

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE OTHER RELIGIOUS PATHS: REJECTING NOTHING THAT IS TRUE AND HOLY

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*[Catholic thinking about other religious traditions has continued to develop rapidly since the Second Vatican Council. The author discusses the impact of conciliar texts, the thought of John Paul II, the “pluralist” and “regnocentric” theologies of religion, and the practice of interreligious dialogue on Catholic views of other religious paths. The multiple issues selected for discussion reflect the controversy surrounding the declaration Dominus Iesus of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.]*

ON SEPTEMBER 5, 2000, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a “declaration” entitled *Dominus Iesus*.<sup>1</sup> In an accompanying letter addressed to presidents of episcopal conferences, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the congregation, explained that the declaration was intended to address “the growing presence of confused or erroneous ideas and opinions, both within the Church generally and in certain theological circles, regarding . . . the salvific event of Jesus Christ . . . and the necessity of the Church for salvation.” Ratzinger stated in that letter that he was

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000). The English text is also found in *Origins* 30 (September 14, 2000) 209–19. The accompanying curial letter to the bishops is found in *ibid.* 220. On the declaration, see *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, ed. Stephen I. Pope and Charles Hefling (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002); also “*Dominus Iesus*”: *Anstössige Wahrheit oder anstössige Kirche? Dokumente, Hintergründe, Standpunkte und Folgerungen*, ed. Michael J. Rainer (Münster: LIT, 2001). I wish to thank a number of colleagues who read earlier drafts of this article, especially John Borelli, Christopher Key Chapple, Thomas Rausch, S.J., Graham MacDonald, Bernard Frisher, Paul Knitter, Randolph Calvo, Thomas Ryan, C.S.P., Francis Decenso, C.S.P., and Barbara Murphy.

confident that bishops around the world would “do everything possible to ensure its distribution and favourable reception.” However, responses to the declaration from many bishops were less than enthusiastic.<sup>2</sup> In addition, some of the Catholic Church’s dialogue partners canceled scheduled meetings to the embarrassment of Vatican officials.<sup>3</sup>

*Dominus Iesus* and the controversy that followed its publication reveal much about the Catholic Church at this time in its history. The theological status of the other religious paths has become a vital and controversial question for Catholics around the world. The various answers they give to this question carry broad and concrete implications as to how they will live their lives as Christian believers. The purpose of my article is to review this lively discussion going on within the Catholic Church by commenting on the declaration and the subsequent controversy. *Dominus Iesus* has much to say not only about other religious paths, but also about other Christian churches as well. However, my article does not address the significance of *Dominus Iesus* for ecumenical relations, and confines itself to how the Catholic Church looks upon other religious traditions in this document.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Edward Kessler, executive director of the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge, England, writing in London’s *Tablet*, criticized *Dominus Iesus*, saying that “some liberal Catholic theologians fear that something far more sinister is afoot: nothing less than a conspiracy to overturn the Second Vatican Council.”<sup>5</sup> What does Vatican II teach in regard to the other religious traditions and their followers?

Where previous official statements of the Catholic Church were tentative, Vatican II is clear and unambiguous about the possibility that those who follow other religious paths can be saved in Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, for example, states:

There are those who without any fault do not know anything about Christ or his Church, yet who search for God with a sincere heart and, under the influence of

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, responses to *Dominus Iesus* from Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza, then President of the National Council of Catholic Bishops, Cardinal Carlo Martini of Milan, Cardinals Walter Kasper and Edward Cassidy (both of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity) and Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Steinfelds, “Beliefs,” *The New York Times*, 7 October 2000, sec. B 8.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the declaration’s impact on ecumenical relations, see the comments by John Hotchkin to the Canon Law Society of America, printed in *Origins* 30 (October 19, 2000) 293–95.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Kessler and Eugene Fisher, “A Dialogue of Head and Heart,” *The Tablet* 254 (November 18, 2000) 1556–59, at 1556.

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 (no. 16).

This much cited selection from *Lumen gentium* speaks about those who “strive to lead an upright life” not about, for example, Shaivite Hindus or Sunna Muslims as such. What about the other religious paths themselves? Are “individuals of good will” saved by means of their religious observances or despite them? Does the saving grace that is “active invisibly” in the hearts of individuals ever become visible and concrete in the religious practices and traditions of these individuals? In regard to these questions, I believe there is a real danger of overinterpreting the council. The Council Fathers are generally clear about the possibility of salvation for those outside the Christian community. In regard to the way in which such people are saved, the council maintains a studied ambiguity and restraint.

For example, in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra aetate* (no. 2), the Council Fathers state simply that the Catholic Church “rejects nothing of those things which are true and holy” in other religious traditions, and no more. In the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, *Ad gentes* (no. 11), the council teaches that Christians must “discover the seeds of the Word which lie hidden in [other religious traditions].” Commenting on the council’s restraint, Karl Rahner argued that an essential problem for the theologian was left open by the council.<sup>6</sup> Are Buddhists saved by Christ in a way that is unconnected to their practice of the Dharma? Does the Holy Spirit sanctify the life of a Jain apart from the Jain’s practice of *ahimsa*? The roots of the council’s ambiguity lead back into preconciliar developments within the Catholic “theology of religions.” The work of Jean Daniélou and Karl Rahner is especially noteworthy in this regard.<sup>7</sup>

From 1956 until 1973 Daniélou published regularly on the meaning and status of the many religious paths.<sup>8</sup> His approach to the question is gov-

<sup>6</sup> Karl Rahner, “On the Importance of Non-Christian Religions for Salvation,” *Theological Investigations* 18 (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 288–95.

<sup>7</sup> The work of Henri de Lubac S.J. and Hans Urs von Balthasar can be mentioned in conjunction with that of Daniélou. Also the work of Gustave Thils and H. R. Schlette is pertinent to the writings of Rahner. For a discussion of theological developments prior to the council, see Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 130–57.

<sup>8</sup> Among other works, see *The Salvation of the Nations* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1962); *Mythes païens, mystère chrétien* (Paris: Fayard, 1966); “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” in *Word in History*, ed. P.

erned by a theology of history. In Daniélou's view, history is the progressive manifestation of the divine to humankind. Within this general history of creation, salvation history proper begins with Abraham and reaches its apex in Jesus Christ whose saving presence within time is now continued by the Church. Daniélou locates religious traditions other than Judaism and Christianity within this theology of history by means of a Scholastic distinction between the natural and the supernatural orders. Although the natural order has its own proper autonomy and intelligibility, it has been ordained by God to find its ultimate fulfillment in the supernatural. This fulfillment of the natural order in its supernatural destiny and finality is manifest in the progressive unfolding of the divine within history. Therefore, Christians may speak not only of two orders, the natural and the supernatural, but also of two covenants, the cosmic (which includes the entire natural order) and the historical covenant (which begins in the Jewish people and continues today in the Church).<sup>9</sup>

Based on this distinction, Daniélou concludes that the other religious paths are human expressions of a real knowledge of God available to human beings through the proper use of natural reason that has a supernatural finality. This natural knowledge of God, however, should not be confused with a supernatural faith which comes only from God's active intervention into the unfolding of a history of salvation beginning with Abraham and culminating in Christ. "The essential difference between Catholicism and all other religions is that the others start from man. They are touching and often very beautiful attempts, rising very high in their search for God. But in Catholicism there is a contrary movement, the descent of God towards the world, in order to communicate his life to it."<sup>10</sup> However "touching" and "beautiful," the other religious paths are located within the natural order and have no power to provide human beings with the salvation that God has made available only in the Church, and indeed, the Catholic Church.

From this confluence of a progressive theology of history and a Scholastic distinction between natural and supernatural, Daniélou develops a theology of religions that includes the following points. First, the other religious paths are part of the prehistory of salvation, related to the divine by means of a cosmic covenant that includes all of the natural world. They are examples of the natural human longing for the divine which finds fulfillment only by leading human beings to where the supernatural has actually entered into history. Second, Daniélou carefully distinguishes the

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Burke (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966) 86–101; *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History* (London: Longmans Green, 1958) 107–21.

<sup>9</sup> See Daniélou, *Lord of History*.

<sup>10</sup> Daniélou, *The Salvation of the Nations* 8.

natural knowledge of God found in the other religions (a product of natural reason) from the supernatural faith enjoyed by Christians (an act of divine revelation). Third, as products of the natural order and part of the “pre-history” of salvation, the other religious paths are not evil or demonic in themselves. Christians must look on other religious traditions as a mixture of truth and falsehood, good and bad, which nevertheless may dispose their followers to a genuine openness to fulfillment in Christ. Fourth, Christianity must be distinguished sharply from the other religious paths as the religion that offers a supernatural fulfillment of the human quest for the divine that is present in the other religions only as an aspiration.

The influence of Daniélou’s theology of religions can be discerned in the council documents. The decree on the Church’s missionary activity, *Ad gentes*, speaks of the other religious paths as endeavors in which people “search for God, groping for Him that they may by chance find Him . . .” and as human “initiatives” which “need to be enlightened and purified” by the Gospel. Even still, the other religious paths are not evil or worthless for they can “sometimes serve as pedagogy toward the true God or as a preparation for the gospel” and thus find their fulfillment there.<sup>11</sup> Later in *Ad gentes*, the notion of “fulfillment” is developed in relation to the Church’s missionary activity. Without mentioning any particular religion, the document extols missionary efforts as that which “purges of evil associations those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God. . . .” For this reason, “whatever good is found sown in the hearts and minds of men, or in the rites and cultures peculiar to various peoples” is “healed, ennobled and perfect for the glory of God” by conversion to the gospel. In this manner, missionary activity leads to an “eschatological fullness.”<sup>12</sup>

Karl Rahner was also widely influential at the council. Along with Daniélou, Rahner had a progressive theology of revelation within history in which Christ forms the apex. In this respect, his theology of religions, like Daniélou’s, is also a fulfillment theology.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Daniélou, however, Rahner does not make as strict a distinction between the natural and the supernatural orders. Human beings are never utter strangers to divine grace. Grace is always already at work in human beings in concrete ways. Because of this, Rahner comes to a significantly different assessment of the role and meaning of the different religions. “In view of the social nature of man . . . however, it is quite unthinkable that man, being what he

<sup>11</sup> *Ad gentes* no. 3, see also *Lumen gentium* no. 23.

<sup>12</sup> *Ad gentes* no. 9

<sup>13</sup> Among Rahner’s more influential essays on this topic, see “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” *Theological Investigations* 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 115–34; “Observations on the Problem of the ‘Anonymous Christian,’ ” *Theological Investigations* 14 (New York: Seabury, 1976) 280–98.

is, could actually achieve this relationship to God . . . in an absolutely private interior reality and this outside of the actual religious bodies which offer themselves to him in the environment in which he lives.”<sup>14</sup> The other religions cannot be seen as merely natural expressions of human wisdom and aspiration as with Daniélou. The religious practices of Muslims and Jains, Confucians and Buddhists mediate the supernatural grace of God to those who follow these paths. As such, other religions do not merely prepare human beings to hear the gospel (*praeparatio evangelica*), they are supernatural acts of God that makes saving grace available to human beings.

Rahner comes to this conclusion about religions because, unlike Daniélou, he does not make a sharp distinction between the natural and supernatural orders within the individual. Every human being is connected to the supernatural order by virtue of being human. Thus, every human act of love, which arises out of freedom, is empowered by supernatural grace and constitutes a concrete incarnation of that grace within the world. In fact, Rahner argues that the notions of a natural and supernatural order are merely “remainder concepts”: although they may be helpful as conceptual clarifications, they refer to a “Holy Mystery” in which we find the human and the divine are already incomprehensibly and profoundly interrelated.<sup>15</sup>

As I have already noted, Rahner and Daniélou both have a progressive theology of history in which Christ forms the *telos* of history and the ultimate fulfillment of all human aspirations. However, Rahner’s view of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural has several repercussions for his understanding of the theology of history and the role played by the several religious traditions within that history. First, for Rahner, in contrast to Daniélou, nature and grace are not two sequential phases in the life of a human being. Grace is always visible and efficacious in the lives of all human beings, whether or not they have heard the gospel and turned to the Church for baptism.<sup>16</sup> This means that the other religions cannot be relegated to the “prehistory” of the drama of salvation as Daniélou would have it. Second, also in contrast to Daniélou, the Church cannot claim to be the only supernaturally revealed religion. Grace is always at work in the lives of human beings and this grace always takes a form that is visible and tangible. There is no basis for excluding the religions of human beings from the supernatural working of grace. We should expect that the other religions mediate the saving grace of Christ to their

<sup>14</sup> Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions” 128.

<sup>15</sup> Rahner, “Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace,” in *Theological Investigations* 1 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961) 297–317, esp. 302.

<sup>16</sup> Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions” 123.

adherents.<sup>17</sup> Third, the Church's missionary effort is not rendered superfluous by the ubiquity of grace, but transformed in character. Evangelization is not a matter of bringing God to those who are godless. Evangelization is making the grace of Christ, which is implicit in the religious lives of Muslims and Jews, Buddhists and Daoists, explicit. In this respect, Rahner's understanding of explicit membership in the Church as a "fulfillment" is rather different from Daniélou's understanding. And fourth, in Daniélou's understanding, the other religious paths are not salvific. They are at best preparations for hearing the gospel and beneficial in that they can lead one to a fulfillment in Christian faith. For Rahner, Christians must recognize in the many religious traditions the saving power of God who saves human beings *through* their religions, not *despite* them.

Rahner's theology of religions can be seen in the council documents as well. In a way consistent with Rahner's understanding of the ubiquity of grace, *Gaudium et spes* no. 22 teaches that "by his Incarnation the Son of God united himself in some sense with every human being." Later on in this same number, after we are told that the Christian is the one who has been incorporated into the paschal mystery and thus shares in the Resurrection of Christ, the document explains that "this applies not only to Christians but to all people of good will in whose hearts grace is secretly at work." In *Ad gentes* no. 3, we find another text consistent with Rahner's theology of religions. The document claims that "this all-embracing plan of God for the salvation of the human race is accomplished not only as it were secretly in their souls." Statements such as these should not be overinterpreted. They move in a Rahnerian direction to the extent that they recognize grace to be operative and efficacious in the lives of people who are not Christians. They do not go as far as Rahner would in recognizing the other religious paths themselves as mediations of Christ's salvation.

In light of these tendencies within the council documents themselves, we can now look into *Dominus Iesus* and its use of the council texts. For the most part, *Dominus Iesus* is more comfortable with Daniélou's approach to religious diversity than with Rahner's. For example, *Dominus Iesus* no. 7 makes a clear distinction between what it calls "belief," as found in other religions, and "theological faith," as found in Christianity and warns that this distinction must be "*firmly held*" (emphasis in the original). The "obedience of faith" is the proper response to revelation and is the result of grace. Citing *Dei Verbum* no. 4, the council document on revelation, the declaration explains that "faith" is the result of grace, for "in order to have faith, the grace of God must come first and give assistance . . . ." Citing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 153, the declaration also explains that faith is "a supernatural virtue infused by [God]." Belief, as found in

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 122.

the other religions, “is that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute.” This clear distinction is reminiscent of Daniélou’s fulfillment theology and his Scholastic distinction between the natural knowledge of God, as found in other religions, and the supernatural faith enjoyed by Christians. *Dominus Iesus* is quite aware of the implications this distinction between “theological faith” and mere religious “belief” brings to the Church’s assessment of the other religious paths. No. 7 closes by noting that contemporary theologians sometimes confuse theological faith with belief as found in other religions and fail to understand that the other religions can only provide “religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself.”

The use of council documents in *Dominus Iesus* no. 8 also suggests a preference for Daniélou’s approach to religious diversity. This passage offers a warning against the tendency in some recent theology proposing that Christians look on the sacred writings of other religions as inspired. The declaration acknowledges that “some elements” of these scriptures may be “*de facto* instruments” by means of which human beings are able “to nourish and maintain their life-relationship with God.” Here the declaration cites a council document, *Nostra aetate* no. 2, which teaches that the religions of others “frequently reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens everyone.” Still, *Dominus Iesus* insists that a strict distinction must be maintained separating the inspired texts of Christianity from the scriptures of the other religious traditions. At this point *Dei Verbum* no. 11 which affirms the inspired character of the Old and New Testaments, is cited.

The same section of *Dominus Iesus* finishes by citing Pope John Paul II in a way that does not seem entirely compatible with the strict distinction just asserted between faith and belief. Quoting *Redemptoris missio* no. 55, a text with affinities with Rahner’s theology of religions, *Dominus Iesus* acknowledges that God “does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression. . . .” From this, *Dominus Iesus* concludes that “the sacred books of other religions, which in actual fact direct and nourish the existence of their followers, receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain.” If the grace contained in the Sutras and the Upanishads, the Qur’an, and the Dao-de-jing is from Christ and not merely the product of human wisdom untouched by grace, how then can Christians maintain a stark, un-nuanced distinction between “theological faith,” on the one hand, and “belief, in the other religions” which is merely “that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration”?

Similarly, *Ad gentes* no. 7 makes clear that God, in a way that does not mitigate the Church's "sacred right to evangelize," can lead non-Christians to "that faith without which it is impossible to please him." In fine, the sharp distinction between theological faith and mere religious belief, which *Dominus Iesus* claims is to be "firmly held," remains problematic when interpreted against the complexities of the documents of Vatican II.<sup>18</sup> This is because these documents do not always conform to Daniélou's fulfillment theology and its clear distinction between the natural and supernatural orders.

*Dominus Iesus* also offers an assessment of the council's teaching regarding the salvation of other religious believers that is cautious and, I believe, accurate. After affirming the certainty that other religious believers can be saved by the grace of Christ in no. 20, the following number goes on to note that Vatican II limited itself to the statement that God bestows this grace "in ways known to himself."<sup>19</sup> Nowhere in its documents does the council unambiguously recognize the other religions as actual mediations of the saving grace of Jesus Christ as Rahner argues in his theology. *Dominus Iesus* no. 21 correctly recognizes that the status of the other religious paths remains an open question for the Church's theologians whose "work is to be encouraged, since it is certainly useful for understanding better God's salvific plan and the ways in which it is accomplished." One theologian who has made a considerable contribution to this very question, a contribution that goes beyond the teaching of Vatican II, is Pope John Paul II.

### THE MAGISTERIAL TEACHING OF JOHN PAUL II

John Paul II is not only the first pope in history to visit a synagogue, he is also the only pope to stand and pray at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. This pope's outreach to Jews and other religious believers is rooted on a clear theological foundation. Since the first year of his papacy, John Paul II has responded to the reality of religious diversity by turning to a theology of the Holy Spirit.

The pope's interest in the theology of the Holy Spirit can be seen in his first encyclical letter, *Redemptor hominis* (1979). This interest has continued to develop since then toward a greater appreciation first of non-Christians as religious believers and subsequently of the other religions

<sup>18</sup> This is the view of Cardinal Dulles who also cites *Ad gentes* no. 7 as an indication that the declaration's distinction between theological faith and belief in the other religions is not in keeping with the council. See Avery Dulles, "D*ominus Iesus*, A Catholic Response," *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (Winter 2001) 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ad gentes* no. 7.

themselves. In the encyclical, the pope recognizes in the beliefs of those who follow other religious paths an “effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body” (no. 6). Indeed, so impressive is the belief of these believers that Christians should be “ashamed at often being themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church.” In Manila, on February 21, 1981, the pope focused especially on the presence of the Holy Spirit in all authentic prayer, a theme that would bear fruit in the Assisi prayer meeting held on October 27, 1986.<sup>20</sup> And while speaking to Hindu leaders in Madras during his first visit to India on February 5, 1986, the pope noted that what makes “true dialogue possible” is the truth of Hinduism. Christians must hold Hinduism, not only Hindu people, in genuine respect because of “the action of the Spirit in man.”<sup>21</sup>

Shortly after this address in Madras, the pope issued an encyclical letter on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et vivificantem* (1986). In that letter John Paul II teaches that a proper appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be limited to the 2000 years of the history of the Christian Church. Christians must “go further back, to embrace the whole of the action of the Holy Spirit even before Christ—from the beginning, throughout the world, and especially in the economy of the Old Covenant” (no. 53). But not only must Christians go back in time, they must also “go further afield.” Quoting *Gaudium et spes* 22, the pope teaches that Christians “must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being associated, in a way known to God, with the Pascal Mystery.” In this encyclical, John Paul II has gone beyond Daniélou’s framework for interpreting the theological meaning of other religious paths. Has the pope thereby taken a Rahnerian turn?

The understanding of the human person in *Dominum et vivificantem* has affinities with Rahner’s theological anthropology. “The Spirit . . . is at the very source of the human person’s existential and religious questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very structure of its being” (no. 28). And like Rahner’s theology of religions, the pope does not restrict the activity of the Spirit to the purely interior, private realm of the individual. “The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.”

The pope’s interest in these themes—the ubiquity of the work of the Spirit made visible in the hunger for prayer and in the religions of the human beings who open their hearts in prayer—accounts in no small way for an event that has had a lasting impact on John Paul II and the subse-

<sup>20</sup> *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963–1995)*, ed. Francesco Gioia (Boston: Pauline, 1994) nos. 371–372.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* no. 507

quent development of his theology of the Holy Spirit. In October 1986, the pope gathered with Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and representatives of other religious traditions for a “World Day of Prayer for Peace” at Assisi. Two months later, in an address to the Roman Curia, the pope reflected at some length on the event as a “clear sign of the profound unity of those who seek in religion spiritual and transcendent values that respond to the great questions of the human heart, despite concrete divisions.”<sup>22</sup> The pope went on to note that “Just as there is no man or woman who does not bear the sign of his or her divine origin, so there is no one who can remain outside or on the margins of the work of Jesus Christ . . . .” To justify this view, John Paul II again quoted *Gaudium et spes* (no. 22) in regard to the universal activity of the Holy Spirit in offering the possibility to all of coming into contact with the saving mystery of Christ.<sup>23</sup> The event at Assisi, therefore, was held in order to confirm the pope’s conviction that “every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every human person.”<sup>24</sup>

John Paul II’s teaching about other religious traditions in light of the work of the Holy Spirit was further expanded in 1990 with the promulgation of *Redemptoris missio*, the encyclical letter “On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate.” The pope summarized in no. 28 the salient themes in his understanding of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s presence and activity are universal and in the hearts of every human person. The Spirit holds out to every person the possibility of sharing in the paschal mystery. The Spirit is the source of every human being’s religious quest, which arises from the structure of his being. The Spirit’s activity affects not only individuals but also religious institutions. In the following section, the pope reflected on the implications of these truths for Christians. Since the Spirit “blows where he wills” (John 3:8), we must “broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place.” Then the pope commented again on the impact that the gathering of religious believers at Assisi had on him, saying that the Spirit, who is present in every human heart, is “the same Spirit who is at work in the Incarnation . . . and who is at work in the Church.”

To conclude that the pope’s theology of the Holy Spirit constitutes a vindication of the Rahnerian side of the council would be tempting, but premature. His apostolic letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (1994), four years after *Redemptoris missio* and eight years after the Assisi event, contains a passage that bears affinities with Daniélou’s fulfillment theology. In the encyclical, the pope discussed “the essential point by which Christianity differs from all the other religions.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. no. 562.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. no. 565

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. no. 572.

Christianity has its starting-point in the incarnation of the Word. Here, it is not simply a case of a human search for God, but of God who comes in person to speak to human beings of himself and to show them the path by which he may be reached . . . *The Incarnate Word is thus the fulfillment of the yearning present in all the religions of humankind* (no. 6).

Holding up a stark contrast between the “human search for God,” and the “God who comes in person” to show human beings “the path by which he may be reached” as an essential point of difference separating Christianity from other religions seems to be a significant departure from the pope’s approach in his earlier statements.

Nowhere in the development of his theology of the Holy Spirit does the pope suggest that other religious paths are salvific in their own right. All salvation is in Christ and through the working of the Holy Spirit. Neither does the pope suggest that the Church can ever be completely distinguished from Christ and the Spirit. Instead, John Paul II speaks of “participated forms of mediation,” i.e. the participation of the other religions in the saving mystery of Christ which is fully present in the Church.

John Paul II’s phrase, “participated forms of mediation,” can be traced back to *Lumen gentium*: “the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a participation in this one source” (no. 62). This conciliar text does not speak of the other religions per se, but rather of elements in the spiritual and material situation of other religious believers. In *Redemptoris missio*, John Paul II made use of this principle in asserting the centrality of Christ in the salvation of all: “Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his” (no. 5). Religions are not equal.

Given the importance of what we have seen for Catholic thought regarding religious diversity, *Dominus Iesus* has surprisingly little to say about the pope’s theology of the Holy Spirit. The second chapter of the declaration is devoted to the role played by the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation. Although the chapter cites the work of John Paul II, the center of his theological contribution is merely acknowledged en route to underscoring that the saving work of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from that of Christ.

While recognizing the historical-salvific function of the Spirit in the whole universe and in the entire history of humanity, the Magisterium states: “This is the same Spirit who was at work in the incarnation and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between

Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions, serves as a preparation for the Gospel.”<sup>25</sup>

The use of the encyclical in this passage cannot be said to be misleading. However, *Dominus Iesus* hardly does justice to the import of the pope’s contribution to the Church’s understanding of other religious paths.<sup>26</sup>

The declaration’s underestimation of the pope’s pneumatology can also be seen in *Dominus Iesus* no. 21, a warning to theologians who, in recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit in the various religions, look on the sacred texts of these religions as inspired in the technical sense. The teachings of Vatican II are acknowledged to the effect that “Certainly, the various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God.” Then the declaration cites the pope’s theology of the Holy Spirit by noting that these elements are part of what “the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions.”<sup>27</sup> The papal teaching, however, is immediately qualified. Although “some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel,” these do not have “a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments.”<sup>28</sup>

The declaration’s cautiousness regarding “prayers and rituals” in other religious traditions is especially curious given the centrality that John Paul II has placed on prayer with other religious believers as an expression of the universal unity of the human race in the Holy Spirit. The pope may very well agree with the declaration’s specification of his thought. However, *Dominus Iesus* no. 21 leaves a distorted impression of the pope’s views of the presence and efficacy of the Holy Spirit in the religious lives of those who follow other religious paths. In his Manila radio address, for example, the pope taught that “In the Holy Spirit, every individual and all people have become, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus, children of God, partakers in the divine nature and heirs to eternal life.”<sup>29</sup> In his address to the Roman Curia after the prayer service at Assisi with representatives of

<sup>25</sup> The passage quoted is from *Redemptoris missio* no. 18.

<sup>26</sup> On June 16, 2000, Ratzinger met with John Paul II who, “with sure knowledge and by his apostolic authority, ratified and confirmed” the declaration and ordered its publication (*Dominus Iesus* no. 23). For this reason, the declaration has “universal magisterial nature” whose truths require the “irrevocable assent by the Catholic faithful.”

<sup>27</sup> *Redemptoris missio* no. 18

<sup>28</sup> NB: the English translation of *Dominus Iesus* uses an indefinite article, “a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy,” where the Italian original uses a definite article, “the divine origin . . .”

<sup>29</sup> *Interreligious Dialogue* (ed. F. Gioia) no. 369.

various religious traditions, the pope strongly stressed the fundamental unity of all human beings through the working of the Holy Spirit. In prayer, the unity of the human race “was manifested clearly at Assisi, in spite of the differences between the religious professions, which were not at all concealed or watered down.” The prayer at Assisi makes visible the fact that all those who pray “are included in the great and unique design of God.”<sup>30</sup>

John Paul II’s pneumatological approach to the question of religious diversity is more prominently and positively reflected in the 1997 statement of the International Theological Commission, entitled “Christianity and the World Religions.”<sup>31</sup> The pope’s teachings are neatly summarized in nos. 81 and 83 before reaching in no. 84 the following conclusion.

Given this explicit recognition of the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the religions, one cannot exclude the possibility that they exercise as such a certain salvific function, that is, despite their ambiguity, they help men achieve their ultimate end. In the religions is explicitly thematized the relationship of man with the Absolute, his transcendental dimension. It would be difficult to think that what the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of men taken as individuals would have salvific value and not think that what the Holy Spirit works in the religions and cultures would not have such value. The recent magisterium does not seem to authorize such a drastic distinction.

The “drastic distinction” that the recent magisterium does not abide is precisely what goes to the heart of the controversy over *Dominus Iesus*: how wide is the distinction between nature and grace, the natural order and the supernatural, the beliefs of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, and the faith of Christians?

### PLURALIST THEOLOGIES

In a response to *Dominus Iesus* published in *Commonweal*, Philip Kennedy, O.P., of Oxford University offered the following view of the Christ-event as a revelation of God within history. “Jesus Christ is not the complete revelation of God in history, but a partial manifestation of what God may be like. Since Jesus is not the unveiling of the fullness of God in the world, other religions may have their say about God’s salvific nature.”<sup>32</sup>

*Dominus Iesus* is centrally concerned with the “unicity” (uniqueness) and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the tendency it sees toward a

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. nos. 565–66.

<sup>31</sup> International Theological Commission, “Christianity and the World Religions,” *Origins* 27 (August 14, 1997) 149–66.

<sup>32</sup> Phillip Kennedy, “Rome and Relativism,” *Commonweal* 127 (October 20, 2000) 12–15, at 15.

theological relativism in regard to both Christ and the Church. According to the declaration, some theologians are claiming that important truths have been superseded, especially traditional beliefs having to do with Jesus Christ as the definitive and complete revelation of God.

As is often the case with Vatican documents, *Dominus Iesus* mentions no particular theologians in regard to these problems. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, however, has been instrumental in the criticism and even the silencing of several theologians in regard to these issues. The declaration claims that the roots of these problems are to be found “in certain presuppositions of both a philosophical and theological nature which hinder the understanding and acceptance of the revealed truth” (no. 4). It mentions views regarding “the elusiveness and inexpressibility of divine truth, even by Christian revelation,” and “relativistic attitudes toward truth itself.” The declaration seemingly has the “pluralist” theology of religions in mind. Many of the concerns raised by the declaration have parallels in other Vatican documents that deal with pluralist theological approaches to religious diversity.<sup>33</sup> Some of the criticism leveled against *Dominus Iesus* has had to do with the declaration’s rejection of pluralist theologies and religious relativism. I believe that a good deal of this criticism is misplaced.

The pluralist model of religions is often associated with John Hick’s philosophy of religion.<sup>34</sup> As a response to religious diversity, Hick argues, Christians and others should adopt the hypothesis that “the great world traditions constitute different conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, the Real from within the different cultural ways of being human.”<sup>35</sup> Religious terms for an impersonal ultimate reality, like *Brahman*, *Sunyata* and the *Dao*, as well as for personal deities such as Yahweh, Allah, Shiva, and Kali are different ways human beings have of naming and connecting with what Hick calls the “Real.” As a consequence, all religions must be seen as partial and incomplete interpretations of a transcendent Reality that utterly surpasses our ability to name. No religion may legitimately claim to be superior to any other religion as a path to salvation.

*Dominus Iesus* is very much concerned that “[t]he Church’s constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also *de iure* (or in

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, the 1996 document of the International Theological Commission, “Christianity and the World Religions,” *Origins* 27 (August 14, 1997) 149–66, especially nos. 4–22, and the talk given by Ratzinger entitled “Relativism: The Central Problem for the Faith Today,” *Origins* 26 (October 31, 1996) 309–17.

<sup>34</sup> The most comprehensive statement of Hick’s pluralist approach is his book, *An Interpretation of Religion: The Challenge of Other Religions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 376.

principle).<sup>36</sup> In this regard, let me offer an observation. Despite its apparent relativism, the pluralist model is hardly neutral toward religions. Hick's pluralist theology is biased against the notion of a normative revelation within history. Religions constitute various "conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, the Real." The idea that the "Real" may have entered into history to reveal itself in any unparalleled way is ruled out from the start. Religions are human interpretations of a transcendent reality that remains transcendent. This means that some forms of Hinduism are privileged at the expense of other religions, especially Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all of which appeal to a theology of revelation. We are led to an ironic conclusion: by imposing a theological relativism on all religions to which some can adjust more easily than others, the pluralist model is not really a form of relativism at all.

The pluralist model of religions also brings with it implications for Christology.<sup>37</sup> To date, the most sophisticated attempt to articulate a pluralist Christology can be found in the work of Roger Haight.<sup>38</sup> The appeal to a Spirit Christology which is at the center of Haight's proposal, is too complicated by far to be treated under present limitations. *In nuce* Haight asks: "Is Christianity really a religion destined for all people?" The answer Haight gives "leans on the side of pluralism."<sup>39</sup> Christians must believe that Jesus is a normative revelation from God, but they may also believe that God is normatively revealed in other religious traditions as well. In this his goal is "to build a bridge between a normative but non-constitutive Christology and pluralist theology" that reflects a "global consciousness" and resists the "sectarian temptation."<sup>40</sup>

In Haight's Spirit Christology, the primary mediation of God's presence and salvation for Christians is Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is therefore normative for Christians, but not for others. This is not to imply that religious leaders, like Muhammad and Siddhartha Gautama, are some kind of Christ-figure. As Haight asserts: "the fundamental mediation of God's salvific presence in other religions need not be a person: it may be an event, a book, a teaching, a praxis."<sup>41</sup> Presumably the Qur'an is the divine mediation for Muslims, but not for Christians. In addition, Christians must recognize that "[n]either Jesus nor Christianity mediates any complete

<sup>36</sup> *Dominus Iesus* no. 4.

<sup>37</sup> For Hick's view of Jesus of Nazareth, see his essay "Jesus and the World Religions," in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 167–85, and his "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralist Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987) 16–36.

<sup>38</sup> Roger Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 298.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 403.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 415.

possession of God. Without a sense of God's transcendent mystery, without the healthy agnostic sense of what we do not know of God, one will not expect to learn more of God from what has been communicated to us human beings through other revelations and religions."<sup>42</sup> Despite his incompleteness, Jesus remains a normative revelation of God for Christians, "the one who mediates God's salvation to humankind."<sup>43</sup>

In promoting a pluralist theology of religions, Haight envisions a Christology that is "normative but non-constitutive." Jesus may mediate salvation for Christians, but he is not salvific for people who follow other religious paths. For this reason, Jesus of Nazareth is not a universal savior, the unique and unparalleled redemptive event intended for all. "[T]he key step or point of transition to the pluralist position is the breakdown of a causal connection between Jesus of Nazareth, who is the basis of christology, and the salvation that according to Christian faith goes on outside of the Christian sphere."<sup>44</sup> There are other mediations of salvation proper to the other religious traditions and not to be subsumed within the mediation Christians affirm. Many separate and autonomous paths lead to one common salvation in God. The basis for this assessment of other religious traditions lies in Haight's Spirit Christology.

Logos Christologies, reflecting the Prologue of John, take as their governing metaphor the Incarnation of the Word. This approach leads predictably to the Chalcedonian language of two natures, fully human and fully divine, within one historical person. Logos Christologies also tend to promote claims regarding Christ's historical uniqueness and unsurpassability. Spirit Christologies, in contrast, understand the divinity of Jesus in terms of the activity of the Spirit who dwells within him. "Indwelling of the Spirit" would seem a fitting metaphor for Spirit Christologies. Haight, however, prefers the image of "empowerment" as more dynamic.<sup>45</sup> The Spirit has descended on Jesus of Nazareth and raised him up as savior of the world. But the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills. Jesus, therefore, is not necessarily the only mediation of the divine empowered by the Spirit. A proper Christology should prepare Christians to recognize other mediations.

How does a Spirit Christology contribute to a pluralist theology of religions? Through the working of the Holy Spirit, Jesus of Nazareth is seen as having been empowered to save all. But Christians must recognize that the Spirit has been at work in the world from the beginning, "without a causal connection to the historical appearance of Jesus."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, by recognizing that the Spirit is not restricted to the confines of the Christian

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 417.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 422.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 456.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 421.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 455.

community, a Spirit Christology is capable of recognizing other mediations of God. "The Spirit is spread abroad and it is not necessary to think that God as Spirit can be incarnated only once in history."<sup>47</sup> In fact, the other religious traditions may be rooted in "incarnations" that are independent of the Christ event which forms the core of Christianity.

Several observations are in order. First, despite Haight's self-acknowledged interest in promoting a pluralist theology of religions, important differences separate him from John Hick. Hick's pluralist model is based on a Kantian epistemology that undermines the notion of a normative revelation of God within history at the outset. In Hick's proposal, religions are not "acts of God" (to say so is only mythological language). The religions of the world are human acts: interpretations of the "Real" which ultimately remains inaccessible to human beings. In contrast, Haight bases his pluralist theology of religions on precisely what Hick's modernist epistemology undermines: a normative, supernatural revelation understood as an act of God within history. In fact, in order to be a pluralist, Haight must multiply these divine interventions into history. Haight's dissatisfaction with Hick's Christology, therefore, should come as no surprise. Hick's view of Jesus as an "inspired man" is "too thin" for Haight's Spirit Christology.<sup>48</sup> Haight's strong sense of historical revelation is more satisfied with the notion of a "divine indwelling," but even this is too static sounding. Haight finally settles on "empowerment" as a way to describe the action of the Spirit within history. Any assessment of Haight's contribution to Christology needs to be aware of how his preference for the language of "empowerment" reveals his strong sense of the active entry of God into history in contrast to Hick's understanding of religions as passive interpretations of what remains distant from human beings.

Second, Haight shares with Hick a problem endemic to pluralist theologies: they are not really very pluralistic. Hick's program succeeds only in forcing all the religions of the world into the straight-jacket of what the European Enlightenment will allow.<sup>49</sup> Religions that stray from their pen are deemed "intolerant." Haight has a similar problem. His pluralist program succeeds in remaking the various religions of the world into the handiwork of the Holy Spirit at work within history. Not many religious traditions fit comfortably into this mold. Some Muslims might be comfortable thinking of the Qur'an as a "mediation" of the divine within history, although what Haight means by "mediation" and how a Muslim under-

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 454.

<sup>49</sup> For criticisms of Hick's pluralist approach, see S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995); and James Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and the Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Paulist, 2000).

stands this word may be radically different. If Buddhism is to be recognized as the work of the Holy Spirit within history, as Haight at least suggests, Christians should be prepared for when Theravada Buddhists are baffled not only by the notion of a “Spirit” that “works” but also by the very idea of “history.”

Third, Haight’s Spirit Christology needs to be compared with the theology of the Holy Spirit that figures so prominently in John Paul II’s understanding of the many religions. The pope and Roger Haight both see the Spirit at work outside of Christianity in the other religious paths. The pope, however, always connects the work of the Spirit outside of Christianity to the Christ-event to which the Church alone bears full and explicit witness. *Dominus Iesus* is very much aware of this qualification. The declaration lodges a complaint against “contemporary theological reflection” which claims that Jesus of Nazareth “reveals the divine not in an exclusive way, but in a way complementary with other revelatory and salvific figures” (no. 9).<sup>50</sup> This view is rejected for being in “profound conflict with the Christian faith” (no. 10). Further on this is stated more specifically: “There are also those who propose the hypothesis of an economy of the Holy Spirit with a more universal breadth than that of the Incarnate Word, crucified and risen. This position also is contrary to the Catholic faith, which, on the contrary, considers the salvific incarnation of the Word as a trinitarian event” (no. 12). That the declaration cites *Gaudium et spes* no. 22 in support of this view should come as no surprise: “the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.” *Dominus Iesus* also cites *Redemptoris missio* where John Paul II notes that the Spirit, who is at work universally for the salvation of all human beings, “is the same Spirit who was at work in the incarnation and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos” (no. 29).

### REGNOCENTRIC THEOLOGIES

*Dominus Iesus* contains a warning to Catholics about the excesses of theologies of religion which describe themselves as “kingdom-centered” or what are sometimes called “regnocentric theologies” (no. 19). In doing so, the declaration raises warning-flags in regard to a major theme in the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) and the work of prominent theologians reflecting in an Asian context such as Michael Amaladoss, L. D’Sousa, and Jacques Dupuis.

<sup>50</sup> For the views of Jacques Dupuis, see *Christianity and the Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002); see also the article by Gerard O’Collins in this issue, pp. 388–97.

Regnocentric theologies of religion recognize that all human beings who work for justice and harmony—signs of the kingdom of God announced by Jesus Christ—are heirs to God’s kingdom and thus saved. These theologies emphasize the elements within other religions that promote an “integral liberation” and therefore call for Christian collaboration with other religions and the inculturation of the gospel message to promote the coming of the kingdom. These theologies raise important and often controversial questions having to do with (1) the role of the Church in the coming of the kingdom, (2) the status of other religious traditions vis-à-vis the kingdom and (3) the necessity of the Church’s missionary efforts.

Regnocentric theologians tend to agree that the reign of God cannot be identified with the Church unambiguously. God’s kingdom is an eschatological reality, already present within history to be sure, but not yet present in fullness. If the Church cannot simply be identified with the kingdom, is membership in the Church necessary for salvation? In answering this question, a regnocentric theologian such as Jacques Dupuis recommends avoiding two extremes. One extreme would place the necessity and universality of the Church on the same level as that of Christ. The second extreme would minimize the necessity and universality of the Church, as if to suggest that there are alternate ways to salvation (ecclesial and non-ecclesial) that are without connection.<sup>51</sup> Dupuis finds a middle path through these extremes in the conciliar notion of being “oriented” to the Church. *Lumen gentium* states that “those who have not yet received the Gospel are ordained, in various ways, to the People of God” (no. 16). In Dupuis’s reading, this means that those who follow other paths can be saved through Jesus Christ without belonging to the Church in any formal way. Instead of belonging, Hindus and Buddhists, Muslims and others are “oriented” toward the Church as the fullness of the means of salvation.<sup>52</sup> In this same vein, Amaladoss maintains that “[b]uilding up the Kingdom is not simply building up the Church.” Besides the Church, God is building the kingdom “in other ways through other peoples—ways unknown to us.”<sup>53</sup>

A second area of discussion has to do with the status of the other religions in relationship to Christianity. In *Redemptoris missio*, John Paul II speaks of the other religious paths as “participated forms of mediation” (no. 5) in which religions participate in the universal mediation of salvation

<sup>51</sup> Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* 347.

<sup>52</sup> Dupuis finds support for this approach in *Redemptoris missio* 10 which teaches that non-Christians can be saved “in virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally a part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation.”

<sup>53</sup> Michael Amaladoss, “Evangelization in Asia: A New Focus,” *Vidyajoti* 51 (1987) 7–28, at 15.

that is the Church. Dupuis looks on other religious traditions as mediations of Christ's salvation that are not dependent on the Church as a mediation. Jews and Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists are saved by being incorporated into Christ, not the Church *per se*. The Church is not necessary for salvation for it is not the only access a human being has to the kingdom of God. Therefore, "The 'others' can be part of the Reign of God and of Christ without being members of the Church and without recourse to her mediation."<sup>54</sup> The other religious paths must be recognized for what they are: responses to God's grace that contribute to the building up of the kingdom in their own rite.

A third issue associated with regnocentric theologies has to do with the mission of the Church to those who follow other paths. Regnocentric theologians have been vocal in criticizing the traditional Catholic understanding of the Church's mission for being too narrowly confined to the task of making conversions. A broadened understanding of the Church's mission must be situated within Christian awareness that their non-Christian neighbors are working toward the kingdom of God and that the religions of their neighbors are mediations of the kingdom. The regnocentric approach argues that collaboration with the other religions for social justice and integral liberation, not competition, is in order.<sup>55</sup>

An expanded understanding of the Church's mission in light of the theology of the kingdom is emerging in the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC).<sup>56</sup> These documents confirm that the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the establishment of Christian communities are integral aspects of mission. In addition, the documents place much emphasis on interreligious dialogue and cooperation with other believers for justice and peace.<sup>57</sup> Each element of the Church's mission constitutes a realization of God's reign. No one element exhausts the mission of the Church or is superior to any other. No element is separable from the others. Miguel Marcelo Quatra in his commentary on the FABC documents notes that any attempt to render these elements of mission hierarchically with proclamation at the top is "unbalanced."<sup>58</sup>

The regnocentric orientation of the FABC documents can be seen in their call for Catholics to collaborate with other religious believers. All human beings have been called to a common pilgrimage whose fulfillment

<sup>54</sup> Dupuis, "The Reign of God and the Others," *Pro Dialogo* 85/86 (1994) 126. Miguel Quatra exhorts the Asian Church to "abandon the idea of being the sole possessor and the only instrument of the Kingdom." See Miguel Marcelo Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes: The Kingdom of God and the Mission of the Church in the FABC Documents* (Quezon City, Philippines: Clarentian, 2000) 196.

<sup>55</sup> See the work of Michael Amaladoss cited above in n. 53.

<sup>56</sup> Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, passim.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 188.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 193.

will be the kingdom of God. The other religious paths have “significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design for salvation.”<sup>59</sup> Like the Church, these religious paths have been raised up by God and placed at the service of humanity. They have been endowed by God with “creative and redemptive forces, that need to be unleashed as God’s transforming grace toward justice and peace.”<sup>60</sup>

The fifth section of *Dominus Iesus* (nos. 18–19) has to do with the Church and the kingdom of God. Quite evidently, the declaration has much to say that is congenial to regnocentric theologians and supportive of their work. Here it is made abundantly clear that the Church cannot be identified with the kingdom: “the kingdom of God—even if considered in its historical phase—is not identified with the Church in her visible and social reality” (no. 19). *Dominus Iesus* also sets limits beyond which regnocentric theologies are not to stray, as where it acknowledges that there can be various theological explanations of the relationship between the Church and the kingdom, but no explanation can deny “the intimate connection between Christ, the kingdom, and the Church” (no. 18).<sup>61</sup> Citing *Lumen gentium*, the declaration notes that the Church is “a sacrament—that is, sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of unity of the entire human race” (no. 1) and concludes that no understanding of the kingdom and the Church can deny their “intimate connection.”

### INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The promulgation of *Dominus Iesus* led immediately to problems with the Catholic Church’s dialogue partners. Writing in *The Tablet*, Edward Kessler, executive director of the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge, England, complained that the declaration seems be part of “a concerted attempt to overturn the dialogue of recent decades.”<sup>62</sup> Catholic bishops around the world were required to reaffirm publicly their commitment to dialogue with both Christians and other believers. These responses can be explained in part by the fact that *Dominus Iesus* says so little about dialogue, ecumenical or interreligious.

The declaration speaks of interreligious dialogue only in nos. 2 and 22. Given the wealth of material in official documents on the nature and practice of interreligious dialogue and the topic of the declaration itself, the

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 195; see FABC document I n. 14.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 196; see BIRA (Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs) document IV/4 n. 6.

<sup>61</sup> That *Dominus Iesus* may have the Asian churches in mind is indicated by the fact that the postsynodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* no. 17 is cited in the footnote.

<sup>62</sup> *The Tablet* 254 (November 18, 2000) 1566–59, at 1556.

reticence of the declaration in this regard is perplexing. Dialogue with other religious believers, as a concern for the Church, was broached for the first time in the documents of Vatican Council. Even before the council was concluded, Paul VI announced the formation of a “Secretariat for Non-Christians” (now the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue).<sup>63</sup> John Paul II has consistently asserted the importance of interreligious dialogue whenever he speaks of the other religious traditions. How, then, to explain the paucity of comment about dialogue in *Dominus Iesus*? In fairness, one must note that *Dominus Iesus* does not claim to be a systematic treatment of the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, let alone the status of the other religions for Catholics (no. 3). Still, one must ask if the theologians who are responsible for the drafting of the declaration actually have had much experience in interreligious dialogue or even sympathy for it. Moreover, one must ask if the modes of consultation linking the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue are sufficient, given the gravity and complexity of dialogue today. More fundamentally, both *Dominus Iesus* and the controversy attending its publication are indications of an ongoing need for discernment by Catholics regarding the Church’s role in a world of religious diversity as well as the purpose and significance of both missionary activity and dialogue.

Specifically, I wish to comment on the matter of most concern to the Church’s partners in dialogue, namely, the claim by the declaration that interreligious dialogue is “part of the Church’s evangelizing mission” (no. 2, see also no. 22). Not surprisingly, some Jews interpreted this linkage to mean that the Catholic Church looks on interreligious dialogue as a technique for gaining converts. Some Hindus, vehemently opposed to Christian conversion efforts in India, expressed similar concerns.

If the linking of dialogue with evangelization was a concern to the Catholic Church’s dialogue partners, it came as a surprise to many Catholics, although it should not have been. *Dominus Iesus* is not breaking new ground in locating interreligious dialogue within the Church’s evangelizing mission. A clear basis for the claim can be found in official documents. *Redemptoris missio* 55 states flatly that “Interreligious dialogue is part of the Church’s evangelizing mission,” and that “*dialogue does not dispense from evangelization*” (no. 55; emphasis in the original).<sup>64</sup> Certainly, Catholic proponents of dialogue with Jews and others can point to official docu-

<sup>63</sup> Much of Paul VI’s teaching on dialogue is found in the encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, see especially nos. 65–108.

<sup>64</sup> For other statements by John Paul II, see *Interreligious Dialogue* (ed. F. Gioia) no. 587. In addition, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, the joint statement by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Commission for Interreligious Dialogue promulgated in May 1991, states that interreligious dia-

ments renouncing any intent to convert in the practice of interreligious dialogue.<sup>65</sup> These same Catholics, however, must acknowledge an ambivalence within official statements about how the Church's mission to "convert all nations" is related to the need for interreligious dialogue. In his encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* (1964), Paul VI stated that although the purpose of interreligious dialogue was not the "immediate conversion of the interlocutor,"<sup>66</sup> the Christian in dialogue is still under the "apostolic mandate."<sup>67</sup> In an address in 1987 to the Secretariat for Non-Christians, John Paul II noted that interreligious dialogue and the proclamation of God's saving work are both elements of the Church's one mission. Therefore, "Christ's followers must carry out his mandate to make disciples of all nations."<sup>68</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that the missionary task of the Church implies a "respectful dialogue" with followers of other religious paths in which Christians proclaim the gospel "in order to consolidate, complete and raise up the truth and the goodness that God has distributed among men and nations, and to purify them from error and evil. . . ."<sup>69</sup> Statements such as these are neither comforting nor encouraging to the Church's dialogue partners. In spite of the Church's official statements renouncing dialogue as a covert technique of conversion, it is not surprising that other religious believers experience confusion and reticence.

How is this linking of interreligious dialogue and evangelization to be explained? Reasons are multiple. For one, there remains an abiding distrust of dialogue, within some sectors of the Catholic Church, as a subversion of the Church's mission to convert all peoples. For example, in official documents affirmations of the importance of interreligious dialogue are often juxtaposed with statements about the necessity of conversion efforts or statements with no further explanation of how dialogue with other people does not mitigate the Church's mission to baptize all nations. Occasionally, this distrust of dialogue surfaces in the form of tensions within

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logue and the proclamation of Christ are both part of the Church's evangelizing mission (see nos. 2 and 77).

<sup>65</sup> For a statement identifying dialogue with the Church's mission but not with conversion efforts as such, see International Theological Commission, "Christianity and the World Religions," *Origins* 27 (14 August, 1997) 114–17. Walter Kasper, as the curial official responsible for dialogue with Jews, has gone so far as to claim that the Roman Catholic Church has no mission to convert Jews. See "The Good Olive Tree," *America* 185 (September 17, 2001) 12–14.

<sup>66</sup> *Ecclesiam suam* no. 79.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* no. 80.

<sup>68</sup> *Interreligious Dialogue* (ed. F. Gioia) no. 587.

<sup>69</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 856.

the Roman Curia or between members of the Curia and other parts of the Church. *Dominus Iesus* itself is an example of this phenomenon.<sup>70</sup>

Internal tensions within the Church, however, are not enough to explain the identification of interreligious dialogue as a form of evangelization. Since the Second Vatican Council, the diversity of religions has become incomparably more complex for Catholics. As a result, the Church has had to rethink its understanding of evangelization and mission by being attentive not only to the post-Counter Reformation world, but also to the post-colonial world. In response to these developments, the meaning of the word “evangelization” has expanded considerably in the postconciliar documents. “Evangelization” refers not only to efforts to convert, but also to a number of other elements which make up the Church’s service to the world.

The roots of this expansion of the term “evangelization” to include interreligious dialogue can be traced back to Paul VI’s programmatic encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* and his postsynodal apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*.<sup>71</sup> John Paul II built on this foundation in his encyclical *Redemptor hominis*. Also the 1984 statement by the Secretariat for Non-Christians *Dialogue and Mission* notably developed the notion of evangelization. The one evangelizing mission of the Church is “a single, but complex and articulated reality” (no. 13), which “comes to be exercised in different ways, according to the conditions in which mission unfolds” (no. 11). The document goes on to delineate five different aspects of this evangelizing mission: the “living witness of the Christian life”; “service to mankind” through social development; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; “the dialogue in which Christians meet the followers of other religious traditions in order to walk together towards truth and to work together in projects of common concern”; and, coming in the last place, “announcing and catechesis in which the Good News of the Gospel is proclaimed” (no. 13).<sup>72</sup>

The location of interreligious dialogue within the Church’s evangelizing mission by *Dominus Iesus* and other official Church documents calls for

<sup>70</sup> After the promulgation of *Dominus Iesus*, tensions between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, which oversees both ecumenical dialogues and dialogue with Jews, became evident. Tensions have also been observed between the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. These tensions are reflected in the preparation of *Dialogue and Proclamation*. See Jacques Dupuis, “A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation,” in *Redemption and Dialogue*, ed. William Burrows (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 119–58.

<sup>71</sup> For a detailed discussion of this development, see Jacques Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of the World Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 207 ff.

<sup>72</sup> See also “Dialogue and Proclamation” (cited above in n. 64) where dialogue

several comments. First, critics of *Dominus Iesus*, especially Hindus, may be surprised to learn that Indian bishops and theologians are among those who have enthusiastically promoted the notion of dialogue as a form of evangelization. For example, Amaladoss considers the inclusion of dialogue as a form of evangelization a “welcome development” because evangelization should not be understood exclusively as an activity with conversion as its goal.<sup>73</sup> Dupuis holds that interreligious dialogue is not some form of “pre-evangelization” that will eventually prepare the way for conversion, the real work of the Church. Dialogue is the real work of the Church and as such must be included as part of the Church’s evangelizing mission.<sup>74</sup> The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) conceives of evangelization as a three-fold dialogue with local cultures, the religions and the poor.<sup>75</sup>

Second, Catholics should be unambiguous with their dialogue partners about their intentions. Contrary to the impression given by *Dominus Iesus*, interreligious dialogue should not be in any sense an attempt to convert the dialogue partner. Covert attempts to do so are not only dishonest but also not in keeping with the dignity of other religious believers called for by Christian faith. Happily, there is ample support for this view of dialogue in official Church statements. In regard for the need for honesty in dialogue, Paul VI taught that interreligious dialogue was not a “tactical snare.”<sup>76</sup> In regard to the innate dignity of the dialogue partner, John Paul II has stated that dialogue with other religious believers is essential for the Church because Christians “are called today more than ever to collaborate so that every person can reach his transcendent goal and realize his authentic growth and to help cultures to preserve their own religious and spiritual values in the presence of rapid social changes.”<sup>77</sup>

Third, despite many official statements to the contrary, there is and there should be a healthy tension between the Church’s outreach to its neighbors in dialogue and its missionary effort. This tension is healthy when it is a sign of the Church’s complex relationship with other religious communities in a religiously diverse world. Certainly, the Church must not neglect its responsibility to proclaim the Good News to a world that needs to hear it. At

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and proclamation are presented as “two ways of carrying out the one mission of the Church” (no. 82).

<sup>73</sup> See Amaladoss “Evangelization in Asia: A New Focus?” (cited above in n. 53) 7.

<sup>74</sup> Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of the World Religions* 208.

<sup>75</sup> For the statements of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), see *For All the Peoples of Asia* (Manila: IMC, 1984) and Miguel Marcelo Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes* (cited above in n. 54).

<sup>76</sup> *Interreligious Dialogue* (ed. F. Gioia) no. 217.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* no. 491.

the same time, the Church must recognize itself as a community with much to learn from those who follow other religious traditions. Does *Dominus Iesus* maintain this tension? In one passage it speaks of both dialogue and the Church's responsibility to proclaim the gospel. Of the two, the Church "must be primarily committed to proclaiming to all people the truth definitively revealed by the Lord, and to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through baptism and the other sacraments" (no. 22). In fact, it further states that interreligious dialogue finds its real purpose in "conversion to Jesus Christ and adherence to the Church" (ibid.). In giving pride of place to proclamation at the expense of dialogue, *Dominus Iesus* once again has ample support in papal magisterium. *Redemptoris missio* teaches that the Church's mission to proclaim Christ must be given a "permanent priority" (no. 44). At the very least, one can say that the lack of consensus in the Catholic Church in regard to the nature of interreligious dialogue helps to explain the surprising assertions in no. 22. Thus, Catholics should not be surprised when their dialogue partners respond to such statements with distrust and disappointment.

Fourth, the declaration mentions that interreligious dialogue "which is part of the Church's evangelizing mission, requires an attitude of understanding and a relationship of mutual knowledge and reciprocal enrichment, in obedience to the truth and with respect for freedom" (no. 2). This is by far the most positive statement the declaration makes in regard to interreligious dialogue. I wish to underscore the recognition here of dialogue as "reciprocal enrichment." This statement is as close as *Dominus Iesus* comes to acknowledging that Catholics might have something to learn by entering into dialogue with those who follow other religious paths. Surprisingly few Vatican statements entertain the possibility that Catholics might benefit significantly from dialogue.<sup>78</sup> This fact must be counted a sign of the underdevelopment of Church teaching in regard to interreligious dialogue. Yet there is a solid basis in official statements for the belief that interreligious dialogue can be enriching for Catholics. For example, John Paul II notes in *Redemptor hominis* that the Church's "self-awareness" (no. 11) is formed by means of interreligious dialogue. In *Redemptoris missio* interreligious dialogue is recognized as "a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment" (no. 55). The same encyclical further notes that dialogue leads to "inner purification and conversion" (no. 56). Here, the conversion intended by the pope is the conversion of

<sup>78</sup> For a notable exception, see *Dialogue and Proclamation* which speaks of going beyond "mutual understanding and friendly relations" in dialogue to "a much deeper level" in which Christians and their dialogue partners mutually "deepen their religious commitment" (no. 40).

Christians, not the conversion of the dialogue partner. Walter Kasper, the cardinal prefect of the pontifical council responsible for dialogue with Jews, in a document widely interpreted as a response to *Dominus Iesus*, claims that dialogue is not a “one way street” but rather “an enrichment for us Christians” in which “we are not only givers, but also the learners and receivers.”

Fifth, even the notion of dialogue as “mutual enrichment” in *Dominus Iesus* needs to be qualified. Other religious believers enter into dialogue with Catholics for a variety of reasons. Some Jews, for example, dialogue with Catholics in order to promote better relations with an institution that has a history of violence against their community. That Judaism might be “enriched” by dialogue with Catholics may be far from the mind of a Jew meeting with a Catholic dialogue partner. The idea that both partners in a dialogue relationship would be mutually enriched may be desirable as an ideal, but Catholics should be neither naïve or presumptuous about the motivations of their dialogue partners.

Sixth, in linking interreligious dialogue with evangelization, *Dominus Iesus* nowhere makes any distinction among the various religious traditions. The declaration gives no indication that Jews are related to the Church in a way that differs from the way that Buddhists are. Since Vatican II, recognizing that religious believers are oriented to the Church in “various ways” (*Lumen gentium* no. 16) has become a principle in Catholic thought, especially in regard to the Jewish community (*Nostra aetate* no. 4). The declaration’s failure to observe this principle is surprising. This failure is also somewhat convenient. The special status of the Jewish community calls into question the adequacy the general statements *Dominus Iesus* makes about other religions. One obvious example is the declaration’s distinction between Christian faith and the “belief” found in the other religions. Is *Dominus Iesus* suggesting that Israel’s covenant with the Lord is merely a form of human wisdom still in search of God?

### CONCLUSION

In the hope of placing *Dominus Iesus* and the controversy it has generated in as broad a perspective as possible, I wish to offer a final comment. Among the many problems posed by modern relativism to the Church’s Christology and ecclesiology, *Dominus Iesus* includes “the eclecticism of those who, in theological research, uncritically absorb ideas from a variety of philosophical and theological contexts without regard for consistency, systematic connection, or compatibility with Christian truth” (no. 4). This statement begs an important question. What about Catholics who seek to learn from other religious traditions with great regard for consistency, systematic connection, and compatibility with Christian truth? I speak of

Catholic Christians who, through patient study and continuing dialogue, are absorbing the truths of other religious traditions in a way that is very much concerned with consistency, systematic connection, and compatibility with Christian truth. These Catholics are approaching the question of religious diversity in a way quite different from the way *Dominus Iesus* approaches the question and, for that matter, the way those criticized by the declaration approach the matter.

Especially since the council, the discussion of religious diversity within Catholicism has shifted from *whether* those who follow other religious paths can be saved to *how* they are saved and the role played by Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Church in this salvation. This shift is evident in the documents of Vatican II and the work of Daniélou 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. *Dominus Iesus* rests squarely within this discussion where, for example, it states as the agenda for theologians that: “theology today, in its reflection on the existence of other religious experiences and on their meaning in God’s salvific plan, is invited to explore if and in what way the historical figures and positive elements of these religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation” (no. 14) The declaration as well as the majority of its critics continue to approach the fact of religious diversity today within the framework of soteriology. Can those who follow the “straight path” of Islam or practice the Buddha’s *Dharma* be saved? Are they saved by Christ? Are they saved by the Spirit apart from Christ? What role does the Church play in their salvation? In my view, this agenda is inadequate to the needs of the Christian community today.

By casting the question within the framework of Christian soteriology, Catholics continue to talk to themselves. In the discussion summarized in this essay, for all its complexity, the voices of Jews and Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists are remarkably absent. The debate among Catholic “liberals” and “conservatives” over *how* other believers are saved seldom takes into account the teachings of the other religious traditions. This amounts to a subtle triumphalism. Catholic “liberals,” following the course charted by Karl Rahner, want to recognize other religious traditions as the work of the Holy Spirit. My own Buddhist friends assure me that this is not the case and that I will never appreciate the *Dharma* to the extent that I persist in this belief. How are Shiite Muslims and Vajrayana Buddhists to react to assurances by Catholics that they are saved by Christ? Perhaps they react the way Catholics do when they learn of Hindu groups who teach that Jesus of Nazareth is an *avatar* of Lord Vishnu.

The time has come for Catholics to move beyond the parameters of the current discussion. The old questions, of course, will remain: *how* does Christ save our neighbors who follow other religious paths? What is the

role of the Church in Christ's saving work among all peoples? But as Catholics become more skillful in the theological craft of interreligious dialogue, I believe they will be less content with these attempts to force the square peg of Buddhism or Islam into the round hole of Christian soteriology. Instead, they will see an opportunity to do Christian theology in a new way: through the careful study of the teachings of other religious traditions. By "Christian theology" I do not mean only the theology of religions. In this new millennium, all Christian theology needs to be done in conversation with Hindus and Buddhists, Jews and Muslims, Daoists and Confucians and others. *Dominus Iesus* is correct when it insists that there should be no facile eclecticism and no uncritical appropriation of the teachings of other religious traditions. The declaration, however, has no vision of the opportunity religious diversity offers Christian faith. There needs to be a genuine quest by Christians to find new and more adequate understanding of their own tradition by responding to the teachings of other religious traditions in depth. Sometimes this quest for understanding will uncover profound similarities. Other times, differences of genuine theological interest will be uncovered. In all cases, doing Christian theology in dialogue with teachers from the other religious paths must be carried out with great regard for "consistency, systematic connection and compatibility" with the Christian tradition knowing that Christian tradition will be transformed by this encounter. *Dominus Iesus* does not envision such a theology, and neither do most of the declaration's critics.

Speaking to the faithful in a general audience in Rome, on January 31, 1973, Paul VI spoke of the difficulties attending the Church's dialogue with the modern world and the hunger that exists within every human being for the truth. The pope's words might serve as a starting point for Catholics who wish not only to affirm the traditional truths of faith asserted by *Dominus Iesus*, but also to heal some of the wounds *Dominus Iesus* has caused. Paul VI stated:

So the search continues. And, as you know, in an ocean of truths and mysteries. In a drama in which each one has his own part to play. This is life. Can it be exhausted in this temporal existence of ours? No. In spite of the immense light of our Catholic religion, the search and expectation of further revelation are not complete: on the contrary, they are still at the beginning. Faith is not complete knowledge: it is the source of hope (Heb. 11:1). Now we see religious realities, even in their incontrovertible reality, in mystery, in their impossibility of being reduced to the purely rational yardstick; we know these realities "in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12). Study, research and let us say the word that comprises the whole human-religious process, love, remain active and dynamic.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup> *Interreligious Dialogue* (ed. F. Gioia) no. 301.