall focus was not Islam per se, but the issue of how science and philosophy in the West had become separated from faith. Be that as it may, the comments appeared to some to be an attack on Islam, and a negative reaction among Moslems ensued. As New York Times journalist Ian Fisher reported:

[T]he Muslim world reacted with rage. Demonstrations broke out in many Muslim countries; firebombers attacked churches in the West Bank and Gaza; gunmen killed an Italian nun in Somalia. The pope himself was threatened.

Eventually, Pope Benedict XVI himself apologized saying he was “deeply sorry” for the reactions his address had caused.

Less than two months later, Benedict XVI journeyed to the predominantly Islamic, yet officially secular, Republic of Turkey. In a speech to the president of the Religious Affairs Directorate, he maintained that people of religion offer “a credible response” to society’s questioning about the meaning


and purpose of life: “We are called to work together, so as to help society to open itself to the transcendent, giving Almighty God his rightful place.” Most interestingly, he specifically cited Pope Gregory VII’s letter to Anzir (see above) as “an illustration of the fraternal respect with which Christians and Muslims can work together.”

But the most noteworthy aspect of his trip was his meeting with Islamic cleric, Mustafa Çağrıçi at Istanbul’s famed “Blue Mosque.” During that “unusual revision” of his schedule (in the words of reporter John L. Allen, Jr.), the pope donned a pair of white slippers in accordance with Islamic tradition and paused with his host “for a moment of what appeared to be silent prayer.” Benedict XVI’s only commentary on the action was to say that “divine Providence” had granted him the opportunity to visit the mosque. “Pausing for a few minutes of recollection in that place of prayer,” he said, “I addressed the one Lord of Heaven and earth, the Merciful Father of all humanity. May all believers recognize that they are his creatures and witness to true brotherhood!”

Benedict XVI also made a visit to the Holy Land in May 2009. To a group of religious, political and academic leaders in Jordan, he noted the meeting’s location in front of a mosque, extolling places of worship as “jewels” that stand out across the earth:

[T]hey all point to the divine, to the Transcendent One, to the Almighty. . . . [T]hese sanctuaries have drawn men and women into their sacred space to pause, to pray, to acknowledge the presence of the Almighty and to recognize that we are all his creatures.

Meeting with different religious groups involved in interreligious dialogue, the pope counselled them that differences should not overshadow their common experience of awe and respect for the universal, the absolute and the true. He declared:

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301 Ibid. Reporter John L. Allen, Jr., commented that Benedict XVI’s citation of Gregory VII’s letter almost seemed like “a deliberate counterpoint” to his quotation of Manuel II Palaeologus in his Regensburg lecture (John L. Allen, Jr., “Pope Benedict Takes a ‘Soft Tone’ in Turkey,” NCR, 8 December 2006, 5).


Religious belief presupposes truth. The one who believes is the one who seeks truth and lives by it. Although the medium by which we understand the discovery and communication of truth differs in part from religion to religion, we should not be deterred in our efforts to bear witness to truth’s power. \(^{306}\)

Believing that they have “a criterion of judgment and discernment which is divine in origin and intended for all humanity,” the pope encouraged the members of these groups in bringing that knowledge to public life: “truth should be offered to all; it serves all members of society.”\(^{307}\) Remarkably, there was no indication that the pope intended his remarks only for his Christian listeners.

C. Statements by the Roman Curia

1. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith\(^{308}\)

In 2000, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the declaration, “Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church.”\(^{309}\) The document reasserts the definitive and complete character of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ: He is the incarnate Son of God and the one in whom God the Father has made Himself known in the fullest possible way.\(^{310}\) It is, therefore, contrary to the faith to say God’s revelation in Jesus is limited, imperfect or incomplete in such a way that it would be complemented by other religions. On the contrary:

[I]t is unique, full and complete, because he who speaks and acts is the Incarnate Son of God. Thus, . . . the Word made flesh, in his entire mystery . . . is the source, participated but real, as well as the fulfillment of every salvific revelation of God to humanity.\(^{311}\)


\(^{307}\) Ibid.


\(^{309}\) A declaration is a pronouncement which either interprets existing law or replies to a contested point of law or doctrine (cf. Morrisey, 116).

There is no valid path to God other than Christ who stands at the centre of God’s design. He is the one and only, the universal and unique, saviour of humankind. He alone is humanity’s mediator with God the Father and the Redeemer of all men and women. Hence, it must be “firmly believed as a constant element of the church’s faith” (emphasis in original) that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has fulfilled the history of salvation. From the beginning, Christians have recognized the salvific value of Jesus of Nazareth who alone, as God’s incarnate Son, bestows revelation and divine life on everyone. This status gives Him a meaning and value for humankind’s history which are “unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal and absolute.”

The CDF teaches that the church, present to humanity as the body of Christ, is necessary for salvation. While subordinate to Christ, she is yet mysteriously united to Him and has “an indispensable relationship” with everyone’s salvation. The declaration reaffirms John Paul II’s teaching that those who are not formal, visible members of the church can still be saved through a grace that is mysteriously related to the church. Also, it reiterates Vatican II’s teaching that God gives His saving grace to non-Christians in ways known to Himself (cf. AG, no. 7 above), while nevertheless opposing any view that would portray the church as just another way of salvation alongside other religions. God wills that Jesus’ church should be the instrument of salvation for all humanity. Though non-Christians can receive God’s grace, they are still in a gravely deficient situation compared to members of the church who have “the fullness of the means of salvation.”

Theologian Masashi Masuda describes DI as “a cold shower,” for the church’s self-righteous claim to have the truth has been handed on into the next century. James L. Fredericks, however, thinks the CDF’s presentation of church teaching about the salvation of non-Christians (especially Vatican II) is

311 DI, no. 6.
312 DI, no. 11.
313 DI, no. 13.
314 DI, no. 15.
315 DI, no. 20. The CDF explains that this is how the famous formula Extra ecclesiam nullus omnino salvatur should be understood (cf. Pope and Hefling, 20 n. 82).
316 DI, no. 21.
317 DI, no. 22.
318 Masashi Masuda, “DOMINUS IESUS: A Plea for Vatican III,” Japan Missionary Journal [54] (Winter 2000): 274. For Masuda DI simply “reiterates old truth claims formed in the circle of western-centric paradigms expressed in traditional theological language.” It seems to him that the current church “is trying to close again the windows that had once been opened onto the world” (see pp. 281–82 passim).
cautious, yet accurate.³¹⁹ Dupuis expresses his agreement with DI “without restriction” wherever it assuredly professes the doctrine of divine and Catholic faith.³²⁰

2. Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

Finally, we come to the 1991 statement, “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” The document was issued jointly by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.³²¹

The document references the “mystery of unity” by which all people who are saved share (albeit differently) in the same salvific mystery of Christ and His Spirit, even though some may be unaware that Jesus is the source of their salvation. Regarding non-Christians, it states:

Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions 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 their Savior (emphasis added).³²³

Two translational issues must be noted: First, the initial word “concretely” is lacking from the official text in Italian; second, the words “or acknowledge” are also absent.³²⁴

Dupuis interprets this as an affirmation that the members of other religions are saved in Christ through the sincere practice of their religion. This is “a weighty statement” which has not been found previously in official church documents and must not (in his view) be underestimated:

³¹⁹ Fredericks, 233.

³²⁰ CR, 262.


³²³ DP, no. 29.

³²⁴ The official text of DP no. 29 runs: “E attraverso la pratica di ciò che è buono nelle loro proprie tradizioni religiose e seguendo i dettami della loro coscienza, che i membri delle altre religioni rispondono positivamente all’invito di Dio e ricevono la salvezza in Gesù Cristo, anche se non lo riconoscono come il loro Salvatore” (see Acta Apostolicae Sedis 84 [1992]: 424).
It means, in effect, that the members of other religions are not saved by Christ in spite of, or beside, their own tradition, but in it and in some mysterious way, “known to God,” through it. If further elaborated theologically, this statement would be seen to imply some hidden presence—no matter how imperfect—of the mystery of Jesus Christ in these religious traditions in which salvation reaches their adherents.²²⁵

Although Dupuis worked closely on this document as a consultor to the PCID, the “maximalist” interpretation he presents above is not unassailable. He himself admitted that the original version of the text was surrounded by controversy and argument among the document’s authors having to pass through several amendments before finding acceptance among a majority of the committee’s membership.²²⁶

Even in the same commentary, one senses Dupuis’s dissatisfaction with the final product:

[T]he vicissitudes the document has known . . . have left their mark on its final redaction. Amendments had to be made to accommodate distinct tendencies, sometimes opposed to each other; compromise formulations were resorted to in search of a consensus, which, however, more often than not, resulted in a loss of vigor, of meaning and clarity.²²⁷

Also, later statements do not reflect the same kind of self-assurance: In TCTRP, for instance, he calls DP, no. 29, a “guarded” statement which only “timidly” opens the door for the recognition that other religions per se are salvific mediations.²²⁸ Noting “influences and counterinfluences” in the document, he complains: “[S]ome of the most open and forward-looking assertions of the document have been toned down (by way of omission or addition), losing thereby a good deal of their cutting force.” As a result, the final text reflects “a regrettable tension between divergent views.”²²⁹

Finally, DP also confirms that non-Christians are oriented to the church, the “sacrament” of the kingdom of God and are saved in Christ when they follow their conscience. The role of the church, which is placed at the service of God’s kingdom, is to recognize where the reality of the kingdom may be found outside her boundaries, such as in the hearts of those who follow other religions. This reality, however, is “inchoate,” or imperfect and needs completion in the church.²³⁰

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²²⁶ See ibid., 135–37. According to Dupuis, there were threats made to scuttle the whole document if it did not recognize the possibility of salvation for non-Christians in the practice of their religions (cf. Jacques Dupuis, “‘The Truth Will Make You Free’: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” Louvain Studies 24/3 [1999]: 226).


²²⁸ TCTRP, 178.


³³⁰ DP, no. 35.
Dupuis characterizes the Catholic Church’s postconciliar magisterium as ambiguous: On the one hand, Paul VI still seems to espouse the fulfillment theory which preceded Vatican II; on the other hand, John Paul II evinces a broader, more positive perspective—though, without clearly going beyond the idea of “fulfillment.” Only DP allows it to be affirmed that grace and salvation are available to non-Christians in the practice of their religious traditions.331 James L. Fredericks is somewhat more generous in his appraisal:

Especially, since the council, the discussion of religious diversity . . . has shifted from whether those who follow other religious paths can be saved to how they are saved. . . . This shift is evident in the documents of Vatican II and the work of Danilou and Rahner, the magisterium of John Paul II and his theology of the Holy Spirit, as well as the debates regarding pluralist and regnocentric theologies (emphasis in original).332

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to summarize—broadly and concisely—various Catholic positions, both official and unofficial, on the salvific status of non-Christians and their religions from the beginning of Christianity to the present. Where appropriate, it has noted developments in Catholic thinking. It has also attempted at several points to engage the opinions of the subject of this study, Dupuis, in order to allow one to see better where he himself is situated within the stream of Catholic thinking on these matters. Moreover, it has provided a context and background from which this thesis can now describe Dupuis’s own solution to the questions and issues raised above, namely, his proposal of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.”

331 TCTR, 179.
332 Fredericks, 253.
CHAPTER TWO
JACQUES DUPUIS’ THEORY OF A
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

I. Introduction

This chapter will summarize Dupuis’s proposal of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism” as presented in his book, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism. After a general exploration of his theological method, the chapter will discuss Dupuis’s choice of the Christocentric paradigm interpreted through a Trinitarian and “Pneumatic” (i.e. Holy Spirit-based) Christology. Next, the chapter will describe Dupuis’s view of salvation history, sketching out his position on the nature and role of God’s salvific mediation in Our Lord Jesus Christ. It will also concisely review his opinion on the reign of God’s connection to the Catholic Church. The chapter will list several of Dupuis’s theological ideas and arguments regarding Christianity’s relationship with the world’s religions. Finally, there will be an overview of scholarly assessments of Dupuis’s theory with his response to each.333

II. Dupuis’s Theological Method

Human beings are incarnate spirits: social beings who naturally embody their religious experiences in creed, code and cult. Christians study the variety of religions from the perspective of salvation history and its correlation to Jesus Christ and His church.334 Dupuis explains, though, that there has been a change in the theological study of non-Christians. It is no longer a question of non-Christians’ personal salvation or other religions’ salvific role, rather the meaning of religious plurality itself in God’s design.335 By a “Christian theology of religious pluralism,” Dupuis offers his reflections

333 For a very general summary and critique of Dupuis’s views see: Ilaria Morali, “Trends in German, French, and Italian Writings on Theology of Religions: II. Overview of Some Francophone and Italian Trends,” in CEWRCS, 325–27 (pp. 327–28 passim).

334 TCTR, 7–8.

335 TCTR, 10.
on the multiplicity of religions from the perspective of his Catholic Christian faith. Nevertheless, he hopes to show a global vision that encompasses the complexity of modern religiosity as well as all human experience of the Divine.\textsuperscript{\textit{336}} Theology needs to ask not only if religious pluralism has a positive significance in God’s salvific plan, but also if Christianity’s belief in Jesus Christ as universal saviour allows also the belief in other religions’ positive, salvific role.\textsuperscript{\textit{337}} Dupuis cannot promise a definitive solution here, but he hopes to “indicate avenues” toward a solution.\textsuperscript{\textit{338}}

A. Praxis of an Hermeneutical “Interreligious” Theology

Dupuis contrasts the “deductive method,” which typically progresses from basic assertions to conclusions, with the “inductive method,” which starts from the reality of lived experience and the questions it may raise. A person is challenged by his or her lived reality and hopes to throw light on the questions raised from his or her own religious context. With the inductive method, one starts from historical reality, allowing oneself to be challenged by it and seeking to evaluate it from “the light of the revealed word.” For the church, it means starting from the concrete context in which she has been living the faith and interpreting that surrounding reality within the context of the gospel. It entails, then, contextualization and hermeneutic.\textsuperscript{\textit{339}} A theology of religions cannot be satisfied with \textit{a priori} deductions from traditional doctrinal principles. Instead, it must take its cue primarily from lived experience which then pursues the meaning of that experience from the revealed datum.\textsuperscript{\textit{340}} Admittedly, both the inductive and deductive methods have limits, for while the inductive might fail to harmonize with the Christian faith the deductive might become abstracted from the concrete reality of other religions.\textsuperscript{\textit{341}} Dupuis, therefore, advocates a combination of both methodologies: the deductive, which does not bracket out the faith and the inductive, which encounters the concrete reality of the religious “other.”\textsuperscript{\textit{342}}

“Hermeneutical theology” consists in the progressive “going-and-coming” from the church’s present day context to the witness of her foundational experience in tradition. This relationship between “text” and “context,” between past and present, is called the “hermeneutical circle.” Actually, this

\textsuperscript{\textit{336}} See \textit{TCTR}, 203–04 (cf. also p. 385).

\textsuperscript{\textit{337}} \textit{CR}, 262.

\textsuperscript{\textit{338}} \textit{TCTR}, 11.

\textsuperscript{\textit{339}} See \textit{TCTR}, 13–15 passim (cf. also \textit{JCEWR}, 246–47, and \textit{WDYSIA?}, 8–10 passim, 30).

\textsuperscript{\textit{340}} \textit{CR}, 231.

\textsuperscript{\textit{341}} \textit{TCTR}, 17.

\textsuperscript{\textit{342}} \textit{TCTR}, 18 (cf. also \textit{CR}, 262).
theology is not circular, but triangular: going from the “text” of the Christian memory in sacred scripture and sacred tradition (including the magisterium); to the “context” of the surrounding religio-cultural reality; to the “interpreter” which is the local church. Context acts upon the interpreter, raising questions and influencing the “precomprehension of faith” by which he or she reads the text. The text acts on the interpreter by providing a direction for Christian praxis.343

Humanity is living in a new multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious context which renders inappropriate previous negative attitudes toward the “other.”344 In modern times, there has been a shift away from confrontation to passive tolerance and, finally, to peaceful coexistence. In order to foster open and positive relations among peoples, cultures and religions, people must make the qualitative leap toward collaboration and dialogue. This “conversion to the other” could provide a way for sincere and profitable relations, achieving not only “true peace” between the world’s religions, but also peace throughout the world.345 Hence, Dupuis claims that a “Christian theology of religious pluralism” must be an interfaith theology based on the interaction of Christianity with the world’s other living faiths.346

The inductive method of theologizing is an “interpretation in context” in which the first act entails the praxis of interreligious dialogue, from which it turns to Christian revelation for light and direction and, then, returns to praxis.347 Dupuis compares the “theology of religious pluralism” to liberation theology. But whereas the latter begins with a praxis from the context of human oppression and the cry for liberation, the former’s point of departure is interfaith dialogue.348 He writes:

With regard to the theology of religions, the “first act” of doing theology must be a serious practice of interreligious dialogue and taking seriously the religious experience met personally in the lives of the “others” with whom one comes in contact through such interreligious dialogue.349

If contextualization and the hermeneutical model are applied seriously, it will be seen that the theology of religions is not another topic of theology, but a new way of doing theology.350 Interreligious dialogue is “the absolutely necessary basis for theological discourse” and is then followed by the “second act” of

343 See TCTRP, 15–16 passim.
344 CR, 2.
345 CR, 7.
346 TCTRP, 203.
347 TCTRP, 293.
348 TCTRP, 18–19 (cf. also p. 17).
349 CR, 8. Since it maintains a dialogical stance at every stage of reflection, the theology of religious pluralism could also be termed “dialogical interreligious theology” (p. 11).
350 TCTRP, 18.
theological reflection on the world’s religions. Only this *a posteriori* procedure, says Dupuis, can yield positive results.\(^{351}\) Dialogue is necessary not only due to its frequent omission in the past, but also because of the need to establish a balance between the two sources of sacred scripture and human experience. Its strength and irreplaceable contribution lie in its ability to immediately immerse the participant in the concrete experience of the religious “other.”\(^{352}\) Such “an ‘interreligious’ hermeneutical theology” invites a broadening of theological discourse which will lead to the discovery of the cosmic dimensions of God’s mystery.\(^{353}\)

### III. Overview of Dupuis’s Theory

In regard to salvation outside the church, Dupuis defines the following parameters: One must uphold God’s universal, salvific will as part of the Christian message (as per 1 Tim 2:4), while also upholding the necessity of faith for salvation (as per Heb 11:6).\(^{354}\) This section will address how he attempts to hold these two affirmations together in a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.”

A. Trinitarian and Pneumatic (Spirit-Based) Christology

Many authors, writes Dupuis, accept the following tripartite division of paradigms: ecclesiocentrism (church-centred); Christocentrism (Christ-centred); and theocentrism (God-centred). The division into exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralistic positions corresponds “in parallel” to this division.\(^{355}\)

For Dupuis, the Christological question lies at the heart of the shift from one paradigm to another. The first shift involves the centrality Jesus is given in regard to the church; the second concerns the type

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\(^{351}\) [CR], 10.

\(^{352}\) *TCTR*, 18. Dupuis distinguishes two aspects of the word, “dialogue”: (1) an attitude; and (2) a distinct element of the church’s evangelizing mission. The first meaning refers to a “spirit of dialogue,” that is, an attitude of respect and friendship. The second meaning refers to the church’s positive and constructive relations with other religions that are directed toward mutual understanding and enrichment in obedience to the truth and with respect for the individual (see *TCTR*, 359–60).

\(^{353}\) *TCTR*, 18.

\(^{354}\) *TCTR*, 111. Courtemanche agrees with Dupuis’s procedure writing: Within the limits of the axiom *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* which has proposed the possibility of salvation in Christ unilaterally for a Christian minority, Dupuis “has good reason” to be disturbed by “the perverted image it offers [que cela nous donne] of the justice and dignity of a God of universal love, and of the genuineness [du sérieux] and efficaciousness of His will to save all men and women” (Courtemanche, 86).

\(^{355}\) *TCTR*, 184. For the classic expression of this paradigm see: Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982 [?]).
of universal, constitutive mediation He is assigned in the order of salvation. Ecclesiocentrism needs to be transcended because a theology of religions cannot be built on “an ecclesiological inflation” which falsifies perspectives. The church is a mystery derived from Jesus Christ and, for this reason, cannot be the yardstick for measuring salvation. There is a clear-cut distinction between Christ’s salvific role and the church’s: They are not and cannot be placed on the same level, for Jesus alone is the mediator between God and humankind (see 1 Tim 2:5; also, Heb 8:6, 9:15, 12:24). Whatever role the church may have, it is not on par with that of Christ; nor can it have the same necessity as His. He declares: “[Jesus Christ], indeed, not the Church, stands at the center of the Christian mystery, which finds in him its raison d’être.” But Dupuis notes a second paradigm-shift from Christocentrism to theocentrism, which seeks to abandon not only the view placing the church at the centre of theology, but also that which places Jesus Christ at the centre. In theocentrism, God alone stands at the centre. Dupuis agrees that only God is the absolute mystery who is at the source, heart and centre of all reality. While “Jesus the man” is the Son of God in a unique way, God yet stands beyond Him. Nevertheless, he disputes whether Christocentrism and theocentrism are mutually opposed and contradictory paradigms:

The Christocentrism of Christian tradition is not . . . opposed to theocentrism. It never places Jesus Christ in the place of God; it merely affirms that God has placed him at the center of his saving plan for humankind, not as the end but as the way, not as the goal of every human quest for God but as the universal mediator of God’s saving action toward people.

The man Jesus is the medium of God’s encounter with humanity. He belongs undoubtedly to the order of signs and symbols, but is the one through whom God’s salvation reaches out to humankind. Christian theology, then, is not faced with the dilemma of Christocentrism versus theocentrism: It is theocentric by being Christocentric and vice-versa.

Dupuis proposes the hermeneutical key of a Trinitarian and Spirit-based Christology which would lead to a more positive evaluation of the world’s religions allowing one to see God’s Word and Spirit as the sources of enlightenment not only for “religious founders,” but also for the religions which are based

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356 TCTRP, 190.
357 TCTRP, 186.
358 TCTRP, 185.
359 TCTRP, 186 (cf. also p. 183).
360 TCTRP, 206. Dupuis writes: “The God whom Jesus calls ‘Father’ is the center of his message, his life and his person: Jesus did not speak primarily about himself, but he came to proclaim God and the advent of his Reign and to place himself at its service. God is at the center, not the messenger!” (CR, 22).
361 TCTRP, 191.
362 Ibid.
on their experiences.\textsuperscript{363} There is a necessary correspondence between the order of origins in the communion of “Father-Son-Spirit” and the Trinity’s communication to humanity in history. The “economic Trinity” prolongs the “immanent Trinity,” thus allowing for the presupposition that God communicates Himself as He is: in other words, in a pluriform manner.\textsuperscript{364} Just as there is a Trinitarian “rhythm” to God’s saving deeds in history, so Dupuis surmises whenever God speaks He speaks through His Word and in His Spirit. He maintains: “A Trinitarian structure is . . . the a priori condition of possibility of every personal divine communication.”\textsuperscript{365} The divine Trinity, then, serves as hermeneutical key for interpreting the experience of absolute reality exhibited by the world’s religions.\textsuperscript{366} In searching for a Christian interpretation of religious pluralism, Dupuis suggests “Trinitarian Christology”:

Such a Christology will place in full relief the interpersonal relationships between Jesus and the God whom he calls Father . . . and the Spirit whom he will send . . . . These relationships are intrinsic to the mystery of Jesus’ person and of his work. Christology ought to be imbued with these intra-Trinitarian relationships in any situation; but this requirement obtains all the more in the context of a theology of religious pluralism.\textsuperscript{367}

A Trinitarian Christology opens the way for the consideration that God’s saving action, while always operating in a unified plan, is also both singular and multifaceted. Though never prescinding from Christ in whom it finds its highest “historical density,” the action of God’s Word (or Logos) is not constrained by His “historically becoming human in Jesus Christ.” Nor is the Holy Spirit limited to His outpouring upon the world by the risen Christ.\textsuperscript{368} Despite its clear, unhesitating affirmation of Jesus Christ as humankind’s “constitutive” and universal saviour, this Christological model nevertheless permits the acknowledgement of a salvific value to the world’s religions.\textsuperscript{369}

Still, a theology based on the Trinitarian economy holds “in constructive tension” both the central character of “the punctual historical event” of Christ and the universal and dynamic influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in such a fashion can it account for God’s manifestation through non-Christian cultures and religions.\textsuperscript{370} The Spirit component is especially required for a “theology of religious pluralism” in which His universal presence and action are not only affirmed, but also serve as “guiding threads and

\textsuperscript{363} TCTRP, 385 (cf. also CR, 255–56).
\textsuperscript{364} TCTRP, 227.
\textsuperscript{365} TCTRP, 242 (cf. also CR, 123–24).
\textsuperscript{366} TCTRP, 264.
\textsuperscript{367} TCTRP, 205.
\textsuperscript{368} TCTRP, 316.
\textsuperscript{369} CR, 1.
\textsuperscript{370} TCTRP, 207.
principles.” Dupuis declares that the Holy Spirit is “the point of entry” for God’s self-communication. Communicated by Christ in virtue of His resurrection, the Spirit’s cosmic influence is inseparable from that of the risen Christ. His function consists in focusing people on Christ whom God has established as the mediator and centre of His salvific plan. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit retains a universal, historical action both before and after Jesus. While the activities of both are distinct, they are also complementary and inseparable. There are not two parallel, salvific economies between Jesus and the Spirit, rather two inseparable and complementary aspects of the one economy of salvation.

B. One God—Multiple Covenants; One Christ—Convergent Paths

According to Dupuis, sacred tradition asserts that humanity was created in order to share in God’s divine life. Therefore, the only concrete order in which humanity has ever found itself has been the supernatural order which “always brings with it” God’s self-manifestation and the offer of salvation. Dupuis believes it must be affirmed that salvation history is coextensive with world history. It is a “dialogue of salvation” begun freely by God with humanity from the time of creation itself and continues until its fulfillment in the eschaton. Since human history is the story of “God-with-humankind,” that implies that He has been revealing Himself to and saving human beings from the beginning and always. The NT’s assertion that God wills the salvation of all (cf. 1 Tim 2:4) supposes no less.


God’s salvific dealings with humankind in the Bible are “punctuated” by covenants. A covenant (Heb. berit) “always” represents a gratuitous initiative by God who enters into a relationship with human beings without any merit on their own part. It is a unilateral pact of friendship begun by God to which people are called to respond with commitment and fidelity. If the reader has noticed that this assertion seems to be self-contradictory—that is, God’s covenants are unilateral, yet mutual—I can only say that it is Dupuis’s own which I have merely reproduced. Apparently, Dupuis himself saw no contradiction in it,

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371 TCTRP, 206.
372 TCTRP, 197 (cf. also CR, 179). Regarding his description of the Holy Spirit as God’s “point of entry” into the human soul, Dupuis seems to have taken the phrase from the British-Canadian theologian, Charles Davis. Yet Dupuis credits him with the idea only in his first book JCHS (see p. 192 n. 9)—and never again.
373 TCTRP, 197 (cf. also pp. 198 and 300). Cf. CR, 178 and 254.
374 TCTRP, 217.
375 TCTRP, 223 (cf. also p. 31).
since he never thought to correct it in his later writings. I can only surmise that his meaning is this: Any covenant offered by God is offered freely and without any necessity on His part. God offers a covenant “unilaterally,” that is, if He chooses to.

Dupuis follows theologian Jean Daniélou’s schema which outlines three stages to God’s covenantal relationship with humankind, that is: “cosmic, Israelite and Christian.” The OT testifies to the use of “covenant language” already in the priestly source’s “Noah cycle” in the Book of Genesis. The covenant is already announced to Noah before the flood (cf. Gen 6:18). What is the Noachic covenant’s theological significance? It is a “cosmic covenant”: It is God’s revelation through the cosmos. It does not belong to a different order than the Israelite or Christian covenants. Its permanence relies not on natural laws, but on God’s faithfulness. His fidelity in the cosmic order guarantees His fidelity in the historical order. Dupuis believes “there is no question here . . . of a mere manifestation of God through the phenomena of nature and the constancy of their recurrence.” Rather, the intimate nature of God’s relationship with Noah and the universality of the Noachic covenant symbolize His personal commitment to the nations and intervention in human history of which their religions are “the privileged testimonies.” Pagans’ saving faith, therefore, rests on “the covenant of the living God with the nations,” which implies the belief in a personal God who providentially intervenes in human affairs and repays according to one’s righteousness. The religions apart from Judaism and Christianity live in the dispensation of the “cosmic covenant.” Dupuis states one must acknowledge the certainty that many people under that dispensation have encountered the true God in authentic religious experiences.

In sacred scripture, Dupuis claims, one is primarily struck by God’s personal interventions in the story of Abraham and Moses. God’s covenant with Abraham already points to His covenant with Moses in which He will create Israel’s identity as His special people. The covenant became the foundation of Israel’s religious experience and the starting-point for its salvific dialogue with God. Dupuis firmly resists, however, any attempt to situate the beginning of salvation history in the call of Abraham. Such an attempt betrays an a priori tendency to discount any personal engagement of God with humankind before and apart from the Abrahamic tradition. Furthermore, Dupuis claims that the example of the Mosaic

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376 *TCTR*, 251 (cf. also *CR*, 134–35).
378 *TCTR*, 226.
379 *TCTR*, 35.
380 *TCTR*, 240 (cf. also p. 226).
381 *TCTR*, 31.
382 *TCTR*, 215–16.
covenant and its abiding value for the Jews even today will stand out as exemplary when asking whether God’s other covenants struck with humanity can also be accepted as having lasting, theological value.\textsuperscript{383}

The OT prophesied a “new covenant” between God and Israel (cf. Jer 31:31–34). The NT’s writers viewed that prophecy from within the context of Jesus of Nazareth. The “new covenant” in Jesus, though, encompasses a broader reality since it extends both to Israel and to the gentiles.\textsuperscript{384} While the church fathers believed there was an underlying continuity between the Logos’ partial manifestations in history and His decisive manifestation in the incarnation, they still maintained the discontinuity and “thorough newness” of God’s appearance in the flesh.\textsuperscript{385} The central position of Jesus Christ in God’s plan must be recalled, for it represents the “high point” of His commitment to humankind. Therefore, the Christ-event is “the interpretative key of the entire extension of personal dealings between God and human beings” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{386} Though Christ’s death and resurrection are limited as historical events, Jesus Himself has been constituted by God as the Christ and has become “transhistoric” through His resurrection. For Christianity, Jesus is the key to understanding the mystery of salvation for all human beings. In the risen Christ, God has established a “new order” in His relationship with humanity, the consequences of which will reach all peoples in their different situations.\textsuperscript{387}

What are the implications for Dupuis’s theory? Dupuis inquires whether the history of other peoples cannot play a role for them analogous to that of God’s relationship with Israel. In other words, God intervenes in human historical events whose divine, salvific significance for their beneficiaries is then guaranteed by the words or interpretations given through “prophets.” He asks if “special” salvation history does not also extend beyond Hebrew-Christian boundaries.\textsuperscript{388} Dupuis wonders whether the situation between Judaism and Christianity (viz. of God’s covenant made with Israel and perfected in Jesus Christ, yet still retaining its salvific quality for Jews) might not serve as a catalyst for reorienting Christianity’s stance toward other religions. What is true in the former case between Judaism and

\textsuperscript{383} TCTR\textit{P}, 215.

\textsuperscript{384} TCTR\textit{P}, 32. The prophecy reads:

\begin{quote}
See, days are coming—oracle of the \textit{LORD}—when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. . . . [T]his is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel[: . . .] I will place My law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be My people. They will no longer teach their friends and relatives, “Know the \textit{LORD}!” Everyone . . . shall know Me—oracle of the \textit{LORD}—for, I will forgive their iniquity and no longer remember their sin (Jer 31:31, 33–34).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{385} TCTR\textit{P}, 78.

\textsuperscript{386} \textit{CR}, 181–82. Dupuis writes that “God has never thought of either the world or humanity without willing them in his Word which would become incarnate.” Jesus Christ stands eternally at the centre of God’s intention from the creation of the world (pp. 158–59)

\textsuperscript{387} \textit{CR}, 31.

\textsuperscript{388} TCTR\textit{P}, 219–20.
Christianity, he argues, is true analogously in the latter case of Christianity and the world’s religions. The world’s religious traditions, symbolized by God’s covenant with Noah, would retain their permanent value. He writes:

As the Mosaic covenant has not been suppressed by the fact of having reached its fullness in Jesus Christ, so also the cosmic covenant made in Noah with the nations has not been cancelled by the fact that in the Christ event the goal that was set for it by God has been reached. That means that the other traditions still have saving value for their followers, but not unrelated to the Christ event.  

Hence, all of God’s covenants remain valid in relation to the decisive one in Christ Jesus and preserve their meaning and value for Christians.

2. Jesus Christ: Word/Logos of God and Mediator of Salvation

For Dupuis, God’s single plan of salvation nevertheless combines two aspects which account for the possibility of non-Christians’ salvation, namely: the universal, active presence of the “Word as such” as well as the inclusive nature of the “Jesus Christ-event.”

The prologue to John’s gospel lays down the biblical foundation for a theology of salvation history: From creation and throughout history, God has been manifesting and revealing Himself through His Logos/Word. Even before His incarnation the Word has been present in the world as the source of life and “the true light” enlightening all human beings (cf. John 1:4 and 9). Dupuis thinks the prologue attests to an active presence of God’s Logos, albeit not yet incarnated, throughout the whole of human history culminating in His incarnation as Jesus (see v. 14). Therefore, Dupuis maintains that one must believe in “a universal presence of the Logos before his incarnation in Jesus Christ.” But while John’s gospel anticipates the Logos’ presence and activity, the NT still sees the incarnate Word as humanity’s universal saviour. The Christ-event is where God’s salvific plan comes to its climax. The “Word-to-be- incarnate” and the incarnate Word represent an indivisible reality and call for each other in a unique dispensation. Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word remains at the centre of God’s plan. Dupuis clearly intends to safeguard the unity of the divine plan of salvation:

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389 CR, 109 (cf. also TCTR, 228–29, 233).
391 CR, 161.
392 TCTR, 53.
393 TCTR, 50–51.
394 TCTR, 196.
The historical event of Jesus Christ, constitutive of salvation and the universal working of the divine Word, do not . . . constitute two different, parallel economies of salvation; they represent complementary and inseparable aspects of a single but diversified plan for humanity.  

Still, in terms of a Trinitarian Christology, he avows that God’s salvation through His non-incarnate Logos persists even after the historical event of Jesus Christ.  

While the divine Word and the flesh He assumed are inseparable, they are also distinct. The human action of the Logos ensarkos (the “enfleshed Word”) is God’s universal sacrament of salvation without either exhausting or negating a distinct and enduring action of the Logos asarkos (or non-incarnate Word)—though, not as a distinct salvific economy parallel to the incarnate Christ. Still, the “Word as such” is existent, present and operative throughout all of history which has become salvation history inasmuch as it comprises the totality of God’s self-manifestations to humankind through His Word/Logos. Dupuis contends, then, that the “Word as such” is historically operative both before and after the incarnation.

What does Dupuis’s “theology of the Word of God” mean for an open theology of religions?

He believes that there exists a continuing action of the “Word as such” in God’s salvific plan for humanity in relation to Jesus Christ. Though the Christ-event retains its universal, salvific value for all times and places through the medium of Jesus’ resurrected humanity, it still stands as part of the wider context of God’s self-manifestation through the Word “as such.” According to Dupuis, what divides the various parties in the current debate on the “theology of religions” is their response to the traditional understanding of Jesus as the one, universal saviour. The salvific role assigned to non-Christian religions and their “saving figures” hinges on how one understands Jesus Christ. The central position of the Christ-event in God’s plan must be recalled, since it not only represents the “high point” of His commitment to humankind, but is also “the interpretative key” for God’s dealings with humanity. The Word’s “becoming-human” in Jesus Christ—in His life, death and resurrection—is the culminating point in the process of God’s self-communication because the Word’s “humanization” marks the unsurpassed

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395 CR, 161.
396 TCTR, 298–99.
397 CR-It, 268 (cf. CR, 140). N.B. I have followed the Italian text here. Translator Robert Berryman renders the Italian expression “comprende la totalità” into English as “comprehends the totality” (CR, 140; emphasis added). That does not seem to have been Dupuis’s meaning, though.
398 CR, 161.
399 TCTR, 280.
400 CR, 181–82.
and unsurpassable depths of God’s communication to human beings as well as the supreme mode of His immanence with them.\textsuperscript{401}

The Letter to the Hebrews states that Jesus is God’s decisive word spoken to the world (cf. 1:1), and Dupuis affirms that the totality of Christ’s person and His ministry constitute the fullness of revelation.\textsuperscript{402} God’s revelation in Jesus was decisive and unsurpassable because Jesus experienced in His human consciousness the mystery of the divine life which He personally shared. His human condition was an expression of the Son of God’s mystery. He was not like God’s revelation given through the prophets; He was God’s Word made flesh. This revelation is therefore central and normative to Christianity insofar as nobody else could communicate the divine mystery with greater depth, except the Son of God Himself who became human: “Jesus brings the word because he is the Word.”\textsuperscript{403} The fullness of Christ’s revelation, however, is qualitative, rather than quantitative. Divine revelation reached its \textit{qualitative} plenitude in Jesus Christ because no revelation of God’s mystery could match the depths of what occurred when God the Son lived out His filial identity “on a human key, in a human consciousness.”\textsuperscript{404} Nevertheless, an open, interreligious dialogue demands that what is relative should not be absolutized. God’s revelation in Jesus Christ was not a plenitude of extension or comprehensiveness (quantitative), but of intensity (qualitative). Such qualitative fullness in no way contradicts the limited nature of Jesus’ human awareness or of the Christian revelation itself which has been expressed according to particular cultures. Christ’s revelation neither exhausts the divine mystery nor gainsays the existence of other true divine revelations through the prophets of other religions.\textsuperscript{405}

Undoubtedly, the Word/Logos was manifested historically in the most complete way possible in Jesus Christ—indeed, in the most profoundly human way best adapted to human nature. Paradoxically, this “very human way” of manifesting Himself contained its own limitations and incompleteness, since the Word remains beyond whatever could have been revealed in Jesus’ human “being.” Jesus’ life was circumscribed by having lived in a certain historical time and place. Though the resurrection introduced His humanity into a meta-historical condition, that event itself also occurred “punctually” in history. Thus, whereas in His glorified state the historicity and salvific nature of the Christ-event becomes present and actual for all times and places, the event itself neither exhausts nor can exhaust the Word’s revelatory and saving power.\textsuperscript{406} Therefore, Dupuis proclaims that the Son’s revelation in Jesus remains “limited,

\textsuperscript{401} TCTR\textit{P}, 320–21.

\textsuperscript{402} TCTR\textit{P}, 248–49 (cf. also \textit{CR}, 130).

\textsuperscript{403} TCTR\textit{P}, 271.

\textsuperscript{404} TCTR\textit{P}, 249.

\textsuperscript{405} TCTR\textit{P}, 379 (cf. also pp. 248–50 passim, 271). Cf. also \textit{CR}, 129–32 passim.

\textsuperscript{406} CR, 159
incomplete and imperfect.” No human consciousness—not even that of the “Son-of-God-become-a-human-being”—could understand or contain the divine mystery because human words spoken in a human language—although pronounced by God Himself—must fail to exhaust His reality. Notwithstanding Jesus’ personal identity with the Word, “the God who saves through him” still remains beyond His human “being” or existence. The risen Jesus does not substitute for the Father. Nor does His glorified humanity exhaust the Word who is never totally contained in any historical manifestation. While Jesus’ human existence was transformed by the resurrection, extending across space and time, it was still the historical Jesus to whom that happened. The universality of Christ, the source of eternal salvation, does not eliminate the historical particularity of Jesus whose particularity Dupuis feels the need to stress due to its consequences for an open “theology of religions” and for interreligious dialogue. Dupuis, however, clarifies that the relativity of the Son of God’s human consciousness does not prevent it from being “a privileged channel through which the divine mystery is truthfully disclosed.” Relative does not mean invalid. Though the divine mystery will always lie beyond humankind’s grasp, the disclosure of that mystery by God’s Son offers special credentials for its truthfulness.

Faith in the uniqueness of Jesus is the message underlying the whole NT. The NT states explicitly the need for faith in order to be saved, emphasizing as well that salvation comes alone through Jesus Christ (see Acts 4:12). The NT calls Jesus “mediator” (see 1 Tim 2:5) because in Him humanity and the Godhead have been joined in an everlasting bond which makes His mediatorship unique. Having been raised from the dead and constituted by God as Christ, the historical event of Jesus’ death now transcends history and has become “transhistoric.” For Christianity, Jesus is the key to understanding the mystery of salvation. In the risen Christ, God has established a “new order” in His relationship with humanity whose effects reach all men and women. Through the incarnate Word, God has established an unbreakable bond of union with humanity. The entire “Jesus Christ event” (from the incarnation to His resurrection and glorification) is the sacrament and seal of God’s “decisive pact” with humanity.

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407 TCTRP, 271 (cf. also JCEWR, 59).
408 CR, 159.
409 TCTRP, 297.
410 TCTRP, 286.
411 TCTRP, 286 (cf. also JCEWR, 197).
412 TCTRP, 84.
413 TCTRP, 307 (cf. also CR, 168).
414 CR, 31.
humanity. In this way, the Christ-event holds a unique and unsubstitutable place (un posto unico, insostituibile) in salvation history, becoming a truly “constitutive” element in the mystery of the world’s salvation.\[415\]

As regards Christ and other religious figures, Dupuis discusses the ambiguity and possible meanings of terms like “singularity” and “unicity.” In one sense, the terms could be used to convey a religion’s specific and original character that makes it different from another. Thus, the words are understood according to a relative (or relational) sense. In another sense, the terms could be used to convey a restrictive view of singularity and uniqueness. The word, “universality,” could also be used in either a relative or a restrictive way. It could mean the universal appeal that a religion has for people as it fulfills their spiritual aspirations (without, however, claiming a monopoly on such appeal). But it could also be used to indicate a “unique universality” which would evoke “an injurious exclusivism.”\[416\] Dupuis would like to avoid any and all talk about the absoluteness either of Christ or of Christianity.

Absoluteness is an attribute of the “Ultimate Reality of Infinite Being” and must not be predicated of any finite reality, even the human existence of the Son of God. Jesus’ position as universal saviour does not perforce make Him the absolute saviour which is God.\[417\] Dupuis continues: Just as Christ’s human consciousness could not exhaustively reveal God’s mystery, so the Christ-event itself could not exhaust God’s saving power. “God,” Dupuis writes, “remains beyond the man Jesus as the ultimate source of both revelation and salvation.” The salvific action of Jesus was a channel, an efficacious sign, a sacrament of God’s will to save. Notwithstanding the Son of God’s personal identity with Jesus, a distance still remains between God the ultimate source and His human icon, Jesus, who is no substitute for Him. If what Dupuis says be true, then it will be seen that the Christ-event is the universal sacrament of God’s salvific will, albeit not necessarily its only possible expression: “God’s saving power is not exclusively bound by the universal sign God has designed for his saving action.”\[418\] Only God saves; only the absolute is the final agent of salvation. God the Father, Dupuis asserts, is and remains the principal cause of salvation. Though the NT calls both God and Jesus “saviour,” Jesus is called that only in a derivative manner without precluding the Father’s status as “the root-cause and the source of salvation.”\[419\] Dupuis affirms the appropriateness of calling Jesus “saviour,” but only in a secondary sense, since the Christ-event is the efficacious expression of God’s saving will and action.\[420\]

\[415\] CR, 158 (cf. CR-It, 298).

\[416\] TCTR, 181–82 passim (cf. also pp. 282–83). Dupuis uses the word “relational” (see p. 303).

\[417\] TCTR, 292–93 (cf. also p. 282).

\[418\] TCTR, 298 (cf. also p. 387).

\[419\] TCTR, 306.

\[420\] CR, 167.
Rather than being “absolute” or “relative,” Dupuis prefers to say Christ’s uniqueness is “constitutive” and “relational.” By “constitutive,” he means that the paschal mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection has a universal significance in accordance with God’s saving design for humanity. Jesus constitutes the privileged channel through which God shares His divine life. By “relational,” he means that a reciprocal relationship exists between the salvific path found in Jesus Christ and those paths proposed by other religions. Christ’s constitutive role as saviour does not thereby relativize His salvific work, since what is “constitutive” belongs to the essence. Upholding Jesus Christ’s constitutive uniqueness does not lead per se to the condemnation of other religions or “saving figures.” Dupuis contends:

Jesus Christ is indeed the constitutive Savior of humankind and the Christ event is the cause of the salvation of all human beings; but this does not prevent the other traditions from serving as “mediations” of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ for their followers within God’s design for humankind.

Dupuis hopes to show that a “well-poised claim” for Christ’s unicity and universality can leave room for an open “theology of religions.” Moreover, a Trinitarian Christology allows for the acknowledgement of the presence and activity of God’s Word and Holy Spirit in other religions, affirming a plurality of salvific paths and the recognition of other salvific figures in accordance with God’s plan in Jesus. Dupuis expounds:

The mystery of the incarnation is unique; only the individual human existence of Jesus is assumed by the Son of God. But while he alone is thus constituted the “image of God,” other “saving figures” may be . . . “enlightened” by the Word or “inspired” by the Spirit, to become pointers to salvation for their followers, in accordance with God’s overall design for humankind.

While Jesus is God’s “human face” and His icon (or image) who is constitutive of salvation for all people, Dupuis believes that this fact neither excludes nor includes the possibility of other salvific figures or paths. For Dupuis, salvation history has reached its pinnacle in Jesus through His confirmation and accomplishment of it, rather than by any kind of substitution or supersession.

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421 TCTR, 305 (cf. also pp. 283, 303, 388). Cf. also CR, 166.
422 CR, 167 (cf. also TCTR, 297).
423 TCTR, 288.
424 CR, 253.
425 TCTR, 281–82 (cf. also CR, 163).
426 TCTR, 298.
427 TCTR, 388.
3. The Reign of God and the Catholic Church

The reign, or kingdom, of God stands at the centre of Christ’s preaching and mission: All of His parables refer to it; His Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes are its charter; His miracles demonstrate that the kingdom is already present and effective.\(^428\) God’s kingdom means that He Himself is acting decisively in the world, manifesting Himself and ordering creation through the “human actions” of Jesus. It represents God’s dominion and Lordship over human beings and over relationships. Jesus is the eschatological prophet in whom the kingdom has arrived and is announced.\(^429\)

Dupuis prefers a “kingdom-centered” (or regnocentric) model of the church because it can show how non-Christians share in the kingdom by opening themselves up to the Holy Spirit without involving any abrogation of the Christocentric paradigm. By sharing in the kingdom’s salvific reality, the religious “other” is still subject to God’s saving action in Christ in whom the reign has been established and under whom He intends the kingdom to grow to its ultimate fullness. By perceiving God’s call in their religions and responding through them, non-Christians become active members of God’s kingdom, even if not formally conscious of it.\(^430\) The reign of God, established in Christ Jesus and proclaimed by Him as operative in His own life, represents the universal reality of salvation. Anyone, in whatever circumstance, may enter that reality through faith and conversion.\(^431\) The church does not exist as an end unto herself;

\(^{428}\) TCTR, 342.

\(^{429}\) CR, 21–22 (cf. also TCTR, 342).

\(^{430}\) TCTR, 344–45 (cf. also pp. 46–47). Although the work of Presbyterian theologian Choan-Seng (C. S.) Song is listed in the bibliographies of both JCEWR and TCTR, Dupuis does not seem to rely on it very much in either book. He appeals to Song’s work several times, though, in CR regarding Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God (see pp. 21–29 passim). Indeed, Peter C. Phan points out specifically how Song’s ideas have influenced Dupuis’s theology in an article for the latter’s Festschrift (cf. Peter C. Phan, “Jacques Dupuis and Asian Theologies of Religious Pluralism,” in IMDW, especially pp. 78–81).

Phan notes that for Song the reign of God—understood primarily in its socio-political and economic aspects—constitutes the key for understanding Jesus Christ (ibid., 79). By addressing human suffering through His miracles and exorcisms, Jesus realized there was no distinction between Jew and gentile, between His own ministry to Israel and to the gentiles (C. S. Song, Jesus in the Power of the Spirit [Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1994], 77–78). God is not restricted to Jews or Christians, but is the God of all people whose reign can be manifested even outside His community (ibid., 207). Phan says that Dupuis “heartily agrees” with Song’s refusal to identify God’s kingdom with the church. He also welcomes Song’s emphasis on the universality of God’s reign and the interreligious implications of his argument that the reign extends beyond Israel to non-Jews (Phan, “Dupuis and Asian Theologies of Religious Pluralism,” 80). But while Dupuis might agree with parts of Song’s theology of God’s reign, Phan surmises that he would not agree with his Christology, especially his “unilaterally sociopolitical interpretation of Jesus’ message.” Dupuis would not only have problems with Song’s rejection of metaphysical categories for Christology, but also with his description of Jesus as the “Prototype” of God’s Love (ibid., 81).

\(^{431}\) CR, 24–25 (cf. also TCTR, 46).
rather she is focused on Christ and the kingdom established through Him.\textsuperscript{432} She does not proclaim herself, but the “good news” of the coming of God’s kingdom just as Jesus did during His own lifetime. Dupuis observes:

It cannot be said . . . that Jesus identified the Reign with the “movement” which he was creating and which was destined to become the Church. Rather . . . he was putting the Church at the service of the Reign when he commissioned the “twelve,” charging them to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{433}

As the kingdom’s sign and sacrament, the church contains and effects the reality she signifies, namely, access to God’s kingdom. But she does not possess a necessity which makes access possible only through her. Since Christ gave her the fullness of the means and benefits of salvation, Dupuis affirms that the reign exists in a privileged way in the church. Non-Christians, while not members of the church, may yet be part of the reign if they respond to God in faith and love through their own religions. In that way, they are “oriented” toward Jesus’ church.\textsuperscript{434} The church has no monopoly on God’s kingdom. Non-Christians who perceive God’s call through their religions truly share in and are members of the reign of God in history. In fact, their religions contribute to building up the reign through a certain mediation that, albeit different from the church’s, is no less real.\textsuperscript{435}

C. Application of Ideas to Christianity’s Relationship with the Religious “Other”

Dupuis recalls some “basic principles and keys of interpretation” that have emerged throughout his study. One principle or “key” is the common and reciprocal relationship among various models like Christocentrism, theocentrism, regnocentrism and so forth. Another key is Dupuis’s “Trinitarian Christological key of interpretation” which has made it possible to identify the universal, active presence of God’s Word and Spirit as the source of enlightenment and inspiration for “religious founders” and their non-Christian religions. A final key is the kingdom-centred model which allows one to visualize how both Christianity and other religions are called to share and build up the reign of God. Further, it has permitted a more accurate view of the church as the sacrament of the kingdom at whose service she is.\textsuperscript{436}

We now discuss how these aforementioned principles have affected Dupuis’s proposal of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.”

\textsuperscript{432} CR, 216–17 (cf. also TCTR, 356–57).

\textsuperscript{433} TCTR, 343.

\textsuperscript{434} TCTR, 355 (cf. also pp. 338–40, 351–52).

\textsuperscript{435} TCTR, 356 (cf. also p. 50).

\textsuperscript{436} TCTR, 385.
1. Religious Pluralism in Principle (De Jure)

Dupuis asks whether the world’s religious plurality should be either accepted or tolerated or if it could be viewed “theologically” as a de jure phenomenon. In a de facto sense, religious plurality is taken simply as a reality to be reckoned with; in a de jure (or “in principle”) sense, religious pluralism is welcomed as a sign of God’s superabundant generosity in His various manifestations to which human beings have responded pluriformly. Put another way: Dupuis wonders if religious pluralism is merely permitted by God or if it is willed by Him. Dupuis argues that religious plurality should be welcomed not just as a matter of fact (de facto), but in principle (de jure), as part of God’s plan of salvation. Hence, a theology of religions must be a theology of religious pluralism.

Dupuis believes he has assembled a variety of elements that justify the claim for de jure religious pluralism. First, he has shown how God has manifested Himself in saving words and deeds throughout history from the time of creation. “Salvation history,” therefore, encompasses the whole of the world’s and humanity’s history: It is indeed salvation in history and throughout history. Second, he has elaborated how God made several other covenants with humankind (viz. with Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses) that were nonetheless directed toward His new covenant in Christ Jesus. Those previous covenants, though, were not provisional and were never abolished or revoked. They remain valid and operative in relation to the Christ-event within God’s overall plan of salvation. Finally, since God had spoken variously to humanity through His Word/Logos before He spoke decisively through His Son, Dupuis concludes that all the world’s peoples are God’s people who live under “the arc of the divine covenant.”

The one God is three persons; and the “communion-in-difference” characterizing His inner life is reflected and operative in the single plan which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have created for Their salvific and revelatory dealings with humankind. Dupuis explains:

If . . . religion has its original source in a divine 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-manifestations to humankind. The divine plan for humanity . . . is one, but multifaceted. It belongs to the nature of the overflowing communication of the Triune God to humankind to prolong outside the divine life the plural communication intrinsic to that life itself. . . . Religious pluralism in principle rests on the immensity of a God who is love.

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437 TCTR, 386 (cf. also CR, 161, 254–55).
438 TCTR, 201 (cf. also p. 11).
440 CR, 263.
441 TCTR, 387 (cf. also p. 321). Cf. also CR, 161, 242, 255.
Dupuis believes the same Trinitarian structure shown in God’s salvific acts throughout history must also apply to His acts of self-revelation: Whenever God speaks in history, He does so through His Word and in His Spirit.\(^{442}\)

2. Model of “Inclusive Pluralism”

Through his “Trinitarian and pneumatic theological model of Christology,” Dupuis believes he can overcome both exclusivism and inclusivism without resorting to a pluralism that negates the constitutive salvation offered in Jesus Christ. His proposal combines “what must be retained” from Christological inclusivism with “what may be said” regarding the pluralism of God’s design.\(^{443}\) The outcome of his study is the theory of “inclusive pluralism” by which he has attempted to combine Christianity’s belief in Jesus’ uniqueness as universal saviour with the positive role and meaning of other religions in God’s salvific plan.\(^{444}\) On the one hand, Jesus is clearly asserted as God’s decisive revelation and constitutive saviour; on the other, one may acknowledge not only God’s revelations in humanity’s history and cultures, but also the presence of salvific “elements of grace” in humanity’s religions.\(^{445}\) While Jesus is constitutive—indeed, the cause—of salvation for all, He neither excludes nor includes other saving figures or traditions, for although not unrelated to Christ or His work elements of God’s truth and grace are also at work outside of Christianity. Furthermore, these elements of truth and grace comprise additional and autonomous benefits and are not absorbed or expropriated by Christianity.\(^{446}\)

3. “Mutual ‘Asymmetrical’ Complementarity”

Dupuis applies the phrase, “mutual ‘asymmetrical’ complementarity” (italics in original), to the question of Christianity’s relationship to the world’s other religions. It expresses for him the kind of complementarity which exists between the truth and grace found in other religions as well as in God’s full

\(^{442}\) \textit{CR}, 123–24 (cf. also \textit{TCTR}, 242 and 243).

\(^{443}\) \textit{CR}, 256 (cf. also p. 94). Cf. also \textit{TCTR}, 208, 387–88 passim.

\(^{444}\) \textit{CR}, 263. The phrase, “pluralistic inclusivism,” is also deemed a suitable alternative by Dupuis (see p. 255; cf. also pp. 90 and 95).

\(^{445}\) \textit{TCTR}, 192–93.

\(^{446}\) \textit{CR}, 256 (cf. also \textit{TCTR}, 388).
manifestation in Christ. “Complementarity” does not mean that the values scattered outside Christianity as fragmentary truths are fulfilled by being integrated, absorbed or assumed unilaterally into the Christian religion. On the contrary, it is a mutual complementarity by which both the Christian and the non-Christian religions exchange and share the saving values found within them and, thus, enrich each other. Be that as it may, Dupuis maintains that the conveyance of ultimate reality by the world’s religions as well as their witness to God’s self-manifestation are nevertheless incomplete: They are incomplete “faces” of God to be fulfilled in Jesus Who is His “human face.” The truth and grace found outside Christianity, he states, cannot simply be reduced to “seeds” or “stepping-stones” which are completed through substitution by the Christian revelation. The Christ-event, which is the culmination of salvation history, does not cancel out all that God has done before and in view of it; rather it confirms it.

The world’s religions converge with Christ’s mystery in that they represent various, albeit unequal, paths through which God Himself has sought humanity in His Word and Spirit. When referring to other religions as “paths to salvation,” Dupuis does not mean humankind’s universal search for God, but God’s search for humanity and His gracious invitation for it to enter into His divine life. The paths to salvation in other religions were laid by God Himself. He writes:

The inclusive efficacy of the Christ event through the risen humanity of Jesus, the universal “illumination” by the Word of God and the equally universal “enlivening” by the Spirit make it possible to discover in other saving figures and traditions, truth and grace not made explicit with the same force and clarity in the revelation and manifestation of God in Jesus Christ.

Dupuis believes there is more truth and grace in the whole history of God’s dealings with humankind than available or discoverable in the Christian tradition. Therefore, notwithstanding the decisive nature of the Christ-event, it is impossible to think that Christianity holds a monopoly on these elements. The God who is truth and love has taken possession of human beings in ways known to Himself alone. Thus, one can speak of a complementarity between “Christian” truth and grace and those discovered outside Christianity. The mutual complementarity existing between Christianity and other religions is

\[447\] CR, 136 (cf. also p. 257).

\[448\] CR, 257 (cf. also TCTR, 326 and 389).

\[449\] TCTR, 279.

\[450\] CR, 256–57 (cf. also, p. 90). Cf. also TCTR, 204.

\[451\] TCTR, 328 (cf. also p. 313).

\[452\] TCTR, 305 (cf. also CR, 242 and 254).

\[453\] CR, 256.
“asymmetrical” (italics in original), since the recognition of truth and grace in other religious traditions does not cancel out the unsurpassable transcendence of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.\footnote{454} While Christianity must situate itself within the totality of religions, it cannot stand without the claim of Jesus’ constitutive uniqueness, since in Him historical particularity and universal significance coincide.\footnote{455} God has provided His gifts to other religions as well so that, while they are fulfilled in His revelation in Christ, they still signify His authentic word to them and “additional autonomous gifts.” These divine gifts, though, do not impair the transcendence and unsurpassability of God’s gift in Jesus.\footnote{456} The “seeds [germi]” of truth and grace, which have been placed in those religions as divine gifts and endowed with their own intrinsic value, can contribute in a positive way to Christianity’s own enrichment—but not in the sense of filling a void in Christ’s own fullness. Dupuis declares:

\[\text{[W]hereas other religious traditions can find and are destined to find, in the Christ event their fullness of meaning—but without being absorbed or dispossessed—\textit{the reverse is not true:} God’s self-manifestation and self-giving in Jesus Christ are not in need of a true completion by other traditions, even though they are interrelated with the other divine manifestations in the overall realm of God’s self-revelation to humankind and can be enriched by mutually interacting with other religious traditions (emphasis added).}\footnote{457}

Similar comments are made regarding the mediation of Christ’s sacramental presence in the church and religions. Although God’s grace is mediated visibly in many ways, these differ in degree and kind. While “a certain mediation of grace” can be ascribed to the practices and rituals of the non-Christian religions, Dupuis demurs at placing them on the same footing as the Christian sacraments instituted by Jesus. Moreover, in the eschatological community of the church, Christ’s mystery is present overtly and explicitly: “in the full visibility of its complete mediation;” but in other religions its presence is only implicit and concealed: “in virtue of an incomplete mode of mediation.”\footnote{458}

4. Qualitative Leap in Christian Theology

According to Dupuis, humanity is living in a new world that is multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious. Negative attitudes toward the religious “other” which have characterized centuries of Christian history are now inappropriate. Moreover, they represent an historical past which demand

\footnote{454} CR, 257 (cf. also TCTR\textit{P}, 388).
\footnote{455} TCTR\textit{P}, 304.
\footnote{456} CR, 136 (cf. also TCTR\textit{P}, 388).
\footnote{457} CR, 257–58 (cf. CR-It, 474).
\footnote{458} TCTR\textit{P}, 319.
repentance and forgiveness. Dupuis calls for a change of mindset and spirit—a metanoia—in which conversion to God and to the “other” would allow for the development of relationships of mutual openness and collaboration between Christianity and the religions. Furthermore, he advocates a purification of theological language by which Christians have spoken in offensive and harmful ways about other religions. Even that is not enough: A purification of theological understanding is required, since negative and offensive attitudes of the past toward other religions have frequently issued from unjust and defamatory assessments of them. Such purification is not easy, but a healing of memories can occur through “encounter,” namely, a shared determination to construct mutual relations of dialogue and collaboration. As part of the purification of memory, Christianity’s “traditional negative appraisals” of other religions must be kept in mind. After becoming the accepted religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity developed an exclusivist, negative attitude toward other religions, describing itself as the only true religion outside of which no one could be saved. Traces of that pejorative thinking can still be found today. In order to have a future characterized by open, positive relations among peoples, cultures and religions, Dupuis advocates “a qualitative leap” toward collaboration and dialogue. Conversion to the “other” can provide a way for sincere and profitable relations that will achieve true peace among the world’s religions—and hence in the world.

The aim of Dupuis’s work has been to propose some guidelines that could offer a “qualitative leap” in Christian theologies of religions, thereby leading to a more positive assessment vis-à-vis other religions and their adherents. His proposal, which is open to theological discussion, has been set deliberately within the framework of the church’s faith. A qualitative leap is necessary for Christianity to retain and augment the credibility of its message in today’s multicultural and multireligious world. This “qualitative leap” could open up a new horizon in the church’s official teaching, albeit an horizon anchored in and built upon her living tradition. Dupuis is convinced the church does not intend to fix rigid boundaries beyond which theology may not venture. On the contrary, while determining authoritatively what belongs to the faith, she draws up guidelines and gives “pointers” by which theologians may reflect anew on the unspeakable mystery of God: a mystery which has been disclosed progressively to humanity throughout history and revealed fully in Jesus Christ.

IV. Assessments of Dupuis’s Proposal by Other Scholars (with His Response)

459 CR, 2.
460 CR, 258.
461 CR, 5–7 passim.
462 CR, 259.
463 CR, 263.
This section presents a survey (in alphabetical order) of critical assessments of Dupuis’s ideas by other scholars. A brief summation of Dupuis’s own response follows immediately after each particular assessment.

A. Gavin D’Costa

In D’Costa’s opinion, Dupuis is “basically a Rahnerian” with a much reduced ecclesiology. While he does not sever Christ from the kingdom of God, D’Costa believes that Dupuis’s proposal can tend to separate the church from both Christ and the kingdom. By breaking the link between Christology and ecclesiology, D’Costa maintains that Dupuis runs the argument to its logical conclusion, namely, there is no necessary mediation of salvation by the church, for Christ alone plays that role. Dupuis realizes he is going against Vatican II and Pope John Paul II (cf. his encyclical RM) which maintain the indissoluble link between Christ, His kingdom and the church. But since Vatican II avoided speaking of an implicit desire for church membership (cf. LG, no. 16), Dupuis reads the council as teaching that non-Christians are “ordained” (ordinantur) to the church and can be saved without ever having belonged to her. D’Costa, however, responds that the word ordinantur was used by Pope Pius XII himself in his 1943 encyclical Mystici Corporis Christi wherein the pope outlined the idea of non-Catholics’ implicit desire for the church. If there really is no implicit desire for the church as per Dupuis, then his own description of an “orientation” among non-Catholics has itself no real significance. While rightly exploring an unresolved question, he ends up breaking the bond between Christology and ecclesiology, offering a “minimalist reading of ordinantur” which ultimately avoids articulating the relationship between Christ and the church clearly.

All of this has implications for the socio-historical mediation of grace. Since Christ’s incarnation is only mediated sacramentally through the church as His body, Dupuis’s “constitutive Christ” is in danger of being reduced merely to the “historical Jesus” without allowing for the full, ecclesiological mediation.

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464 Gavin D’Costa, review of *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, by Jacques Dupuis, *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998): 911. D’Costa outlines two very important developments of theologian Karl Rahner’s positions by Dupuis. First, Dupuis argues that the Word and Spirit have both been active before and after the incarnation, which means that “a high constitutive Christology” could be open to recognizing God’s activity in other religions. Second—“and here we do have something novel”—he extends Rahner’s insight that (as per the incarnation for all humanity) God’s grace can be mediated to non-Christians in a socio-historical manner. Thus, Dupuis argues that other religions can be considered salvific paths (ibid., 911–12).

465 Ibid., 910–11, 912 passim.

466 D’Costa, review of *TCTRP*, 912–13. Cf. especially LG, no. 16.

467 D’Costa, review of *TCTRP*, 913.
implications of the resurrection and of Pentecost.\textsuperscript{468} This danger is further exemplified in Dupuis’s distinction between Christ and the \textit{Logos}—”as if the two could be really distinguished, other than theoretically.”\textsuperscript{469} While embracing the church as the universal sign and instrument of salvation in terms of finality (as per \textit{LG}, no. 9), Dupuis refuses to accept her as the instrumental, efficient cause of salvation for non-Christians.\textsuperscript{470} Instead, her instrumentality consists in terms of expectation and hope, in non-Christians’ “orientation” toward her. This makes the church “very special indeed” as the best and full sign, but D’Costa believes it ultimately places the church on par with other salvific mediations.\textsuperscript{471}

1. Dupuis’s Response

Although Pope John Paul II’s \textit{RM} enunciates the church’s specific and necessary role, Dupuis notes \textit{pace} D’Costa that it does not ascribe to her any universal mediation of grace in the sense of an “efficient instrumental causality.”\textsuperscript{472} While conceiving the church as the universal “sign” of salvation is easily conceived according to Dupuis, her instrumentality in the conferral of saving grace to non-Christians is not. Dupuis demurs: “It is difficult to conceive that [the latter] might be so.”\textsuperscript{473} Vatican II deliberately avoided calling non-Christians “members” of the church—and for good reason. As defined by \textit{LG} (cf. no. 8), they are simply not members; rather they are ordained to her, since Christ has given her the fullness of salvific means.\textsuperscript{474} Non-Christians find a “substitutive mediation” through the elements of truth and grace present in their religions (albeit not without relation to Christ’s unique mediation). The benefits of the sacraments and proclamation of God’s scriptures do not by definition reach non-members for whom instead the church intercedes that God may give His grace. The church’s mediation, Dupuis asserts, is not on a logical par with others, for non-members who are saved remain oriented to the church’s mystery.\textsuperscript{475}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{468} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{469} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{470} Gavin D’Costa, review of \textit{Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue}, by Jacques Dupuis, \textit{New Blackfriars} 84 (June 2003): 310–11 passim.
\item \textsuperscript{471} Ibid., 311.
\item \textsuperscript{472} Dupuis, “Truth Will Make You Free,” 250.
\item \textsuperscript{473} Jacques Dupuis, “‘Christianity and the Religions’ Revisited,” \textit{Louvain Studies} 28/4 (2003): 378.
\item \textsuperscript{474} Ibid., “Truth Will Make You Free,” 251. Dupuis also seems to have in mind here \textit{LG}, no. 16.
\item \textsuperscript{475} Dupuis, “Christianity and Religions Revisited,” 378–79 passim.
\end{itemize}
B. Giuseppe De Rosa

De Rosa acknowledges that Dupuis affirms Christ’s centrality and decisiveness. He also notes Dupuis’s avowal of the fullness of Christ’s revelation as well as His role as humanity’s constitutive saviour. Yet it seems to him that Dupuis always follows such statements with others that either weaken or empty (vanificate) the others of their meaning. Dupuis’s alleged (addotto) reason for qualifying such statements is the belief that only God can be said to be absolute—not the historical event of Jesus Christ. But the question of Christ’s “absoluteness,” responds De Rosa, is not centred on Jesus’ historical and, hence, necessarily limited humanity. Jesus is the Son of God made man. Since it is God’s Son who acts in Jesus, His human actions, albeit themselves historical and limited, have become unique and absolute, since they have divine value. Christ is the unique, universal and absolute saviour of all. He is not a salvific figure—even the greatest—among others.

De Rosa does not deny that the preincarnate Word has scattered His “seeds” of truth and grace throughout history or that the Spirit has “inspired” prophets among the nations in whose scriptures is found an authentic revelation. But these were done in view of the fullness of grace and revelation to be given in Christ. Because Jesus is God’s Son, His revelation is unique, total and definitive. After His revelation of God’s mystery, there are no other “words of divine revelation” to be placed beside Him. Jesus, then, is the definitive and absolute “reveler.”

Dupuis does not have much good to say (non sia dato il giusto rilievo) about the church’s mediation of salvation. In LG no. 48, Vatican II calls the church the universal sacrament of salvation, without always clarifying its meaning. Since the council also called her the body of Christ, De Rosa thinks it means that the church both collaborates with and depends on Jesus in evangelization, in offering the holy eucharist for the salvation of all, in her members’ prayer and sufferings. Since she is “vitally united” to Christ as His body, the church’s mediation would be according to efficient—and not just final—causality. De Rosa wonders further if it still makes sense for Dupuis to make all peoples disciples as per Christ’s command in Matt 28 (vv. 18–20). If other religions have saving figures, prophets

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477 Ibid., 141.

478 Ibid., 142. While Dupuis rightly accents non-Christian religions’ positive values, De Rosa nevertheless faults him for only alluding to their errors and gravely negative aspects (p. 143).

479 Ibid., 141.

480 Ibid., 143.
and scriptures; if they too are “peoples of God;” if they already form part of God’s reign: Why, De Rosa asks, should they become Christians?  

1. Dupuis’s Response

As regards Jesus’ human consciousness, Dupuis admits in reply that he should have used the word “limited” instead of “relative” to describe it. Still, he questions whether a divine, absolute and infinite value can be given to Jesus’ human activity which remains human in its specificity. Since absoluteness is part of God’s divine nature and only He saves absolutely, it seems better to call Christ the “constitutive,” rather than absolute, saviour. God is the primary, principal and originating cause of salvation; Jesus is its efficacious expression. This does not relativize Christ’s salvific work, since whatever is “constitutive” pertains to the essence. Dupuis rejects the contention that he reduces Jesus to just another salvific figure. Jesus is “constitutive” inasmuch as He is truly the universal cause of salvation. Nevertheless, other religious figures could indicate ways through which their adherents could encounter salvation in Christ (l’evento di salvezza Cristo), even without having been conscious or aware of it. Furthermore, no divine manifestation can be detached from the Christ-event, which has universal importance. Any additional, autonomous benefits (beni) found in them are related to the qualitative fullness of God’s revelation in Jesus, who is “the obligatory criterion for discerning their validity.” They are not a parallel economy.

Dupuis affirms the possibility of the church’s “mediation” in the proclamation of the gospel and in her prayer and intercession through the sacramental economy. Though, since the church’s message of the gospel does not normally (in his opinion) reach all people, he prefers to call that type of mediation “instrumental efficient causality.” Because the church’s mediation through prayer and intercession encompasses the salvation of all, he calls it “moral and final.” Regarding non-Christians’ conversion, Dupuis answers that their “ordination” to the church and calling to follow Christ are not given in view of a salvation that is otherwise unobtainable (non raggiungibile). The church is entrusted with the fullness

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481 Ibid.
483 Ibid., 680–81.
484 Ibid., 681.
485 Dupuis, “Teologia del pluralismo religioso rivisitata,” 672–73.
486 Ibid., 685.
of salvific means which is unavailable (a disposizione) outside of her; and only the church can communicate the explicit knowledge of Christ in whom they are saved.\footnote{487}

C. The Editorial Committee of Revue thomiste (abbreviated RThom)

The editors of RThom believe that Dupuis’s understanding of the “hypostatic union” is deficient, since he insists on an insurmountable distance between God’s “absoluteness” and Jesus’ humanity. Undoubtedly, Christ’s humanity is not ontologically identical with the divine absolute. But for RThom that is not the question. By having been assumed and lifted up by the absolute, Jesus’ humanity now presents a real necessity of absolute means.\footnote{488} Furthermore, the incarnation affirms precisely that Christ’s human nature, without ceasing to be finite, subsists in the same existence of the absolute that is common to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is God; He has no other existence than God’s own.\footnote{489} Moreover, RThom rejects any contradiction in the uniqueness of the mediation of Christ’s humanity in the order of grace: Jesus’ humanity is the source of all grace, which is thus necessarily “Christ-conforming.”\footnote{490}

Yet it is with the church that Dupuis “shows his hand [introduire du jeu],” rejecting ecclesiocentrism very clearly.\footnote{491} For Dupuis, the church is a means of salvation, rather than its reality. When speaking of non-Christians’ salvation, one speaks necessarily of their “ecclesiality” which, albeit imperfect, is real and salvific. The church’s mission ad gentes helps them pass from the imperfect to the perfect by implanting the full, ecclesial mystery. The church’s “living tradition” seems to privilege this view. Dupuis, though, conceives of Christ and the church as two entities, the actions of which are distinct and separable. In that way, he argues non-Christians can be saved by Christ apart from the church. This seems to go against the teaching of Vatican II which presents the church as the mystical body of Christ: a complex unity formed of distinct elements finding her ontological perfection only in the Catholic church.\footnote{492}

\footnote{487} Ibid., 689.


\footnote{489} Ibid., 603.

\footnote{490} Ibid., 604–05.

\footnote{491} Ibid., 601.

\footnote{492} Ibid., 608–10 passim.
RThom notes how Dupuis uses Rahner’s idea that, in the seven sacraments, the sign and the thing signified cannot be completely identified. Consequently, using Vatican II’s image of the church as “the universal sacrament of salvation,” Dupuis proposes a separation between the sign—viz. the church—and the reality signified—viz. membership in God’s kingdom. Dupuis then glides surreptitiously from the image of the church as “sacrament” to the actual “seven sacraments” themselves, without acknowledging that the sacramentality is different. The church is tied to the reality of salvation; the seven sacraments can be substituted (suppléés). The great virtue of the sacramental approach is that it manifests the inseparability of the signs and instruments and the reality. Wherever grace is present, there are perforce the signs and instruments of the reality and hence the church as well—at least, in genesi. The religions would then participate diversely in the same reality of the church.

According to RThom, Dupuis’s argument about the qualitative fullness of Christ’s revelation relies on the following sophism: Since Jesus’ human consciousness could not exhaust God’s mystery, it leaves His revelation incomplete. It is not, however, revelation’s goal to exhaust God’s mystery, rather to communicate all the truths necessary for salvation. It is not, then, contradictory for God to have communicated all He wanted humanity to know through Jesus Christ. Though not excluding other “revelations,” they cannot be anything but participations in the fullness of Christ’s. Nor are they parallel or complementary to His. RThom questions Dupuis’s “complementarity” of religions and religious pluralism de jure, as if each religion holds a piece of the truth which could then like a puzzle be placed back together.

For Dupuis all authentic religious experience is the work of the Holy Spirit and a divine revelation. Due to humankind’s social nature, these experiences and the elements of divine truth in them get gathered up into people’s religious traditions and sacred texts. The editors of RThom agree with this latter insight “without reservation.” But RThom counters that such experiences are themselves conditioned by their religion and may become distorted by defective representations. An experience of grace is not necessarily a revelation. While nothing prevents elements of the non-Christian religions from mediating grace to their adherents, those elements are always mixed with others that are objectively

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493 Editorial Committee, 613. Indeed, the editors identify Karl Rahner as “l’inspiration théologique de fond” for Dupuis’s thinking (p. 599).

494 Ibid., 616.

495 Ibid., 623.

496 Ibid., 626.

497 Ibid., 627.

498 Ibid., 624 (cf. also p. 625 n. 53).

499 Ibid., 624.
opposed to grace and can distort the most authentic religious experience. Without the church’s full sacramentality and means of salvation, the life of grace is extremely precarious and weakened (fragilisée) in them. The non-Christian religions cannot in any manner constitute “ways of salvation,” since they are ordained to fulfillment in Christianity.  

1. Dupuis’s Response

Dupuis admits he rejects ecclesiocentrism if understood rigidly as “Outside the church; no salvation” or as a paradigm maximalizing the church’s position. He reassures RThom’s editors, though, that he does not forget or separate the close bond which exists between Jesus Christ and the church. Dupuis disallows RThom’s talk of “ecclesiality” among non-Christians, since LG intentionally speaks of their ordination to the church—not membership. He sees an attempt at “recuperation” in the church’s favour. He writes:

To state that [she] . . . is “the very reality of salvation” fails to take account of the fact that the Church is a related, derived mystery, not having in herself, but in Christ, her raison-d’être and that, therefore, relatedness not to her but to Christ himself must serve as the ultimate criterion for human salvation.

Rather than RThom’s “model of an all-pervading ecclesiology,” regnocentrism provides a more fruitful way for opening up a broader horizon regarding the “theology of religions” and dialogue.

Whereas RThom grants that non-Christians could have experienced grace and that those experiences have a social dimension, Dupuis questions why the idea that their religions might contain a divine revelation (albeit incomplete) is rejected outright. Surely, discernment based on Christ is required, since not everything in other religious writings can be reckoned as having come from God. Error is

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500 Ibid., 628–29 passim. In fact, the editors criticize Dupuis’s “extreme benevolence” toward the non-Christian religions, underestimating them too much as “structures of sin” and a “heritage of unfaithfulness” that distort even the most authentic religious experience. Grace would be at pains (du mal) to clear a path through (p. 628).


502 Ibid., 248.

503 Ibid., 223. Dupuis uses the English word “recuperation” here and throughout this article in a non-standard way (see pp. 229, 232 and 253). He seems to have had in mind the French récupération which means “recovery; accomplishment; fulfillment; or retrieval.” Thus understood, Dupuis’s claim would be that RThom’s editors were trying to retrieve or rehabilitate the outdated, church-centred view of the past.

504 Ibid.

505 Ibid., 254–55.
Without minimizing the sinful and anti-Christian elements in other religions, Dupuis adds that they do not have a monopoly on sin or on traits running contrary to the gospel. Accepting Christianity as God’s unique “way” in His Son does not entail underestimating the positive value of other paths.\(^{507}\) Dupuis’s talk of complementarity of religions does not result in “parallel” revelations supplementing what Christianity lacks. Even less does he intend \(RThom\)’s puzzleboard analogy which “caricatures” his real position about the transcendence of Christian revelation.\(^{508}\)

Regarding the hypostatic union, Dupuis maintains that, while the Word’s divine action is naturally transcendent, His existence does not interfere with the specificity of Jesus’ human acts. Otherwise, it would mean (\textit{pace} the Council of Chalcedon) that His divinity would be absorbed into His humanity, thus losing its specific action. Dupuis clarifies that the same \textit{Logos asarkos} is become incarnate in Jesus Christ. But he contends that even after the incarnation and resurrection “a divine action of the Word \textit{as such}” (emphasis in original) continues beyond the human action of the risen Christ.\(^{509}\) Although conceding the “retroactive” application of Christ’s merits such that every grace conferred before Him was given in view of the incarnation, Dupuis still finds it impossible to conceive how Christ’s humanity could have acted instrumentally in giving grace before it existed.\(^{510}\)

D. Léon (Leo) Elders

Elders believes that, for Dupuis, all religious experience leading to a new vision or consciousness is a divine revelation and a springboard to the supernatural. But according to Elders “revelation” is strictly speaking the perception of a message from God. Someone’s grasp of a new vision or consciousness is not revelation in the biblical sense; nor are the gifts of grace given to non-Christians public revelations destined for the whole community.\(^{511}\) Vatican II’s “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (\textit{Dei Verbum})” restricts revelation to Israel and the church without recognizing any other

\(^{506}\) Ibid., 233.
\(^{507}\) Ibid., 249.
\(^{508}\) Dupuis, “Truth Will Make You Free,” 236.
\(^{509}\) Ibid., 237–38.
\(^{510}\) Ibid., 238.
public revelation outside of them. Therefore, it is “un non-sens théologique” to speak of “revelation” in non-Christian religions.  

Pope John Paul II expresses “the perennial doctrine [la doctrine de toujours]” on non-Christians’ belonging to the kingdom of God in the encyclical RM, namely, wherever people live in accord with the gospel, there is an incomplete beginning of God’s kingdom among them. Though God’s assistance (concours) and grace work within those outside the church preparing them for entry, Elders underlines that they are not linked to any particular religious structure. Dupuis, though, reads much more here: Non-Christians already belong to God’s kingdom in Christ. Conceding that some non-Christians are members of the church in potentiality, Elders nonetheless wonders how they pass from the natural plane of the world to grace, since adhesion to the gospel message is necessary.

The axiom “Outside the church; no salvation” is presented by Dupuis as unacceptable; rather he prefers to say that the church is the universal sacrament of salvation. Elders, however, does not see where the insurmountable difficulties lie: To be saved one must belong to the church, yet there are different manners of “belonging” (e.g. in the sincere desire to do God’s will accompanied by faith and charity).

Dupuis reduces the church’s importance for salvation by asserting that she does not monopolize God’s action or grace. For Elders, these are “very grave” affirmations. Certainly, the church does not monopolize all natural truths, but regarding salvific truth the Catholic faith teaches that Christ the mediator confided that to His church for her building up (l’édification). Moreover, Vatican II upholds the traditional doctrine on salvation: preaching the gospel is indispensable for bringing about faith in God and in Christ. While respecting the good elements in other religions as expressions of humanity’s search for God, the way to conversion passes through the proclamation of the gospel.

Finally, Elders criticizes Dupuis’s “autonomous approach” to interreligious dialogue which by recognizing non-Christians’ equality in the process does not seek their conversion. While all dialogue partners are equal as human beings, that does not place the truth of their positions on an equal footing. Further, it is erroneous to exclude conversion from the finality of interreligious dialogue which, though not having conversion to Christianity as its sole end, should still aim toward that end. Christians are obliged to work for the salvation of those outside the church; and Pope John Paul II declares in RM that dialogue is oriented toward proclamation, which has absolute priority.

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512 Ibid., 102 (cf. also p. 103).
513 Ibid., 113–14.
514 Ibid., 110.
515 Ibid., 114.
516 Ibid., 104.
517 Ibid., 115–16.
1. Dupuis’s Response

Dupuis agrees with Elders that individual gifts of grace do not make for a public revelation—*if* understood according to the precise sense intended by Christianity’s traditional theology of scripture. But if account is taken of “the social destination” of human beings’ genuine religious experiences which have been willed by God, then traces of those experiences may be found in the sacred writings of the non-Christian religions. Those writings can serve, then, as channels through which God says something to the pagan world through His Word and in His Spirit.\(^{518}\)

Regarding church membership for salvation, Elders fails to note *LG* “deliberately abstained” from “the theology of implicit membership,” saying only that those saved outside the church are nonetheless ordained to her.\(^{519}\) Vatican II never states non-Christians are members of the church. The novelty of John Paul II’s encyclical *RM* is in its teaching that God’s reign extends beyond the church and includes the members of other religions (cf. no. 20).\(^{520}\) Moreover, while Dupuis accepts faith is necessary for salvation, it does not follow that explicit faith in Christ is necessary even after the Christ-event. This position has long been abandoned.\(^{521}\) Dupuis further rejects that his interpretation of Vatican II is faulty. While much of the council’s language “evokes . . . the fulfillment theory,” it also speaks of truth and grace in the religions. Dupuis concludes that, though not saying non-Christian religions are means of salvation, it goes in the direction of attributing saving values to them.\(^{522}\)

Interreligious dialogue neither constitutes the church’s whole mission nor replaces the proclamation of the gospel. Dupuis has “consistently refused” identifying dialogue with mission so as not to reduce proclamation merely to dialogue.\(^{523}\) Church documents purposefully avoid Elders’ idea that dialogue is a “preparatory step” to proclamation, fearing that it might instrumentalize or manipulate dialogue. While the aims are different, Dupuis certainly agrees that in dialogue the Christian would hope to share his or her witness of faith in Jesus Christ.\(^{524}\)

\(^{518}\) Dupuis, “Truth Will Make You Free,” 234.

\(^{519}\) Ibid., 222–23.

\(^{520}\) Ibid., 252.

\(^{521}\) Ibid., 248.

\(^{522}\) Ibid., 225.

\(^{523}\) Ibid.

\(^{524}\) Ibid., 256.
E. Paolo Gamberini

Gamberini agrees with Dupuis in distinguishing Christ’s divine and human natures—but not with his attempt to distinguish the divine person of the Word from “the concrete human existence of Jesus Christ.” Jesus’ humanity does not exist of itself; rather it subsists in the Word. Thus Jesus’ existence is identical to that of God’s Word. Further, though Gamberini also distinguishes the divine and human operations in Jesus, these are always referred back to the same incarnate Word. What is operative in the risen Christ? Gamberini answers: the Word’s human nature. But—Who is operative? The incarnate Word. The Word’s hypostasis does not denote His divine nature; rather it is the support of subsistence for both the human and divine natures in Jesus. By Dupuis’s Logos asarkos/ensarkos distinction, Gamberini believes one might think the Word in Jesus is not identical to “the Word ‘as such’ [il Verbo in quanto tale].”

Gamberini concurs with Dupuis that the hypostatic union does not eliminate the limits of Jesus’ human consciousness, which can neither absolutize nor exhaust the divine mystery. While Jesus’ awareness of God and of Himself was limited, the witness of the NT is not merely about Jesus’ own self-understanding, but of God’s revelation in Him. Indeed, the resurrection reveals a much greater proximity than difference between God and Jesus: God has defined His divinity within the “narrow confines” of Christ’s humanity, binding Himself forever and freely to His self-manifestation in Jesus. In order to preserve the Word’s transcendence, it is not necessary to require that it be not circumscribed, reduced or exhausted by Christ’s human nature. He is not God in spite of having become man; rather He is God becoming man. He is not other than or beyond Jesus’ human existence and action; there is no “surplus” of the non-incarnate Word distinct from what became incarnate (distinto da quello incarnato).

1. Dupuis’s Response

Dupuis concedes to Gamberini the confusion which has been caused by the former’s adoption of the Logos asarkos/Logos ensarkos terminology. Although the Logos asarkos is “obviously” the same as

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526 Ibid., 134–35 passim.
527 Ibid., 137.
528 Ibid., 138.
529 Ibid., 140.
Logos which took flesh in Christ, God’s preexistent Logos has operated in history before the incarnation. Therefore, “the same Logos as such can continue to exercise an enlightening and saving activity toward human beings, even after the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (emphasis in original). Dupuis promises to substitute the phrases “Word as such” and “Word as incarnate” for the Logos asarkos/Logos ensarkos distinction in his subsequent writings.530

In Dupuis’s opinion, Gamberini’s criticism of his proposal of the Word’s “surplus” activity is “ambiguous and improper.” Unquestionably, the agent of the actions of Christ’s human nature is the divine person of the Word who is their only subject. But His activity need not be exhausted by Jesus’ humanity.531 Gamberini’s statement that God has defined Himself by Christ is unclear leading to “doubtful conclusions.” Dupuis criticizes this “levelling up” of Christ’s humanity to His divinity.532

F. George Gispert-Sauch

While asserting Jesus Christ as the climax of God’s revelation, Gispert-Sauch observes how Dupuis argues nevertheless that, due to the creatureliness of His human nature, Jesus’ revelation could not have exhausted God’s infinite nature. Yet Gispert-Sauch fails to capture Dupuis’s meaning: The incarnation is not an attempt to “exhaust” God, rather to show that the total divine reality is personally present in Jesus Christ. Though Dupuis “surely accepts this,” Gispert-Sauch believes it is a question of whether he admits that God is found exclusively in Christ.533 While Dupuis contrasts the “Word-to-Be-Incarnate” with the Word incarnate, Gispert-Sauch observes that future and past are human perceptions, whereas God’s action and revelation are not conditioned by time. The Word should always be linked with Jesus’ humanity which in its risen state exists beyond time “in an eternal now without past or future.”534

The question of grace is a weakness. For Dupuis the communication of grace is substantially identical in every case, that is, always involving the self-gift of the triune God. The only difference in the communication of God’s grace after the incarnation is the “intervention” of Christ’s glorified humanity through which the Holy Spirit is given. Still, he wonders then what difference the risen Christ actually


531 Ibid., 183.

532 Ibid., 185.


534 Ibid., 969.
makes for Dupuis. Moreover, Gispert-Sauch disagrees that God’s gracious self-gift is always identical. Personal self-gift is a relation—and there can be many types of relationship. Theology discriminates among various graces in the church, like the sacraments, which “are not different taps from which we can get the same water from the tank above,” but mediate new ways of relating to God. This is an important realization for understanding the meaningfulness of relating sacramentally to God through Jesus.

Gispert-Sauch is “uneasy” with Dupuis’s proposal about God offering revelation and salvation through separate activities of each divine person. While believing Dupuis is “basically correct” about other religions as divine revelations and channels of grace, Gispert-Sauch nevertheless “keep[s] a question mark” over the hypothesis on a plurality of action of the divine persons of the Trinity that would be unrelated to Christ. The Blessed Trinity is both a mystery of plurality and a mystery of unity. Surely, the divine persons are involved differently in revelation and salvation. But Gispert-Sauch does not feel that Dupuis has explained the mystery of their unity sufficiently in some places.

1. Dupuis’s Response

Regarding Gispert-Sauch’s comments on Dupuis’s claim that Christ’s revelation cannot “exhaust” God, Dupuis responds nonetheless:

[S]ince the revelation of God in Jesus is based on his human finite consciousness of being the Son of the Father, it does not and cannot express fully the divine mystery; only God’s transcendent divine knowledge comprehends the mystery fully.

It is a question, then, of a revelation which—however historically unsurpassable—remains necessarily “incomplete, unfinished, waiting for completion in the eschaton [sic]” when God will be fully revealed. Gispert-Sauch, he claims, has misread him. Furthermore, Dupuis maintains that he has never spoken of separate, salvific activities for each divine person of the Blessed Trinity. The church’s councils (viz. Chalcedon and Constantinople III) teach that Christ’s divine and human natures as well as their actions remain distinct. While not separated from Jesus’ humanity, the actions of the “Word as such” are nonetheless distinct. Dupuis also sees grace as a “relation” by which God calls human beings to share

535 Ibid., 969–70.
536 Ibid., 970.
537 Ibid., 969–71 passim.
539 Ibid.
540 Ibid., 221.
in His life. It is substantially the same in the following way: Whenever God gives of Himself, He does so as He is which is Father, Son and Spirit.\textsuperscript{541} Hopefully, he has sufficiently clarified that the plurality of God’s salvific activity is always related essentially to Jesus Christ. The Trinity is not only a mystery of communion, but also of communication among the divine persons in the unity of the Godhead.\textsuperscript{542}

G. Terrence Merrigan

In \textit{TCTRP} Dupuis has tried to develop a comprehensive theology of religions that is (in Merrigan’s words) “avowedly Christian and indeed inclusivist,” while also exploring avenues beyond inclusivism.\textsuperscript{543} On the one hand, Merrigan wonders if in some places Dupuis has actually moved beyond the fulfillment theory. While his inclusivist view of the salvific role of non-Christian religions is clear, some passages of \textit{TCTRP} could be read as a return to the fulfillment theory.\textsuperscript{544} On the other hand, Merrigan fears that Dupuis can sometimes speak about the religions “in a fashion which is susceptible of non-inclusivist interpretations.” Furthermore, occasionally he seems to echo pluralist themes like: the multiplicity of salvific paths and figures; the relative, non-absolute nature of God’s revelation in Christ; the surplus of truth and grace lying outside the Christian religion. Merrigan thinks that the issue might be more one of Dupuis’s language than of his doctrine. Clearly Dupuis does not mean to deny either the constitutiveness or the universality of Christ’s revelation. Still, he questions whether Dupuis’s own inclusivist framework can really permit that kind language. Merrigan answers: “I do not think it does.”\textsuperscript{545} Merrigan suggests that Dupuis should use the word “limited” instead of “relative.”\textsuperscript{546} In the end Merrigan remains unconvinced “that Dupuis has established . . . that religious traditions, merely by their very existence, are purveyors of revelation and salvation.”\textsuperscript{547}

1. Dupuis’s Response

\textsuperscript{541} Ibid., 222.

\textsuperscript{542} Ibid., 225.


\textsuperscript{544} Ibid., 351–52, 355 passim (cf. also 352 n. 25).


\textsuperscript{546} Ibid., 355 n. 28.

\textsuperscript{547} Ibid., 358.
Dupuis counters Merrigan by asserting that he distances himself “everywhere” from the fulfillment theory if understood as humanity’s universal aspiration toward God which is fulfilled in Christ and Christianity. Insofar as Jesus is the supreme mode of God’s salvation, the Christ-event “fulfills” any imperfections in other mediations by their relation or ordination to His own.\textsuperscript{548} Dupuis accepts Merrigan’s comment that calling Jesus’ revelation “relative” is ambiguous; he should rather say “limited” or “finite.” Dupuis only wants to preserve the transcendent, unsurpassable character of the fullness of God’s revelation which is not exhausted by Jesus’ created human awareness.\textsuperscript{549} By “incomplete” he means that God’s revelation through Jesus’ consciousness will only be finalized in the eschaton.\textsuperscript{550} In his statement about more truth existing in other religions than in Christianity, Dupuis clarifies that he is not affirming the pluralist paradigm. While maintaining Christianity’s unique and transcendent character, the existence of reciprocal and complementary revelations is possible due to Christianity’s “inbuilt ‘limited’ character.” He does not mean it in the sense that the Christian revelation would be supplemented by other revelations, but that some aspects of God’s mystery might be stressed more or expressed more vividly by other religions than in Christianity.\textsuperscript{551}

\textbf{V. Conclusion}

This chapter has sought to summarize Dupuis’s argument for a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.” Furthermore, it has presented a sketch of various criticisms of his positions raised by other scholars as well as his attempt to answer the critics. As Terrence Merrigan writes, Dupuis is best regarded as “an explorer on the frontiers.” It is not surprising, then, that he opens “untried paths” which may lead to dead-ends. Still, Dupuis’s work is courageous as well as creative in its attempt to relate the faith to the contemporary context of giving value and respect to non-Christian believers.\textsuperscript{552}

\textsuperscript{548} Dupuis, “Truth Will Make You Free,” 246 (cf. also p. 228).

\textsuperscript{549} Ibid., 235.

\textsuperscript{550} Ibid., 247.

\textsuperscript{551} Ibid., 235–36.

CHAPTER THREE
DUPUIS’ USE OF THE BIBLE IN HIS THEORY

I. Introduction

This chapter addresses how the Bible functions in Dupuis’s proposal of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.” It will sketch out in a systematic, albeit brief, way how he views the nature and purpose of the Christian scriptures as well as its relationship to the sacred writings of other religions. The chapter will treat the following biblical texts which feature prominently in Dupuis’s writing on the subject of the religious “other”:

(1) Genesis 9:8–17;
(2) Gospel of John 1:1–18;
(4) Letter to the Romans 1:18–23;

The texts will be examined not only according to how Dupuis interprets each, but also according to how that interpretation coordinates with his overall argument for “inclusive pluralism,” which was presented in the previous chapter.

II. Overview of Dupuis’s Attitude toward the Bible

Dupuis differentiates three stages of God’s revelation: First, he believes that God has granted in the heart of “seers” the perception of His secret word, traces of which are located in the scriptures of the religions. Dupuis is not always clear about what he means by using the term, “word.” Is it meant to be synonymous with “revelation”? Or is it meant to point to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, called “the Word [ho logos]” in the prologue to John’s gospel (1:1–18)? Unless the term is capitalized as “Word,” then my presumption has been that Dupuis means something akin to “revelation.” Though, I must confess that I am not always sure. Perhaps, the ambiguity is intentional. Second, God has spoken “officially” to the people of Israel through His prophets. That word as well as the human response to it
has been recorded in the OT. Nevertheless, God’s revelation in these first two stages is geared, albeit differently in each, to His plenary revelation in Jesus Christ. In the third and final stage, God has uttered His decisive word in Jesus Christ, the one who is the Word and whose official witness can be found in the NT.  

A. The Bible’s Nature and Purpose

For Dupuis, the Bible is both divine and human. It contains memories and interpretations of God’s revelation which have been consigned to writing by human beings under divine impulse. Thus, God Himself can be called their author. Dupuis does not mean, though, that the human authors and compilers of the sacred traditions either ceased to be authors in their own right or did not exercise their faculties when writing or editing. On the contrary, authorship (albeit on different levels) should be ascribed both to God and to the human person.  

Dupuis notes the opinion of theologian Karl Rahner who has emphasized the communal character of scripture: The Bible is the church’s “book;” it contains God’s revelation addressed to the ecclesial community. In the Bible, the church sees the authentic expression of, as well as the basis for, her faith. Sacred scripture, then, is “a constitutive element in the mystery of the church, which is gathered together by the word of God.”

In the church’s ongoing reflection on Christ, the NT occupies a privileged position, representing the apostles’ reliable interpretation of Christ’s mystery. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the church recognizes God’s revelation in the NT, which remains the necessary frame of reference and final norm (or norma normans) for any further theological elaboration. The Bible also retains an intimate connection with other aspects of Catholicism, like sacred tradition and the magisterium. Dupuis observes that Vatican II’s Dei Verbum (i.e. nos. 4 and 7) discriminates between the fullness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and the transmission of that event in the NT. While the authentic memorial of Jesus transmitted in the NT is surely and always normative for the church’s faith, that does not mean it embodies the fullness of God’s revelation to humankind. The NT itself admits that it bears only an incomplete witness to Jesus (e.g. in John 21:25). The NT writings constitute “the official record and interpretation, the authentic

553 TCTR, 250. Dupuis names these three stages of revelation: “cosmic, Israelite and Christian” (p. 251).

554 TCTR, 246.


556 WDYSIA?, 75.

557 TCTR, 15–16 passim.

558 TCTR, 249.
memorial” of God’s revelation in Christ and should be distinguished from Him. Dupuis states that “[i]t is the very person of Jesus Christ, his deeds and his words, his life, his death and his resurrection . . . that constitutes [sic] the fullness of revelation. In him, God has uttered to the world his decisive word.”

Theology invokes the concept of “divine inspiration” in relation to the Bible so as to explain both God’s mystery and the coauthorship of scripture by human beings. The concept indicates that God, while respecting the human author’s own activity, nevertheless assumes and guides that activity so that what is written down is truly His own word. Dupuis is unhappy with the way in which the vocabulary describing God’s revelation—terms like “word of God,” “sacred scripture” and “inspiration”—has traditionally been restricted to the writings of Judaism and Christianity. Such terms, he believes, could admit a broader definition that would be applicable analogously, albeit differently, to other religious traditions during the stages of God’s progressive revelation to humanity. He challenges the legitimacy of defining these concepts in such an a priori fashion that they validly apply only to the biblical scriptures. If so, then there is no word of God, no sacred scriptures at all, except for the Bible. Furthermore, Dupuis feels the Holy Spirit’s role is passed over in silence: “[T]he current theology of Sacred Scripture continues to assert that God is the author in a rather indeterminate way.” Inspiration is conceived as a common Trinitarian act seemingly without any reference to the active presence of God’s Spirit “who, by inspiring the sacred writers, impresses his personal seal on what is written.” By bringing out “once again” and to a greater degree the Spirit’s personal influence in sacred scripture, it will be possible to assert “a more open attitude” to the scriptures of other religions.

B. The Bible’s Relationship to Non-Christian Scriptures

Dupuis both distinguishes and links divine revelation, prophetism and sacred scripture. Prophetism does not relate primarily to future prediction; rather it is the interpretation of a people’s sacred history, of God’s historical interventions and of His will for them. The source of this charism is located

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559 *TCTR*, 248–49.
560 *TCTR*, 246.
561 *TCTR*, 251.
562 *CR*, 134.
564 *TCTR*, 244.
in mystical experience.\textsuperscript{565} God has personally manifested Himself in the history of the nations, so that theology can speak of a divine revelation, albeit ordered toward the Jewish and Christian one. Recalling the OT’s “pagan saints” and God’s covenants with humanity, Dupuis feels that it should be admitted that the prophetic charism is not exclusive to Israel both before and after Christ.\textsuperscript{566}

Dupuis maintains that the experience of God by the nations’ sages and \textit{rishis} (Sanskrit, “seers”) has been guided by the Holy Spirit. Addressing them in the recesses of their heart, God secretly enters into the histories of the nations, guiding them toward the accomplishment of His plan. Their scriptures, then, represent the legacy of a “tradition-in-becoming” which has been destined in God’s providence to lead others to the experience of that same Spirit. He writes:

\begin{quote}
[T]he personal experience of the Spirit by the \textit{rishis}, inasmuch as . . . it is a personal overture on the part of God to the nations and . . . has been authentically recorded in their sacred scriptures, is a personal word addressed by God to them through intermediaries of divine choosing. In a true sense, this word may be called ‘a word inspired by God,’ provided we do not impose too strict a version of the concept and that we take sufficient account of the cosmic influence of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{567}
\end{quote}

Hence, the nations’ sacred texts correspond—along with the OT and NT—to various ways in which God has addressed humanity throughout a continuous process of divine self-revelation.\textsuperscript{568} While containing God’s initial and hidden words, Dupuis is not however claiming that other religions’ scriptures have the “official” character of the OT which represents God’s immediate, historic preparation for His revelation in Jesus Christ. Nor do they carry the meaning and decisive value of His word in Jesus after whom no new public revelation is to be expected (see \textit{DV}, no. 4). Though these scriptures do not signify “public revelation” as per Vatican II, Dupuis nonetheless argues they cannot be reduced to mere “private revelations” because, insofar as God has addressed those non-Christian communities through their prophets, they exercise a social function.\textsuperscript{569} Moreover, Dupuis does not claim that the whole content of the nations’ sacred books is God’s revelation in the words of humans, for many elements may have been introduced which are only human words about God. He is also not suggesting that God’s revelation in them represents His decisive word to humankind, as if He had nothing more to say than what had already

\textsuperscript{565} \textit{TCTR}, 245. Dupuis believes the notion of prophetism as mystical experience has been “excellently formulated” in the article “Introduction to the Prophets” in the \textit{New Jerusalem Bible} translation (cf. 1985 ed., pp. [1157]–89).

\textsuperscript{566} \textit{TCTR}, 244–45 passim. Cf. e.g. the pagan Balaam’s prophecies in Num chaps. 22–24 or the later Sibylline oracles.

\textsuperscript{567} \textit{TCTR}, 247–48.

\textsuperscript{568} \textit{TCTR}, 250.

\textsuperscript{569} \textit{CR}, 133. Still, Dupuis maintains elsewhere that the non-Christian scriptures’ social character has been willed by God (cf. \textit{TCTR}, 247).
been said through the nations’ prophets.\textsuperscript{570} Notwithstanding the singular character of the “Jesus Christ-event” or the unique place of its official record in the NT, Dupuis believes it is still possible to propose an “open theology” of revelation and scripture which recognizes that God has uttered “initial words” to humankind through its prophets, traces of which can be found in the writings of the world’s religions. For Dupuis, God’s decisive word in Christ does not preclude other words.\textsuperscript{571} Dupuis asks if God’s revelation in the religions’ sacred books has a value only for their adherents or if He speaks to Christians through them as well. “[T]he fullness of revelation contained in Jesus Christ,” he writes, “does not gainsay this possibility.”\textsuperscript{572} God’s revelation is progressive and differentiated; and there exists a true complementarity between the Judeo-Christian revelation and that found in other traditions. Similarly, the biblical corpus and scriptures of other religions complement each other, since it is the same God who has spoken both through the prophets in history and in the heart of the nations’ sages and seers. Since all truth comes from God who is truth, it needs to be honoured—no matter through which channel it has come.\textsuperscript{573} Writing on the complementarity existing between Christianity’s sacred writings and those of other world religions, Dupuis explains:

\begin{quotation}
The complementarity between them is . . . reciprocal, in the sense that there are not merely uncovered in the other sacred books some “indentations,” that is “pierres d’attente,” in the way of a “natural” knowledge of God, which would be fulfilled in a unilateral way by the Judeo-Christian tradition. . . Nor, is it merely the case of some particles or scattered fragments of divine truth, the fullness of which would be found necessarily in abundance in the Christian revelation (italics in original).\textsuperscript{574}
\end{quotation}

Instead, the non-biblical writings can elicit aspects of God’s mystery with greater clarity than is found in the Bible including the NT.\textsuperscript{575} Dupuis thinks one would discover, with joy and surprise, astonishing convergences between the “words of God” and His Word in Jesus. Indeed, a prolonged contact with non-biblical writings can bring Christians to a deeper discovery of the divine mystery that has been unveiled to them in Christ.\textsuperscript{576}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{570} \textit{TCTR}, 247.
\item \textsuperscript{571} \textit{TCTR}, 250.
\item \textsuperscript{572} \textit{TCTR}, 252–53.
\item \textsuperscript{573} \textit{TCTR}, 251–52. Dupuis adds, however, that such complementarity exists without prejudice to the decisiveness of the Christ-event (p. 252).
\item \textsuperscript{574} CR-It, 261. This is my own translation of Dupuis’s Italian text (cf. Berryman’s translation in \textit{CR}, 135–36).
\item \textsuperscript{575} CR-It, 260–61 (cf. \textit{CR}, 135).
\item \textsuperscript{576} \textit{TCTR}, 253.
\end{itemize}
III. Important Scriptural Loci Theologici for Dupuis’s Theory

We now turn to several sections of the sacred scriptures which serve as “theological focal points,” or *loci theologici*, for Dupuis’s discussion of religious pluralism. I have chosen those texts which seem to me to have factored most importantly in his arguments from a theological standpoint.

A. Texts and Analysis

Dupuis’s analysis of the biblical texts below has been assembled from various writings. Given his concern for highlighting the personal and contextual aspect of theologizing, an effort has been made to supply examples from his writings (wherever possible and relevant) that show the impact of other religious traditions upon Dupuis’s reading of the Christian scripture.

1. Genesis 9:8–17

   8 God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 9 See, I am now establishing My covenant with you and your descendants after you 10 and with every living creature that was with you: the birds, the tame animals and all the wild animals that were with you—all that came out of the ark. 11 I will establish My covenant with you, that never again shall all creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood; there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth. 12 God said: This is the sign of the covenant that I am making between Me and you and every living creature with you for all ages to come: 13 I set My bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between Me and you and every living creature—every mortal being—so that the waters will never again become a flood to destroy every mortal being. 16 When the bow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature—every mortal being that is on earth. 17 God told Noah: This is the sign of the covenant I have established between Me and every mortal being that is on earth.

According to Dupuis, the record of God’s salvific dealings with humanity in the Bible is “punctuated” by covenants. The term “covenant,” or *berit* in Hebrew, is used theologically throughout the Bible in the sense of God’s free, personal and salvific intervention in history. For Dupuis it “always” represents a gratuitous initiative by God who enters into a relationship with human beings without any merit on their own part. It is a unilateral pact of friendship begun by God to which people are called to respond with commitment and fidelity. Dupuis’s understanding of this OT concept and its

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577 *TCTR*, 31 (cf. also p. 223).

578 *TCTR*, 223 (cf. also p. 31). Dupuis’s meaning above seems to be this: Any covenant offered by God is offered freely and without any necessity on His part. God offers a covenant “unilaterally,” that is, if *He* chooses to.
usage has been drawn from articles in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* and *Anchor Bible Dictionary.*

Dupuis continues: The idea of “covenant” first appears in the Book of Genesis in reference to God’s everlasting covenant with Noah (cf. Gen 6–9 passim) occurring especially in the priestly source’s account of the Noah cycle in Genesis. Dupuis writes:

This revelation and covenant [i.e. with Noah] constitute the oldest and most precious revealed datum on which a theology of the religious traditions of humanity may be established.

In Gen 9, God strikes an everlasting covenant with all creation through Noah. Its sign is the rainbow which will symbolize the persistence of the cosmic order, a new world order that would cancel out the flood’s destruction.

Against the background of the whole biblical witness regarding Noah, his covenant takes on its full meaning: It is a covenant with both humanity and the cosmos itself (cf. Gen 9:10). Everlasting and irrevocable (v. 16), this covenant manifests the promise of God’s fidelity to His creation of which the rainbow is a “sacramental sign” (cf. vv. 12–15). Dupuis notes the views of Jean Daniélou as to the theological meaning of the Noachic covenant: It is a cosmic covenant, for its permanence is not due to natural laws, but to God’s faithfulness (Heb. *emet*) in the cosmic order. It also guarantees His fidelity in the historical order. Noah’s intimacy with God as well as the universality of God’s covenant with him demonstrate God’s “personal commitment . . . toward the nations,” namely, the universality of His intervention in humankind’s history of which the world’s religions are “the privileged testimonies.”

Dupuis quotes Bernhard Stoeckle who writes:

The covenant with Noah constitutes [wird . . . vorgestellt] the lasting foundation for the salvation of every human person. Its true significance is falsified if one sees in it—as a long tradition in Catholic theology has done—nothing beyond the setting up of a “natural” religion having nothing to do yet with a supernatural revelation. The particular characteristics recorded in the Scripture concerning the Noah covenant make it clear that there is question here of a true event of

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580 *TCTR*, 32. Even before the flood, God announces His intention to form a covenant with Noah (cf. Gen 6:17–18).

581 *JCEWR*, 131.

582 *TCTR*, 32.

583 *TCTR*, 35–36.


585 *TCTR*, 226 (see also p. 33).
salvation, marked by grace [ein echtes, gnadenbestimmtes Heilsereignis] . . . The entirety of the covenant [der Pakt] with Noah appears as an outline of the covenants [der Bündnisse] with Abraham and Moses. . . . Israel and the nations have thus a common base: they are in a state of covenantship with the true God and under the same salvific will of that one God.  

The Noachic covenant, then, has far-reaching consequences for a theology of “extrabiblical” religions, since they too remain in a state of covenantship with God and also deserve to be called God’s people. In fact, Deutero-Isaiah sees the image of God’s enduring love for His people Israel in His oath to Noah (cf. Isa 54:9–10).  

Furthermore, Dupuis appeals to church tradition for the validity of God’s multiple covenants, thus showing that salvation history has not been limited to a “chosen people,” but extended to all humanity throughout history. He appeals to the scheme of Irenaeus of Lyons who distinguishes four covenants made by God with humanity: one with Adam, with Noah, with Moses and the one through Christ (cf. Haer. 3.11.8). The Adamic and Noachic were universal covenants and reflected God’s historical manifestation from the beginning of creation. The Mosaic covenant concerned the people of Israel and served to directly prepare for God’s decisive manifestation in Jesus in whom the whole process finally came to its climax. Dupuis sees here a theological analogy between Christianity’s relationship with Judaism and that with the world’s religions:  

As the Mosaic covenant has not been suppressed by the fact of having reached its fullness in Jesus Christ, so also the cosmic covenant made in Noah with the nations has not been cancelled by the fact that in the Christ event the goal that was set for it by God has been reached. That means that the other traditions still have saving value for their followers, but not unrelated to the Christ event.  

In Dupuis’s opinion, the covenants relate to each other as God’s various engagements with humanity through His Logos. They are “Logophanies” through which the Word rehearses His entrance into history via the incarnation. The covenants, therefore, relate to each other as a seed to a plant: Each already contains the promise of the fullness that will issue forth.  

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587 TCTR, 226–27.  

588 TCTR, 33 (cf. also pp. 35–36, 224).  

589 TCTR, 78.  

590 CR, 109 (cf. also TCTR, 233 and 320).  

Dupuis further takes up Daniélou’s idea that Noah was a “pagan saint,” namely, a righteous person who lived either before “the Israelite dispensation” of God’s covenants with Abraham and Moses (e.g. like Abel and Enoch) or contemporaneous with Israel, albeit outside of her people. The Bible emphasizes the intimate relationship between God and Noah (cf. Gen 9:1–17). In fact, Genesis already says in chap. 6 that Noah has found favour with God (v. 8) and has “walked with God” (v. 10). The Book of Wisdom testifies to Noah’s justice (cf. 10:4); Sirach describes him as “just and perfect” (44:17); and the prophet Ezekiel numbers him among the elect (cf. Ezek 14:14). Noah not only typifies the (pagan?) person who is saved, but also becomes the instrument by which the world is saved (cf. Sir 44:16–17). Since Noah and his family—the remnant—are saved from divine judgment and become the “principle of a new humanity,” Dupuis argues thereby that Noah prefigures Christ Himself. In the NT, Jesus praises Noah for obeying God’s revelation about the world’s impending judgment (cf. Matt 24:37–39). He is called a herald of righteousness in the Second Letter of Peter (2:5) because he is a prophet who announces God’s judgment on the nations and calls them to repentance. But it is in the Letter to the Hebrews that Dupuis finds Noah’s fundamental significance: In chap. 11 (especially vv. 4–7), the author celebrates Noah’s fear of God and exalts his faith. He is a model of faith, since, based solely on God’s testimony, he believed in events that were as yet unforeseen. Due to his righteousness, he escapes God’s judgment and condemns the world through his act of faith. Hebrews 11, then, witnesses not only to the possibility of saving faith outside of “the Jewish dispensation,” but also before it. It follows from the presence of “saints” like Noah that before God manifested Himself to Abraham and Moses He had already done so to the nations. However obscure that manifestation might have been, Dupuis believes it nevertheless concerned God’s salvific action in the world. The Bible does not say how many “pagan saints” responded to God’s revelation; it is satisfied to reveal that some did and propose them as models of faith. It teaches that faith and holiness in the sight of God were possible—and indeed, realities—among pagan peoples.

2. Gospel of John 1:1–18

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592 TCTR P, 34 (cf. especially n. 7).
593 CR, 105 (cf. also TCTR P, 226).
594 TCTR P, 35.
596 TCTR P, 35.
597 TCTR P, 34.
598 Ibid.
In the beginning was the Word [ho logos],
and the Word was with God [ho theos],
and the Word was God [theos].

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world,
and the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own,
but his own people did not accept him.

But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God.

And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory [doxa], the glory as of the Father’s only Son [monogenēs], full of grace and truth.

John testified to him and cried out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.’” From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him.

In the prologue to John’s gospel (1:1–18), NT Christology comes to its climax and finds its best expression. Truly, it can be considered “the culmination of . . . christological reflection.”

Dupuis notes that in John 1:1 God the Father (ho theos) is distinguished from His Word who is also “God” (theos). John the evangelist seems to be the first NT author to call Jesus “God” in contradistinction to the Father. Dupuis writes: “The meaning of the term is . . . broadened to refer to the

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599 WDYSIA?, 71. Elsewhere in the same book he calls John’s prologue “the summit” of NT Christology (p. 66).

600 WDYSIA?, 72.
‘Godhead’ common to Father and Son. The ‘ontic’ terminology of the New Testament is beginning to evolve toward an ontological terminology.”

Dupuis maintains that John’s vision of the divine Logos is connected to the economy of God’s word and wisdom in the OT. The evangelist has borrowed the concept of God’s “word” from the OT’s sapiential literature and applied it to the Father’s preexistent Son. In the OT God’s “word,” or dabar in Hebrew, manifests His law (see Exod 20:1–17; Deut 5:6–22); it interprets His historical involvements (cf. Exod 20:2); it executes infallibly His designs, whether in history or the cosmos (see Isa 55:11). Primarily, the Word’s efficacious activity is applied to God’s interventions on behalf of Israel (see Deut 9:5), but it can also be related to the act of creation (see Gen 1:3–5; cf. also Pss 33:6–9 and 107:20). This is the Word’s universal significance which shows up in John’s prologue (e.g. in 1:1–3).

Dupuis cites biblical scholar John L. McKenzie, who writes:

Most Old Testament scholars . . . wonder why anyone has ever thought it necessary to appeal to any source beyond the Old Testament to explain John’s application of logos to Jesus Christ. . . . Old Testament thought is a sufficient explanation for the appearance of the term. . . . In Jesus Christ is fulfilled the word as a distinct being; as a dynamic creative entity; as that which gives form and intelligibility to the reality which it signifies; as the self-revelation of God; as a point of personal encounter between God and man.

Jesus’ appellation as “the Word” by the evangelist was a factor of immense significance giving a definite orientation to subsequent centuries of Christian thinking about God’s Son. While Dupuis knows that it is a disputed question among NT exegetes as to why Jesus Christ is called “the Word” in John’s gospel, he nevertheless thinks that it is meant to emphasize that in Christ the revelatory function of the OT dabar has been fully realized. Though John’s gospel privileges the concept of “word” to explain the one who would become flesh in Jesus, emphases from the OT’s wisdom literature are also not lacking in the prologue. Wisdom (Heb. chokmah; Gk. sōphia) was present with God before creation and was His instrument in creation (cf. Prov 8:22, 27–31; Wis 7:22, 9:9). Wisdom was sent to humanity to reveal

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602 TCTR, 51.

603 WDYSIA?, 72.

604 TCTR, 42–43.


607 CR, 142 (cf. also TCTR, 51).
God’s hidden plans and to deliver His message of salvation and lead people to life and immortality (cf. Prov 4:13, 8:32–36; Wis 6:18–19, 9:10–11). These connotations are transposed into the gospel and applied to God’s incarnate Word: Just as wisdom had set up her tent in Israel before (see Sir 24:8–12), the Word has set His tent among humankind (John 1:14). Dupuis cites Johannine scholar Raymond E. Brown:

Personified Wisdom language appears in the [Synoptics]... but there is nothing to match the massive number of echoes in John;... this background supplied a major element in the vocabulary and imagery for the Johannine presentation of Jesus as a preexistent [sic] who came into this world from another, heavenly realm where he had been with the Father.

In OT theology, God’s word and wisdom stood for dynamic attributes to which literary or poetic personification had been given. The difference for John, according to Dupuis, is that “through his incarnation the Logos is now revealed as a person distinct from God, yet one who shared with God in the divine life ‘in the beginning’ (Jn 1:1), later to enter human history as a human being. He contends that, since John’s “Logos-Wisdom theology” provides the widest NT perspective for God’s universal and continual involvement with human history, it allows for a positive approach to the world’s religions.

For Dupuis, “[t]he text of John 1:9... is of primordial importance for a theology of the religions.” The fact God always speaks through His Word is “clearly implied” in the prologue’s reference to (in Dupuis’s own rendering) “the true light that enlightens every human being by [sic] coming into the world.” In v. 9 Dupuis argues “we are surely dealing with the active presence of the divine Logos, not yet incarnate, throughout the whole of human history.” Dupuis recognizes that the verse has many exegetical difficulties. Yet he claims that for “[a]uthoritative commentators” its meaning is clear:

[T]he Word of God—whose action is described after the model of Wisdom in Sir 24—is the source of light for all human beings throughout history, including the period of history that preceded its coming into the flesh; its enlightening and saving power is universal, extending as it does to all times and all persons.

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610 TCTR, 51.

611 Ibid. (see also p. 42).

612 CR, 63.

613 TCTR, 242.

614 TCTR, 50–51.

615 TCTR, 319.
In proof of his opinion, he cites NT scholar Rudolf Schnackenburg who writes:

In the original hymn [v. 9] . . . certainly referred to the order of creation, that is, to the Logos before his incarnation. It transfers to the Logos the functions ascribed in Jewish literature to Wisdom or the Torah, which took on later in Jewish thought the role of giver of light which Wisdom had played, since creation. . . . But the Christian hymn insists that Christ, the Logos, possessed this power before his earthly existence and merely exercises it anew in his mission of salvation, because it essentially belongs to him . . . and because he is the “true” light . . . Thus the Logos has a transcendent power of illumination, which comes from his godhead (v. 1c) and which can and must be displayed in every man who desires to reach his goal.\(^{616}\)

Since John’s prologue refers explicitly to the Word’s universal action throughout history, the Christ-event does not exhaust the power of the Word who later became flesh in Jesus Christ.\(^ {617}\)

John 1:14 expresses “the personal human becoming of the Word” who now shares the feeble condition of humanity’s “flesh.” Notwithstanding the weakness of the “flesh,” God’s glory (\textit{doxa}) still shines from the beginning through Jesus’ human existence, so that for John the manifestation of Christ’s glory is not delayed until His resurrection and exaltation.\(^ {618}\) The saying “He dwelt among us” recalls the OT notion of God’s \textit{shekinah} in virtue of which wisdom “pitched her tent” among humankind.\(^ {619}\) Jesus is the only-begotten (\textit{monogenēs}) Son of God by which John means to express His eternal begetting from the Father. This, claims Dupuis, is in contrast from His functional title, the “first born” from the dead, applied to the resurrected Christ in Col 1:18.\(^ {620}\) Since the incarnate Word is “full of grace and truth,” He is in His person the culmination of God’s loving-kindness (Heb. \textit{hesed}; Gk. \textit{charis}) and faithfulness (Heb. \textit{emet}; Gk. \textit{alētheia}) toward men and women.\(^ {621}\) Regarding vv. 16–17 Dupuis states, “[W]hile the Law given by God through Moses was already a grace (\textit{charis}), Jesus Christ is God’s supreme grace . . . and the supreme manifestation of God’s faithfulness to God’s saving purpose” (italics in original).\(^ {622}\)


\(^{617}\) \textit{TCTRIP}, 319.

\(^{618}\) \textit{WDYSIA?}, 72.


\(^{620}\) \textit{WDYSIA?}, 72.

\(^{621}\) Ibid.

\(^{622}\) \textit{WDYSIA?}, 73.
1:18 shows that the Christian faith does not claim to possess a definite representation of God’s inner self, since even after His self-disclosure in Christ God remains beyond one’s intentional grasp. The Christian faith nonetheless proclaims that the mystery of the Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit—corresponds objectively, albeit analogically, to God’s inner reality: The ultimately real is both personal and interpersonal.623

Dupuis confesses that “[s]ome exegetes” (e.g. Raymond E. Brown) read a direct reference to the incarnate Word either from the very beginning of the prologue (i.e. John 1:1) or from v. 6. Nevertheless, “others . . . insist” that vv. 1–13 refer to the “Word-of-God-to-be-incarnate” who has been present in God’s mystery and at work since the start of human history.624 In CR he appeals at length to the interpretations of biblical scholar Xavier Léon-Dufour. Léon-Dufour, he writes, believes that John 1:2–5 portrays the Word/Logos working from the beginning of creation as the source of light and life and establishing a personal relationship between humankind and God. The Word was “coming into the world” in the way of God’s wisdom as described in Sir 24. He was the source of light for all human beings and to those who received Him He gave the power of becoming children of God (as per John 1:9 and 12). Léon-Dufour characterizes “the synergy” which takes place between God and human beings when the latter welcome the Logos. Dupuis quotes Léon-Dufour’s French original on this point according to his own translation:

This enlightening action, insofar as it is welcomed, produces divine sonship. And this is so, even before the Logos takes a human face, that is independently from any explicit reference [allégeance] to Jesus Christ.625

In fact, Léon-Dufour states that the Word’s “coming” has already been mentioned in v. 10 of the prologue, namely, the Logos has been in the world and is coming unto His own. Therefore, the Logos’ communication of God has begun with creation—not the incarnation—and continued throughout the whole history of revelation. The incarnation, though, marks a radical change in the mode of that communication. Léon-Dufour continues (again according to Dupuis’s own translation of the French):

[H]enceforth [revelation] happens through the language and the existence of a man among others: this phenomenon of concentration in a man will make it possible for the revelation of God to be formulated directly in an intelligible way, and for all people to have access to a definitive communication with God.626

623 TCTRP, 259.

624 CR, 142.


626 CR, 143. See Léon-Dufour, 112.
Notwithstanding the incarnation’s novelty, Léon-Dufour insists that that new stage does not supersede the previous one. The Word continues to be expressed through creation and the witness to the light. Many can still receive the Word and become God’s children. From now on however, revelation has been concentrated “also and mostly” (Dupuis’s translation) in the one to be named Jesus Christ. Dupuis concludes, then, that according to Xavier Léon-Dufour’s exegesis one must speak not only of a universal action of the preincarnate Word/Logos before the incarnation, but also of a continuing action of the “Word as such” after the incarnation and after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Dupuis also mentions “[o]ther exegetes who can serve as witnesses” for seeing a universal action of the Word both before the incarnation and “as such” after it. They are: Rudolf Schnackenburg; Jacques Dupont; André Feuillet; and Marie-Émile Boismard. Nevertheless, Dupuis believes that it “suffices” to finish by noting “the firmly held opinion” of biblical scholar Donatien Mollat. Regarding John 1:9 Dupuis claims that Mollat says that it clearly affirms the Logos’ universal action even until the present day. Dupuis cites (what he calls) Mollat’s “introduction to the exegesis of John.” Writing in Latin, Mollat maintains according to Dupuis’s own translation:

> In this verse . . . this coming of the Word into the world, implicitly referred to in vv. 4 and 5, is explicitly revealed. It is said that this true light “enlightens all men.” The present tense, “enlightens” . . . signifies that this is its proper task and its constant work. This work is to be understood in the supernatural sense of the enlightening which in v. 4 was declared to be the salvific illumination through which man is instructed and freed, transfigured and sanctified, and also judged. It must be stated that the illuminating virtue of this true light extends to all men. There is no one who is not reached or touched by it. A personal relationship between all men and the Word must therefore be affirmed [Ergo . . . affirmatur].

From all this Dupuis concludes that “[i]t seems . . . possible to talk of an action of the Word of God, not only before the incarnation . . . but also after the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” That action is distinct from the salvific action through the Word’s humanity, provided that that continued

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627 CR, 143. See Léon-Dufour, 124.

628 CR, 143.


630 CR, 143–44. See Donatianus [Donatien] Mollat, “Introductio in Exegesim Scriptorum Sancti Joannis, 1962,” rev. and expanded, typewritten manuscript of class notes, pp. 45–46, Pontificl Gregorian University, Rome. N.B. In his articles and CR Dupuis cites from the 1961 version of Mollat’s work. I am extremely grateful to Rev. Fr. Jacek Oniszczuk, S.J., of the Pontificale Gregorian University in Rome for having provided me with photocopies of those 1961 notes, so that I could compare them with the only version I was able to obtain. I can confirm that, except for variations in the page numbers and some wording, there are no significant differences between the version Dupuis has used and my own copy.
The salvific centrality of the incarnation cannot be allowed to obscure either the Word’s abiding presence and action or His enlightening and saving power which has not been circumscribed by the historical particularity of His incarnation. Based on the Logos’ transcendence of the boundaries of space and time,
a Trinitarian Christology can thus account for the salvific mediation of the world’s religions as well as the plurality of ways in which God has dealt with humanity.637


22 Then Paul stood up at the Areopagus and said: “You Athenians, I see that in every respect you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around looking carefully at your shrines, I even discovered an altar inscribed, ‘To an Unknown God.’ What therefore you unknowingly worship, I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands, 25 nor is he served by human hands because he needs anything. Rather it is he who gives to everyone life and breath and everything. 26 He made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions, 27 so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us. 28 For ‘In him we live and move and have our being,’ as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ 29 Since therefore we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divinity is like an image fashioned from gold, silver, or stone by human art and imagination. 30 God has overlooked the times of ignorance, but now he demands that all people everywhere repent 31 because he has established a day on which he will ‘judge the world with justice’ through a man he has appointed and he has provided confirmation for all by raising him from the dead.”

32 When they heard about resurrection of the dead, some began to scoff, but others said, “We should like to hear you on this some other time.” 33 And so Paul left them. 34 But some did join him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Court of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Dupuis maintains that Paul’s speech at the Areopagus in Athens is affirmative of pagan religiosity: “Here Paul praises the religious spirit of the Greeks and announces to them the ‘unknown God’ whom they worship without knowing.” Whatever might be the passage’s exegetical problems (e.g. its Pauline or Lucan authenticity), the message surely seems to be that the world’s religions are not bereft of value; rather they find the fulfillment of their aspirations in Christ and act as “a positive preparation” for Christianity.638

637 TCTRIP, 321.

Dupuis follows biblical scholar Lucien Legrand in comparing “the two great axes” of discontinuity and continuity found between Paul’s attitude in Rom 1 (see below) and Acts 17. The discontinuous element (à la Rom 1) contrasts the newness of Christ and His resurrection with the darkness and sinfulness of the ancient world. The continuous element underlines the homogeneity of God’s plan of salvation, which is the view presented in Acts 17, namely, the Greek world waiting for the “Unknown God” and prepared to meet Him by its “poet-theologians.”

In Acts 17:25–27 Paul refers back to his doctrine found in Rom 1 about God’s self-revelation to all peoples through the cosmos. Yet he goes even further in his speech above by affirming the nearness of God to all persons (see e.g. v. 27). In proof of this point St. Paul refers in v. 28 to a statement made by the Greek writer Aratus (3rd cent. B.C.) that all human beings are God’s offspring. Apart from any rhetorical device or captatio benevolentiae by quoting that pagan writer Paul has recognized a genuine search for God in the Greek tradition (viz. Stoicism and Platonism).

Dupuis cites the witness of Clement of Alexandria who writes that, by quoting Aratus, Paul has approved of what is well spoken by the Greeks, intimating by his reference to the “unknown god” that they have already been worshipping the creator in a roundabout way. Still, it was necessary for positive knowledge to come from His Son, so that the eyes of the blind might be opened and the “Greek circumlocution” revealed (see Strom. 1.19).

The fact that St. Paul’s conversation with his pagan interlocutors breaks down when he mentions the resurrection (see v. 32) does not change anything or mean his approach was a failure (since some did accept the faith). “However limited Paul’s success at Athens may have been,” writes Dupuis, “the
Areopagus speech inaugurates a missionary strategy based on a positive approach to the religiosity of the Greeks.  

4. Letter to the Romans 1:18–23

18 The wrath of God is indeed being revealed from heaven against every impiety and wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness. 19 For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a result, they have no excuse; 21 for although they knew God they did not accord him glory as God or give him thanks. Instead, they became vain in their reasoning and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 While claiming to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image of mortal man or of birds or of four-legged animals or of snakes.

While the NT data regarding the Apostolic church’s attitude toward other religions is complex and ambivalent, Dupuis thinks one is on “safer ground” with the ministry and theology of St. Paul. Paul’s pessimism in his Letter to the Romans (especially chaps. 1–3) is well known. Pagans will experience God’s wrath for not having recognized His permanent revelation through the cosmos (Rom 1:18–23); Jews, despite their special status and superadded gifts, fall under the same condemnation (see Rom 2–3). Though the gifts differ, Dupuis thinks the gentiles’ situation parallels the Jews’ in that all will be judged according to their works (see Rom 2:14–15) and saving faith given in proportion to the gifts one has received. For St. Paul Christians are in a privileged position. Dupuis writes:

[In comparison with the new, the past—whether that of the nations or of Israel itself—is like a state of perdition, now a thing of the past. Faith, once offered to Christians, abolishes, by virtue of a divine decree, the value of all religions (Rom 6:6; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9).]

Yet there is “no declaration of principle” or absolute denial here by Paul of any value to other religions; rather it reflects his view of the privileged situation of someone who has found new life in Christ in these latter days (see Rom 6:4, 7:6; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 2:15, 4:8–11).

Regarding this section of Rom 1 Dupuis appears to profess somewhat the opinions of theologian Jean Daniélou. According to Daniélou—and Dupuis?—in Romans St. Paul refers to God’s faithfulness

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643 TCTR, 50.

644 TCTR, 48–49.

645 Ibid.

in the natural order. Through nature, God reveals Himself as the Maker of all things (see Rom 1:19–20). He adds, however, that humankind is guilty for not having recognized God in His creation, thus falling into polytheism and idolatry (vv. 20–21). Romans 1, then, describes the situation of non-Christians: They know God either through the medium of the created world or the voice of the human conscience. Insofar as they recognize their creator, they acquire a valid, natural knowledge of God. Insofar as they do not, their minds become darkened and godless; they exchange the glory of God for images of human beings and animals (cf. Rom 1:23). For Daniélou, the world religions belong to the “cosmic” religion and covenant which serves merely as a substratum for God’s personal and historical revelation. While a certain continuity remains between the cosmic and historical covenants, God’s free intervention into human history begins a new order which commands an even greater discontinuity between them.  

While Dupuis summarizes Daniélou’s deliberations on Rom 1 in TCTR, it must be added that he would not have agreed with every part of Daniélou’s comments (e.g. the fulfillment aspect). I have only tried to offer what seem to be points of contact between the two.

5. First Letter to Timothy 2:4

[3 This is good and pleasing to God our savior,] 4 who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.

[5 For (gar) there is one God.
There is also one mediator between God and the human race,
Christ Jesus, himself human.]

N.B. I have given the verses preceding and following 1 Tim 2:4 above in order to afford context for Dupuis’s analysis below.

According to Dupuis, Christian tradition has always held that God wills the salvation of all human beings (see 1 Tim 2:4). By salvation, Christianity means sharing in God’s life here on earth and union with Him in Heaven. Of course, the free acceptance of God’s grace implies the possibility of refusal; and God respects the freedom of the human person who alone is responsible for not being saved. Nevertheless, God’s salvific will endures even when frustrated by an individual’s free choice. The assertion of God’s universal, saving will in 1 Tim 2:4 cannot be reduced to a “velleity,” to a conditional or ineffective wish. His salvific will is subject to no other condition than a person’s free acceptance of


647 Cf. TCTR, 134–35 passim.

648 TCTR, 311.
His self-manifestation and -bestowal. Dupuis points out, though, that a universal and saving will is not attributed to the risen Christ, rather to God. God’s universal will is “the ‘absolute’ element” and focal point which constitutes salvation for the whole world. Furthermore, the NT’s assertion in 1 Tim 2:4 presupposes Karl Rahner’s opinion that world history and “salvation history” coincide. Human history is the story of “God-with-humankind,” implying that always and from the beginning He has been revealing Himself to humanity.

First Timothy represents “a clear testimony of a mature affirmation by the apostolic church of the irreplaceable role of the risen Christ in the order of salvation.” The risen Christ’s mediation is founded in God’s universal, salvific will epitomizing its concrete, visible expression. He is its sacrament. Christ’s mediatiorship stands as God’s own testimony to the seriousness of His saving plan for humanity. God efficaciously wills the salvation of all through the mediation of Jesus Christ. This is indicated in Paul’s use of the preposition gar (“for”) in 1 Tim 2:5. However:

While the man Christ Jesus is called “mediator,” the one who is “our Savior” remains the God who is beyond [che sta al di là] the risen Christ, as primary and ultimate source of the salvation of humankind. Jesus Christ does not replace the Father.

Moreover, the constitutive uniqueness of Christ, the universal mediator of salvation, does not nullify any of the NT’s positive statements regarding the religious life and traditions of non-Christians; rather it explains how their salvific effectiveness is due to the universal and “transhistoric” presence of the risen Christ.

Dupuis notes theologian Gavin D’Costa’s opinion that the typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism can be accounted for by how one treats two basic axioms of the faith, namely, the universality of God’s salvific will and Christ’s necessary mediation of salvation. Whereas exclusivism erroneously relies on the second axiom to the neglect of the first, pluralism errs by relying on the former to the detriment of the latter. Only inclusivism in his view holds both together. Dupuis seems to accept

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649 TCTR, 217.
650 CR, 41.
652 CR, 41.
653 CR, 42. N.B. The Greek word gar is not a preposition. See chap. 5, sec. B.6, of this thesis below.
654 CR, 41.
655 CR, 42.
D’Costa’s proposal calling these two axioms: “the pair of crucial axioms that ought to govern a Christian theology of religions.” For Dupuis, the parameters are clear: God’s universal, salvific will must be clearly upheld as part of the substance of the Christian message (see 1 Tim 2:4). The question becomes how to account for saving faith before and after the time of Jesus Christ, the universal saviour. He agrees with D’Costa that only inclusivism is capable of holding together and harmonizing these two truisms of the faith which “remain obligatory for any Christian theology of religions.” On the one hand, Jesus is clearly asserted as God’s decisive revelation and constitutive saviour; on the other, the door is open to acknowledging not only His manifestations throughout history and across cultures, but also the presence of efficacious and salvific “elements of grace” in the world’s religions.

### IV. Conclusion

This chapter has examined in a general way how Dupuis views the nature and role not only of the Christian scriptures, but also those of other religious traditions. Further, it has looked at some signal texts in his proposal of a “Christian theology or religious pluralism” sketching out how they have been interpreted in his writings. Dupuis’s sources, especially from the field of biblical study and exegesis, have also been noted and consulted wherever relevant. Thus, the groundwork has been laid for the analysis of Dupuis’s biblical hermeneutic which will take place in Chapter Five.

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657 TCTR, 111.

658 TCTR, 192–93.
CHAPTER FOUR
PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION,
“THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE IN THE CHURCH, III:
CHARACTERISTICS OF CATHOLIC INTERPRETATION”

I. Introduction

This chapter will look at the PBC document, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” especially chap. III. The document was published in French on September 21, 1993. This chapter will outline in a succinct way the nature and purpose of the PBC within the Vatican. It will also consider the rationale behind the document. The chapter will also present a survey of the statement’s contents. Finally, a rundown of scholarly opinions regarding the document will be provided.

Unless otherwise indicated, all English quotations of church documents in this chapter come from Dean Béchard’s anthology The Scripture Documents. However, in the case of IBC let the reader note the following: In the anthology Béchard has used the official English version of IBC put out by the Vatican. That version suffers from a certain looseness of translation that does not always do justice to what the document actually says. So, while I have used the version of IBC found in Béchard’s book as a base, I have also supplemented it in many places with my own translation from the French. Wherever I have done this has been indicated in the footnotes.

II. The Nature and Purpose of the PBC in the Structures of the Holy See

The PBC was established in 1902 by Pope Leo XIII “for the purpose of maintaining the full


660 Cf. Béchard, 244 footnote.

integrity of Christian truth and of further promoting the study of Scripture.662 The commission was to meet in Rome and be composed solely of cardinals, chosen by the pope, with a secretary as its head. The PBC’s members would be assisted by “several eminent scholars of different nationalities, who are commended by their learning in the sacred sciences, especially in those that pertain to the study of the Bible.” Furthermore, it would publish reports periodically and “[i]f an opinion is requested . . . it will reply to those who consult it.”663 The question of the obedience due to the “replies” or responsa of the PBC was a matter of controversy among theologians in the commission’s early years. Pope St. Pius X addressed the matter in his 1907 apostolic letter Praestantia Scripturae Sacrae (“Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio on the Decisions of the Biblical Commission”) declaring:

[A]ll are bound in conscience to submit to the decisions of the Biblical Commission . . . in the same way as to the Decrees pertaining to doctrine, issued by the Sacred Congregations and approved by the Sovereign Pontiff (emphasis in original).664

According to theologian Francis A. Sullivan, the pope thus made the binding nature of the PBC’s responsa equivalent to that of decrees coming from the Holy Office (i.e. CDF).665

In 1971 the PBC was reorganized by Pope Paul VI.666 The PBC was combined with the CDF whose cardinal-prefect would now serve as its “president.” The PBC’s secretary would be appointed by the pope upon the recommendation of the CDF prefect and would be counted among the CDF’s advisors. It was to be composed of no more than twenty biblical scholars who were distinguished for their learning, prudence and “Catholic regard” for the church’s magisterium. Each would be appointed to a five-year, renewable term.667 Nevertheless, the PBC’s mission remained the same: “to assist the advance of sound


663 Ibid., no. [10]. Jorge Mejía took a dim view of this original set-up, since the commission’s membership was reserved only to cardinals whose competency in the Bible—in his opinion—could justifiably be questioned (de cuya competencia bíblica era lícito dudar en ciertos casos). The commission’s biblical specialists were described merely as “consultors” (Jorge Mejía, “La nueva Comisión Bíblica,” Criterio 44 [1972]: 532).

664 Pius X, Praestantia Scripturae Sacrae, no. [4].

665 Sullivan, Creative Fidelity, 148. Cf. also the appendix to Béchard (pp. 318–29).

666 Paul VI, Sedula Cura (“Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio on New Laws Regulating the Pontifical Biblical Commission”).

667 Ibid., norms 1–5. The pope’s letter also mentions (cf. norm 2) the possibility of choosing a vice-president from among the PBC’s members to assist the CDF’s cardinal-prefect. But according to Alessandro Belano, the commission’s administrative assistant, this option has never been used. He has written to me: from [sic] 1972 to the present the Pontifical Biblical Commission has never had a Vice-President, but only a President assisted by a Secretary . . . yes, it is just a possibility that have [sic] never been used (Alessandro Belano, e-mail communication to Matthew W. I. Dunn, 10 November 2010; bold-faced type in original).
biblical teaching, to protect the integrity of biblical interpretation from every rash opinion and to coordinate more fittingly the mutual collaboration of exegetes and theologians with the Holy See.”

According to Albert Vanhoye, Paul VI’s change in the PBC’s structure necessarily corresponded to a change in its nature and function. The PBC is no longer a magisterial organ participating in the authority of the pope; rather it became a consultative organ joined to the CDF and placed at the service of the church’s magisterium. Sullivan confirms this view: The commission “no longer participates in papal teaching authority, but is a body of scholars advisory to the Holy See and presided over by the Prefect of the [CDF].” Consequently, writes Vanhoye, the “new” PBC does not have the power to settle biblical questions in the manner of the “old” PBC by issuing responsa to which all Catholic scholars would then have the obligation of submitting. Its role is different: It studies questions and formulates conclusions.

III. The Nature and Purpose of the Document “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”

IBC was published in the name of the PBC, albeit with Pope John Paul II’s explicit endorsement attached—”the first time this had occurred,” according to scholar Peter S. Williamson. The pope furthermore demonstrated his approval of the document by taking “the unusual step” (Williamson’s phrase) of receiving it during a solemn gathering of the PBC membership, the cardinals, the Vatican’s diplomatic corps and professors at the Vatican’s Pontifical Biblical Institute. Williamson believes that IBC should be interpreted in accordance with the address that the pope gave to that gathering. The pope’s

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668 Paul VI, Sedula Cura; in Béchard, 148.


670 Sullivan, Creative Fidelity, 149.


672 Peter S. Williamson, Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”, with a preface by Albert Vanhoye, Subsidia Biblica, vol. 22 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001), 23. According to Joseph Ratzinger: The Holy Father was in agreement about the importance of the subject which needed a clear word to update the magisterial teaching [per aggiornare il magistero in merito]. But all in all, it turned out that the voice of the experts—the theologians—confirmed by the Pope [dalla voce del papa], was better suited to meet the current challenges and new questions. I believe this to be a very interesting model. Theologians . . . speak in all their responsibility as believers and pastors of the church, composing a scientific and pastoral work. Then the Holy Father with a carefully prepared address confirms the essential points, thus assuming the essence of this text (as opposed to its details) into magisterial teaching (cited in Williamson, Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: Study of IBC, 25; emphasis added by Williamson).

“reception” of the document “lends [IBC] its authority in the Church” and offers a reason for supposing that the principles contained therein are truly Catholic principles of interpretation.673

A. John Paul II, “Address on the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”

The pope observes that the PBC’s document responds to his “heartfelt concern” regarding the interpretation of sacred scripture. For the way in which biblical texts are interpreted has immediate consequences for humanity’s personal and communal relationship with God and is closely connected to the church’s mission.674 The pope notes how advances in research have produced both solutions and new questions, and that many new discoveries have been made and new methods of investigation and analysis perfected. This changed situation has made it necessary for a fresh examination of the problems. The PBC has worked on the task, and its fruit is the document IBC.675

The first thing which strikes the pope about IBC is “the spirit of openness in which it was conceived.” Despite having to state occasionally serious reservations about current exegetical practices, the document nevertheless acknowledges almost always the presence of valid elements. A second characteristic is the document’s “balance and moderation” (emphases in original), since it harmonizes both the diachronic and synchronic aspects of interpretation recognizing their complementarity, thus bringing out the full truth of the text and satisfying the legitimate demands of modern readers.676 Finally, the pope notices the document’s recognition of “the biblical Word [who] is at work speaking universally, in time and space, to all humanity.” God speaks His words in human language, so that they may be understood by all. This is the aim of biblical interpretation, namely, to arrive at the authentic sense of the sacred text in order to communicate its meaning to its recipients.677

B. Joseph Ratzinger, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” Preface

CDF prefect and PBC president Joseph Ratzinger describes IBC’s purpose as to “take the bearings of Catholic exegesis.” IBC contains a well-grounded overview of the current panorama of exegetical methods addressing both the possibilities and limits of each one. It asks how one may know scripture’s meaning in which “the human word and God’s word work together in the singularity of

673 Williamson, Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: Study of IBC, 27.
674 John Paul II, “Address on the Interpretation of the Bible in Church.”
675 Ibid., nos. 12–13.
676 Ibid., no. 14.
677 Ibid., no. 15.
historical events and the eternity of the everlasting Word which is contemporary in every age.” The PBC document aids in showing the right way to understand sacred scripture.  

**IV. Basic Contents**

IBC looks at various aspects of current biblical studies in order to determine what corresponds best to the church’s mission of exegesis. The document addresses four areas:

1. The exegetical methods and approaches used in biblical studies;
2. Certain hermeneutical questions;
3. The characteristics of Catholic biblical interpretation and its relationship to theology;

A. General Overview of IBC

1. Introductory Comments (IBC, Introduction–I.A)

Although for a long time the church hesitated at applying the “historico-critical method” to the Bible, IBC notes that a more positive attitude toward it emerged later and was confirmed at Vatican II. This more constructive attitude has undeniably borne fruit. Nevertheless, “at the very time when . . . [the historico-critical method] . . . is freely practiced in exegesis . . . it is itself brought into question” (emphasis in original). IBC summarizes the counter-positions: The historico-critical method’s plurality of methods and approaches is seen as a sign of confusion. Also, the historico-critical method is sometimes used to deny articles of the church’s faith. Others see the historico-critical method as sterile making the Bible’s interpretation available only to specialists. Yet the PBC insists that the historico-critical method is “the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts.”

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678 IBC, Preface

679 IBC, Introduction, B. IBC clarifies: “By an exegetical method we understand a group of scientific procedures employed in order to explain texts. We speak of an approach when it is a question of an inquiry proceeding from a particular point of view” (ibid.; emphasis in original).

680 IBC, Introduction, A.

681 Ibid. According to IBC, the historico-critical method is “historical,” since by studying the biblical texts historically it sheds light on the processes which have given rise to them. It is “critical,” since it operates according to “scientific criteria” that seek to be as objective as possible (cf. I.A.2).

682 IBC, Introduction, A.

683 IBC, I.A. Indeed, IBC claims that the historico-critical method has acquired an importance of the first order (de premier plan; cf. IBC-Fr, 457).
Since the Bible is God’s revelation in human language and has been composed by humans, its proper understanding requires the use of the historico-critical method. Used objectively the historico-critical method implies no a priori judgment; rather any judgment comes—not from the “hermeneutical choices” which govern a person’s own interpretation.

2. Summary of Exegetical Methods and Approaches (IBC, I.B–F)

Rhetorical analysis merits “high regard” for drawing attention to language’s capacity for persuasion and conviction. But when it remains purely at the descriptive level of style, it can have limitations. Narrative analysis is clearly useful, since many places in the Bible display the attributes of “story” and testimony. Yet the PBC has a few concerns (e.g. its tendency to exclude further doctrinal development), and feels that the method must still be supplemented by diachronic study. Semiotic analysis focuses on the biblical text as it comes before the reader in its final form as a complete unit of meaning with its own “grammar” and without consideration of any “external” data (e.g. authorship). Semiotics, however, has to be disentangled from certain assumptions of structuralist philosophy (e.g. a text’s lack of reference to anything beyond itself), for its “great risk” lies in remaining only at the level of the text without drawing out the message.

The canonical approach explains the Bible in light of the final canonical form in which it has been received by the Christian community. While noting several points of approval and agreement (e.g. the status given to the believing community in the interpretation of scripture), IBC is nonetheless unclear about the approach’s understanding of how a text becomes normative, and whether that process should be “the guiding principle” for biblical interpretation at all. Although commending the use of Jewish biblical interpretation—“an asset of the highest value [une aide de première valeur]”—IBC nevertheless thinks that it should be used with discretion (à bon escient). Jews and Christians come at the Bible from

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684 IBC, I.A.
685 IBC, I.A.4.
687 IBC, I.B.2.
690 IBC, I.C.1.
different starting-points. Despite points of contact and similarity, their contexts are radically different especially given Christians’ faith in Jesus.\(^{691}\) IBC acknowledges the benefits of the traditio-historical approach (called by its German name *Wirkungsgeschichte*) which analyzes the history of the effect of a literary work on its readership. The document, however, worries about certain “tendentious and false” interpretations that could be brought to the Bible when using this approach—with “baneful” effects.\(^{692}\)

IBC remarks on the “many positive aspects” of sociological analysis which has provided indispensable knowledge about the economies, cultures and religions of the biblical world. Still, its portrait of the biblical world can lack comprehensiveness. Also, it can tend to focus only on the socio-economic issues of human life, rather than its religious dimension.\(^{693}\) Anthropology has clearly (évidemment) been useful for studying the Bible, delineating which parts of its message are essential to human nature and which are “contingent” on culture. IBC cautions, though, that “this approach is not qualified simply by itself to determine what is specifically the content of revelation.”\(^{694}\) Psychology brings “a certain enrichment” to biblical exegesis and has impelled “fresh attempts” at interpreting the Bible. But there are problems: For example, a type of atheistic psychology makes itself incapable of rendering an account of the data of faith, while other types eliminate the realities of sin and salvation. Given the diversity of viewpoints within the field itself, IBC warns against the danger of absolutizing only one psychological perspective in biblical study.\(^{695}\)

Liberation theology reads sacred scripture from the vantagepoint of addressing the present needs of humanity, especially the need to liberate the world’s poor and oppressed. While recognizing “elements of undoubted value” in this type of reading of the Bible, the commission worries that liberation theology’s reading of scripture can become one-sided. It is also concerned by its adherence to materialist doctrines (e.g. the Marxist idea of class struggle) and focus on “an earthly eschatology.” Liberation theology needs to explain further not only its hermeneutical presuppositions and methods, but also its coherence with the church’s faith.\(^{696}\)

Feminist exegesis “has brought many benefits” (e.g. detecting the presence and significance of women in the Bible; also unmasking biased readings used to justify women’s domination by men). But to

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\(^{691}\) IBC, I.C.2 (cf. IBC-Fr, 470).

\(^{692}\) IBC, I.C.3. These effects include: anti-Semitism, racism and “various kinds of millennialist delusions” (ibid.).

\(^{693}\) IBC, I.D.1

\(^{694}\) IBC, I.D.2. For instance, anthropological study has helped to clarify the position of women in ancient times as well as the influence of agrarian rituals on Israelite society (ibid.).

\(^{695}\) IBC, I.D.3.

\(^{696}\) IBC, I.E.1.
the extent that feminist exegesis proceeds from “preconceived judgments [un parti pris],” it itself risks interpreting the Bible in a tendentious and debatable way.\textsuperscript{697} While raising questions about the use of power in the church, feminist exegesis is useful only if it does not fall into the same trap which it denounces, thus losing sight of Jesus’ teaching that “power” means “service.” The following footnote has been appended by the commission to this section on feminist exegesis: “Out of nineteen votes cast, the text of this last paragraph received eleven in favor, four against and there were four abstentions. Those who voted against it asked that the result of the vote be published along with the text. The commission consented to this.”\textsuperscript{698}

IBC faults fundamentalist interpretation for refusing to admit the full truth of the incarnation, namely, “that the inspired Word of God has been expressed . . . by human authors possessed of limited capacities and resources.” Hence, it treats the Bible as divine dictation. Other problems include: its historicization of material never claiming to be history; its naive confusion ([il] confond naïvement) of the gospel traditions with what Jesus actually said and did; its literal acceptance of the Bible’s outdated cosmology.\textsuperscript{699} IBC also criticizes its attachment to the principle of \textit{sola scriptura} (“by scripture alone”) which separates biblical interpretation from the church and tradition. IBC ends with a stern judgment:

The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, because it is attractive to those people looking for biblical responses to the problems of life. It can trick them by offering them pious, yet illusory, interpretations, instead of telling them that the Bible does not necessarily contain an immediate response to each of those problems. Fundamentalism calls for . . . a form of intellectual suicide \textit{(suicide de la pensée)}. It puts into one’s life a false certitude . . . mistak[ing] unconsciously the human limitations of the biblical message with the divine substance of that message.\textsuperscript{700}

3. Various Hermeneutical Questions (IBC chap. II)

Since the Bible is God’s revelation for all ages, scholars should not excuse themselves from using hermeneutical theories incorporating the literary and historico-critical methods into a broader, interpretive model. Exegesis should overcome the distance existing between the Bible’s original authors and modernity so as to permit the correct actualization of its message. IBC rejects the ways of certain contemporary theories which by an excessive “demythologization” would constrain Christianity’s message to a particular philosophy or empty the Bible of its religious reality.” The unique object of

\textsuperscript{697} IBC, I.E.2.

\textsuperscript{698} Ibid. Cf. Béchard, 273 n. 7.

\textsuperscript{699} IBC, I.F (cf. IBC-Fr, 483).

\textsuperscript{700} IBC, I.F (cf. IBC-Fr, 484).
biblical hermeneutics is the salvific event in Jesus Christ whose wealth of meaning can only be unveiled by new interpretations.  

Because the historico-critical method seeks only one meaning in the text, it knocks against theories which affirm a plurality of meanings. Ancient exegesis, for example, attributed two senses of meaning to each text, namely, the literal and the spiritual. Medieval exegesis further distinguished the spiritual sense into: the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses. Still, IBC defends the process of seeking out a text’s literal sense which is “that which has been expressed directly by the inspired human authors.” As the fruit of inspiration, that sense is also intended by God. Generally a text has one literal sense. But sometimes the human author and God himself may have intended multiple meanings (à produire une ambivalence). IBC impugns the historico-critical method’s tendency of “too often . . . limiting the meaning of texts . . . too rigidly to precise historical circumstances.” Rather exegetes should look for a “direction of thought” that would help show extensions of a text’s meaning “that are more or less foreseeable in advance.” Still, one cannot give the Bible any meaning one would like. An interpretation which would be “alien [hétérogène]” to the author’s meaning expressed in the text is inauthentic, cutting off the Bible from its historical roots and allowing an uncontrollable subjectivism. 

The “spiritual sense” of scripture is “the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it.” The spiritual sense can never be stripped from its connection to the literal sense which is its “indispensable foundation.” Otherwise one could not speak of the text’s “fulfillment,” since there must be a continuity between the two. An authentically spiritual interpretation holds together: the biblical text; the paschal mystery; and the present circumstances of life lived in the Holy Spirit.

The so-called sensus plenior or “fuller sense” of scripture, although relatively recent, has given rise to discussion. The fuller sense, explains IBC, is “a deeper meaning of the text [which has been] intended by God but not clearly expressed by the human author.” The standard for finding this “new literal sense” is when the biblical text has been used in a new context by another biblical author or in “an

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701 IBC, II.A.2

702 IBC, II.B. The CCC explicates these three senses thusly: By the allegorical sense one “acquire[s] a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ.” The moral sense impels one to act justly (cf. 1 Cor 10:11). The anagogical sense helps one “view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland” which is heaven (see CCC, para. 117).

703 IBC, II.B.1 (cf. IBC-Fr, 489).

704 IBC, II.B.1.

705 Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 490).

706 IBC, II.B.2
authentic doctrinal tradition or a conciliar definition.” Lying behind the sensus plenior is the belief that the Holy Spirit has guided the Bible’s human author to express a deeper, hidden truth whose full import is only revealed over the course of time, thus creating new contexts with “fresh possibilities of meaning.”

N.B. IBC’s chap. III will be dealt with in its own section below.

4. Biblical Interpretation in the Church’s Life (IBC chap. IV)

IBC writes that the church views the Bible as God’s revelation addressed to her and to the world, such that she works to actualize and inculturate its message.

“Actualization” means rereading the Bible in the light of new contemporary circumstances and, then, of applying that rereading to them. As a work of the past, the Bible must be applied and adapted to contemporary circumstances and language in order to reveal its current significance. Therefore, actualization presupposes hermeneutical endeavour in order to uncover the essential points of its message. Actualization comes to its realization in the dynamism of the church’s living tradition which exists in continuity with the communities that have handed on the scriptures. Tradition protects the biblical text from deviant interpretations and ensures the transmission of its original dynamism. Actualization cannot mean the manipulation of the text by projecting “novel opinions or ideologies” on the Bible. Rather it should be the sincere attempt to uncover what scripture has to say for the present time. Actualization also presumes the correct exegesis of the biblical text which includes determining its literal sense. IBC recommends the interpretation of scripture within scripture itself as the surest and most fruitful method for its successful actualization. Actualization, though, should remain within “certain limits” and guard against possible deviations. IBC warns against tendentious readings that use scripture for narrow purposes or are based on principles opposed to the Bible’s fundamental orientation. Deviations are

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707 IBC, II.B.3. For example, the Hebrew word almah (“young woman”) of Isa 7:14 was changed to the Greek parthenos (“virgin”) in the OT of the Septuagint. The Gospel of Matthew later afforded a deeper sense to the Septuagint’s version of Isaiah’s prophecy by applying it to Jesus’ virgin birth (cf. Matt 1:23).

708 IBC, II.B.3

709 IBC, IV.

710 IBC, IV.A.

711 IBC, IV.A.1.

712 IBC, IV.A.2 (cf. IBC-Fr, 516 and 517). Cf. e.g. the interpretations given later by Jews and Christians to the episode of the manna in the desert in Exod 16 (cf. Wis 16:20–29 and John chap. 6 passim).

713 IBC, IV.A.3 (cf. IBC-Fr, 517). The document specifically mentions the Jehovah’s Witnesses as an example.
avoided when actualization starts with the text’s correct interpretation and, then, continues within “the stream of the living tradition” which has been placed under the guidance of the church’s magisterium.\textsuperscript{714}

The inculturation of scripture is based on the belief that God’s revelation (Parole) transcends the culture in which it was initially expressed and, hence, can reach human beings of all cultures. God’s revelation is a seed taking from the earth whatever elements are useful to it for its growth and fruitfulness. This involves a mutual enrichment, since the treasures (les richesses) of various cultures allow God’s revelation to produce new fruit, while it illuminates whichever cultural elements may be valuable or harmful.\textsuperscript{715} IBC commends faithfulness to Christ, to His paschal mystery and to His love for the church as the ways for avoiding either a superficial “adaptation” of the Bible’s message or a syncretistic confusion.\textsuperscript{716}

From earliest times scripture has constituted an integral part of Christian liturgy. The church’s worship, especially the proclamation of the scriptures during the eucharist amidst the believing community, represents “the most perfect actualization of the biblical texts.”\textsuperscript{717} IBC also extols the practice of lectio divina in which one reads a passage of scripture as a springboard for further prayer and meditation. Its end is to nourish a real and constant love for sacred scripture. It also aims at promoting a better understanding of worship as well as the Bible’s important position in theology and prayer.\textsuperscript{718}

IBC identifies three uses of the Bible in pastoral ministry: catechesis; preaching; and “the biblical apostolate.”\textsuperscript{719}

Scripture furnishes catechesis with its “starting point, foundation and norm” for its explanation of God’s revelation. Catechesis aims at a proper (juste) understanding and fruitful reading of the Bible in order to lead to its divine truth and evoke a response to its message.\textsuperscript{720} Preaching draws spiritual sustenance from the biblical text and adapts it to the needs of the church. That ministry is exercised especially in the homily during the eucharist when the biblical text is explained in such a way as to

\textsuperscript{714} IBC, IV.A.3. Cf. also IBC, IV.A.1.

\textsuperscript{715} IBC, IV.B (cf. IBC-Fr, 518 and 519).

\textsuperscript{716} IBC, IV.B.

\textsuperscript{717} IBC, IV.C.1.

\textsuperscript{718} IBC, IV.C.2

\textsuperscript{719} IBC, IV.C.3.

\textsuperscript{720} Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 523). In catechetical instruction the commission advises focusing on the ten commandments, the OT’s prophetic oracles and wisdom literature, and “the great discourses in the Gospels” like Christ’s sermon on the mount.
enlighten a person’s faith and stimulate his or her progress in the Christian life. Preachers must preserve the Bible’s principal character as the good news of salvation offered freely by God. They should help the faithful “know the gift of God” in scripture (cf. John 4:10), so that they will understand the obligations flowing from such knowledge. The “biblical apostolate” aspires to make the Bible known as God’s revelation and the source of life not only by promoting its translation, but also by the formation of study groups and conferences. It also includes the publication of journals and books about scripture.

Ecumenism seeks to restore the unity of God’s people. Indeed, most issues confronted in ecumenical dialogue derive in some way from biblical interpretation. While not resolving all issues, IBC maintains that the adoption of corresponding methodologies and hermeneutical positions among Christian exegetes has achieved “[a] remarkable degree of progress.” Since the Bible is the common basis for their rule of faith, IBC notes that “the ecumenical imperative” urgently summons all Christians to reread the inspired text in docility to the Holy Spirit: with charity, sincerity and humility. Christians should read and live the Bible so as to bring about their own conversion and holiness of life which, joined with the prayer for unity, constitute the “soul” of the ecumenical movement.

5. IBC’s Conclusions

IBC outlines its conclusions:

First, biblical exegesis fulfills “an indispensable task.” To bypass it would create an illusion and dishonour the scriptures. True respect for sacred scripture means undertaking “all the labors necessary” to gain a thorough understanding of its meaning (on puisse bien saisir son sens). Since the eternal Word became incarnate in history, in a particular society and culture, to understand Him requires “the necessary help of human knowledge,” seeking Him out humbly wherever He has appeared.

Second, the nature of the Bible requires the continued use of the historico-critical method—at least in its principal features. The Bible records in writing God’s revelation in human history. Therefore,

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721 IBC, IV.C.3. IBC earlier describes the homily as integral to the Christian liturgy seeking to actualize further God’s revelation (cf. IBC, IV.C.1).

722 IBC, IV.C.3.

723 IBC, IV.C.3.

724 IBC, IV.C.4

725 Ibid. The authors have in mind here the text from Vatican II’s “Decree on Ecumenism” (or Unitatis Redintegratio), no. 8.

726 IBC, Conclusion (cf. IBC-Fr, 526).

727 IBC, Conclusion.
its message is solidly grounded in history, and cannot be understood correctly without examining the circumstances which have shaped it. Therefore, diachronic research is “always . . . indispensable for exegesis.” IBC admits that the historico-critical method cannot claim a monopoly over exegesis and should be conscious of its own limits and dangers.\textsuperscript{728} Despite any interest or value, however, it declares that synchronic approaches cannot replace diachronic research; rather they “should accept [the historico-critical method’s] conclusions . . . at least according to their main lines.”\textsuperscript{729}

Third, IBC calls on Catholic exegesis to maintain its identity “as a \textit{theological discipline}” whose principal aim is to deepen people’s faith (emphasis in original). Catholic exegesis, it warns, should not “become lost, like a stream of water, in the sands of a hypercritical analysis;” rather its vital function for the church and the world is to contribute to the authentic transmission of sacred scripture. The work of Catholic exegesis tends toward this end along with the renewal of theology and the pastoral tasks of actualization and inculturation. IBC ends by “hop[ping] to have made some contribution toward the gaining [\textit{espère avoir facilité}] . . . of a clearer awareness of the role of the Catholic exegete.”\textsuperscript{730}

B. Detailed Overview of IBC, Chapter III: Characteristics of Catholic Interpretation

Catholic exegesis recognizes that the Bible is partly the work of human authors who employed their own capacities for expression with the means provided by their age and social context.\textsuperscript{731} Consequently, while not claiming any particular method as its own, Catholic exegesis makes free use (\textit{utilise sans arrière-pensée}) of scientific methods and approaches that allow for a better grasp not only of the Bible’s sources and authorship, but also of its literary, cultural religious and historical contexts.\textsuperscript{732} Catholic exegesis is characterized by “deliberately plac[ing] itself within the living Tradition of the church, whose first concern is fidelity to the revelation attested by the Bible.” This is its “preunderstanding.” It holds closely together (\textit{unit étroitement}) both modern, scientific culture and the religious traditions of Israel and the early church.\textsuperscript{733}

\textsuperscript{728} Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 527). Limits and dangers include: the historico-critical method’s lack of sufficient attention to the dynamic aspect of scripture’s meaning and development; also the fact that the historico-critical method can become absorbed solely by the issue of sources and stratification of texts (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{729} IBC, Conclusion.

\textsuperscript{730} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{731} IBC, III.

\textsuperscript{732} Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 493).

\textsuperscript{733} IBC, III (cf. IBC-Fr, 494). Still, Catholic exegetes must guard against giving the Bible meanings which do not come from the text itself, but which reflect later developments in sacred tradition (ibid.).
1. Interpretation in the Biblical Tradition

The biblical texts witness to multiple, preexisting religious traditions which have flowed together in “one great common tradition.” The Bible is the privileged expression of this process and continues to have “controlling influence” (à être régulatrice) over it.\footnote{IBC, III.A (cf. IBC-Fr, 494).} The PBC wants here to make some observations on how texts are interpreted within the Bible itself.

The Bible discloses a unique, inner unity in the fact that its later writings often depend on earlier ones. They create “re-readings [relectures],” of an earlier biblical text that develop new aspects—which might sometimes be quite different from the text’s original sense. They also refer to older passages in order to show that their meaning has been either deepened or fulfilled.\footnote{IBC, III.A.1. Cf. e.g. Nathan’s prophecy to David of an eternal “house” in 2 Sam 7 and its reinterpretation throughout the Bible (cf. Gen 1:28; Pss 2:7–8, 8:6–9, 110:1 and 4; Wis 9:2–3, 10:2; Isa 7:13–14; Jer 23:56; Amos 9:11).} The intertextual relationships between the OT and NT are extremely dense, especially in the latter’s allusions and explicit citations of the former. The NT authors believed that God’s revelation in the OT had been fulfilled in Jesus’ death and resurrection (see 1 Cor 15:3–5), which was “the center and core [le noyau central] of apostolic preaching.”\footnote{IBC, III.A.2 (cf. IBC-Fr, 496).} This is the only other place that the commission adverts to the “intertextual” reading of sacred scripture. The other place is in the section on semiotics (see I.B.3 above). Still, in neither place does the PBC actually explain what it understands “intertextual” to mean. Continuing on, the PBC asserts a “mutual illumination” and dialectical progress between the scriptures and their fulfillment: Sacred scripture reveals the meaning of events and events also reveal sacred scripture’s meaning, so that certain aspects of the received interpretation must be set aside in favour of a new one. Indeed, Christ’s death, resurrection and glorification pushed the interpretive limits, provoking not only a break with the past, but also unforeseen openings. It was in the light of the events of Easter that the NT’s authors read afresh the OT scriptures. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, they were led to discover their spiritual sense.\footnote{IBC, III.A.2. So, for instance, hyperbolic expressions in the OT like “lord” and “son of God” (cf. e.g. Pss 110:1 and 2:7) were applied literally to Jesus (cf. IBC, III.A.2).}

The relationships existing between the OT and NT are quite complex. In using the Bible, the NT authors naturally had recourse to the ideas (connaissances) and interpretive procedures of their time. Exegetes should seek to know these in order to interpret correctly how they have been used by the authors. Moreover, the commission observes the juxtaposition and tension between different perspectives in the NT and OT writings.\footnote{IBC, III.A.2 (cf. IBC-Fr, 497).} The Bible, it notes, is characterized both by the absence of systematization
and the presence of dynamic tensions. It is “a repository of many ways of interpreting the same events and reflecting upon the same problems. . . . [I]t urges [invite] us to avoid excessive simplification and narrowness of spirit.”  

The Bible’s style (façon) of interpretation suggests the following observations: Since (Étant donné que) the canon of sacred scripture has come into existence out of the consensus of believing communities which recognized it as the expression of revealed faith, its interpretation should be “a source of consensus” on essential matters for the living faith of ecclesial communities.  

I must admit that I am not completely clear as to the meaning of the PBC’s argument on this point. For example, why should the church’s recognition of which books comprised the biblical canon lead as a consequence to agreement on matters of interpretation? Did not both Arian and Nicene Christians accept the same or a similar canon of biblical books from which they maintained their own Christological positions? Even today, despite recognizing the same NT canon Catholics, Protestants and eastern Christians are divided on any number of doctrinal matters. Furthermore, the PBC’s statement that the biblical canon has been derived from the consensual agreement of Christian communities comes perilously close—without intending it, I presume—to the view rejected by the First Vatican Council (1869–70) in its “Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith” (Dei Filius). In that document, the council disallowed the theological opinion which claimed that the books of the Bible were held to be “sacred and canonical” because they had been approved subsequently by the church’s authority. On the contrary, the canon of books was deemed sacred “because, being written under the inspiration of the holy Spirit, they have God as their author and were as such committed to the church.”  

Since (Étant donné que) the expression of the faith found in the scriptures acknowledged by all has needed to renew itself continually to meet new situations, biblical interpretation should likewise involve “an aspect of creativity” in confronting and responding to new questions. Since (Étant donné que) the biblical texts “sometimes show relationships of tension between them,” the interpretation of scripture must necessarily be plural. No particular interpretation can exhaust the meaning of the whole which is “a symphony of many voices;” the interpretation of a particular text must avoid being exclusivistic (éviter d’être exclusiviste). The Bible is in dialogue with communities of believers: It has developed out of their traditions of faith and, reciprocally, has contributed to them. It follows, then, that biblical interpretation occurs in the plurality and unity of the church. It also follows that the biblical

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739 Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 498).

740 IBC, III.A.3 (cf. IBC-Fr, 498).

741 See Dei Filius, chap. 2; in Tanner, 2:806.

742 IBC, III.A.3 (cf. IBC-Fr, 498).
exegete should participate fully in the life and faith of the believing community. The document calls for a complete dialogue with scripture not only as it has been understood by previous generations, but also by today’s generation. Such dialogue will establish a relationship of continuity, albeit acknowledging differences. A process of “sifting and setting aside [un travail de vérification et de tri]” is required preserving elements of the earlier exegetical traditions, while in other matters progressing beyond them.

2. Interpretation in the Tradition of the Church

The church is aware that she is aided by the Holy Spirit in her understanding of sacred scripture (cf. John 14:26, 16:12–13). Guided by that Spirit and by “living tradition,” she has discerned which writings should be regarded as sacred scripture in the sense that, written under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the church. These scriptures contain the truth which God wanted placed there for the sake of humankind’s salvation (see DV, no. 11).

Many factors played a role in this process: Jesus’ own recognition of the OT as inspired; the belief the NT writings genuinely reflected the apostles’ preaching; their conformity with the “rule of faith” and use in worship; and their affinity (accord) with the church’s life and capacity for nourishing it. In discerning the canon, the church was also discerning herself: The Bible functioned as a mirror in which she continually rediscovered her identity, assessing how she was responding to Christ’s gospel and equipping herself as the apt vehicle for its transmission. The canonical scriptures, then, have a salvific and theological value that is “completely different” from that of other ancient texts which can never substitute for their authority. The canonical writings are fundamental for the understanding of the Christian faith.

From earliest times, it has been recognized that the same Holy Spirit, who moved the NT authors to write down the message of salvation, likewise provided the church with continued assistance in interpreting the inspired writings. The church fathers play a foundational role in the church’s living

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743 Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 498–99).
744 Ibid.
745 IBC, III.B.
746 IBC, III.B.1.
747 Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 501).
748 IBC, III.B.1.
749 IBC, III.B.2.
tradition, accompanying and guiding her reading and interpretation of sacred scripture. Their contribution lay in having drawn out basic orientations from the Bible which both shaped Catholic doctrine and provided a rich, theological basis for the instruction and nourishment of the faithful. As is evident not only from their homilies and commentaries, but also from their works of theology and controversy, the church fathers placed a high value on the reading and interpretation of scripture, which found their place chiefly in the church’s liturgical worship.\(^\text{750}\)

The church fathers regarded the Bible as God’s book: the single (unique) work of a single (unique) author. While not reducing the human authors to passive instruments or overlooking a book’s own specific purpose, their approach nevertheless paid scant attention to the historical development of revelation. Especially in apologetical disputes, the church fathers felt at liberty (authorisés) to take biblical statements out of context in order to bring out the revealed truth contained therein.\(^\text{751}\) Moreover, in order to eliminate the apparent scandal of certain biblical passages to both Christians and pagans, they frequently employed allegory, although without abandoning (évacuéés) those texts’ literalness and historicity. Their allegorical interpretations stemmed from the conviction that God speaks an ever-relevant message (un message toujours d’actualité) to the church through sacred scripture. Believing everything was written for their instruction (cf. 1 Cor 10:11) and nothing was “lacking meaning [caduc],” the church fathers wove together both typological and allegorical explanations of scripture. As God’s book, the Bible contained inexhaustible meaning; and any passage could be allegorized as long as it respected “the analogy of faith.”\(^\text{752}\) Although the fathers’ allegorical interpretations might embarrass modern humans, they are useful in showing how to read the Bible “theologically,” namely, within the heart of the “living tradition” and with an authentically Christian spirit.\(^\text{753}\)

Sacred scripture is “the communal treasure of the entire body of believers.” Therefore, all members of the church have a role in interpreting it.\(^\text{754}\) As the apostles’ successors, the bishops are “the first witnesses and guarantors of the living Tradition within which Sacred Scripture is interpreted in every age.” Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they have the task of faithfully guarding God’s revelation, explaining and spreading it through their preaching.\(^\text{755}\) As bishops’ coworkers, priests have the proclamation of the word as their primary duty. Furthermore, priests “are gifted with a particular charism

\(^{750}\) Ibid.

\(^{751}\) Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 502).

\(^{752}\) Ibid.

\(^{753}\) IBC, III.B.2.

\(^{754}\) IBC, III.B.3.

\(^{755}\) Ibid. See DV, no. 9, and LG, no. 25.
or spiritual gift] for the interpretation of Scripture” when—in transmitting God’s revelation, rather than their own ideas—they apply the gospel’s eternal truth to the concrete circumstances of a person’s daily life. 756

I find the PBC’s assertion of a priest’s special charism for interpreting the Bible to be a distinctly novel and puzzling idea. (N.B. I am in no way questioning the unique grace of sharing in Christ’s high priesthood that a man receives in the Catholic sacrament of holy orders.) The PBC appears to cite as its source for this observation Vatican II’s “Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests” (Presbyterorum Ordinis) where it says:

The ministry of the word is discharged in a variety of ways, according to the differing needs of the hearers and the gifts of the speakers [praedicantium charismata]. In regions or communities that are not christian [sic], people are drawn to faith and the sacraments of salvation by the preaching of the gospel. In christian [sic] communities, however, particularly where attendance appears to go with little understanding or belief, preaching of the word is necessary for the administration of the sacraments, since they are sacraments of faith, which is born and nourished by hearing the message. 757

The term, “charisms [charismata],” is certainly present in the conciliar text. Yet I fail to see where it teaches that the grace of ordination to the Catholic priesthood also contains within it a peculiar charism for biblical interpretation. On the contrary, the document seems to be using the word in a broad, less specific sense. For, the decree later uses the same word (i.e. “charism”) in reference to spiritual gifts exercised by the laity. 758 This theological caesura was noticed by at least one reviewer of the IBC document (see below). The PBC continues that it belongs to priests as well as to deacons, especially when administering the sacraments, to clarify the unity which exists between scripture and sacrament in the church’s ministry. 759 As presiders of the eucharistic community and educators in the faith, ministers of the scriptures also have the task of assisting the faithful to discern what “the Word of God [la Parole de Dieu]” is saying to them through the scriptures. Provided they remain united in faith and love with the church, these communities can become in their own contexts vigorous sources of evangelization and dialogue as well as agents for social change. 760

The document likewise affirms that the Holy Spirit has been given to all individual Christians whose hearts “burn” within them as they prayerfully study sacred scripture from their own context (cf.

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756 IBC, III.B.3.

757 Presbyterorum Ordinis, no. 4; cf. Tanner, 2:1047.

758 In Presbyterorum Ordinis no. 9, it counsels priests to “discern with a sense of faith the manifold gifts [charismata . . . multiformia], both exalted and ordinary, that the laity have” (cf. Tanner, 2:1054).

759 IBC, III.B.3. N.B. This is the only place where the ministry of deacons is mentioned in IBC.

760 Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 504). By “Word of God” I presume the commission intends Christ the Logos.
Luke 24:32). Their readings are never truly private, though, since they are always reading scripture from within the church’s faith. The PBC furthermore recognizes the position of those who are “of lowly status” in the world’s eyes and who are viewed by Jesus in particular as privileged hearers of God’s revelation (italics in original). The powerless; those without resources; those forced to trust in God and His justice: These can hear and interpret God’s revelation in ways which should be acknowledged by the church and society.\footnote{Ibid. IBC, III.B.3}

The document remarks on the church’s esteem for those who build up of the body of Christ through the exegesis of sacred scripture. While their past labours were not always encouraged as they are today, exegetes nonetheless offer their learning as a service to the church. In fact, the renewed insistence on scripture’s literal sense requires their efforts and proficiency as well as their ability to use the methods of “scientific criticism.” What is more, the church depends upon exegetes animated by the Holy Spirit to ensure that there might be as great a number of servants of the scriptures as possible providing effective nourishment from them to the people of God.\footnote{IBC, III.B.3.}

The PBC adds its satisfaction at the growing number of female exegetes who “frequently contribute new and penetrating insights to the interpretation of Scripture and rediscover features that had been forgotten.”\footnote{IBC, III.B.3.} Be that as it may, while stating its approval for the presence and work of female biblical scholars, the PBC adverts nowhere to the fact that it has never had a woman serving among its membership. The matter was raised with Donald Senior, president of the Catholic Theological Union (Chicago, Ill.) and PBC member, during an interview with Catholic News Service. He placed the blame on the national conferences of bishops, stating:

“I don’t think the problem is at the Vatican,” he said, adding he is convinced the Vatican would welcome a national bishops’ conference nominating a woman.\footnote{Quoted in Cindy Wooden, “Biblical Scholars Provide Pope with Research, Advice on Scriptures,” Catholic News Service, 4 September 2008; available at: <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0804501.htm>.}

Senior’s answer, though, begs the question of why in fact the Vatican has not taken the initiative asking bishops’ conferences to include female candidates in their list of nominations for the PBC. After all, according to the stipulations of Paul VI’s Sedula Cura it is ultimately the pope himself who appoints the commission’s members on the recommendation of the CDF and in consultation with local churches.\footnote{Cf. Paul VI, Sedula Cura, norms 3–5 passim.}
Finally, while the Bible belongs to the whole church as her “heritage of the faith,” the duty of interpreting God’s revelation in sacred scripture and sacred tradition authentically has been confided solely to the church’s living magisterium, whose authority is exercised in Christ’s name.\footnote{IBC, III.B.3. Cf. DV, no. 10.} In performing this service, the magisterium consults theologians, exegetes and other experts. It is united (\textit{il reste lié}) to them by a reciprocal relationship, while recognizing their “legitimate liberty.”\footnote{IBC, III.B.3 (cf. IBC-Fr, 506).}

3. The Task of the Exegete

The Catholic exegete’s task is “ecclesial” by bringing the riches of holy Scripture to both pastors and faithful through his or her study and explanation. Yet it is also “a work of scholarship [\textit{une tâche scientifique}],” placing the Catholic exegete in contact with non-Catholics and with other areas of scholarly research. His or her work also includes research, teaching and publication.\footnote{IBC, III.C.}

Since the Bible expresses God’s historical revelation in human words bearing the stamp of their time, Catholic exegetes must pay due attention to scripture’s historical character. Consequently, they must avail themselves of the historico-critical method.\footnote{IBC, III.C.1.} Catholic exegetes must never forget they are interpreting God’s revelation: They only arrive at their work’s “true goal [\textit{Le but}]” when they explain sacred scripture’s meaning as God’s revelation for today (\textit{comme parole actuelle de Dieu}). This they do by taking into consideration the variety of hermeneutical perspectives which help actualize the Bible’s message, thus making it responsive to the needs of modern readers.\footnote{Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 507).}

The commission commends the Christological, canonical and ecclesial readings of the biblical texts. The OT writings not only acquire their full meaning in the mystery of Jesus Christ, but they shed light on His mystery. Indeed, they prepared God’s people for His coming. Scripture’s Christological significance should be clarified whenever possible. The Bible came into existence within believing communities, both Jewish and Christian. United to the living tradition preceding it, sacred scripture is the privileged means by which God builds up the church as the “people of God.” Exegesis, then, must look at the relationship between the Bible and the church which also necessarily involves an openness to ecumenism.\footnote{IBC, III.C.1.} Furthermore, based on the fact that the Bible expresses God’s offer of salvation to all

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{IBC, III.B.3. Cf. DV, no. 10.}
\item \footnote{IBC, III.B.3 (cf. IBC-Fr, 506).}
\item \footnote{IBC, III.C.}
\item \footnote{IBC, III.C.1.}
\item \footnote{Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 507).}
\item \footnote{IBC, III.C.1.}
\end{itemize}
people, exegetes’ task also comprises a universal dimension requiring an attention to other religions and the expectations of the actual world.772

Regarding exegetical research, the document declares it is “very important” that there be sufficient numbers of well-prepared persons devoted to exegetical research, since a lack in this area risks placing the church at the mercy of a scholarship which is alien to her and to the life of faith. Calling scripture study “the soul of theology” (see DV, no. 24), Vatican II indicated the crucial importance of exegetical research. The council also implicitly reminded Catholic exegetes that their research has an essential relationship to theology, of which they should be conscious.773

In teaching exegesis, professors should communicate to their students a profound esteem for the Bible, showing how it deserves an attentive and objective study leading to a better appreciation of its multifarious value. It warns, however, against any approach which would restrict itself unilaterally either to a spiritual commentary devoid of historico-critical base or an historico-critical commentary devoid of doctrinal and spiritual content. Teachers should demonstrate the historical foundation (l’enracinement) of the biblical writings; their aspect as God’s personal revelation addressed lovingly to His children; and the scriptures’ indispensable role in the pastoral ministry.774

As the fruit of research and a complement to teaching, publishing has a highly important function (une fonction de grande importance) in the advancement and spread of exegetical work. For researchers, publication at a high academic level is the principal means of dialogue, discussion and cooperation; and through it Catholic exegetes can interact with other scholars and centres of research.775 The Catholic exegete has no other purpose than to serve God’s revelation. The exegete’s aim is not to substitute the results of his or her own work for the biblical texts, but to shed light on them so that they might be appreciated better and understood with more historical accuracy and spiritual depth.776

4. Relationship with Other Theological Disciplines

Since it is a theological discipline, exegesis has a close (étroites) and complex relationship with other fields of theology. Systematic theology influences the presuppositions (la précompréhension) with

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772 Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 508).

773 IBC, III.C.2.

774 IBC, III.C.3. IBC recommends two methods of teaching: synthetic analyses (exposés) which introduce students to the biblical books as a whole and in-depth analyses (analyses approfondies) which will provide an initiation into the practice of exegesis (cf. IBC-Fr, 509)

775 IBC, III.C.4 (cf. IBC-Fr, 509).

776 IBC, III.C.4.
which the exegete approaches the biblical text; exegesis provides theology with the data fundamental to its operation. Accordingly, exegesis and theology stand in a dialogical relationship.\textsuperscript{777}

When approaching the biblical writings, exegetes necessarily hold preunderstandings (une précompréhension). For Catholics, that preunderstanding is based on faith: The Bible is a divinely inspired text entrusted to the church both for the cultivation of her faith and guidance in the Christian life. This certainty of faith has not come to the exegete “in a raw state [à l’état brut],” rather through its elaboration within the ecclesial community through the process of theological reflection.\textsuperscript{778}

By their reflection on biblical inspiration and its function, systematic theologians (dogmaticiens) provide an orientation for exegetes’ research. Likewise, exegetes provide “an experience” that theologians should take into account for better elucidating the Bible’s inspiration as well as its ecclesial interpretation. In particular, exegesis engenders a livelier and more precise awareness of the historical character of biblical inspiration not only because of its occurrence over the course of history, but also because of its realization through the mediation of human beings marked by their history (époque).\textsuperscript{779}

Though not its sole locus theologicus, sacred scripture constitutes “the privileged foundation” of theological study. Theologians need the work of exegetes in order to interpret scripture with “scholarly accuracy and precision.” By giving particular attention to the Bible’s religious content, exegetes should so orient their research that the study of scripture can effectively become the “soul” of theology (cf. DV, no. 24).\textsuperscript{780} This portion of IBC seems to read somewhat unevenly as if biblical scholars do not need theologians in a way that theologians need biblical scholars. Exegetes provide “an experience” that theologians should take into account; exegetes alert theologians to a better awareness of the Bible’s historical context; exegetes’ work is necessary to that of theologians. All of this is indeed true, though the traffic of ideas and experiences between the disciplines hardly seems to be reciprocal. The commission does grant, however, that exegetes benefit from the work of theologians by being reminded of the Bible’s “religious content” (undefined). Yet I wonder if biblical scholars are truly unaware that they are dealing with a religious text.

Exegetes help theologians avoid two extremes: on the one hand, a dualism which would completely separate doctrinal truth from its linguistic expression as if it did not matter; and on the other hand, a fundamentalism which would confuse the human and divine by considering as revealed truth even contingent features of human discourse.\textsuperscript{781} To avoid these extremes, the PBC recommends making

\textsuperscript{777} IBC, III.D (cf. IBC-Fr, 510).

\textsuperscript{778} IBC, III.D.1 (cf. IBC-Fr, 511).

\textsuperscript{779} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{780} IBC, III.D.2.

\textsuperscript{781} Ibid.
“distinctions without . . . separations” and accepting “a continuing tension”: God’s revelation finds expression via human authors; its thought and words come at the same time from God and human beings, such that everything in the Bible comes both (à la fois) from God and from the inspired author. This does not mean, however, God has given an absolute value to the historical conditioning of the Bible’s message (son message). Its message is open to interpretation and updating (actualisé)—an operation for which exegetes lay the groundwork by detaching it “to some extent [au moins partiellement]” from its past, historical conditioning and transplanting it into the present. Systematic theologians continue this work by taking into consideration other loci theologici that contribute to the development of dogma.

The document observes that similar observations could be made regarding moral theology. To narratives concerning the history of salvation, the Bible closely links many instructions about proper conduct (la conduite à tenir). Exegesis’ task consists in assessing the significance of this wealth of material, thus preparing for the work of moral theologians. This is not easy, since the Bible often does not distinguish universal moral principles, prescriptions of ritual purity and legal ordinances; rather all is placed together. Moreover, a considerable amount of moral development is reflected throughout the Bible, finding its completion in the NT. Even the NT is not easy to interpret, since it often expresses itself in a picturesque way or in ways that are paradoxical and provocative. Therefore, moral theologians (Les moralistes) are justified in asking many important and stimulating questions of exegetes. In more than one case, it may be that no biblical text explicitly addresses the problem. Yet the Bible’s witness, understood together with its vigorous dynamism, cannot fail to help outline (définir) a fruitful direction.

While IBC rejects any conflict between Catholic exegesis and dogmatic theology, it does recognize nonetheless moments of strong tension. Each discipline’s viewpoint is different: The exegete primarily wants to determine the precise meaning of the biblical text in its various settings, throwing light on . . .

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782 Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 512). The French “son message” could refer here either to God Himself—namely “His message”—or to the Bible—that is its message. I have chosen to assume that the document means the latter, i.e. the Bible’s message.

783 IBC, III.D.2 (cf. IBC-Fr, 512).

784 IBC, III.D.3 (cf. IBC-Fr, 512).

785 IBC, III.D.3.

786 Ibid.

787 IBC, III.D.3 (cf. IBC-Fr, 513).

788 Ibid.

789 IBC, III.D.4.
on its theological meaning to the extent that it has one (lorsque ceux-ci ont une portée de cette nature). Hence, a relationship of continuity is established between exegesis and theological reflection. Still, exegesis’ viewpoint is not the same as theology’s: “The task of the exegete is fundamentally historical and descriptive . . . limit[ing] itself to the interpretation of the Bible.”

In my opinion the commission appears to be concerned with staking out the essential boundaries of biblical exegesis from those of theology. But its delineation of biblical scholarship’s “fundamental task” raises all sorts of questions for me about other statements occurring throughout the document. For example, if the purpose of exegesis is basically historical and descriptive, then what of the commission’s comments regarding the exegete’s role in actualizing and applying the biblical text? What about its affirmation that, at its root, scripture scholarship is a theological discipline? This indicates not just the description of the scriptures’ contents, but reflection upon them. How does one understand the commission’s proclamation that exegesis should not concern itself simply with uncovering the literal meaning of the biblical text and no more? The PBC wrote IBC partly to commemorate the anniversary of the publication of Divino Afflante Spiritu, Pope Pius XII’s landmark statement on Catholic biblical studies. Paradoxically, the document’s description of “[t]he task of the exegete” seems in stark contrast to that expressed in Pius XII’s encyclical:

> With special zeal should [Catholic exegetes] apply themselves not only to expounding exclusively these matters, which belong to the historical, archaeological, philological and other auxiliary sciences—as, to our regret, is done in certain commentaries—but, having duly referred to these in so far as they may aid the exegesis, they should set forth in particular the theological doctrine in faith and morals of the individual books or texts so that their exposition may not only aid the professors of theology in their explanations and proofs of the dogmas of faith, but may also be of assistance to priests in their presentation of Christian doctrine to the people, and . . . may help all the faithful to lead a life that is holy and worthy of a Christian.

One might note the pope’s censorious comment regarding “certain” scripture commentaries which stick almost exclusively to an exegesis that is primarily historical and descriptive without having any apparent theological application. Yet that is what the PBC describes as Catholic exegesis’ fundamental task.

According to IBC, theologians (Le dogmaticien) play a more speculative and systematic role which is only really interested in certain texts and aspects of the Bible. Otherwise, they take into consideration a lot of data which is not biblical. Their task is not simply to interpret the Bible, but also

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790 Ibid. (cf. IBC-Fr, 513).
791 IBC, III.D.4.
792 Divino Afflante Spiritu, no. [15].
793 IBC, III.D.4 (cf. IBC-Fr, 514). According to IBC the non-biblical data used by theologians include: the church’s fathers, councils, magisterium, liturgy and so forth. Theologians also make use of philosophical systems as well as the socio-political conditions of the modern world (ibid.).
to offer an understanding of it that is fully reflective of all the dimensions of the Christian faith and that faith’s decisive relationship with humanity. Due to its speculative and systematic orientation, the IBC claims that “theology has often yielded to the temptation to consider the Bible as a store of dicta probantia serving to confirm doctrinal theses.” It continues: As God’s written revelation the Bible has a richness of meaning which cannot be completely captured or imprisoned (emprisonnée) by any systematic theology. This sounds like a rather forceful indictment against the practice of theologians. The caveats above should be compared with the IBC’s relatively guarded admissions on the deficient use of the historico-critical method by biblical scholars.

The document states that one of the Bible’s principal functions is “to mount serious challenges [de lancer de sérieux défis]” to theological systems, constantly drawing attention to important aspects of divine revelation and human reality that are sometimes forgotten in “efforts at systematic reflection.” Does this mean that exegetes’ relationship with theology is more one of contestation, rather than collaboration? Adversarial, rather than cooperative? And what of the Bible’s role in challenging the presuppositions and methodologies of biblical interpreters? The document does not say. Correspondingly, exegesis should allow itself to be informed (éclairer) by theology, so that interpreters will be prompted to put “important questions” to the biblical texts and discover their full richness and meaning. The critical (scientifique) study of the Bible cannot be isolated from theology, from spirituality or from the discernment of the church. “Exegesis,” declares the commission, “produces its best results when it is carried out in the context of the living faith of the Christian community, which is directed toward the salvation of the entire world.” While theologians are said above to be “challenged” by the Bible, IBC only asks here that exegetes allow themselves to be informed by the work of theologians. One might ask if this envisions a truly and authentically reciprocal relationship between exegetes and theologians.

V. Reactions to the Document

A. Lewis Ayres and Stephen E. Fowl

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794 Ibid.
795 Ibid.
796 Ibid.
Ayres and Fowl believe IBC represents the most developed and prominent apology for the historico-critical method’s priority and indispensability yet offered by Catholic scholars.\textsuperscript{797}

IBC draws a parallel between Christ’s divine and human natures and the Bible’s character as written by human beings under divine inspiration. Just as an orthodox Christology demands an assertion of Christ’s full humanity, so the full humanity and historicity of the biblical text must be asserted, which also requires the use of historical-critical methods.\textsuperscript{798} Ayres and Fowl call the parallel “logically incoherent,” since asserting that scripture has divine and human aspects does not necessarily require any particular reading practice. The analogy is “deeply confused about how to understand the dual natures of Scripture.”\textsuperscript{799}

Furthermore, the authors maintain that this type of argument has not appeared in any document of the ordinary magisterium. Since IBC has no intrinsic authority, its position cannot be viewed as an official shift in church teaching; rather it indicates merely the current thinking among some Catholic biblical scholars.\textsuperscript{800} Yet Ayres and Fowl seem to have forgotten that the same argument was indeed outlined by Pope John Paul II in his address at the presentation of IBC above.\textsuperscript{801} An official address by the pope on a theological matter like the Bible assuredly has magisterial authority, albeit at a low level.\textsuperscript{802} Further, I would tend to disagree with their assertion that IBC has no intrinsic authority: At the very least, it has the authority of a document produced by a consultative body of the Holy See.

Ayres and Fowl dispute the PBC’s claim that the historico-critical method can be used objectively, without \textit{a priori} assumptions:

This claim is of course something of a hostage to fortune, given the accuracy with which the document itself goes on to tie the necessity of [the historico-critical method] to assumptions about the character of ancient texts, . . . about the need to treat the Scriptures as ancient texts and . . . about what is possible in light of the direction of modern hermeneutical philosophy.\textsuperscript{803}

Moreover, the claim seems to be contradicted by the document’s own \textit{a priori} thesis that a text can have only one meaning.\textsuperscript{804}

\textsuperscript{797} Lewis Ayres and Stephen E. Fowl, “(Mis)Reading the Face of God: The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” \textit{Theological Studies} 60 (1999): 515.
\textsuperscript{798} Ibid., 514 (cf. also pp. 521–22).
\textsuperscript{799} Ayres and Fowl, 515.
\textsuperscript{800} Ibid., 514.
\textsuperscript{801} John Paul II, “Address on Interpretation of Bible in Church,” no. 6 (cf. nos. 6–11 passim of that talk).
\textsuperscript{802} Cf. e.g. Sullivan, \textit{Creative Fidelity}, 19–20. Cf. also \textit{CCC}, paras. 2033–34.
\textsuperscript{803} Ibid., 516–17.
\textsuperscript{804} Ibid., 517 n. 14.
They also criticize the document’s survey of alternative, exegetical methods which seems mainly concerned with bolstering the historico-critical method’s primacy against potential challengers.\footnote{805} “[S]omething called fundamentalism” is attacked, since by refusing the historico-critical method’s primacy it cannot accept the full truth of God’s incarnation. For Ayres and Fowl the way in which the document sets up fundamentalism as an enemy illustrates just how strongly it holds both to the preeminence of the historico-critical method and to its Christological parallel as a theological apology for it.\footnote{806}

IBC concedes that modern hermeneutical theory makes it difficult to assert a text has a single, stable meaning. It also allows that scripture could have multiple senses. But it then defines the literal sense as a text’s precise meaning as expressed or produced by its author.\footnote{807} The document defends this notion of the literal sense by citing St. Thomas Aquinas’ teaching that all scriptural senses must be founded on the literal one (see \textit{ST} I, q. 1, art. 10 ad 1). “Unfortunately,” counter Ayres and Fowl, “Aquinas cannot be held up as support,” for in the section preceding the one cited by the PBC, Thomas acknowledges the existence of \textit{many} meanings in a passage’s literal sense.\footnote{808} More significantly, IBC’s definition undermines what it says later, namely, that as the Bible’s principal author, the Holy Spirit, could have guided the human writer’s expression in such wise that the words expressed a deeper truth than the human writer perceived. Hence, the PBC tries to incorporate traditional methods of reading scripture with exegesis trying to discover the author’s intentions. But this position cannot be squared with its insistence that no reading should be accepted which is not the author’s meaning expressed in the written text.\footnote{809}

\textbf{B. Paul M. Blowers}

\footnote{805}{Ibid., 517.}
\footnote{806}{Ibid. They contend that IBC defines fundamentalism in an “inaccurate and somewhat patronizing” way (p. 517 n. 15).}
\footnote{807}{Ibid., 518–19.}
\footnote{808}{Ibid., 519. The relevant passage reads:
Now because the literal sense is that which the author intends and the author of holy Scripture is God who comprehends everything all at once in his understanding, it comes not amiss . . . if many meanings are present \textit{plures sint sensus} even in the literal sense of one passage of Scripture (Thomas Aquinas, \textit{ST}, I, q. 1, art. 10 responsio; in Blackfriars, 1:38–39).}
\footnote{809}{Ayres and Fowl, 520.}
Blowers opines that the PBC document’s issuance “could not be more timely.”\textsuperscript{810} Although formulated for Catholic concerns, it sends “unmistakable signals” to the broader culture of postmodern biblical study. The document makes clear that “the Church is still the foundational context for expounding Scripture and the only promising medium for actualizing the Word of God.”\textsuperscript{811} Given the landscape of contemporary biblical studies, Blowers believes Protestants “should identify profoundly” with IBC’s bold reaffirmation of the church’s hermeneutical prerogatives.\textsuperscript{812}

While agreeing with the PBC’s proposal for collaboration between “diachronic” and “synchronic” interpretations, Blowers calls it “highly optimistic in the ‘real world’ of biblical interpretation.” He writes:

\begin{quote}
[E]xegetical battles are waged amid the complex networks of academic guilds, well-defined hermeneutical schools of thought and other channels of scholarly influence in which loyalties are strong and in which committed Christian and Jewish exegetes must still practice their craft.\textsuperscript{813}
\end{quote}

There is no consensus among scholars that diachronic and synchronic interpretations can coexist—or, are even compatible.\textsuperscript{814}

C. Avery Dulles

Dulles believes IBC constitutes “a genuine advance” over previous official and “quasi-official” church teaching.\textsuperscript{815} Its description of other approaches is “very concise but . . . helpful” and commends it for its keen and balanced presentation of each one’s merits and shortcomings.\textsuperscript{816}

Still, Dulles identifies a lack of clarity in the PBC’s treatment of the literal, spiritual and “fuller” senses of scripture. The document defines the literal sense as what is directly expressed by the inspired human author. However, it leaves the term “directly” unexplained. Dulles, though, takes it to mean

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{811} Ibid.
\bibitem{812} Ibid., 41.
\bibitem{813} Blowers, in Blowers et al., 41.
\bibitem{814} Ibid.
\bibitem{816} Ibid., 33.
\end{thebibliography}
“intentionally” or “consciously.” IBC teaches that a text has only one literal meaning unless the author intended an ambiguity. Yet it allows that God could guide the author’s expression in such a way as to permit more than one meaning to the text. Dulles asks: Should those additional meanings also be classified as “literal”? If so, IBC’s own definition would need to be modified. Furthermore, he believes the spiritual sense seems to be collapsed into the other two: the literal sense if the author has intended to write about spiritual realities or into the “fuller” sense if no such meaning is intended. Since the PBC admits a “dynamic aspect” to the literal sense which is open to further developments, it is not clear what actually distinguishes the literal from the “fuller” sense.

The commission evidently felt some obligation to defend the historico-critical method. While he personally supports the defence, Dulles nevertheless regrets that IBC’s whole first section seems to endorse a non-theological, objectivist approach which is later repudiated. IBC says the historico-critical method—when used objectively—implies in and of itself no a priori; rather a priori principles come from the hermeneutical tendencies of the interpreter. Still, Dulles does not see how the historico-critical method could be practiced without some kind of presupposition: for example, about how texts are composed and transmitted; or what counts as historical evidence. The document also affirms that exegetes bring “pre-understandings” and presuppositions to their interpretation of the Bible. Dulles agrees with that assertion, but wonders how those assumptions “differ from the potentially tendentious a prioris [sic] discountenanced in [‘IBC’]?”

Despite ambiguities in other places, the document clearly interprets exegesis as a theological discipline, though he confesses that the line between exegesis and theology can become difficult to draw:

Many of the same elements . . . are present in exegesis and systematic theology, but the proportions are different. On balance, exegesis is more historical and descriptive; systematic theology is more contemporary and speculative. Every Christian exegete is something of a systematician; every systematic theologian engages in some measure of exegesis.

Dulles agrees that the Bible’s richness of meaning cannot be fully captured by any single theological system and that exegesis can point out things which theology has sometimes disregarded. Truly, the Bible can mount serious challenges to conceptually-narrow theologies—”[b]ut,” Dulles adds, “the

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817 Ibid., 31.
818 Ibid.
819 Ibid., 31–32 passim.
820 Ibid., 32–33.
821 Ibid., 33.
822 Ibid., 34.
challenges are mutual.” Philosophically responsible reflection can also mount challenges to any “naive biblicism” seeking answers for modern questions in biblical categories alone.823

Dulles detects a certain vagueness in IBC’s teaching on biblical inerrancy. While avowing the inerrancy of God’s revelation, it leaves open whether that same holds for the Bible’s human record.824 When IBC quotes Vatican II’s DV no. 11, for example, it significantly omits the council’s statement that the books of scripture teach God’s salvific truth “firmly, faithfully and without error.” Furthermore, it fails to quote from the same sentence the statement that everything asserted by the inspired authors is also asserted by the Holy Spirit. Dulles wonders: “Is the biblical Commission deliberately backing away from even a moderate and nuanced doctrine of biblical inerrancy?” Or, did it just not want to take a position on the matter?825

As a theologian writing for theologians Dulles has found “many merits and some shortcomings” in the document. But “[a]ll things considered . . . [it] is to be congratulated for its open and balanced assessment of contemporary methods and approaches . . . While encouraging healthy initiatives, [it] offers timely cautions against unilateral excesses.”826

D. J. T. Forestell

Forestell calls IBC “an excellent introduction to the interpretation of the Bible for all in the Church who are seriously interested in the Scriptures.” IBC begins with “a spirited defence” of the historico-critical method as the basic and necessary foundation for all methods of biblical interpretation. “Unfortunately,” he writes, “this defence is necessary, especially in the Roman Catholic Church.”827 Most complaints about Catholic exegesis revolve around the historico-critical method: Some think it makes the Bible a scholarly enterprise and inaccessible to the faithful; others think it reduces God’s

823 Ibid., 34–35.
824 Ibid., 36.
825 Ibid., 36–37. Peter S. Williamson raised Dulles’ concern during an interview with the PBC secretary Albert Vanhoye who answered:

The Biblical Commission . . . did not wish to enter into a discussion regarding the precise meaning of inerrancy. If we did not cite the entire paragraph of Dei Verbum it was solely because it sufficed to cite a few words to make the point and it was not necessary to quote the entire passage (quoted in Peter Williamson, “Catholicism and the Bible: An Interview with Albert Vanhoye,” First Things [June/July 1997]: 39).

revelation to merely human words. The understanding and use of the method as outlined in IBC, he thinks, may do much to allay those fears.\textsuperscript{828}

Forestell chides the PBC’s treatment of newer methods of biblical interpretation as “far too brief.”\textsuperscript{829} Regarding \textit{Wirkungsgeschichte}, he thinks it could have been mentioned that “the responsible use of the [historico-critical method] would have forestalled [the] abuse of the word of God” in deviant attitudes, like racism or sexism, as well as doctrinal deviations.\textsuperscript{830} Given liberation theology’s heterogeneity, IBC can only offer “provisional remarks.” Forestell notes the disagreement over the section on feminist exegesis—but he does not know if some found the text either too critical or inopportune: “[O]n this point I have no further information.”\textsuperscript{831}

IBC repeats the traditional belief that the authentic interpretation of the Bible belongs solely to the church’s magisterium which judges a particular interpretation’s compatibility with the gospel. Forestell worries, however, that “our non-Catholic colleagues may misunderstand this official formula.”\textsuperscript{832} Forestell thinks the PBC’s claim that, even if no text of the Bible addresses explicitly a particular moral question, the Bible will certainly indicate a fruitful direction, appears “a little too confident.” Likewise, it seems “a bit unfair” to say that systematic theologians are only really interested in certain texts and aspects of the Bible. Many theologians, he insists, do acknowledge the importance of a more complete and integral knowledge of the whole Bible. Still, he lauds the PBC for including “a much-needed exhortation” about the need to give proper care and respect to the public proclamation of the scriptures during Mass.\textsuperscript{833}

IBC concludes, hoping that it has made a contribution toward a clearer awareness of the role of Catholic exegesis. Forestell believes that it has:

> It seems to me that the instruction certainly accomplishes this task, but it also lays down an important challenge . . . to liberate the Bible from the esoteric realms of historical criticism and systematic theology—necessary and indispensable though these disciplines most certainly must remain—and make the biblical message of God’s universal love dynamic for every man, woman and child.\textsuperscript{834}

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E. Peter Hebblethwaite

\textsuperscript{828} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{829} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{830} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{831} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{832} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{833} Ibid., 18–19 passim.
\textsuperscript{834} Ibid., 21.
Hebblethwaite acknowledges IBC as an important statement on scripture.\textsuperscript{835} The document reviews methods which have proliferated and judges them “discriminatingly”: All can be useful; none is self-sufficient. He describes its critiques of the feminist and liberationist approaches as “sensational” and “nuanced.”\textsuperscript{836} There is in IBC a more positive interpretation of liberation theology than one has heard so far from Rome; and the comments on feminist scholarship sound “too good to be true. It is not just a pat on the head.”\textsuperscript{837}

Hebblethwaite asks if there is such a thing as “Catholic” exegesis. In his opinion, the document answers firmly in the negative—if by that one means a special approach to scripture that is not shared by other Christians. Nevertheless, there is a Catholic approach to scripture which ties all methods together. Its preunderstanding is the church’s living tradition and its chief concern is to remain faithful to the biblical revelation.\textsuperscript{838}

Hebblethwaite is adverse, however, to IBC’s claim that all priests retain a charism for scriptural interpretation. Here, the document makes “an unwarranted jump and an exaggerated claim.” To say that all priests possess this charism by virtue of their office makes nonsense out of the notion of “charism” as a special gift.\textsuperscript{839} Also, he would have welcomed more emphasis on Jesus as a pious Jew who came to fulfill—not to destroy—the law.\textsuperscript{840}

F. Jon D. Levenson

Levenson calls IBC “generally [a document] of admirable balance and thoughtfulness . . . wonderfully comprehensive and concise.” It is “a document of great value to both Catholic and non-Catholic interpreters of the Bible.”\textsuperscript{841}

Levenson notes the document’s “two-sidedness” in which it continually embraces modern methods of biblical study, while warning of their limitations. IBC asserts the Bible’s divine authorship and worries that that dimension could disappear when the historico-critical method is given sole validity.


\textsuperscript{836} Hebblethwaite, 13.

\textsuperscript{837} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{838} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{839} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{840} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{841} Jon D. Levenson, in Blowers et al., 42.
But Levenson points out that that is precisely the goal of many biblical studies programs. The issue of avoiding the Bible’s “desacralization” in academic communities that are not religiously homogeneous is not addressed by the report:

The fact remains . . . that unless the Catholic Church (re)ghettoizes itself . . . its exegetes will continue to be integral members of communities of interpretation that are religiously diverse and whose lingua franca has long been historicism and naturalism—that is, philosophical positions averse to the monotheistic traditions and biased toward secularity.842

The commission offers no help about how to prosecute a pluralistic scholarship which upholds both the transcendent and the historical dimensions of the Bible. The “schizoid solution” of having the exegete behave as a believer in church, but as an historicist in the academy, is not an effective redressal of the matter.843

Levenson observes the document’s “stern and repeated denunciations” of fundamentalism: “Nothing else that this remarkably open and learned report addresses . . . comes in for so much censure.”844 He thinks the PBC’s eagerness to distance itself from fundamentalism reflects its conviction that the historico-critical method when used in an objective manner implies of itself no a priori. Levenson calls this position “philosophically naive and easily falsified.”845 The PBC also evades the possibility that the historico-critical method might lead to the denial of magisterial teaching or cast doubt on the Bible as a collection of witnesses from one great tradition which has unfolded organically. The historico-critical method compels one to cast doubt on traditional claims: “The affirmation of ongoing tradition and the critical study of history are willy-nilly often at cross purposes.”846

Levenson further observes that the OT is treated far more critically than the NT “on which [the document] tends to fall back into fuzzy mystical language.”847 What is more, “[t]he treatment of Jesus himself in the report . . . exhibits scant influence from the historical-critical method.” He faults IBC not only for its “fundamentalistic assumption that Jesus said what the gospels attribute to him,” but also for its gross minimalization of Jesus’ continuity with Judaism. Levenson quips: “You would almost think

842 Ibid.
843 Ibid.
844 Ibid.
845 Ibid., 42 and 43 (e.g. the historico-critical method’s a priori rejection of clairvoyance and, therefore, the ability of anyone—even a divinely inspired prophet—to predict the future).
846 Ibid., 43. Levenson notes, for instance, how the historico-critical method’s study of Jesus’ “brothers and sisters” in the gospels contradicts the belief of the Catholic and Orthodox churches in the lifelong virginity of His mother Mary. Also, it challenges Christian traditions regarding Jesus’ miraculous birth, for while those traditions are indeed found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke they are absent from the other gospels and from the writings of St. Paul (ibid.).
847 Ibid. (cf. also pp. 43–44).
[Jesus] was Catholic.\footnote{Ibid., 44.} Though the PBC condemns anti-Semitic interpretations of the Bible, the danger of such interpretations continues as long as Jesus is protected from “rigorous historical-critical analysis.” Also, “precious opportunities” to deepen the church’s understanding of scripture will be lost.\footnote{Ibid.}

G. Peter S. Williamson

Williamson maintains that IBC sheds light on the essential characteristics of Catholic biblical interpretation while offering “balanced judgments” on some hotly debated issues.\footnote{Williamson, “Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture,” Catholic Biblical Quarterly 65/3 (2003): 348.} Many interpreted IBC as giving unqualified endorsement to the historico-critical method as the means for ascertaining scripture’s literal sense. But Williamson argues that “a more careful reading” reveals the PBC’s important “re-dimensioning” of the method.\footnote{Ibid.} Williamson welcomes IBC’s recognition of the literal sense’s “dynamic aspect” which permits exegesis to follow a text’s trajectory of thought or potential extension of meaning.\footnote{Williamson, “The Place of History in Catholic Exegesis: An Examination of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” in “Behind” the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 211.} Furthermore, he finds IBC’s reaffirmation of the validity and necessity of seeking out the spiritual sense “striking.”\footnote{Williamson, “Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture,” 341.}

A common criticism of the historico-critical method is that it is used to undermine traditional Christian doctrines and the trustworthiness of the Bible. Williamson notes: “Surprisingly, despite the biblical Commission’s awareness of this criticism, [it] does not address to [sic] this issue.”\footnote{Ibid., 342.} On the contrary, he believes that IBC’s evaluation of the current state of the historico-critical method is “overly positive,” for the document “glosses over problematic presuppositions that still often accompany the use of the [historico-critical method] and that are considered by some scholars to be intrinsic to it.”\footnote{Williamson, Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: Study of IBC, 248.} While IBC suggests that those issues are in the past, Williamson is not so sure: There is “considerable evidence
of the continued use of the [historico-critical method] controlled by philosophical presuppositions contrary to Christian faith.\textsuperscript{856}

Notwithstanding those shortcomings, IBC’s affirmation of the historico-critical method—“properly understood and placed in the broader context of Catholic exegesis”—is an important step forward.\textsuperscript{857} It could provide a viable alternative to the way the method is commonly understood and practiced.\textsuperscript{858}

\textbf{VI. Conclusion}

This chapter has investigated the PBC’s 1993 statement, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” surveying its essential contents and providing a cross-section of scholarly reviews on its quality. Sullivan pays the document a high compliment calling it “an eloquent witness to the progress that has been made in Catholic biblical studies, since the time of Pius X.”\textsuperscript{859}

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{856} Ibid., “Place of History in Catholic Exegesis,” 218.
  \item \textsuperscript{857} Ibid., \textit{Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: Study of IBC}, 252.
  \item \textsuperscript{858} Ibid., 247–48.
  \item \textsuperscript{859} Sullivan, \textit{Creative Fidelity}, 149.
\end{itemize}
CHAPTER FIVE

OBSERVATIONS ON DUPUIS’ USE OF THE BIBLE
ACCORDING TO THE PBC DOCUMENT

I. Introduction

This chapter will examine Dupuis’s use of the Bible in his theological method according to the four characteristics of Catholic biblical interpretation identified in chap. III of IBC. The chapter will bring Dupuis’s use of sacred scripture into dialogue with each of the four principles mentioned above. This section will utilize chap. III of the document in order to develop a detailed critique of Dupuis’s use of the Bible in his “Christian theology of religious pluralism” and will also employ secondary literature to support its arguments where applicable.

II. Examination according to Chapter III, “Characteristics of Catholic Interpretation”

A. Opening Remarks

Catholic exegesis, stipulates the opening section of IBC, places itself within the church’s “living Tradition” whose chief concern is remaining faithful to the revelation attested by the Bible.\(^{860}\) I believe that Dupuis unquestionably situates his proposal for a “Christian theology of religious pluralism” within the purview of the data of revelation and Christian tradition. One finds this throughout his writing. Indeed, almost the whole first part of his magnum opus TCTR\(^{861}\) is devoted to an analysis of the biblical and traditional evidence for a more positive approach to the non-Christian religious “other.”\(^{861}\) Moreover, Dupuis writes explicitly that the theological evaluation of religions relies formally on the Christian revelation “contained in the word of God and interpreted by the Church’s living tradition.”\(^{862}\)

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\(^{860}\) IBC, III.


\(^{862}\) TCTR, 5–6 passim (cf. also pp. 7 and 385)
IBC also acknowledges the existence of hermeneutical “pre-understandings” which for exegetes include both modern, scientific culture and the church’s religious tradition.\textsuperscript{863} Dupuis describes his own “pre-understanding” in several ways: “a posteriori,” “inductive,” “dialogical,” “contextual.” For him a theology of religions begins from the context of the world’s religious plurality.\textsuperscript{864} For Dupuis it is not just the need to acknowledge the de facto existence of the world’s non-Christian religions; rather it also includes showing that the world’s religions exist as de jure realities given by God to humanity as gifts for its salvation.\textsuperscript{865} Therefore, in his reading of the church’s scripture and tradition he advocates taking a “qualitative leap” over Christianity’s traditionally negative appraisal of other religions, reexamining and reinterpreting the biblical data and texts “with a fresh understanding . . . so as to be able to propose a renewed biblical theology of the religions in the contemporary context of the theological reassessment of the religions.”\textsuperscript{866}

Nevertheless, IBC warns Catholic exegetes about the danger of letting their own “pre-understandings” attribute meanings to the Bible that it does not contain.\textsuperscript{867} This danger is especially acute in Dupuis’s case, since the scriptures do not treat the matter of religious pluralism outright. So, the problem of Dupuis’s applying his own a priori deductions taken from his proposed contextualized theology is a real one. It opens the door to the charge that Dupuis uses the scriptures merely as a reservoir of dicta probantia for bolstering his own ideas for Christianity’s positive assessment of other religions. Dupuis himself knows the danger and assures that he has avoided the “proof-text method” which has been found “too often” in Christology and the theology of religions, where one takes selected scriptures out of context and makes them affirm what they do not say.\textsuperscript{868} Nevertheless, despite that assurance, I believe that, as will be seen below, more often than not in the case of the five texts considered in this thesis (and especially in the case of texts like John 1:9 and 1 Tim 2:4) he does indeed end up taking some portion or all out of context in order to bend the meaning in favour of his proposal of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.”

B. Interpretation according to Biblical Tradition

\textsuperscript{863} IBC, III.

\textsuperscript{864} Dupuis, “Teologia del pluralismo religioso revisitata,” 692.

\textsuperscript{865} Cf. e.g. TCTRIP, 201, 321, 386–87, and CR, 4, 136–37, 161, 242, 254–55, 257–58.

\textsuperscript{866} See CR, 2, 5–7 passim, 18–19 passim (cf. also pp. 258–59).

\textsuperscript{867} IBC, III.

\textsuperscript{868} Dupuis, “Christianity and Religions Revisited,” 367.
1. God’s Covenant with Noah in Gen 9

According to John L. McKenzie, most scholars would agree that the analogy of *berit* or “covenant” is the key to understanding all of the biblical images used to describe God’s relationship with Israel.\(^{869}\) Dupuis, then, can be regarded as insightful in trying to appropriate the account of God’s covenant with the pre-Abrahamic personage Noah in Gen 9 in such a way as to talk meaningfully and positively about God’s relationship with the adherents of other religions. Dupuis calls God’s covenant with Noah “the oldest and most precious revealed datum on which a theology of the religious traditions of humanity may be established.”\(^{870}\) But as McKenzie points out above “covenant” is used exclusively throughout the Bible to describe the bond of God’s relationship with Israel—not with others. Dupuis’s assertion, then, tends to presume that the author of the passage in Gen 9 is using “covenant” in a way that it is not typically used throughout the OT in that regard.

IBC notes the presence of *relectures* or “rereadings” within the Bible which can provide fresh insights into other biblical texts and deepen their meaning.\(^{871}\) Indeed, we see this in Gen 9 in regard to “covenant.” It is well acknowledged among OT scholars that the single flood story in Gen chaps. 6–9 is actually an amalgamation of two sources: the “Yahwistic” (or J) and the priestly (or P).\(^{872}\) Furthermore, most biblical scholars accept that the passages detailing God’s covenant with Noah (i.e., 6:18 and 9:1–17) have been composed later by the priestly source and added to J’s account. This means that in its earliest version the biblical story of Noah did not contain a reference to a covenant between God and Noah.

Dupuis might have replied that indeed this would have constituted a *relecture* of “covenant” in favour of his proposal, for the priestly source has extended the concept to include even non-Israelites. Unfortunately, the addition of the idea to the story of Noah points in the opposite direction, since “covenant” as understood by the priestly source means only the Sinai covenant between God and Israel contained in the law of Moses. It is the “covenant” of the Mosaic law which P has retrojected into the story of Noah.\(^{873}\) The tendency of the Bible’s rereading of the concept lies, then, toward exclusivism—and not toward inclusivism.

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\(^{869}\) John L. McKenzie, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought,” in *NJBC*, 77:76 (see also nos. 74–75).

\(^{870}\) *JCEWR*, 131.

\(^{871}\) IBC, III.A.1.

\(^{872}\) The Yahwist was active sometime in the tenth century before Christ. The priestly source was active post 539 B.C., that is, sometime after the Babylonian exile (cf. Roland E. Murphy, “Introduction to the Pentateuch,” in *NJBC*, 1:6–8).

\(^{873}\) McKenzie, “Aspects of OT Thought,” in *NJBC*, 77:78. McKenzie observes that, while the traditions about the covenant are obscure and complex, Moses’ connection with the establishment of the covenant is so deeply embedded within those traditions that his memory cannot be removed (no. 48).
Moreover, Dupuis is especially impressed by the fact that the covenant with the non-Israelite Noah—and hence a “pagan” in Dupuis’s view—is an everlasting and irrevocable one. I agree with Dupuis that there is certainly an important point to be made here by the Bible about the close bond which still and always exists between God and the world’s peoples who live outside His later covenant with Abraham. Yet IBC itself warns about the Bible’s “absence of systematization.” And Dupuis neglects to consider that the Bible testifies to the existence of several different “eternal” or “everlasting” divine covenants mentioned throughout the OT. For example, God establishes everlasting and irrevocable covenants with: Abram (cf. Gen 15), the whole Israelite community (cf. Exod chaps. 19–24) and King David (cf. 2 Sam 7). What is more, it describes God’s creation of perpetual covenants with the high priest Aaron (cf. Num chap. 18; cf. also Sir 45:6–22) and his grandson Phinehas (cf. Num chap. 25; cf. also Sir 45:23–25). Dupuis does not address adequately in my view what kind of role these other covenants play in his proposal of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.” Only God’s covenants with Noah and with the people of Israel seem to have retained theological import for Dupuis and within his proposal. But what about the Davidic covenant? How could a so-called “Christian theology of religious pluralism” not even discuss God’s covenant with David? What also about God’s covenants of “eternal priesthood” with Aaron and Phinehas? What is their significance for the church and for Christians within a theology of religious pluralism? Dupuis does not say, since he does not mention them either.

2. Dupuis’s Treatment of the Prologue to John’s Gospel

The next scripture figuring prominently in Dupuis’s thought is the prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1–18, especially v. 9). Dupuis believes “[t]he main bone of contention” for some critics is his claim that v. 9 refers to the Word’s enlightening and saving activity before the Word’s incarnation and without reference to it. The ninth verse reads:

> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

In his review of *CR*, for example, George Gispert-Sauch faults Dupuis’s reference to John 1:9 for “overlooking the significance of its context after vv. 6–8;” and he doubts whether the evangelist ever

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875 *IBC*, III.A.2.

876 These covenants are called “eternal” because their foundation rests upon the gracious activity of God and are not conditional on human behavior. They are also called “promissory covenants,” since their terms rely on God’s own faithfulness to His promises, rather than on the conduct of the human party or parties (cf. Bernhard W. Anderson, “Covenant,” in *OCB*, 139, and M. Weinfeld, “Berith,” in *TDOT*, 2:270).

877 Dupuis, “Christianity and Religions Revisited,” 367. Though, Dupuis does not name precisely which critics have been bothered by this hermeneutic.
conceives of the Word as acting without relation to the humanity of Jesus. In his defence, Dupuis deploys a “source critical” argument responding that vv. 6–8 of John’s prologue have been added to the original hymn. That interpolation, he argues, has the result of attributing in advance to Jesus Christ what is stated only about the nonincarnate Word in vv. 9–12. Dupuis finishes: “The authorities in exegesis on whom I have based my argument are quite clear on the matter.”

This is a novel argument for Dupuis, for it does not appear in his previous writings before CR. It is also an ingenious one, since it uses the consensus among biblical scholars that a “Logos hymn” lies behind John’s prologue in order to neutralize the issue of the presence of verses in the prologue which seem to refer already to the incarnate Word. Yet, albeit clever, Dupuis’s argument leaves some issues to be explored. Source criticism is certainly useful at getting at any underlying materials used by an author, but it comprises only one piece of the puzzle. The exegetical process also includes using redaction criticism, that is, “the way in which . . . literary pieces are made to serve the general purpose of the writer.”

By Dupuis’s own admission above, the author of John’s gospel did not just take up the preexisting “Logos hymn” without any modification: On the contrary, the evangelist changed and added to it. What do those changes mean for how John interpreted the “Logos hymn”? Assuming that the source used for John’s prologue did indeed focus on the perduring character of the enlightenment of humankind by a disembodied Word with little or no reference to that Word’s incarnation: What does it mean for the evangelist to have redacted that source in such a way as to associate its original subject with the event of the Word’s incarnation as Christ? Dupuis does not ask this question.

IBC concebes that the biblical authors have utilized preexisting sources which they have reworked and reinterpreted. Therefore, there is no problem with Dupuis’s defending his ideas by appeal to whichever source or sources may have been used for the composition of John’s prologue. One must remember, though, that the idea of a preexisting “Logos hymn” is only a theory, for no evidence of an actual “hymn” has been found outside of John’s prologue. Therefore, no reconstruction of the “Logos hymn” can claim to be anything but conjectural. This is admitted plainly by exegetes in the field, and

878 Gispert-Sauch, 969.

879 Dupuis, “Dupuis Responds,” 220. Dupuis utilizes this “source critical” argument in passing in the response article “Christianity and the Religions Revisited.” He writes: [T]he result [is] that the enlightening and saving action of vv. 9 to 12 seems already to refer to Jesus, the Word incarnate. However, in the original form of the hymn the mystery of the incarnation of the Word is introduced in v. 14 (p. 367).


882 Cf. e.g. IBC, A and A.1. Cf. also III.A.
many different reconstructions of the hymn’s “original” form have been offered.\textsuperscript{883} For his part—and I wonder if by intention—Dupuis himself never actually reveals throughout his writings to which of the many possible reconstructions of the “Logos hymn” he adheres or which he believes to be most likely. One is left to suppose. Indeed, as far as I can tell in his writings Dupuis always adheres to the canonical form of John’s prologue as now found in the gospel. There are no appeals to the preeminence of the prologue’s “original” form.\textsuperscript{884}

Verse 9 of John’s prologue has a lot of significance for Dupuis’s proposal of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.”\textsuperscript{885} Yet, by relying on “source critical” arguments above in defence of his claim for the assertion of a continued, enlightening action of the Word in John’s prologue apart from the incarnation Dupuis’s proposal runs into a major complication, for there seems to be a significant division among Johannine scholars about whether John 1:9 is part of the original “Logos hymn” or not. As Raymond E. Brown describes, scholars are divided into three camps: those who regard v. 9 as an original part of the “Logos hymn;” those who consider it a redactional element added later; and those who think it is some combination of the two (i.e. partly original, partly redactional).\textsuperscript{886} This situation should offer the context, then, for Dupuis’s remark above to Gispert-Sauch that “[t]he authorities in exegesis on whom I have based my argument are quite clear on the matter.”\textsuperscript{887} I do not see how Dupuis could have claimed this with such assurance, unless he had only chosen to consult authorities that were already in agreement with his own views about which parts of the prologue were redactional (e.g. John 1:6–8) and which were original (e.g. v. 9). Dupuis dismisses the allusion to the Word’s incarnation in vv. 6–8 as an interpolation to the original hymn. When it comes to v. 9, however, there is no mention at all by Dupuis of any redactional issues. It makes me wonder just how dispassionately Dupuis is able to handle the data he uses—especially contrary data—on issues of importance to his proposal for a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.”

Dupuis relies on the concepts of God’s “word” and “wisdom” (respectively dабar and chokmah in Hebrew) in the OT for his understanding of the Logos of John’s prologue.\textsuperscript{888} There is surely validity to


\textsuperscript{884} While taking note of Dupuis’s argument above, Courtemanche yet believes that “it is important to refer ourselves above all to the actual text which has been received” (Courtemanche, 321).

\textsuperscript{885} Cf. e.g. \textit{TCTR}, 50–51, 242; also \textit{CR}, 63, 157.


\textsuperscript{887} Dupuis, “Dupuis Responds,” 220.

\textsuperscript{888} See \textit{TCTR}, 43–44, 51–55.
Dupuis’s search in the Hebrew scriptures themselves for an understanding of how John has intended to use the idea of “the Word” in the prologue. IBC recognizes the existence of “a unique, inner unity” to the Bible, such that later texts of the Bible can offer “rereadings” of earlier ones. These relectures can reveal both a deepening or a fulfillment of the previous text, albeit not without “the juxtaposition and tension between different perspectives” that occurs when “certain aspects of the received interpretation must be set aside in favour of a new one.” Moreover, IBC acknowledges the extreme density of the NT’s allusions to, and explicit citations of, the OT. Still, I am not always sure how much Dupuis has made himself aware of the conceptual trajectories across the OT that each concept has taken; or how those trajectories may have influenced John’s appropriation of them for his prologue.

Dupuis appeals to the opinion of biblical scholar John L. McKenzie for his opinion on the source for the usage of the concept logos (Gk. “word”) in John 1. McKenzie writes that the OT concept of dabar is a sufficient enough to explain the evangelist’s use of the term. That may be so. But Dupuis fails to mention McKenzie’s further revelation that in the later Jewish scriptures (e.g. the Book of Deuteronomy and Ps 119), the concept of dabar or “word” had become almost totally assimilated into the Pentateuch, especially the law of Moses:

The Law has assimilated into itself the word of the prophet, the torah of the priest and the wisdom of the sage; each of these earlier charisms has lost its identity in the Law (italics in original).

The same development can be found in regard to the idea of “Lady Wisdom,” or chokmah. As Roland E. Murphy describes, in the later Jewish scriptures the concept of the divine chokmah became exclusivized as the sole possession of the people of Israel. To the Jews alone had God given wisdom through His revelation of the Torah. Assuming (as Dupuis does) that John’s prologue has relied on the OT concepts of dabar and chokmah, the question can be asked: Does that mean the evangelist himself has also meant to adopt the exclusivist understanding of the terms found in the OT’s later scriptures? Or, has the evangelist changed their exclusivism? Dupuis never asks these questions. This is unfortunate, since scholar Reginald H. Fuller himself believes that John’s prologue offers a rereading of the later OT’s

889 IBC, III.A.2.
891 McKenzie, Myths and Realities, 56–57.
892 Roland E. Murphy, “Introduction to Wisdom Literature,” in NJBC, 27:17. For example, the author of Sirach identifies wisdom with “the book of the covenant of the Most High God” (Sir 24:23; cf. also vv. 8–10). Cf. also the following from the hymn to wisdom contained in the Book of Baruch:

[Blessed are we, O Israel;
For what pleases God is known to us!] (Bar 4:1, 4).
exclusivism in regard to God’s wisdom in such wise as to portray the Logos’ revelatory activity as universal in scope.\textsuperscript{893} Surely, noting this instance of John’s relecture of OT tradition would have strengthened Dupuis’s arguments in favour of the positive value of other religions.\textsuperscript{894}

As per IBC, the practice of the historico-critical method also necessarily includes using redaction criticism which looks at “the modifications that [biblical] texts have undergone before being fixed in their final state . . . trying as far as possible to identify the tendencies particularly characteristic of this concluding process.”\textsuperscript{895} The PBC acknowledges, moreover, that in the course of the Bible’s formation its various contents have been reworked and reinterpretet.\textsuperscript{896} On Dupuis’s own admission, the evangelist did not just take up the idea of the Word or the “Logos hymn” without any change: John redacted it; he added to it. What do those changes mean? Assuming—as Dupuis appears to do in his response to Gispert-Sauch above—that the original hymn focused on the perduring character of the Word’s enlightenment of humanity without any particular reference to the Word’s incarnation as Jesus Christ, then what are we to make of the evangelist’s retouching of that hymn so that the Word’s incarnation as Christ has been insinuated throughout? These are questions Dupuis does not ask in his own exegesis of the text, however.

4. Rhetorical Criticism and Paul’s Speech before the Areopagus in Acts 17

IBC detects how the NT authors “naturally [have had] recourse to the ideas [connaissances] and procedures for interpretation current in their time.” Catholic exegetes, recommends the document, should acquire the knowledge of these ancient techniques, so that he or she can interpret correctly how they are

\textsuperscript{893} Reginald H. Fuller, \textit{The Foundations of New Testament Christology}, Fontana Library of Theology and Philosophy (n.p., 1965; reprint, London: Collins, 1969), 223, 225–26 (page numbers from reprint edition). The same observation is found in one of Dupuis’s own resources for his interpretation of the prologue, namely, André Feuillet. Feuillet argues that by having spoken about the Word’s enlightenment of all humankind, John the evangelist attributes to the Word a universal action comparable to that of OT wisdom (cf. Feuillet, \textit{Prologue du quatrième évangile}, 240). Dupuis, however, seems to have been unaware of this supportive comment from one of his authorities.

\textsuperscript{894} As a matter of fact, Dupuis’s insights into the word and wisdom motifs found in John’s prologue seem to me to be somewhat prosaic. He writes that in OT theology God’s word and wisdom stand as dynamic attributes of God’s historical self-revelation in word and deed to which the OT authors later gave literary or poetic personification. God’s universal manifestation through His Word has culminated in Jesus Christ, revealing that “through his incarnation the Logos is . . . a person distinct from God, yet one who shared . . . in the divine life ‘in the beginning’ [Jn 1:1]” (\textit{TCTR}, 51). Does John’s prologue have no more to say theologically than just disclosing that the Word has had a distinct existence since the time of creation? Also, where has the wisdom motif gone?


\textsuperscript{896} IBC, III.A.3.
used in the Bible. Does Dupuis make an effort to understand and utilize the ideas and interpretive procedures used by Luke in his composition of Paul’s speech in Acts 17?

In his earlier writings like *JCHS, WDYSIA?* and *TCTR*, I would have to say: ordinarily “no.” In his later work, though, Dupuis does make the attempt to add the insights of rhetorical criticism to his discussion of Acts 17:23b. In that place, St. Paul states to the members of the Areopagus:

“What therefore you unknowingly worship, I proclaim to you.”

Dupuis believes that this verse’s function within the speech “must be seen correctly.” Paul’s statement in v. 23b is a *propositio*, that is, the announcement of the theme of his argument which will be developed further. The development of Paul’s theme will occur in the *probatio* of the speech (i.e. vv. 24–29). In Dupuis’s view, Acts 17:23b functions as “the key to the interpretation of [Paul’s] entire speech.”

Granting that Dupuis is correct in assuming that Acts 17:23b comprises the *propositio* of Paul’s speech, why does it matter? For Dupuis, it matters greatly. The statement in the *propositio* of Paul’s speech is tantamount to an affirmation that “[t]he Gentiles worship in a situation of ‘not-knowing.’” Such “ignorance,” Dupuis claims, is an essentially religious ignorance, since the Athenians lack the “knowledge” that Christians have from the resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, the *propositio* shows that human beings can open up in the very depths of their being or existence to an authentic encounter with God. That experience has an intense spiritual value, although only Christians bear the light of revelation that has been enkindled in them by their acceptance of the gospel. Understood in this way, St. Paul’s speech offers an unquestionably important contribution to a Christian understanding of other religions.

This newfound argument in Dupuis’s writings has come from the work of biblical scholar Giovanni Odasso, who himself has based his own rhetorical analysis of the Areopagus speech on an

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897 *IBC*, III.A.2.

898 Whereas the historicity of the discourses reported by Luke in Acts of the Apostles was once taken more or less for granted, the scene in NT studies changed with the publication of Martin Dibelius’s book, *Aufsätze zur Apostelgeschichte* (published in English as: *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Mary Ling, ed. Heinrich Greeven [London: SCM Press, 1956]). The consensus opinion among NT scholars now is that the speeches found in Acts are the peculiar creations of Luke and not actual reportage of Paul’s statements. I am assuming the current consensus opinion throughout.

899 *CR*, 36 (cf. *TCTR*, 50). Rhetorical criticism analyzes the textual strategies through which a discourse’s communicative aims are achieved. The underlying assumption is that a text reveals the contexts of both the author and the reader. According to biblical scholar Sandra M. Schneiders, “rhetorical criticism is interested . . . in the rules and devices for argumentation used by the writer [and] . . . all the strategies whereby the interests, values and emotions of readers . . . are engaged” (Sandra M. Schneiders, in Brown and Schneiders, in *NJBC*, 71:65–66 passim).

hypothesis proposed in an article by Dean W. Zweck. Zweck proposes to divide Paul’s discourse into three major parts:

- vv. 22–23: the *exordium* (ending with the *propositio*);
- vv. 24–29: the *probatio*;
- vv. 30–31: the *peroratio*.¹⁰²

Odasso, like Dupuis above, believes that individuating the exact function of St. Paul’s solemn affirmation in Acts 17:23 is “indispensabile” and “of fundamental importance.” He writes:

> The fact that the declaration of v. 23b . . . announces the theme that is developed . . . is not only decisive for gathering the sense and the objective of the discourse itself, but is also fundamental for understanding the significance of the announcement of the Gospel in the world of the Gentiles.¹⁰³

He continues later:

> Taken in an isolated sense, the sentence can certainly be interpreted in a positive perspective in the encounter [*nei confronti*] of religions. The announcement of the Gospel comes to people [*giunge a persone*] who, although not knowing it, are in a relationship of adoration with the God Who reveals Himself in the Risen Christ.¹⁰⁴

Odasso concedes, though, that “[t]he validity of this interpretation . . . in the context of Acts 17, is not immediately evident” and needs to be demonstrated.¹⁰⁵ His procedure is unlike that of Dupuis who seems to presume *a priori* that St. Paul’s statement in Acts 17:23b already and necessarily contains an affirmation of the positive value of the pagan Athenians’ religious experience. Whereas Dupuis cites Odasso’s conclusions—obviously congenial to Dupuis’s own “inclusivist-pluralist” viewpoint—he does not apparently feel the need to demonstrate why those conclusions are proper and justified.

Surely, Dupuis is to be applauded (as per IBC’s recommendation above) for having brought the fruits of the study of ancient rhetoric to his analysis of Acts 17. This adds a level of sophistication to his hermeneutic. It also demonstrates his concern for trying to understand as accurately as possible what Luke intends to convey in his account of Paul’s discourse before the Areopagus. Yet in the end I think that Dupuis places too much importance on the certainty of meaning that an interpretation of the Bible

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¹⁰³ Odasso, 342.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 336 (cf. also pp. 345, 346–47).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 336.
based on the standards of ancient rhetoric can give. Rhetoric, both ancient and modern, is an art and not an exact science. It should come as no surprise, then, that in ancient Greece and Rome theories abounded about the nature and practice of oratory. To name just a few examples from western antiquity, we have: Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*; Cicero’s *Partitiones Oratoriae*; the anonymously written *Rhetorica ad Herennium*; the dialogues on rhetoric by Plato (viz. *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*); and—last, but not least—Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (*Rhet.*).

Odasso, Dupuis’s resource, ascribes preeminent status to Aristotle’s book, *Rhetoric*, for his own understanding of the function of Acts 17:23b in Paul’s speech. Yet Odasso fails to explain clearly why, out of all the works on rhetoric above, Aristotle’s ideas should hold the dominant sway. Moreover, if Aristotle is to be used, then it is notable that neither Odasso nor Dupuis seems to have been aware of the possible contradictions between their own assertions on the role of the *propositio* in a speech and Aristotle’s positions in *Rhetoric*. For instance, Aristotle outlines as the essence of any speech: to state one’s subject (the *prothesis*) and to prove it (the *pistis*). He writes:

> [T]he necessary parts of a speech are *the statement of the case and proof*. These divisions are appropriate to every speech, and at the most the parts are four in number—exordium, statement, proof, epilogue; for refutation of an opponent is part of the *proofs*, and comparison is an amplification of one’s own case, and therefore also part of the *proofs*; for he who does this proves something, whereas the exordium and the epilogue are merely aids to memory (emphasis added).\(^906\)

Thus, it would seem that for Aristotle the major part of any speech is the *pistis* which is the equivalent to what is called the *probatio* in Latin authors on rhetoric. While the statement of theme (the *propositio* in Latin) is important, Aristotle does not believe it is required for each and every speech, like in the case of a “deliberative speech” when the listeners are acquainted already with the subject.\(^907\) In other words, it would appear that, contrary to Dupuis’s and Odasso’s claims, the only indispensable and fundamental part for any speech in Aristotle’s view is the *pistis* or the proof—not the *prothesis* wherein one announces the theme. To put it another way: The *propositio* of a speech reveals the topic on which a speaker will speak, but it does not necessarily reveal how that speaker will speak. For that, it would have made more sense for Dupuis to have focused his attentions on the *pistis* or *probatio* of Paul’s discourse (i.e. Acts 17:24–29) in order to see if he developed his *propositio* in a positive or negative direction.

5. The Intertextual Relationship of Acts 17 and Romans 1

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IBC affirms the presence of intertextual relationships not just between the OT and NT, but also among the NT texts through the juxtaposition of different perspectives. The Bible, it states, is “a symphony of many voices” and any interpretation of it must allow for that plurality. Dupuis also recognizes the existence of a plurality and diversity of views in the NT: in other words, that its testimony is not monolithic.

At the beginning of the Letter to the Romans (1:18–23), St. Paul proffers a severely negative arraignment of the gentile world’s idolatry. Since God’s “invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity” (v. 20) could have been gleaned from a consideration of the created world, pagan humanity has had “no excuse” for not according God glory and thanks (v. 21). Instead, the gentiles have foolishly perverted their knowledge of “the glory of the immortal God” for the worship of creaturely idols in the form of human beings, birds, animals and so forth (vv. 22–23). One could note several examples of both conceptual and verbal intertextuality between Rom 1 and Paul’s speech in Acts 17. For instance, the theme of knowledge versus ignorance is highlighted (cf. e.g. ginōskō and its forms in Rom 1:19, 21 and Acts 17:23, 30). The manufacture of idols is expressly critiqued (cf. Acts 17:23, 24–25a, 29 with Rom 1:18). One can also note the use of related words: Asebeia in Rom 1:18 is an antonym for eusebeia (cf. e.g. Acts 17:23). There is also the presence of cognate forms for “divinity”: Theotēs in Rom 1:20 and to theion in Acts 17:29. Other verbal connections are clearer like the use of the word kosmos for the world and the verb poieō to denote its creation by God (cf. Rom 1:20 with Acts 17:24, 26). Yet none of these possible linkages of ideas and language between Acts 17 and Rom 1 is treated at all by Dupuis.

In one of the few instances where he does indeed note an intertextual relationship between Rom 1 and Acts 17, Dupuis opines merely that in Acts 17:25–27 St. Paul marks a return to his doctrine stated in Rom 1 about God’s revelation to all peoples through the cosmos. But as biblical scholar Lucien Legrand remarks:

There is a spectacular contrast between Acts 17 and Rom 1. This contrast is one of the strong arguments to prove the redactional activity of Luke in Acts. It could hardly be the same man who wrote Rom 1 and pronounced the sermon of Acts 17.

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908 IBC, III.A.2.
909 IBC, III.A.3.
910 Cf. WDSIA?, 75 (cf. also pp. 9–10, 21, 73–76).
911 The Greek word “foolish [asynetos]” used in Rom 1:21 comes from the verb asyniēmi which means: “to be without comprehension.”
912 TCTRP, 49–50. In that place, Paul proclaims to the members of the Areopagus: “[God is not] served by human hands because He needs anything. Rather, it is He Who gives . . . life and breath and everything. He made . . . the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth; and He fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:24–27).
Dupuis’s contention about Paul’s having marked a “return” to his previous doctrine seems to take for granted that Acts 17 contains actual reportage of Paul’s discourse rather than as an example of a free creation by Luke. Therefore, Dupuis does not have to address the possible plurality and diversity of views mentioned by IBC above, namely, how Luke’s account of Paul’s speech may possibly represent a reinterpretation of the latter’s teaching. Thus, the “symphony” of perspectives described by IBC is reduced to one instrument.

6. The Statement of God’s Universal Salvific Will in 1 Tim 2:4

The avowal of God’s universal salvific will for humankind in 1 Tim 2:4 is an important text for Dupuis. Yet he offers little, if any, exegesis of it throughout his book *TCTRP*. Where Dupuis does make attempts to refer to the Bible, the results are more often than not incomplete and unsatisfactory. For example, he states that “it must be affirmed” that both the world’s history and salvation history coincide. And since human history is the story of “God-with-humankind,” it implies that from the beginning and “at all times” God’s revelation and salvation have been present. He continues, claiming that “[t]he New Testament’s unambiguous assertion that God ‘wills (thelei) all human beings to be saved’ (1 Tim 2:4) supposes no less” (italics in original). But Dupuis’s mentioning of the Greek verb *ethelō* (“to will; to wish or desire”) leaves me puzzled. Why is it here? What does it indicate? Could it simply be a matter of Dupuis’s showing that he was familiar with 1 Tim’s Greek text? While I can see how one might infer the presence of God’s salvation from His “will [thelēsis]” to save, I do not see the necessary connection between the First Letter to Timothy’s use of *ethelō* in this place and the necessary presence of divine revelation to humankind.

Dupuis resumes with the claim that God’s universal, salvific will cannot be reduced “to some kind of conditional and ineffective wish or velleity.” God’s will in this regard is “subject to no condition other than each human person’s free acceptance of God’s gratuitous self-manifestation and self-bestowal.” I am not clear how Dupuis can maintain that God’s will in 1 Tim 2:4 is not tied to any conditions, especially when the passage also states that He wills (thelei) all people “to come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4b). For the author, this apparently means accepting the message of the gospel.

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913 Legrand, “Unknown God of Athens,” 230. Not that Legrand intends to oppose Luke and Paul as representing two mentalities or two spiritualities. That would be a “superficial” view (ibid.).

914 *TCTRP*, 217.

915 “Middle Liddell,” 225.

916 *TCTRP*, 217.
Biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson writes that “Paul is convinced that it is through the gift of Christ Jesus that humans can be saved and come to a recognition of truth (2:4). Otherwise, he would not be a herald and an apostle of this message.”

As a matter of fact, it could seem that the author has placed a very clear condition on God’s salvific will when he proclaims the unique, mediatorial role of Christ immediately after v. 4:

For there is one God [Eis gar theos].
There is also one Mediator
Between God and the human race,
Christ Jesus, Himself human (1 Tim 2:5).

Dupuis, though, does not see this statement as a condition per se, rather as a sign that God does will efficaciously the salvation of all. This, he claims, is indicated by the use of the preposition gar in 1 Tim 2:5a. This is an unfortunate lapse, however, for the word gar (“in fact, indeed, for”) is not a preposition at all. According to Herbert Weir Smyth’s A Greek Grammar for Colleges, it is used in classical and NT Greek as “a confirmatory adverb and a causal conjunction.” The word is “especially common in sentences which offer a reason for, or an explanation of, a preceding or following statement.”

Thus, the word gar would seem to create a much stronger linkage between God’s will to save and to impart the truth (1 Tim 2:4) and the mediatorship of the man, Christ Jesus (v. 5).

Nevertheless, asserts Dupuis, underlying the affirmation of God’s universal and saving will in 1 Tim 2:4, lies the principle of God’s non-partiality. Evinced by St. Peter’s encounter with the pagan Cornelius in Acts (cf. chap. 10) and taught by St. Paul in the Letter to the Romans (cf. chap. 2), God’s non-partiality serves as the foundation for recognizing the operative presence of salvation outside Judaism and Christianity. The mediation of Christ as stated in 1 Tim does not contradict that recognition; rather it presumes and confirms it.

Not all scholars find in 1 Tim 2 a clear statement of God’s non-partiality in regard to salvation—especially salvation in His Son. Johnson writes on the relationship between 1 Tim 2:4 and 5:

To the principle of God’s universal will for salvation, Paul adds another and more paradoxical claim: “One also is the mediator between God and humans, the human being Christ Jesus” (2:5).

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918 CR, 42.


920 CR, 41–42 passim.
At first, this may seem to contradict the earlier proposition, for it introduces an element of particularity. That is why it is important to observe that . . . Jesus is mediator . . . on the basis of his very humanity. Jesus is the representative human before the one God. . . . As the one God wills the salvation of all, the one mediator gives himself for all.

Certainly an element of particularity remains. . . . But this particularity . . . is not rooted in an ethnic or a cultic difference, but in a shared humanity through which God seeks to reach all people. Nowhere in the New Testament is such an inclusive hope for humanity comparably expressed. The presence of such a statement in this place is especially noteworthy because the passage following it moves in such a different direction. 921

C. Interpretation according to Church Tradition

1. Genesis 9 and Irenaeus of Lyons’ Scheme of God’s Four Covenants with Humanity

IBC asserts that the church fathers play “a foundational role” in the church’s sacred tradition, accompanying and guiding her reading and interpretation of sacred scripture. They have drawn out basic, theological orientations from the Bible so as to shape Catholic doctrine and provide nourishment and instruction for the Christian faithful. 922 I think that it is safe to say that Dupuis himself respects both the church fathers’ position and role in the interpretation of scripture. This can be seen from his own application to Gen 9 of the fourfold scheme of God’s covenants with humankind proposed by the second-century theologian, St. Irenaeus of Lyons. 923

In a famous passage from his magnum opus Adversus Haereses, Irenaeus identifies four divine covenants in the Bible: one with Adam; one with Noah; one with Moses; and one through Jesus the Christ. It might be helpful to reproduce it here again:

For the living creatures are quadriform and the Gospel is quadriform, as is also the course followed by the Lord. For this reason were four principal . . . covenants given to the human race: one, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom. 924

According to Dupuis in TCTR, Irenaeus’ proposal of successive covenants illustrates the “continuity-in-discontinuity” of God’s historical manifestations through His Word. Dupuis continues: The Adamic and

921 Johnson, First and Second Letters to Timothy, 197.

922 IBC, III.B.2.

923 Cf. TCTR, 64 (cf. also pp. 78 and 225).

924 Irenaeus, Haer. 3.11.8.
Noachic covenants identified by Irenaeus are universal since they reflect God’s manifestation to humanity throughout history, even from the beginning of creation.\textsuperscript{925}

Dupuis is quite adamant in his writings, however, about the need for an “hermeneutical,” or contextual (or inductive), approach to the craft of theology. Theologians, he maintains, can no longer settle for interpreting statements from the Bible, the church fathers or ecclesiastical documents out of their context; rather an hermeneutico-contextual approach ought to be combined with the deductive approach.\textsuperscript{926} But in my own reading of \textit{Haer.} 3.11.8 I would argue that Dupuis does not follow the path he himself has outlined in favour of a contextual approach. On the contrary, he seems to denude Irenaeus’ statement from its context, preferring rather an interpretation which fits in with Dupuis’s “aprioristic” assumption regarding the existence of God’s multiple salvific covenants with humankind.

Irenaeus’ purpose in \textit{Haer.} 3.11.8 appears to be to explain why there exist four different versions of the gospel about Christ. In fact, he opens the section with the “aprioristic” declaration:

\begin{quote}
It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{927}
\end{quote}

Just as there are four zones of the world, just as there are four principal winds, just as there are four faces to the cherubim upon which God sits (cf. Ps 80:1), just as there are four living creatures in the heavenly court (see Rev 4:6b–8)—in just the same way, reasons Irenaeus, the gospel must be fourfold. He continues: To the “patriarchs” before Moses, the Word appeared according to His glorious divinity. But to those living under the law of Moses, He was manifested through their priestly worship. Later, the Word appeared to humankind in the flesh as man. From all this data, Irenaeus is led to conclude:

\begin{quote}
Such . . . as was the course followed by the Son of God, so was also the form of the living creatures; and such as was the form of the living creatures, so was also the character of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{928}
\end{quote}

But Dupuis gives the impression that St. Irenaeus’ purpose in \textit{Haer.} 3.11.8 is to assert, based on a reading of sacred scripture, the abiding presence of four divine covenants with humankind.\textsuperscript{929} Yet to me Irenaeus’ reference to the fourfold scheme of God’s covenants does not sound like a matter of theological principle drawn from the biblical data. His purpose is apologetical and not entirely concerned with constructing an argument based on the Bible for a multiplicity of saving covenants between God and humankind. IBC

\textsuperscript{925} TCTR, 78.

\textsuperscript{926} Cf. TCTR, 15–19 passim, 30. Cf. also CR, 8, 18–19, 66, 262.

\textsuperscript{927} Irenaeus, \textit{Haer.} 3.11.8.

\textsuperscript{928} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{929} Cf. TCTR, 225.
cautions that the church fathers’ hermeneutic of the Bible “paid scant attention” to its historical
development.930 That might explain why the establishment of a covenant between God and the patriarch
Abraham (cf. Gen 15) is completely lacking in Irenaeus’ scheme—as also God’s covenant with David
(see 2 Sam 7). Clearly, a certain arbitrariness inhabits St. Irenaeus’ scheme that Dupuis does not admit.

2. The Word/Logos of John’s Prologue and the Documents of Vatican II

IBC asserts the Holy Spirit’s help, promised by Christ Himself, in the church’s ever-deepening
and progressive understanding of God’s revelation in the scriptures.931 The successors to the apostles, the
church’s bishops, are “the first witnesses and guarantors of the living Tradition” which they are charged
to guard faithfully.932 I think that in Dupuis’s scholarly work he demonstrates his acceptance of the
institutional church’s role in the interpretation and clarification of sacred scripture. Some of the patristic
authorities to whom he appeals above have been bishops (e.g. Irenaeus), and he cites frequently from the
documents of the church’s magisterium. Indeed, a notable portion of TCTR is devoted to an evaluation
of the church’s magisterium.933

The fact that God always speaks through His Word, contends Dupuis, is “clearly implied” by vv.
1–3 and v. 9 of John’s prologue. Vatican II has these verses in mind when it affirms, for example, that
the non-Judeo-Christian religions possess “a ray of that truth which enlightens everyone” (NA, no. 2).
Furthermore, he claims that the same reference to the prologue seems to have been implied in the
council’s “repeated appeal” (Dupuis’s words) in AG to the “seeds of the Word” found in other religions.
He argues that these are “two themes which unmistakably go back to the Word in the prologue of John’s
Gospel (cf. Jn 1:4–5, 9).” 934

Dupuis never addresses perhaps the most obvious objection to these statements: If the authors of
both Nostra Aetate and Ad Gentes had intended to refer in some way to the verses of the prologue of
John’s gospel, then why in neither document did they insert any kind of citation of or reference to the
prologue? Dupuis mentions the problem in his last book CR where he admits that the alleged reference to
the Johannine prologue in NA has “[u]nfortunately” been kept “implicit” by the text.935 The same kind of

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930 IBC, III.B.2.
931 IBC, III.B.
932 IBC, III.B.3.
933 Cf. TCTR, 93–96, 99–102, 120–29, 158–79. This list is by no means meant to be exhaustive.
problem arises in regard to his appeal to Vatican II’s statements about “seeds of the Word” in AG. The decree uses the expression in four places (i.e. in AG, nos. 6, 11, 15, 22). Still, in none of those places does one find an accompanying reference to John’s prologue. The reason for this lacuna may be obvious, namely, there was in fact no intent whatsoever by the document’s crafters to infer a reference to the Johannine prologue.

Only in AG no. 11 do I find an instance of the idea of “seeds” being connected with an allusion to the Word/Logos of John’s prologue. In that place the bishops encourage Catholics to detect with joy and reverence whatever “seeds of the Word [semina Verbi]” may lie hidden in the socio-cultural and religious life of their native communities.936 Let the reader note the important presence of capitalization. Is the phrase meant to signal Dupuis’s idea of the “Word as such” whose saving and revelatory presence yet exists among humanity in contradistinction to the Word’s incarnation as Jesus Christ? The document’s reference to the presence of the Word’s seeds, instead of to the Word Himself, leads me to think that it is not so. Also, the fact that John’s prologue has no cognate idea for “seeds” indicates to me that perhaps another source lies behind the council’s expression above, namely, Jesus’ “Parable of the Sower” (cf. Matt 13:1–9, 18–23 // Mark 4:1–9, 13–20 // Luke 8:4–9, 11–15). Still, except for this one instance, wherever else AG mentions “the seed of the word of God” (e.g. in nos. 6 and 22) or “the seed of the word” (e.g. in no. 15) the evidence tends toward indicating that the authors have had in mind “the word of God” contained in the Christian scriptures, namely the gospels. I think that this is evident not only from the context of each passage, but also from AG’s use of capitalization in the Latin text (i.e. verbum versus Verbum).937 The following text is illustrative:

The principal means of this implanting [of the church] is the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was to proclaim this gospel that the Lord sent his disciples over the whole world so that people, reborn by means of the word of God [per verbum Dei renati], might be joined through baptism to the church which, as the body of the incarnate Word [ut Verbi incarnati corpus], receives nourishment and life from the word of God [ex verbo Dei] and the eucharistic bread.938

Dupuis himself later admitted that in the end he could not resolve the matter. In CR he writes that Vatican II has taken a variety of expressions from “the early tradition” without defining their meaning clearly and exactly. The council never indicates how the phrase “seeds of the Word” should be understood. In the end he believes that “[t]he council has left us in doubt about its true intentions on the

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936 AG, no. 11 (cf. Tanner, 2:1020).

937 Cf. also AG, no. 15, where the council proclaims: “The holy Spirit . . . calls all to Christ by means of the seed of the word [per semina verbi] and the preaching of the gospel” (cf. Tanner, 2:1023). N.B. Michael G. O’Brien’s English translation of AG for Tanner changes the Latin text’s semina—which is plural—to the singular. I do not know why.

Due to the lack of capitalization for the word verbum, I would view the document’s statement to be hendiadys, meaning: “by the seed of the word which is the preaching of the gospel.”

938 AG, no. 6 (cf. Tanner, 2:1015–16).
matter. While the general assessment of the religions sounds rather positive, it still suffers from a certain vagueness.\(^{939}\) For his part, Courtemanche agrees with this view writing that Dupuis “deplores with reason the ambiguity which surrounds the concept of the ‘seeds of the Word’ mentioned in the conciliar documents.”\(^{940}\) Yet, as I have just shown above, the concept of “the seeds of the Word” (at least, as it appears in Vatican II’s AG) is not as ambiguous or as vague as either Dupuis or Courtemanche may believe. The “vagueness” of the concept in the conciliar documents perceived by Dupuis derives, I think, from the fact that he wants to see a clear reference to the Word/Logos whereas, in the case of the statements in AG above, that idea is probably not the primary one intended.

3. Dupuis’s Comment on a Citation of Paul’s Areopagus Speech in Clement of Alexandria

Dupuis notes the following comment on St. Paul’s discourse to the Areopagus in Clement of Alexandria’s Stromateis, where the latter writes:

[[It is evident that the apostle, by availing himself of poetical examples from the Phenomena of Aratus, approves of what had been well spoken by the Greeks; and intimates that, by the unknown God, God the Creator was in a roundabout way worshipped \(\text{\textit{timasthai}}\) by the Greeks; but that it was necessary by positive knowledge \(\text{\textit{kat\'epignōsin}}\) to apprehend and learn Him by the Son (italics in original).]\(^{941}\)

Commenting on this passage, Dupuis maintains that it is in “philosophy” as thus understood that Clement, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus of Lyons recognize the Word’s preparation of pagan humanity for the message about Jesus Christ. He continues:

The Wisdom of God present in the one [viz. whatever has been well said by pagan philosophy] and the other [viz. Jesus] functioned as the meeting point between them. The patristic theme of the “seeds of the Word” offers, today, a valid foundation for a positive approach to the “religions”

\(^{939}\) CR, 63–64. Dupuis offers a surprisingly negative evaluation of the Vatican II documents in this, his last book, calling the openness of the council’s teaching on other religions “limited and scant [\text{\textit{parsimoniosa}}]” (CR, 259; cf. CR-It, 476). Moreover, he faults the council for the “ecclesiocentric angle of vision” with which it talks about and judges the value of other religions (see CR, 65–66). Noting the overall “silences and limits” of the council’s teachings on the religious “other,” Dupuis admits that, when reading some of Vatican II’s texts forty years later, he experiences feelings of “disillusionment and dissatisfaction” with its doctrine regarding the non-Judeo-Christian religions. Some expressions used in the conciliar documents now sound bad to him in the contemporary context of interreligious dialogue: “Obviously, the council did not yet have the sensitivity that postconciliar theology has fortunately developed toward the ‘others’ and their traditions” (p. 66).

\(^{940}\) Courtemanche, 324.

\(^{941}\) The Greek verb \textit{timao} means “honour or revere” (see “Middle Liddell,” 807). It does not carry the connotation of adoration or worship, for which one would use: \textit{proskynēsis} and \textit{proskyneō} (ibid., 693). It would appear then that the translators of the \textit{ANF} series have opted to translate Clement’s \textit{timasthai} according to its obsolete Anglo-Saxon meaning (i.e. \textit{weorthscipe}), rather than the modern English one.
inasmuch as in them too, thanks to the active presence of the Word of God, justice and piety . . . are not wanting.\textsuperscript{942}

Within this statement by Dupuis there resides a sort of mish-mash of ideas taken from both Clement of Alexandria and Justin Martyr. One might object that Dupuis bends the data a little too much in his favour, especially with his reference to the “active presence” of the divine Logos in the religions of pagan humanity. That caveat aside, however, I would tend to concur with his overall judgment that the recognition of God’s presence among pagan humanity—no matter how indirectly affirmed—does yet offer “a valid foundation for a positive approach” toward non-Christians as he argues. This is so, I believe, even regardless of the further question of whether God’s presence is found only in the natural virtues and genius of human societies and culture or whether it is also to be found within humankind’s religious beliefs and structures.

Be that as it may, the nature of what Clement is actually saying above about Paul’s procedure in Acts 17 should be investigated somewhat further, to wit: Paul approves only of what has been “well spoken” about God by pagans (in this case, the Athenian Greeks). Is this a datum in favour of the positive evaluation of non-Christians religions? Certainly. But one cannot overlook the negative datum which also may be inferred, namely, that there are ideas about God circulating among pagans which are “ill spoken,” that is, wrong. Further, Clement notes St. Paul’s citation of a bit of poetry by the pagan author, Aratus (cf. Acts 17:28). Surely, that can be seen as a positive affirmation of Greek knowledge. Yet it is interesting that Clement does not cite Paul’s acknowledgement of the Athenians’ religiosity (v. 23b). Nor does he mention Paul’s statement regarding their altar dedicated to the “Unknown God” (vv. 22b–23). Does that silence provide a contrary datum: evidence possibly of Clement’s negative valuation of pagan religiosity? Clement writes that St. Paul “intimates” to his pagan interlocutors they have “worshipped” (read: honoured) “God the Creator . . . in a roundabout way.” Read in this way, the citation from Clement’s \textit{Stromateis} above does not appear as indicative as Dupuis may have hoped. I bring all of this up as a counterpoint to Dupuis’s own tendency sometimes to overestimate or maximalize the evidence he uses.

Moreover, Clement of Alexandria concludes that, whatever “well spoken” knowledge the Greeks may have had about God, the \textit{epignōsis} or “full knowledge” about God is brought to pagan humanity through His Son Jesus. In its verbal form (i.e. \textit{epigignōskō}), it indicates knowledge that one receives from looking upon or witnessing something, which leads one almost effortlessly to think of the incarnation of the Word as described in the Johannine literature (cf. John 1:14; 1 John 1:1–3).\textsuperscript{943} There is then little

\textsuperscript{942} \textit{TCTRIP}, 71. Cf. also idem, “Truth Will Make You Free,” 222.

\textsuperscript{943} See “Middle Liddell,” 289.
reason for Dupuis’s idea of a “Word as such,” for as per Clement’s doctrine the fullness of salvific knowledge about God has of necessity been revealed in His incarnate Son.

D. Interpretation according to Modern Exegesis

1. Dupuis’s Use of the Historico-Critical Method Regarding God’s Covenant with Noah in Genesis 9

A recurrent (and somewhat disconcerting) aspect of Dupuis’s use of the Bible in his theology is the almost completely derivative quality of his work. Surely, I recognize that all scholarship is to some degree “derivative” of other scholars’ work. No scholar lives on an island working in isolation. And I would certainly expect in a person’s scholarly work that he or she would appeal to other scholars in the field in order to show support for the case which he or she is trying to make. Indeed, IBC concedes that the exegetical task is “far too large [trop vaste]” for just any one person and it recommends interdisciplinary collaboration among scholars, so that they may overcome the limitations of specialization. 944 So, by calling his work “derivative” let the reader note that I am not in any way questioning Dupuis’s procedure of having relied on the scholarship of others in his own research and argumentation. This type of procedure is common to and typical of the scholarly project. By “derivative,” I mean that Dupuis can at times tend to use the work of other scholars in a somewhat naive and ingenuous way without attending to—or sometimes even mentioning!—any disputed or problematic points that may exist in another person’s scholarship. IBC asks Catholic exegetes to pay “due attention” to the Bible’s historical character, repeating its instruction that they must avail themselves the historico-critical method. 945 Instead, as I hope to demonstrate below, Dupuis himself seldom delves into the task of exegeting the Bible. On the contrary, he oftentimes relies on the work of other scholars who either (like himself) are not recognized in the field of biblical studies or who themselves only use the historico-critical study of the Bible in their own work in an infrequent manner. This can sometimes lead him into methodological mistakes as well as misreading the Bible. 946

A case in point is Dupuis’s contention that Gen 9:8–17 testifies to the establishment of a “cosmic covenant” between God and Noah. As far as I can tell, Dupuis’s employment of this idea has not come from his own analysis of the Bible in the Book of Genesis. Nor has it apparently come from his own consultation of the work of biblical scholars and their commentaries on the passage. On the contrary, the

944 IBC, III.C.2 (cf. IBC-Fr, 508).
946 Still, Dupuis did not train as a biblical scholar and, so, some of the issues noted below might have been due to his own lack of confidence in dealing with the historico-critical method and its data.
idea seems to have been taken over from the stages of God’s revelatory covenants with humankind proposed by French bishop and theologian Jean Daniélou.947 For example, in his book *The Faith Eternal and the Man of Today* Daniélou maintains:

Scripture is not silent about that moment of human history which is not yet Christian revelation, which is not even yet the revelation of Abraham, but which is what we may call cosmic revelation or the first stage of the history of revelations (emphasis added).948

The constitution of a “cosmic covenant” by God with pagan humanity is epitomized according to Daniélou in Gen 9’s reference to God’s covenantal relationship with the non-Israelite, Noah.949 Of course, the lines of this argument should sound familiar, since they appear similarly stated by Dupuis in *TCTRP*. He even adopts Daniélou’s language in describing the three stages of God’s revelation to humankind, calling it: “cosmic, Israelite and Christian.”950 By having adopted certain elements of Daniélou’s idea, Dupuis appears to take for granted that the former’s proposal regarding the Bible in Gen 9 is simply correct and self-evident.

The Bible’s assertion of a covenant between God and humankind which has preexisted God’s other several covenants with the people of Israel—even the one through His Son Jesus Christ—does surely seem to offer an attractive datum for making a theological analogy in regard to God’s continued providential relationship with the peoples of the world who have not and do not live under God’s covenant with Israel or the one made through His Son Jesus. The situation becomes even more appealing for someone like Dupuis who is committed to trying to construct a “Christian theology of religious pluralism” which exhibits an affirmative, open and positive outlook on non-Christians’ relationship with God. In its document, the PBC advises Catholic exegetes that they arrive at their “true goal [Le but]” when they have explained the Bible’s meaning in such a way that its message becomes actualized according to the needs of modern readers. Because the Bible contains the record of God’s offer of

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950 Cf. *TCTRP*, 251. Another of Daniélou’s ideas which finds its place in Dupuis’s biblical interpretation is the former’s assertion of “pagan saints” in the OT. Dupuis himself confesses in *TCTRP* that he has relied “much” on Daniélou for it (see p. 34 n. 7). In fact, the section in *TCTRP* dealing with the claim that “pagan saints” exist in the Bible reads like a catena of citations from Daniélou’s *Holy Pagans of OT* with little or no accompanying analysis by Dupuis (cf. *TCTRP*, 34–37 passim).

Theologian Harold Netland challenged Dupuis’s uncritical use of Daniélou’s theory writing that, whereas Dupuis “makes much” of Daniélou’s claim of “so called ‘pagan saints’ of the OT,” it was questionable whether the cases mentioned did in fact support the conclusion of God’s presence and saving activity in contemporary religions (Harold Netland, review of *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, by Jacques Dupuis, *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 20/1 [Spring 1999]: 110). Dupuis, however, never acknowledged or replied to Netland’s criticism.
salvation to all people, Catholic exegesis also “necessarily includes [comporte]” taking into account humanity’s religions as well as its “hopes and fears [attentes].”

Dupuis lived among the Christian minority of India for almost forty years. As he himself writes of his experiences, his sojourn within India’s multireligious, non-Christian context forced him “to revise altogether” his previously biased evaluation against non-Christian religions. He decided that his theological practice could no longer proceed along a priori, dogmatic lines; rather it had to begin with the experience of “lived reality” for which answers would then be sought in the light of scripture and tradition. This kind of theologizing “in context,” he opined, would also involve “a reinterpretation.”

I can understand, then, why Dupuis would have wanted to actualize the mention of God’s covenant with Noah in Gen 9 in a way that would highlight his own positive experience of non-Christians and their religions while having lived in India.

Still, I think that one should also remember IBC’s caution to Catholic scholars that their aim in exegesis is not to substitute the results of their own work—one could also add in this case “experience”—for the Bible. The aim of Catholic exegesis is to shed light on the Bible, so that it may be appreciated and understood better, that is, with more historical accuracy and spiritual depth. While one might be in the main supportive of Dupuis’s attempt to reinterpret the Noachic covenant of Gen 9 in a theologically positive way for non-Christians, one cannot also overlook the criticism levelled at Dupuis by biblical scholar Roland E. Murphy that his survey of the biblical data in TCTR is based on “inadequate, even mediocre exegesis.” Specifically, Murphy cites as a negative aspect Dupuis’s adoption of “the so-called ‘cosmic covenant’ of the Lord and Noah, proposed by Jean Daniélou.”

Dupuis died in 2004, and apparently never got a chance to respond to Murphy’s critique of his deployment of Daniélou’s “cosmic covenant” in his interpretation of Gen 9.

Dupuis, however, was aware of the challenge posed by theologian Leo Elders to the biblical exegesis offered in TCTR, especially his hypothesis on the salvific value of the Noachic covenant in Gen

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951 IBC, III.C.1 (cf. IBC-Fr, 507 and 508). Cf. also IBC, IV.A.

952 As Dupuis recalls:

I had gone to India with the prejudices enshrined in our western civilization and even in our Christian tradition. We thought we were the best, not to say the only ones, where civilization is concerned; we also had it engrained [sic] in us that Christianity was the only “true religion” and therefore the only one with an unquestionable right to exist. Not in the sense that there were no human values to be found in the religious life of the people we met and in the religious traditions to which they belonged . . . but these values were at best the expression in the various cultures of the universal aspiration toward the Infinite Being, innate in human nature itself. In the course of time, I came to realize that such a position was untenable and that we would have to revise our premises altogether (Dupuis, “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” 170).

953 Ibid.

954 IBC, III.C.4.

Dupuis responds to Elders’ critique of his reinterpretation of the Noachic covenant by repeating the “firm conclusion” of Bernhard Stoeckle (quoted above in chap. 3 of this thesis) that not only does the covenant with Noah delineated in Gen 9 constitute the foundation of salvation for all humanity, but that it also functions analogically in relationship to God’s covenantal relationship with the people of Israel. Dupuis adds:

That the perduring of the Mosaic covenant serves analogically as a model for a theology of religions which affirms the enduring value of the religious traditions represented by the covenant with Noah, [sic] has been suggested by different authors.957

But who these “different authors” who agree with Dupuis’s reading of Gen 9 are is anyone’s guess, for he never specifies any. As for Stoeckle, while his verdict on the positive value of God’s covenant with Noah is clearly supportive of Dupuis’s own view, it should be noted that Stoeckle’s proper specialization is in moral theology—and not biblical exegesis. Of course, that does not mean that Stoeckle’s opinion is suspect. Nor does it mean that as a moral theologian—or, for that matter, as a theologian generally—he is somehow less capable of practicing the exegesis of sacred scripture. I myself am an (aspiring) theologian who attempts to use the fruits of the modern historico-critical study of the Bible. So, I do not discount Dupuis’s appeal to Stoeckle’s scholarship. My point, however, is that: On such a controverted point as Dupuis’s contention of a “cosmic covenant” existing between God and Noah (and, hence, between all of humanity) I believe that Stoeckle is perhaps not the best choice for claiming ultimate support for that argument.

Furthermore, one can also point out how Dupuis does not actually address the critical analysis which Elders levels at Dupuis’s own interpretation of the covenant mentioned in Gen 9. Instead, he replies to it by merely reproducing—without any further comment—part of a longer quotation from Stoeckle that he has already used in TCTR. (Dupuis’s rather vague reference to other unnamed authors has already been noted.) There is no further exposition or substantiation by Dupuis of his view. Despite any contrary points that Elders either has raised or may still have raised against his hermeneutic, Dupuis apparently views the matter as if it were settled. Nevertheless, IBC declares in this section that the publication of one’s findings and ideas is the principal means for dialogue, discussion and cooperation among scholars. It provides Catholic exegetes the opportunity for interaction with other centres of research as well as the scholarly world in general.958 I am not convinced that Dupuis’s practice of simply

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958 IBC, III.C.4.
repeating what he has already written or cited in his previous works suffices to qualify as the “dialogue, discussion and cooperation” which the PBC’s documents recommends should be evident among scholars.

2. Dupuis’s Use of Exegetes’ Work in His Discussion of John’s Prologue

IBC commends the practice of publishing for the role it plays in the advancement of exegetical work. It is also “the principal means of dialogue, discussion, and cooperation” among scholars, both Catholic and non-Catholic alike. It is not apparent to me in regard to his theory of a “Word as such” found in John’s prologue that Dupuis had published it anywhere before his publication of TCTR P. Therefore, one could surmise that both the theoretical and exegetical novelty of the idea was untested when his book came out. Some reviewers challenged Dupuis’s reading of John’s prologue as it pertained to his idea of the “Word as such.” He defended his hermeneutic in subsequent articles citing the authority of certain biblical scholars. That new material was incorporated into his last book CR. I will not rehearse here Dupuis’s citations of the exegetical authorities mentioned above. Rather my purpose is to focus on how he has used them: Does he cite them properly? Do they agree with his interpretation of John’s prologue?

Only in WDYSIA?, Dupuis’s earlier book on Christology, does one find a detailed examination of John’s prologue: an exegesis which he stipulates will not be “elaborate.” Be that as it may, Dupuis’s discussion of the prologue in WDYSIA? is still quite cursory and unnuanced, for his actual exegesis of the prologue’s text does not even extend beyond one full page. Moreover, he fails to avail himself of the broad range of scholarship that has been produced on the Johannine corpus—in fact it is extremely thin. In the case of the exegesis of John’s prologue in WDYSIA? Dupuis cites the work of only two scholars: Rudolf Schnackenburg and Raymond E. Brown. While his own book was published in 1994, neither

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959 Ibid.

960 That might explain (to some extent) why Dupuis’s work had received such a preliminarily negative reaction in some quarters—perhaps even an overreaction. As Terrence Merrigan surmised in relation to the CDF’s investigation of TCTR P:

It would seem that the official inquiry into Dupuis’s study most probably relates to very specific expressions and turns of phrase. As I hope this review makes clear, the fundamental thrust of his argument is manifestly orthodox. This makes it all the more disconcerting that he should have been investigated so soon after his work appeared. Perhaps more time should have been left for the theological community to digest the work and to engage the author in dialogue (Merrigan, “Exploring the Frontiers,” 358).


962 WDYSIA?, 71.
source used postdates 1970.\textsuperscript{963} I believe that Dupuis’s perfunctory manner of treating the biblical text (in this case John’s prologue) as well as his sources (see below) indicates a general tendency by him to know in advance what the scriptures already mean before the process of interpretation has begun. This is especially so in cases where the biblical text may seemingly be reinterpreted in a positive fashion in regard to Christianity’s relationship with other religions. Nevertheless, it can cause Dupuis in my opinion to overlook or ignore contrary data which may tend to weaken or challenge his theological proposal.

In CR Dupuis relies to a large extent on the work of Xavier Léon-Dufour in defence of his argument for the existence of the “Word as such” based on John’s prologue. Dupuis posits that, based on the exegesis of John’s prologue, Léon-Dufour believes that one may say that the Word’s enlightening and salvific activity has existed since creation (cf. John 1:2–5), and not the Word’s incarnation \textit{per se}. The Word is the source of light and life for all humanity, creating such a “synergy” between God and human beings that it makes those who receive the Word children of God (cf. vv. 9 and 12). That activity has been occurring “even before the Logos takes a human face . . . independently from any explicit reference to Jesus Christ” (N.B. Dupuis’s translation from Léon-Dufour’s French). Granting the incarnation has marked a radical change in the mode of communication, Léon-Dufour still thinks that the Word’s communication has nonetheless continued throughout the history of God’s revelation.\textsuperscript{964} Dupuis fails to note, however, just how radically Léon-Dufour believes that the mode of the Logos’ presence to humanity has been changed by the incarnation. Léon-Dufour writes:

\begin{quote}
[T]he [Word’s] presence in the flesh is \textit{other} than the diffuse presence of the divine light in creation and in history; the experience of the [Word’s] glory is \textit{other} than the reception of the light \cite{965}.
\end{quote}

Dupuis claims that, notwithstanding the incarnation, Léon-Dufour maintains that the Word’s new mode of presence does not supersede His prior one: While His revelation is concentrated in Jesus Christ, the Logos continues to express Himself through creation and through His enlightening witness, thus allowing people to receive Him and become God’s children.\textsuperscript{966} Nevertheless, the full context of Léon-Dufour’s comment reads as follows:

Revelation is expressed already by the luminous presence of the Logos *ásarkos* \textit{[sic]} to all of creation, but henceforth it is conveyed \textit{[se dit]} through the language and in the existence of one Man amongst others: This phenomenon of concentration in a man will allow the revelation of


\textsuperscript{965} Léon-Dufour, 112 (cf. also p. 113).

\textsuperscript{966} Cf. \textit{CR}, 143. Cf. also Léon-Dufour, 124.
God to articulate itself [se formuler] directly in an intelligible fashion and be open to all. This new stage does not supplant the preceding one. The Logos continues to be expressed through Creation of which He is the author and thanks to the witness rendered to the Light; numerous are those who can receive Him and become children of God. Meanwhile, revelation is concentrated henceforth also and above all [surtout] in that One Who will be designated by the name, Jesus Christ. . . . By relation to the revelation of the Logos, Light of Life, that which is new is the revelation of His glory as the Son of God [la révélation de sa gloire de Fils de Dieu]. The glory of the Logos manifests itself in the fact that [en ce que] men and women recognize in Him the unique Son of the Father and enter by Him into union with the Father Himself. From now on, a Man will be the very face of God [le visage même de Dieu]: “Who sees Me,” says Jesus, “sees the Father” ([John] 14:9).967

Dupuis avows that “[a]ccording to Léon-Dufour it is . . . clear that we must speak not only of the universal action of the Word-to-be-incarnate before the incarnation, but also of the continuing action of the Word as such after the incarnation . . . and after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”968 From my own reading of Léon-Dufour’s commentary, I can agree with Dupuis that based on his exegesis of John’s prologue Léon-Dufour does appear to think that there is asserted there not just the active presence of God’s Word/Logos from the time of creation, but also the Word’s continued activity among men and women before the incarnation, enlightening them and making them children of God to the extent that they are able. What I have failed to find, however, is any insinuation by Léon-Dufour (as per Dupuis’s idea) that a non-incarnate Logos or “Word as such” continues to exist and act distinctly from Jesus after the incarnation. On the contrary, far from being a replacement or disowning of the Logos’ preincarnate presence and activity, Léon-Dufour calls the Word’s incarnation as Jesus Christ “the culminating point” of the Logos’ revelation.969

After dealing with Léon-Dufour, Dupuis mentions “[o]ther exegetes who can serve as witnesses for a universal action of the Logos before the incarnation and of the Logos as such after the incarnation, according to the prologue of John.”970 He names: Rudolf Schnackenburg; Jacques Dupont; André Feuillet; Marie-Émile Boismard; and Donatien Mollat. Nevertheless, I have found problematic issues with each one of these citations.

First and foremost is Dupuis’s citation of the work of Rudolf Schnackenburg. In TCTR P Dupuis cites Schnackenburg’s exegesis of John’s prologue as supporting his own views, especially the idea of the “Word as such.” He quotes Schnackenburg:

The power of the Logos to give light and life is universal and indispensable to every man. In him and in him alone, was the divine life for the true spiritual being of men and he and he alone . . .

967 Léon-Dufour, 124.
968 CR, 143.
969 See Léon-Dufour, 125.
970 CR, 143.
was the true divine life for all. In the original hymn this statement . . . certainly referred to the order of creation, that is, to the Logos before his incarnation. It transfers to the Logos the functions ascribed in Jewish literature to Wisdom or the Torah, which took on later in Jewish thought the role of giver of light which Wisdom had played, since creation. . . . But the Christian hymn insists that Christ, the Logos, possessed this power before his earthly existence and merely exercises it anew in his mission of salvation, because it essentially belongs to him . . . and because he is the “true” light. . . . Thus the Logos has a transcendent power of illumination, which comes from his godhead (v. 1c) and which can and must be displayed in every man who desires to reach his goal.971

What Dupuis fails to quote, however, is what Schnackenburg adds immediately to these statements above:

[H]ow far men allowed themselves to be illumined and guided by this divine light of life—this is something of which [v. 9] speaks as little as v. 4; the subject is reserved for the next strophe (vv. 10–11). In the present context, however, after the insertion of vv. 6–8 by the evangelist, it can hardly be doubted that the reader is meant to think at once of the incarnate Logos whose “illumination”, [sic] active, since creation and always remaining (present) active, has been bestowed in a special manner, since the Incarnation . . . on those who believe in him (v. 7). The historical coming of the Logos-Light into the world . . . has reduced the previous spiritual illumination to something unessential in the eyes of the evangelist and he has absorbed the second strophe of the original hymn directly into this historical perspective. After the precautionary remark of v. 8, the adjective ἀλήθινον must also have had for him the significance of the “true, genuine light” in contrast to all other ostensible bringers of light (emphasis added).972

And earlier on in the same commentary Schnackenburg explains: “[T]he evangelist always has the incarnate Logos in mind.”973 Furthermore, he writes:

[H]e who speaks on earth is identical with the Logos of whom the hymn sang, so that the affirmations of the prologue with regard to the eternity of the Logos with God and as God (1: 1) are continued in the self-attestation of Jesus. The incarnate Logos retains the direct, divine knowledge of his pre-existence, he who descended from heaven remains fully conscious of his heavenly experience (emphasis added).974

In my opinion these statements contrast sharply with Dupuis’s claim about Schnackenburg’s hermeneutic of the prologue, for Dupuis maintains that Schnackenburg believes that before John 1:14 there is no reference at all to the incarnation by John.

André Feuillet is a forthright adherent of the “fulfillment theory” which he has integrated into his exegesis of the Johannine prologue. He even cites the work of Jean Daniélou in several places.975

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971 Quoted in *TCTR*, 319–20 (cf. Schnackenburg, 253–54). Dupuis indicates that his English translation of Schnackenburg’s statement above has been “corrected” (see *TCTR*, 320). But: How? By whom? Why? He does not say. I could not find any difference between the original text and Dupuis’s citation in *TCTR*.

972 Schnackenburg, 254.

973 Ibid., 227.

974 Ibid., 280.

975 Cf. e.g. Feuillet, 176–77, 245, 277, 287–88.
Feuillet, then, seems like a highly unusual choice for Dupuis who has proclaimed that he distances himself “everywhere” from the “fulfillment theory.” Jacques Dupont is another curious choice. He expressly contradicts Dupuis’s reading of John’s prologue, asserting that v. 9’s reference to the “true light” does refer already to the incarnation. Dupont even speaks about “the pre-existent Christ” whose “action upon the world did not start with His terrestrial life; rather it is the principle and origin of the world and everything.” Yet Dupuis is very clear in his reply to Paolo Gamberini above that he rejects any language which attributes some kind of preexistence to the Word’s human reality.

In CR, Dupuis adduces “the firmly held opinion” of biblical scholar Donatien Mollat that John 1:9 clearly affirms the continued and universal action of the “Word as such.” Dupuis’s lengthy quotation of Mollat has been reproduced above in chap. 3 of this thesis. Dupuis’s translation of Mollat’s Latin text is more or less accurate. But it can be pointed out that nowhere in the cited statement does Mollat actually maintain that the Word’s salvific illumination of humanity continues on distinctly after the Word’s incarnation. Moreover, in another place he writes that wherever John’s gospel uses the expression “coming into the world” it is always used in reference to Jesus. This tends to contradict Dupuis’s own interpretation of John 1:9 as referring only to the non-incarnate Logos. As Gilles Courtemanche observes:

Most of the time, the expression “coming into the world” is omitted [by Dupuis], thus eluding the disputed question of the identity of the one [celui] who “is come into the world”: the incarnate Word, the non-incarnate Word or both [les deux].

I wonder, then, if this explains why Dupuis does not mention Mollat’s comment on John 1:9c.

976 See Dupuis, “Truth Will Make You Free,” 246 (cf. also pp. 223, 232, 228). Dupuis is quite plain throughout his later works that he rejects the “fulfillment theory” of the non-Christian religions (cf. e.g. TCTR, 168–79 passim, 232, 251–52, 278, 303–04, 316–17, 326, and CR, 135–36, 255–58 passim).

977 Cf. Dupont, Essais sur la christologie de Saint Jean, 98–100 passim. As for Boismard, he is influenced to some measure in his exegesis of John’s prologue by the work of Dupont (cf. e.g. Boismard, 48–49, 122–23). Boismard structures the prologue concentrically, so that the Logos who is proclaimed in John 1:1 connects literally with the Son who reveals the Father in v. 18. The Word’s incarnation in v. 14 is tied to the Word’s various “comings” into the world avowed in vv. 9–11 (cf. pp. 106–07). It should also be pointed out that Boismard rejects John 1:9 as having been part of the original “Logos hymn” (cf. Rochais, 9).

978 See Dupont, Essais sur la christologie de Saint Jean, 48 (cf. also pp. 49 and 58).


980 See CR, 143–44.

981 Cf. Mollat, 44.

982 Courtemanche, 320 (cf. also pp. 470 and 224–25 passim).
While all the scholars mentioned above by Dupuis accept that the first thirteen verses of John’s prologue state the preincarnate presence and activity of God’s Logos—although, some (e.g. Schnackenburg and Boismard) do see anticipations of the Word’s incarnation in these verses—I could not find one who also affirmed that John’s prologue taught the existence of a universal action of the “Word as such” after the statement of the Word’s incarnation in John 1:14. Surprisingly, Dupuis himself seems to have been aware that some of the scholars from whom he claims support above do not in fact agree with his reading of John’s prologue. In his article responding to Italian-language reviews of his book TCTR, Dupuis divulges the following:

Other exeges of the prologue of John are in agreement with Schnackenburg and Léon-Dufour regarding the illuminative action of the Logos before [prima] the Incarnation (see Boismard . . . [and] Feuillet), even without placing in relief the continuity of such an action beyond the Incarnation.  

This begs the question: If Dupuis knew beforehand that Boismard’s and Feuillet’s exegesis of John’s prologue tended to contradict his own, then how could she have cited them later in CR as having affirmed his opinions? Since no one ever questioned him on it, I have no concrete answer.

E. Interaction between Theology and Exegesis

In IBC the PBC recognizes that theology necessarily influences the presuppositions or preunderstandings with which the interpreter approaches the Bible. One could say that the main presupposition Dupuis brings to his reading of the Bible is his wish to demonstrate a generous spirit toward the religiosity of the non-Christian “other.” I believe that this positive approach can be seen in the witness of Jesus Himself who said to the rabbi, Nicodemus:

“For, God so loved the world that He gave His Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life. . . . God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:16–17).

The message of the Hebrew scriptures, of the gospel and of the church’s preaching of Christ is, then, fundamentally a positive message to and for the world.  


984 IBC, III.D (cf. also III.D.1).

985 And yet, Jesus adds:

“Whoever believes in [the Son] will not be condemned. But whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the verdict: that the light came into the world—but, people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil” (vv. 18–19).
Be that as it may, does Dupuis properly and actually respect the witness of sacred scripture? Or, do his theological presuppositions tend to overshadow its message? Regarding the first question, I would say: “yes”—when it is a case of agreement with his own positive agenda for Christianity’s attitude toward the salvific status of the non-Christian religions. When it is a case, however, of something which might question his favourable preunderstanding, I would answer: “no.” In my view, he tends to treat such texts only in the most cursory of ways. Moreover, in his zeal to correct (what he sees as) Christianity’s formerly hostile view of other religions, I feel that he can occasionally overcorrect—even gloss over or ignore—what the Bible has to say about those who exist outside the bounds of the people of Israel or the church. Dupuis all but admits that he does this in CR, where he writes:

In the new situation . . . of mutual understanding and openness to dialogue . . . it seems proper, in fact urgent, that a theological presentation of the biblical appraisal of the religions of the nations properly highlight those positive elements capable of providing, in a changed context, a valid basis for a more generous theological appreciation of the other religious traditions in the world.986

It is not enough, he continues, just to highlight some positive elements on other religions found in the Bible; rather its data must be re-examined and reinterpreted according to fresh understandings.987

1. Theological Issues Related to Dupuis’s Interpretation of Noah’s Covenant in Gen 9

As the PBC writes above, interpreters are necessarily influenced by the theological assumptions they bring to the Bible. Some of Dupuis’s presuppositions seem to have been based more on his own theological inclination for a positive view of the world’s religions, rather than on his own reading of sacred scripture. As noted above, it becomes clear in TCTRפ that most of Dupuis’s treatment of God’s covenant in Gen 9 has actually been drawn from the work of theologian Jean Daniélou.988 While it is surely allowable for Dupuis to have applied the insights of another theologian to his hermeneutic of the Bible, I think that he should have been more candid about the fact that his own acceptance and use of that idea of a “cosmic covenant” was drawn from the theological principles of another. In my opinion in his haste to construct a Christian theology with a positive and favourable view toward the non-Christian “other” Dupuis can sometimes employ the biblical idea of “covenant” in a somewhat distorted manner: consider for example his complete disregard of any theological value applied to God’s “eternal covenant” with King David. He never explores the biblico-theological significance of the Davidic covenant at all.

986 CR, 18.

987 CR, 19 (cf. also TCTRפ, 30).

988 TCTRפ, 31–34 passim.
In fact, he even reinterprets the obvious and patent references in Ps 89 to God’s everlasting covenant with David as references to God’s “cosmic covenant” in creation.989

Dupuis also tends to forgo addressing any of the tensions that might arise from his novel interpretation of the covenant and its variegated usage in the Bible itself. For example, Gen 9 makes very clear with whom and with which groups God makes a berit or covenant: His covenant is with Noah, with his family and with all living creatures. It is equally plain regarding what that covenant entails: He will never again destroy the earth by a flood. The Bible’s inclusion of the entirety of God’s other creatures in His covenant—not just humanity, but also the animals and birds, the fish life and the “crawling things” (Gen 1:24)—implies to me that something else is meant there in the text than the mystical experience of divine revelation. I believe that Dupuis himself must have sensed the tensions which his preunderstanding brought to the text in Gen 9 because he also refers to God’s emet, or faithfulness, in the “cosmic order.”990 Still, I fail to see where in God’s covenant with Noah and all creation there exists the promise of a continuing revelation to the nations through their religions. I see no trace in the Bible of Dupuis’s assumption that the Noachic covenant (if there be one) is intended to include the mystico-spiritual dispositions of humankind or of its religious practices—even of the Hebrews!

IBC states that exegesis provides theology with the data that are essential to its operation.991 Furthermore, theologians need the work of exegetes in order to interpret sacred scripture with “scholarly accuracy and precision.”992 Rather than relying on works of biblical exegesis and the data they might provide for his interpretation of the Bible, Dupuis seems to countenance instead his own theological presuppositions as well as the work of theologians whose work is deemed useful in justifying his argument for “inclusive pluralism.” Yet I believe that it is Dupuis’s failure to consider the data of exegesis which can sometimes lead him down blind alleyways and into incoherent positions. For example, Dupuis utilizes Jean Daniélou’s argument for a “cosmic covenant” between God and Noah in order to show biblically how God’s revelation and salvation preexisted the Jewish and Christian covenants.993 As a matter of fact, Dupuis contends that God’s covenant with Noah provides the foundation for the ancillary argument of pagan “sainthood.” Thus, according to Dupuis the Noachic covenant is without a doubt “the most revealing positive datum” in the Hebrew scriptures regarding the

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990 TCTR, 32 (see also p. 33).

991 IBC, III.D.

992 IBC, III.D.2.

salvation of human beings without the gospel. Yet by his injudicious use of another scholar’s theory Dupuis himself is led into a theological quandary, for Noah is recognized as a righteous person before any covenant whatsoever has been made with him. The Book of Genesis records:

Then the LORD said to Noah: “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for you alone in this generation have I found to be righteous before Me” (Gen 7:1; cf. also 6:8, 9).

In TCTR P Dupuis maintains that Adam and Eve’s son, Abel (cf. Gen 4), “inaugurates the line of the saints of the cosmic covenant” (emphasis added). He is presented by the Bible as the first “pagan saint.” But how could Abel be identified as a “saint” of the “cosmic covenant” when Noah had yet to be born? The problem is further exacerbated by Dupuis’s addition of Enoch (see Gen 5:21–24) to the list of holy pagans. He writes:

The saving faith of pagans is faith in the covenant of the living God with the nations. This faith implies believing in a personal God who intervenes in human affairs through his providence and remunerates people for their righteousness. With such faith Enoch appears as the prototype of the salvation of the pagans; he is the prophet of cosmic [?] religion.

All of this, however, is not based on the Book of Genesis in my opinion, but on Dupuis’s own reading of the NT Letter to the Hebrews (cf. chap. 11). How can Enoch have had “faith in the covenant of the living God” when the concept of the covenant (berit) does not even appear until Gen 9? As to why Enoch deserved to be called the “prototype” of pagan salvation, rather than Abel, I cannot say. Dupuis is silent on the matter. Based on Dupuis’s own outline of the theory, it would seem that both holiness and salvific faith were not only possible among pagan humanity, but also already present, without any specific covenantal relationship with God.

2. Dupuis’s Claim of Theological Discontinuity between Acts 17 and Rom 1

Another presupposition lying behind Dupuis’s hermeneutic of scripture is the idea of “continuity-in-discontinuity” (see chap. 2 above). Dupuis cites agreeably the work of Lucien Legrand who (he says) also “concludes to ‘two great axes . . . of continuity and discontinuity” when comparing St. Paul’s attitude toward other religions as expressed in Acts 17:16–33 and Rom 1:18–23. Actually, Legrand is not comparing these two texts at all, rather discussing how “the primitive Church” situated herself in relation to surrounding religions. On the “discontinuous” side, the NT church stresses the radical novelty of the resurrection in contrast to the ancient world’s darkness and sinfulness. This attitude is found not only in

995 TCTR P, 34–35.
996 TCTR P, 35.
the Apocalypse of John’s demonization of the Roman Empire (cf. Rev 13), but also in the Letter to the Romans declaration of God’s wrath against the nations’ impiety (cf. Rom 1:18–32) and the arrogance of those who follow the law (2:1–13). On the “continuous” side, the NT church underlines the homogeneity of the history of salvation developing according to God’s plan. That is Luke’s intention when presenting not only “a faithful Israel” which is open to the gospel (cf. Luke 1:5; Acts 2:5–41), but also a pagan world which is well disposed (cf. Luke 7:51, 23:47; Acts 10:1–22, 18:12–17) and waiting for the “unknown God” whose way has been prepared by its “poet-theologians” (cf. Acts 17:23–28).997

While Dupuis leaves Legrand at this point, Legrand nevertheless continues by pointing out that these two axes do not exist independent of each other and might better be called: the “two axes [foyers] of an ellipse.” Neither view can be completely detached from the other.998 This is important to point out, since Dupuis can give the impression that Legrand has intended an opposition of views between St. Luke and St. Paul. But that is not the case. Indeed, in an earlier article Legrand makes clear that it is “superficial” to oppose Luke and Paul as two opposite mentalities with one qualified as positive and the other, negative.999 He writes:

The challenge of the tension between those two texts [viz. Acts 17 and Rom 1] and the men who wrote them is, for those who sympathise with Paul’s vibrant protest against the world and his sense of the newness of Christ, to be realistically aware that this newness has been made flesh and . . . submitted to the slow pace and frustrating process of human growth. For those who share in Luke’s . . . concern for continuity and history, the challenge is to remember that any history, any human action and thinking stand under the judgment of God’s word.1000

And Legrand finishes:

An integral theology of religion should be able to listen to both [Dietrich] Bonhoeffer and [Raimon] Panikkar.1001

Is Dupuis careful to listen to both sides of the Bible’s message, even when it proposes views that are (in his word) “discontinuous” and negative toward the religious “other”? I am not sure that he always does.

3. Dupuis’s Theological Use of 1 Tim 2:4


998 Legrand, “Jésus et l’Église primitive,” 76.


1000 Ibid., 231.

1001 Ibid.
Thomas Ryan notes that one of the “touchstone[s]” for Dupuis’s idea of “inclusive pluralism” are the two axioms found in 1 Tim. 2:4-6, namely, God’s will to save all and Jesus Christ’s pivotal role in how that will happen. He writes:

Exclusivism, said Dupuis, does not take God’s will to save all seriously enough. And pluralism does not take seriously enough the central role God has accorded to Jesus Christ in God’s plan for the salvation of all. Only inclusivism manages to hold the two fundamental axioms together at once.\footnote{1002}

While I would agree with Ryan’s contention about the importance of these two ideas in Dupuis’s theological proposal, I am not sure that I would link their importance for him \textit{per se} to the First Letter to Timothy. On the contrary, I believe that Dupuis reads into 1 Tim 2:4 his own theological preunderstanding derived from an insight given to him by fellow theologian, Gavin D’Costa. In \textit{TCTRPS} Dupuis rehearses D’Costa’s argument that there are two essential axioms “of traditional Christian faith” (Dupuis’s words) which must be kept in mind when discussing Christianity’s relationship to other religions.\footnote{1003} First, there is the axiom of God’s universal, salvific will; second, there is the axiom of Christ’s necessary mediation. People’s contrasting attitudes toward these axioms account for the positions of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Exclusivism highlights the second axiom, while neglecting the first; pluralism highlights the first to the detriment of the second.\footnote{1004} He appears to agree with D’Costa’s position that only inclusivism can hold together both beliefs: While Jesus is asserted clearly to be God’s decisive revelation and “constitutive Savior,” the door is nevertheless left open to an acknowledgement of God’s manifestations to humankind as well as to the presence of His saving grace in humanity’s religious traditions.\footnote{1005}

In his review of \textit{CR}, theologian Terrence Merrigan remarks that “[i]n his attempt to find scriptural support for his position, Dupuis might sometimes be accused of bending the text to suit his purposes.”\footnote{1006} I believe this is particularly accurate in the case of 1 Tim 2:4 where Dupuis’s theological assumptions

\footnote{1002 Thomas Ryan, “Jacques Dupuis: Pathfinder for Our Times,” \textit{Catholic New Times}, 20 March 2005, 3. Cf. also Harold Netland’s comment: At the heart of Dupuis’s model is a desire to maintain two theses: first, the one eternal God, the Holy Trinity, has revealed himself definitively and has acted decisively for humankind’s salvation in the Incarnation in Jesus Christ; and second, God the Holy Trinity is present and active salvifically within the non-Christian religions themselves (Netland, 108).

\footnote{1003 \textit{TCTRPS}, 192. (He is referring to D’Costa’s book \textit{Theology and Religious Pluralism}.) Courtemanche also notes D’Costa’s book as “reinforc[ing]” Dupuis’s argumentation (cf. Courtemanche, 26). Although, Courtemanche makes it sound as if D’Costa is indebted to Dupuis for the idea, rather than the other way around.

\footnote{1004 \textit{TCTRPS}, 192. N.B. Dupuis has included no references whatsoever to 1 Tim. That oversight (?) was remedied in \textit{CR} (see p. 89) where citations of 1 Tim 2:4 and 5 have been inserted.

\footnote{1005 \textit{TCTRPS}, 192 (cf. also pp. 193 and 311).

\footnote{1006 Merrigan, “Believer on Frontiers.”}
affect not only how he reads the text, but also how he cites it. In his doctoral thesis on how Dupuis uses certain biblical texts in his theology, Gilles Courtemanche observes:

[M]ost of the time, [Dupuis’] citation of this verse is incomplete, for he fails to include the expression: “and coming to the knowledge of the truth;” and, the few occasions where his citation is complete, his commentary fails to mention that it is “in reaching toward [accédant à] the truth” that one is brought [l’on parvient] to salvation.\(^{1007}\)

Still, Courtemanche feels that Dupuis “corrects this omission in an indirect fashion” by his own affirmation that faith is still necessary for salvation, as per the teaching of the Letter to the Hebrews (cf. 11:6).\(^{1008}\) Hebrews 11:6 is cited several times by Dupuis in \textit{TCTR}\textit{P}.\(^{1009}\) But, curiously his citations of that text appear wholly in the earlier “historical” portion of the book, and do not recur in later chapters devoted to his theological appraisal of the collected data. So, I am not sure just how important that scriptural passage is for him: Does it amount to an attempt by Dupuis to “correct” (as per Courtemanche’s claim) his truncated citations of 1 Tim 2:4? Since I can only locate one place in \textit{TCTR}\textit{P} (viz. p. 111) where Dupuis makes any explicit linkage between 1 Tim 2:4–6 and Heb 11:6, I must admit that I am skeptical. Furthermore, I cannot share such a sanguine view as that of Courtemanche regarding Dupuis’s procedure of excising parts of the Bible—even parts of the same verse!—that he may find problematic for including into his theological viewpoint. The PBC notes “the temptation” among theologians to treat sacred scripture “as a store of \textit{dicta probantia} serving to confirm doctrinal theses.”\(^{1010}\) One of the Bible’s functions is “to mount serious challenges [\textit{de lancer de sérieux défis}]” to theological systems, constantly drawing attention to important aspects of divine revelation and human reality that may sometimes be forgotten or neglected in “systematic reflection.”\(^{1011}\) But the Bible cannot fulfill that function when the theologian consistently removes or minimizes texts which do not fit in with his or her presuppositions.

### III. Conclusion

\(^{1007}\) Courtemanche, 85.

\(^{1008}\) Ibid.

\(^{1009}\) See \textit{TCTR}\textit{P}, 34, 35, 111, 114, 121, 161.

\(^{1010}\) IBC, III.D.4.

\(^{1011}\) Ibid. In its discussion of “actualization,” I believe the PBC makes an observation that I think is apropos to my study of Dupuis. The commission writes:

Actualization . . . cannot mean manipulation of the text. It is not a matter of projecting novel opinions or ideologies upon the biblical writings, but of, sincerely seeking to discover what the text has to say at the present time. The text of the Bible has authority over the Christian church at all times, and, although centuries have passed, since the time of its composition, the text retains its role of privileged guide not open to manipulation (IBC, IV.A.1).
This final chapter has looked at Dupuis’s use of the Bible in his theology according to the four characteristics of Catholic biblical interpretation as outlined in IBC chap. III (i.e. from within the Bible itself; from the viewpoint of church tradition; from the work of exegetes; and from the work of theologians). It has attempted to bring Dupuis’s use of sacred scripture in his proposal for a “Christian theology of religious pluralism” into dialogue with each of these areas. Thus, it has sought to offer a thorough critique of his interpretations by applying not only the testimony of the Bible itself, but also the work of biblical and theological scholarship.
CONCLUSION
SUMMARY

I. Introduction

This section brings to an end the doctoral thesis as proposed and outlined in the Introduction. I will now summarize below what has been done in accordance with the thesis statement. Moreover, I will offer several questions that might be considered further.

II. Summary of the Thesis Statement

This doctoral thesis has examined in depth how the late Jesuit theologian, Dupuis, has used the Bible in his theory of a “Christian theology of religious pluralism.”

It did this by first setting the stage in its opening chapter by a survey of various opinions about and attitudes toward the religious “other” found among the church fathers. It noted changes in doctrinal perceptions on the salvation of those outside the church which arose among theologians and church leaders in the later Middle Ages (i.e. after the fifteenth century). It regarded some contemporary opinions among modern theologians—by no means extensively—in order to set the scene again for discussing the teachings of the Second Vatican Council as well as of the recent popes (beginning with Paul VI).

Second, although this thesis is not focused on an analysis of Dupuis’s theory, it nevertheless devoted an entire chapter to the elucidation and explanation of his “Christian theology of religious pluralism,” which he also called “inclusive pluralism.” This was deemed needful in order to demonstrate later how his theological assumptions and “pre-understandings” affected his employment of biblical texts. Scholarly critiques of his ideas were invoked in order to show not only that the thesis chosen by me was truly an original one, but also to indicate possible areas of weakness in Dupuis’s underlying ideas. It seemed only fair, of course, to also cover Dupuis’s rejoinders to those critiques of his work.

Before looking more closely at Dupuis’s use of the five scriptures identified in the introduction to this thesis (i.e. Gen 9:8–17; John 1:1–18; Acts 17:22–34; Rom 1:18–23; and 1 Tim 2:4), it seemed logical to discover as much as possible how these scriptural texts themselves had factored and been interpreted by Dupuis in his “theology of religions.” So, another chapter was devoted both to his theology of sacred
scripture in general and to his hermeneutic of each biblical text mentioned above in particular. In some cases, there was much to say and point out (for example, regarding John’s prologue); in other cases, there was quite frankly very little to glean and say from Dupuis’s writings (for example, on 1 Tim 2:4).

I looked at the PBC document itself, so that the reader would be familiar with the standards I was using. After a general summary of IBC’s other chapters, I offered a detailed presentation on the chapter that would be used to analyze Dupuis’s use of sacred scripture, namely, chap. III. It was then possible to start moving more deeply into the purpose of the thesis, namely, the analysis of Dupuis’s use of these scriptural texts in his theory according to the four characteristics of Catholic biblical interpretation laid out in chap. III of IBC.

The final chapter was organized according to the fourfold schema of Catholic biblical interpretation found in IBC, that is: how the Bible interacts with its own data; how the scriptures find their use and interpretation in the church’s tradition (the fathers, the councils, liturgy, etc.); how the Bible is interpreted from the vantagepoint of the modern conception of “historico-critical” exegesis; and how biblical hermeneutics interacts with theology in general. I was able to identify some features of Dupuis’s appropriation of the Bible in his theory that coincided with the PBC’s view and some that did not.

According to IBC, Catholic biblical interpretation looks not only at how God’s revelation to Israel has been reread within the Hebrew scriptures themselves, but also—and especially—at how it has been interpreted through the prism of the ministry, death and glorification of God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

It considers the variety of views, both continuous and discontinuous, that are present within the Bible itself. Oftentimes, though, Dupuis seemed to me to be more interested in highlighting the Bible’s continuities with his own views on the positive value of (so-called) “pagan” religiosity, rather than its discontinuity with them. For instance, the negative accents lying behind Paul’s speech in Acts 17 are lacking in Dupuis’s discussion. Also, his reading of the Bible tended toward a distinct atomization. Only in the case of the figure of Noah does he even attempt to follow through on asking how he might have found further development in the Bible. Acts 17 and Rom 1 are related together, albeit in a perfunctory manner.

IBC described next how the Catholic biblical hermeneutic was rooted in the sacred tradition of the church: in the fathers; in the liturgy; in the ecumenical councils and magisterium of the bishops. The idea of “covenant” appeared again as an avenue of interest, for example, in the interpretation of St. Irenaeus of Lyons. I believe, though, that I have shown that Dupuis’s lack of attention to context has led him into distorting the true value which Irenaeus attributes to God’s “covenant” with Noah. Furthermore, I found Dupuis’s claim that the documents of Vatican II use the image of the Word sowing his seeds among humanity was more assumed than proven. I also pointed out how Dupuis tended to emphasize the positive aspects of interpretation (e.g. in Clement of Alexandria’s comment on Paul speech before the Areopagus) sometimes at the expense of negative or contrary data. Given the fact that St. Augustine of
Hippo struggled to make his own extreme, absolutist soteriology coincide with the salvific universalism of 1 Tim 2:4. I had expected Dupuis to exploit the issue as a “case study” for how scripture can challenge Christianity’s traditionally negative assumptions about the religious “other.” Yet no such discussion materializes in Dupuis’s writings. The opportunity is missed. I believe that I have shown that such missed opportunities are not infrequent in Dupuis’s discussion of sacred scripture.

The PBC then relates the Catholic interpretation of the Bible to the academic enterprise of professional exegetes. More often than not, though—too often—Dupuis either does not avail himself or does not seem to be aware of the variety of exegetical resources available for his task. On occasions, he uses his sources improperly: for example, using the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament for information on important OT terminology like berit and dabar. Overall, I was disappointed by Dupuis’s use of (what the PBC terms) “modern exegesis.” Either through his own lack of knowledge of biblical scholarship or of how to use the historico-critical method, Dupuis was not very successful in strengthening his argument vis-à-vis Christianity’s relationship to other religions through the Bible.

I discovered that much of Dupuis’s interpretation of scripture was not based on the work of exegetes; rather it was derivative of other scholars—usually, other theologians. Jean Daniélou comes immediately to mind. Too often, I felt that he appealed to likeminded scholars, like Giovanni Odasso, who agreed with Dupuis in following along the lines of the inclusivist model. Scholars’ difficulties or lack of consensus in interpreting the biblical text (e.g. the prologue to the Gospel of John) are hardly ever mentioned. Furthermore, I discovered that Dupuis’s memory as to what some of the scholars he cites (e.g. Xavier Léon-Dufour, Rudolf Schnackenburg, André Feuillet, etc.) actually wrote or meant could be unreliable. In some cases, the views of exegetes contrasted sharply with what Dupuis claimed was the clear meaning of the biblical text.

The last section of IBC chap. III addresses the relationship between exegesis and theology. Was Dupuis sufficiently candid both with himself and with readers about how his presuppositions governed his treatment of scriptural texts? I am not sure that he always was. Yet I believe that this thesis demonstrated on more than one occasion that no matter from which vantagepoint one looked at his hermeneutic—he it from within the Bible itself; or from tradition; or from the practice of exegesis or theological inquiry—Dupuis’s interpretation of sacred scripture was typically governed by his presupposition about the “qualitative leap” needed in Christianity’s appreciation of other religions. In order to balance out Christianity’s previously negative use of the Bible against non-Christians, I believe that Dupuis felt obliged to privilege positive readings of the scriptures he used. Thus, he tended to interpret the Bible in a way that was affirmative of the plurality of human religions and their salvific power for their adherents. Also, in the case of 1 Tim 2:4 Dupuis presents the verse’s meaning as self-evident in the way that Dupuis wants to see it. The fact that the verse continues on with the consequent statement regarding God’s desire for all to come to the knowledge of the truth is frequently overlooked or
omitted in his citation of it. His attempt to correct Christianity’s negative stance toward other religions hindered him from seeing some of the theological issues raised by his interpretations of scripture (e.g. his proposed distinction in the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, which received much attention).

III. Suggestions for Further Research

As Bernhard W. Anderson points out, “the relationship between all creatures and their creator is expressed in the universal covenant with Noah (Gen. 9.1–17), which assures God’s faithful pledge to humanity, to nonhuman creatures and to the earth itself.”

The covenant mentioned in Gen 9 is much broader in its horizon than the nations of the world, including a pledge both to the world’s other living creatures and—metaphorically—to the earth Itself. Without trying to be facetious, one could ask how animals and insects fit into Dupuis’s scheme of a “cosmic religion” which has its roots in God’s covenant with Noah. Given the (literal) universality of the terms of that covenant, is it even appropriate to speak of a Noachic covenant at all? Should one, then, prefer to speak of a “cosmic covenant” alone (including all living creatures and the natural world)?

Moreover, is too much emphasis placed on the overall significance of the reference to a berit in Gen 9? The term was common enough in the secular, economic and political life of the Israelites. Is every reference to it in the OT necessarily a religious reference that could be meaningful for a “theology of religions”? Could God’s promise in Gen 9 have been meant only to demonstrate that God has a binding, providential relationship with all of His creatures—not just with humanity? In other words, it shows how He cares about humankind, about the animals, about this planet and about the universe in general. Whether that “cosmic covenant” includes the religious beliefs and structures of human beings in particular is another question that can be asked.

Furthermore, is the idea of the Noachic covenant even necessary for espousing a more positive attitude toward the religious “other”? Dupuis himself noted in several places how God’s relationship with Adam, the father of humankind, had been viewed as covenantal. Would not that datum in and of itself be sufficient to provide a foundation for a positive view of humankind’s religious endeavours?

Is it possible to make a distinction within the divine personhood of God the Son without necessarily falling into the heresy of Nestorius whose theological position was condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431)? In arguing for the orthodoxy of his idea of the “Word as such,” Dupuis seemed to think that one could. But would it not have been better and more accurate to have spoken of a distinction

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1012 Anderson, in OCB, 138.

1013 See TCTRP, 32, 33 (cf. also pp. 35–36), 120 n. 7, 224–26 passim. As a matter of fact, Dupuis treats explicitly St. Irenaeus of Lyons’ idea that God made some sort of covenant with Adam (see pp. 64 and 78). Alas, the idea is never developed further.
in the *activities* of the divine person of the Word? Thus, one could have maintained the salvific nature of the Word’s enlightening action (as per John 1:9) in contradistinction to the salvation that was offered in a preeminent way in the Word’s incarnation as Jesus Christ. Could not Dupuis have argued just as well that the Logos’ salvific activities before the incarnation had remained effective still afterwards? Why was it necessary to introduce a distinction at all into the divine person of the Word?

Furthermore, what did he mean by describing Jesus as the “constitutive saviour” of humankind? The title is applied repeatedly to Christ throughout *TCTRP*. Yet I have found it to be a singularly difficult task to pin down exactly what he means by that. How does Jesus of Nazareth “constitute” God’s salvation for the whole world? What does it mean that Dupuis places Jesus’ “constitutive” saviourhood in relation to the existence of other “saving figures” in the world’s religions?

Why does St. Paul appeal to the testimony of the pagan writer Aratus in his discourse before the Areopagus? What are its interreligious implications for today? Scholar Ben Witherington III espouses the pragmatic view:

> From a rhetorical point of view the function of the quotation . . . here is to cite an authority recognized by one’s audience. . . . It would have done Paul no good to simply quote the Scriptures, a book the audience did not know and one that had no authority in the minds of these hearers. Arguments are only persuasive if they work within the plausibility structure existing in the minds of the hearers.

Surely, there is a certain validity to Witherington’s observation that, if Paul had wanted to appeal to an authority, he would have wanted to utilize a source that was acceptable to his listeners. Quoting the Hebrew scriptures in that context before the members of the Areopagus would have probably fallen like the proverbial “lead balloon.” Still, is there not more here than a case of simple rhetorical pragmatism? Does not the apostle quote Aratus because he feels that what Aratus has written about the divinity is *true*? How does this irenic and approving view coincide with other statements by Paul?

Dupuis insists over and over again from his contacts with non-Christians that he has experienced personally the goodness, the values and the virtues which they carry within themselves. But the question to be asked is: Do these come from God *per se*? Was his experience an experience of grace or of a natural goodness that is related to—although not necessarily the same as—God’s grace. Another question: What is Dupuis’s “theology of grace”? The matter was raised briefly in a book review by

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1014 Cf. e.g. *TCTRP*, 283, 292–93, 303–05 passim, 387–88.


1016 Cf. e.g. the apostle Paul’s recommendation in the Letter to the Philippians: [W]hatsoever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious—if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise—think about these things” (4:8).
George Gispert-Sauch (to which Dupuis replied). Except for that exchange, though, I am not aware that the matter has been pursued in depth by anyone else.\textsuperscript{1017}

Dupuis devotes a lot of space to tracing the genesis and development of the expression, \textit{Extra ecclesiam nulla salus}. Why does he spend no time at all studying Christianity’s attitude toward the role of human reason in the discovery of natural truths? Or, in the development of natural virtue? Consider the following famous quote from the third-century theologian, Tertullian (+ca. 225):

> Whence spring those “fables and endless genealogies,” and “unprofitable questions,” and “words which spread like cancer?” [cf. 2 Tim 2:17]. From all these . . . [the Apostle Paul] expressly names philosophy as that which he would have us be on our guard against. Writing to the Colossians, [he] says, “See that no one beguile you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men” [Col 2:8]. . . . He had been at Athens and had . . . become acquainted with that human wisdom which pretends to know the truth, whilst only corrupts it. . . . \textit{What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?} . . . Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{1018}

Obviously, Tertullian has Acts 17 in the back of his mind when asserting his skepticism of using human reason in order to understand the faith. One might ask hypothetically how Dupuis might have responded to that negative view in light of his treatments of Acts 17 and Rom 1. I think, though, that more must be done about addressing the issue of (what could be termed) “grace versus virtue.” There is, perhaps, a need to recover and apply the several distinctions of grace found in the theological manuals to the contemporary issue of religious pluralism. When Paul speaks in Rom 1 about pagan humanity’s distortion of God’s revelatory presence in the natural world, is he not implying that His presence could possibly be known through nature \textit{without} distortion? Whether that possibility does exist in fact is a further question.

The First Letter to Timothy teaches that God wills for all human beings to be saved (2:4). According to Dupuis, this saving will of God is no mere wish or “velleity.” It is real, active and unconditional.\textsuperscript{1019} Stated in such absolutist terms, the question is raised: What, then, is the need to appeal at all to a “cosmic covenant” as the foundation for God’s relationship of revelation and salvation with pagan humanity? If (as Dupuis contends) God’s universal and salvific will is subject to no other condition than a person’s free acceptance of His self-manifestation through grace, then what role—if any—does Jesus Christ play for the salvation of humankind? Does not such a view tend to diminish to the point of irrelevancy the role played in humankind’s history by the people of Israel? Furthermore,

\textsuperscript{1017} Cf. Gispert-Sauch, 969–70, and Dupuis, “Dupuis Responds,” 222–23.

\textsuperscript{1018} Tertullian, \textit{De Praescriptione Haereticorum}, no. 7.

\textsuperscript{1019} TCTR\textit{P}, 217.
where does Dupuis’s own idea of the salvific activity of the “Word as such” fit into God’s unconditional will to save? Does not such a distinction become otiose?

**IV. Conclusion**

We come now to the end of this doctoral thesis. I want to express my appreciation to the reader for having “hung in there” as we have traversed through Dupuis’s use of the Bible in his “Christian theology of religious pluralism” as analyzed according to chap. III of IBC. I believe that I have met all of the goals stated at the outset in the Introduction. I think that it is fitting to end this dissertation with the words of God’s revelation contained in sacred scripture. Hence, I finish with a quotation from the anonymous epitomizer who composed the Second Book of Maccabees:

I will bring my story to an end. . . . If it is well written and to the point, that is what I wanted; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that is the best I could do. . . . Let this, then, be the end (15:37–39).
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