

JACQUES DUPUIS'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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[The author summarizes the content of Jacques Dupuis's latest work, Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue (Orbis, 2002) and indicates some of the points where it differs from his earlier, longer book, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (Orbis, 1997). He then reflects on the terminological and substantial issues that Dupuis has taken up in his two works. Both books offer outstanding contributions to interreligious dialogue.]

NOT ONLY CURRENT world events but also repeated encouragement from Pope John Paul II have put the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue among the top priorities for responsible Catholic thinkers and leaders. It is in this dramatic context that Professor Jacques Dupuis, S.J., of the Gregorian University, has published his two most recent books in this area.

In late 1997 Dupuis brought out a 447-page theological reflection on Christianity and other religions.¹ Written originally in English, this book appeared almost simultaneously in French and Italian, and subsequently in Portuguese (1999) and Spanish (2000). Shortly after that work was published in October 1997, the publishing house of Queriniana (Brescia) asked Dupuis to write a shorter, more accessible version. This time Dupuis wrote in Italian, completing the manuscript on March 31, 2000, over five months before the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the declaration *Dominus Iesus* and almost a year before the Congregation issued on February 27, 2001, a notification concerning *Toward a Christian The-*

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¹ *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997).

ology of Religious Pluralism. For various reasons the publication of Dupuis's shorter work was delayed for over a year and finally appeared in the autumn of 2001. A full year later English, French, and Spanish translations were published.²

The literature and documentation, both published and unpublished, on *Toward a Christian Theology* is vast. Dupuis's article for *Louvain Studies* (1999) took into account, for example, 20 reviews that had appeared in English and 27 in French.³ Some of these, such as the assessment by Terrence Merrigan in *Louvain Studies*, entered into critical dialogue with Dupuis in a way that was admirable; others, such as an equally long piece in *Revue thomiste*, seemed an odd going back to a dead past. In all, there have been over 100 reviews in English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and other languages, as well as articles and chapters of books dedicated, in whole or in part, to a critical evaluation of his views. Clearly, Dupuis has addressed a central question: how can we profess and proclaim faith in Jesus Christ as the one redeemer of all humankind, and at the same time recognize the Spirit at work in the world's religions and cultures—as has been done by Pope John Paul II? From a Christian perspective, what is the place of the other religions? As revealer and redeemer, Jesus is one and universal, but in practice the visible paths to salvation have remained many. Would Dupuis's views, if, as some said, “taken to their logical conclusion” (whatever that means), eliminate missionary work?

In this present note I summarize the content of *Christianity and the Religions* and indicate some of the points where it differs from *Toward a Christian Theology*. I then reflect on the terminological and substantial issues that Dupuis has taken up in the two books. As he himself explains, the second more “popular” work omits much scholarly debate with other authors and reduces footnotes to a minimum. But Dupuis also aims at avoiding some earlier ambiguities, using further data from Christian revelation and tradition to back up his positions, and clarifying those positions even better.⁴ In this second book, he faces the same basic questions: (a) Can the adherents of other religions be saved? (b) If one answers yes, do the elements of truth and grace found in these religions mean that the adherents can be saved, not despite, but through these elements? (c) If one

² *Il cristianesimo e le religioni: Dallo scontro all'incontro* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2001); *La rencontre du christianisme et des religions: De l'affrontement au dialogue* (Paris: Cerf, 2002); *El cristianismo y las religiones: Del desencuentro al diálogo* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2002); *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002). This book will appear also in Polish and Portuguese.

³ “‘The Truth Will Make You Free’: The Theology of Religions Revisited,” *Louvain Studies* 24 (1999) 211–63.

⁴ *Christianity and the Religions* 262.

answers yes, do these religions enjoy a positive meaning in God's one plan of salvation for all human beings? In answering affirmatively all these questions, *Christianity and the Religions* sums up Dupuis's position by introducing a new expression, "inclusive pluralism," which is explained in the ten chapters of the book.

Dupuis begins with three chapters that summarize the attitude of Jesus and the Church of the New Testament toward those who do not belong to the "people of God," the teaching of Vatican II and of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, as well as the major theological views in the field of the theology of religions. The other seven chapters treat themes that support Dupuis's own "inclusive pluralism." The Bible recalls how God established saving covenants with "other" peoples, who can therefore be called "peoples of God" (chap. 4). The "many and various ways" (Hebrews 1:1) through which the divine revelation has come may be understood to include wider religious traditions (chap. 5).⁵ The Logos has acted salvifically "beyond" the humanity of Christ, although always with reference to it (chap. 6). Other religions are "participated mediations" in the "one mediation" of Christ (chap. 7). While not separated from the kingdom of God, the Church is not identical with it (chap. 8). Interreligious dialogue is mutually enriching (chap. 9), and, in particular, shared prayer should be fostered (chap. 10). As before, a trinitarian Christology constantly supports Dupuis's position, even if in *Christianity and the Religions* he sums up his theology of religions as "inclusive pluralism."

In evaluating the views of Dupuis found in the two books, one might distinguish, but not separate, the issues that have emerged into terminological and substantial ones. Terms such as "distinguish," "separate," "absolute," "definitive," "complementary," the "Logos" qualified in various ways, and "pluralism" have recurred over and over again in reflection on Dupuis's work. The debate itself has essentially come down to the work of Christ, of the Holy Spirit, and of the Church for the salvation of all people. Let us look first at the terms, trying to "watch our language" in ways rightly encouraged by analytic philosophy but sometimes neglected by contemporary theology.

SOME TERMS

Over and over again Dupuis has insisted that he distinguishes but does not separate various things: for instance, the divine and human operations

⁵ Dupuis's appeal to the Letter to the Hebrews, to underpin a "wider" view of revelation, could be supported by also recalling the "wider" view of faith found in Hebrews 11. The list of outstanding examples of faith is not confined to Abraham, Sarah, and subsequent members of the "people of God."

of the incarnate Son of God, or distinct paths of salvation within the one divine plan to save all human beings. In using this language to make such points, he has shown himself a faithful follower of the Council of Chalcedon and its vitally important language about the two natures of Christ being distinct but not separated. No critic has found a passage in Dupuis's two books (or other writings) where he moves beyond a distinction and introduces a false separation, for example, between the incarnate Word's action within the Church and in the world at large. Critics have alleged that he separates the Word of God and the man Jesus into two separate subjects, but they have never produced chapter and verse to back up this accusation. What Dupuis has consistently argued is that within the one person of Jesus Christ we must distinguish the operations of his (uncreated) divine nature and his (created) human nature. Here Dupuis lines up with Thomas Aquinas, who championed the oneness of Christ's person but also had to recognize that Christ's "divine nature infinitely transcends his human nature (*divina natura in infinitum humanam excedit*)" (*Summa contra gentiles* chap. 4, 35, 8).

Some reviewers puzzled over Dupuis calling Christ "universal" and "constitutive" but not "absolute" Savior and Redeemer, and speaking of the whole "Christ-event" as "decisive" rather than "definitive." Dupuis dislikes the inflationary use of "absolute" and "absolutely" that flourishes in much ordinary speech and in some theological talk. He maintains a firm, Thomistic line: only God, who is totally necessary, utterly unconditional, uncaused, and unlimited, is truly absolute. While Dupuis certainly has never wanted to reduce Christ to being one Savior among many, he is sensitive to the limits involved in the historical Incarnation of the Son of God, the created character of the humanity he assumed, and the specific quality of his redemptive, human actions. Moreover, the Incarnation itself was a free act of God's love and not unconditionally necessary. As regards the other dimension of the divine self-communication in Christ, God's self-revelation that was completed with the Resurrection and the coming of the Spirit, one should not so emphasize the "fullness" of this revelation as to ignore "the glorious manifestation of our Lord" still to come (*Dei Verbum* no. 4). Our present knowledge of God as revealed to us in Christ is limited and neither "absolute" nor "definitive." Those who claim otherwise ignore the way the language of revelation in the New Testament is strongly angled toward the future (e.g. 1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2), as Avery Dulles pointed out years ago in his *Models of Revelation*.⁶ John Paul II said the same thing in his 1998 encyclical on the relationship between faith and reason, *Fides et ratio*, where he wrote of "the fullness of truth which will

⁶ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 228–29, 240–42.

appear with the final revelation of God" (no. 2). We now "see through a glass darkly" and not yet "face to face"; hence it is more accurate to call the revelation completed in Jesus Christ "decisive" rather than "definitive," a term that would too easily suggest (wrongly) that there is nothing more to come. A knee-jerk reaction has characterized some who are upset by Dupuis's refusal to speak of God's historical self-communication in Christ as "absolute": "he must mean that it is only relative and there are various, more or less equal saviors and revealers." That was not what Dupuis means; in declining to use "absolute" and "definitive," he sticks closely to the language of Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* and that of the New Testament itself.

As regards any "complementarity" between Christianity and other religions, Dupuis has never intended to claim that the revelation that reached its fullness in Christ needs to be filled out by other religious traditions. Rather he has used that term to indicate how some elements of the one divine mystery can be vividly expressed by the practices and sacred writings found beyond Christianity. In prayerful and respectful dialogue with other traditions, Christians may "hear" something which enriches them spiritually. They can receive as well as give, as the closing message of the 1977 international bishops' synod on catechetics recalled (no. 5). Nevertheless, to express Christian faith in the unique fullness of the divine self-revelation in Christ, it may have been better for Dupuis to have qualified from the outset the kind of "complementarity" he had in mind. In *Christianity* he called this complementarity "asymmetrical"—an adjective which brings out the Christian belief that in Jesus Christ the divine revelation enjoys a unique fullness, and that there is no void to be filled by other revelations and traditions.

In *Toward a Christian Theology* Dupuis distinguished the Logos *asarkos* (the Word of God *in himself* and not, or not yet incarnated) from the Logos *ensarkos* (the Word of God precisely as incarnated). Dupuis was surprised to find this distinction leading a few readers to conclude that he was "doubling" the Logos, as if he were holding that there were four persons in God! To avoid such odd misunderstandings, in *Christianity and the Religions* he has dropped the terms *asarkos* and *ensarkos*. However, he continues to distinguish between the Word of God *in se* and the Word of God precisely as incarnated. We must make such terminological distinctions. Otherwise we will finish up joining some critics in such a strange statement as "the Word of God as such is the Word incarnate." Those who fail "to watch their language" and use such an expression seem to attribute an eternal, real (and not just an intentional) existence to the human being created and assumed by the Word of God at a certain point in the history of the world, as well as appearing to cast doubt upon the loving freedom of the Word of God in becoming incarnate for our salvation.

Finally, the term “pluralism,” which has obviously acted as a red flag to certain readers. Some link it at once to such “pluralists” as John Hick, who put Christ on a par with other religious founders or at least allege that he differs from them only in degree but not in kind. But “pluralism” means a range of things: above all “pluralism de facto” (which recognizes the fact of different religions) to “pluralism de iure” (which endorses a pluralism in principle). Now this latter pluralism in principle may take a soft, Hickian form: in principle all major religions have equal authority, and hence in principle are equally valid, separate paths to salvation. But pluralism *de iure*—or, better, pluralism in principle—may take another form, as, for instance, when the declaration *Dominus Iesus* of September 2000, following the lead of John Paul II (e.g. in his 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris missio*) acknowledges that God becomes present to peoples through the “spiritual riches” that their religions essentially embody and express (no. 8). “The presence and activity of the Spirit” touch not only individuals but also “cultures and religions” (no. 12); the “elements of religiosity” found in the diverse “religious traditions” come “from God” (no. 21). Now, granted that God never acts merely “in fact” but always “in and on principle,” such statements about the Spirit’s activity in various religions and all that comes from God to the religions imply some kind of religious “pluralism” which exists in principle. Thus one needs to differentiate sharply between the “pluralists” and “pluralism,” and then scrutinize very carefully what kind of “pluralism” Dupuis or anyone else endorses. Kneejerk reactions to terminology are totally out of place here. Hopefully the careful statement of what he means by “inclusive pluralism” in *Christianity and the Religions* will help to dispel misunderstandings.

CENTRAL QUESTIONS

The first of the three central issues raised by Dupuis’s books concerns the work of the incarnate Son of God for the salvation of all. Certain critics have attributed to Dupuis something he has never maintained: a personal distinction between the eternal Word of God and the historical Jesus of Nazareth. He has always upheld firmly that the Word of God and Jesus are personally identical.

But Dupuis insists on distinguishing (but never separating) the two natures of Christ and their respective operations. Christ’s finite human nature remains basically and integrally human, and is therefore incapable of states of being and operations that are strictly infinite and divine. The particular, created character of Christ’s humanity in no way threatens his unique role in conveying divine revelation and salvation. That unique value derives from the *personal* identity of the Son of God, an identity that is not to be confused *tout court* with his two natures and their operations. In *Toward a*

Christian Theology Dupuis might have cited the Third Council of Constantinople (A.D. 680/81) in support of his position here. That council distinguished not only between the two wills of Christ but also between the “energies and operations” of the two natures. In the Incarnation the Son of God’s divine nature does not lose its essential characteristics and functions. In *Christianity and the Religions* Dupuis has drawn attention to the importance of this council’s teaching for reflection on the universal salvific activity of the divine Word before and after the Incarnation.⁷

In particular, Dupuis argues that, while the human acts of his whole historical story enjoy an ever-present efficacy, the Word’s universal divine operations are not canceled or restricted by his assumption of a human existence that has now been glorified through the Resurrection. Both before and after the Incarnation, the Word of God remains divinely present and active everywhere, and has not been somehow “eclipsed” by the assumption of a human nature. This vision of the Logos’s activity draws support from the way some major exegetes understand John 1:9 (“the true Light that enlightens everyone, coming into this world”), from the writings on the Logos of such Church Fathers as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Athanasius, and from modern theologians such as Avery Dulles. In fact, Dulles anticipated the conclusion Dupuis wished to draw from the universal activity of the Logos:

It need not be denied that the eternal Logos could manifest itself to other peoples through other religious symbols. . . . In continuity with a long Christian tradition of the Logos-theology that goes back as far as Justin Martyr. . . . it may be held that the divine person who appears in Jesus is not exhausted by that historical appearance. The symbols and myths of other religions may point to the one who Christians recognize as the Christ.⁸

Dupuis wants to add two points to such a position.

First, he repeats over and over again that the Word of God who remains universally operative is personally identical with Jesus of Nazareth. One must distinguish between the divine and human actions, but never between two personal agents. Second, along with all the distinctions to be drawn, there is only one divine plan of salvation. All people are called to share finally in the one divine life of the Trinity, through the gracious activity (both human and divine) of the incarnate Son of God and the divine activity of the Holy Spirit. I cannot understand how some readers of Dupuis’s *Toward a Christian Theology* could miss his insistence on the divine plan of salvation through Christ and the Spirit being undivided and not multiple. He excludes any talk of two “economies” of salvation: either in

⁷ *Christianity and the Religions* 144.

⁸ *Ibid.* 190.

the form of an alleged pneumatocentric plan of salvation separated from a christocentric one, or in the form of an economy of salvation in the Word as such that is separate from an economy of salvation in the incarnate Word.

Mention of the Spirit leads us to a second major issue. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost to give life to the Church in its mission to preach to all people the good news of Christ crucified and risen for our salvation. Dupuis values as much as anyone the ongoing power of the Spirit, working in and through the glorified Christ, both in the life of the Church (*Lumen gentium* nos. 3–4) and in the whole world (*Gaudium et spes* no. 22). But, on the other hand, he also emphasizes that the action of the Spirit is not confined to acting in and through the risen humanity of Christ. Before the Incarnation, the Spirit acted in a revelatory and salvific fashion (*Ad gentes* no. 4). With the Resurrection and Pentecost, the Spirit, while working in total communion with the glorified Christ, does not lose the Spirit's universal, divine activity, so as to exercise the Spirit's mission *ad extra* only through the mediation of Jesus' risen humanity. To allege that the Spirit's saving and revelatory action takes place exclusively through Christ's glorified humanity means maintaining the kind of Christomonism that Eastern Christians have often rightly denounced. If the visible Incarnation did not mean the suppression of the divine powers of the Word, a fortiori the invisible, non-incarnate mission of the Holy Spirit did not entail limiting the divine nature of the Spirit. What Dupuis has written about the universal mission of the divine Spirit fills out very nicely, I would argue, what John Paul II has taught about the Spirit operating beyond the visible Church and enriching the world's cultures and religions.

This activity of the Spirit reaches and enriches the members of various religions in and through their religious life and practice. There is no other way possible, since that is where Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and others live and worship. Since these religions contain elements of truth and goodness (*Nostra aetate* no. 2) and the Spirit of God is mysteriously but powerfully present to them, adherents of these religions can reach salvation by following the ways proposed to them. In some sense their religions are ways of salvation for them. In a guarded way the International Theological Commission reached this conclusion in its 1997 document on "Christianity and the Religions": "Because of such explicit recognition of the presence of Christ's Spirit in the religions [the reference is to John Paul II's 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris missio* no. 55], one cannot exclude the possibility that these [religions] *as such* exercise a certain salvific function" (no. 84). This document went on to allow cautiously that the religions can be "a means which helps their followers to salvation" (no. 86).

But Dupuis adds four qualifications to this picture. First, over and over again he relates the ways of salvation proposed by other religious traditions

to the “event of Jesus Christ”: that is to say, Dupuis never forgets the mysterious but real relationship of these “ways” to the Incarnation, life, death, Resurrection, present activity and future coming of Christ. Second, all this happens as foreseen and intended by God. Granted that under God the various religions have a positive role for the salvation of their adherents, there is only one divine plan of salvation for the whole world, a whole in which one can distinguish different parts or paths: namely, the paths proposed by different religious traditions. In that picture it is God the Father who searches us out and saves us, through his (incarnate) Word and his Spirit; it is improper, or at best secondary, to speak of people being saved through any religious traditions. Here Dupuis can rightly appeal to the Council of Trent which called God the Father “the efficient cause” of justification and salvation (DH 1529). Third, Dupuis has highlighted the *final* causality in the divine plan for salvation. In that one plan all things, all cultures, and all religions converge toward the final reign of God and the omega-point, the risen and glorious Son of God.⁹ Fourth, Dupuis has repeatedly acknowledged that the fullness of the means of salvation is to be found only in the Church. But what then is the role of the Church for the salvation of those who are not baptized and go to God after a life spent in practicing their religious faith?

Most theologians remain grateful that Vatican II never repeated the old slogan of “outside the Church no salvation”—slogan that many explained (or should one say explained away?) by talking of people being saved through “implicitly desiring” to belong to the Church or by an “implicit baptism of desire.” The Council used rather the language of all people being “ordered” or “oriented” toward the Church (*Lumen gentium* nos. 15–16).¹⁰ What then is the “necessity” of the Church for the salvation of all human beings? To begin with, one should follow Dupuis in recognizing that the reign of God is the decisive point of reference. The Church exists for the kingdom and at its service, not vice versa. Second, one should join Dupuis in noticing how the official magisterium, from the time of Vatican II, is more cautious and less precise about the Church’s role in the saving grace reaching those who are not baptized Christians (e.g. *Redemptoris missio* nos. 9–10); the mystery of God’s plan to save all must be respected. Third, the Church mediates grace to its members principally, although not exclusively, through the proclamation of the Word and the sacraments, the center of which is the Eucharist; it intercedes for “the others.” The eucharistic prayers distinguish between the invocation of the Holy Spirit to

⁹ *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* 389–90; *Christianity and the Religions* 194.

¹⁰ *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* 347–56; *Christianity and the Religions* 208–10.

maintain the unity of the faithful and liturgical intercessions for “others” (intercessions which do not take the form of an *epiklesis*). Here the “law of praying” should encourage theologians not to blur the distinction between the Church’s role for the salvation of her members and for the salvation of “the others.”¹¹

At a special audience on April 6, 2001, to commemorate the 450 years of the Gregorian University’s existence, Pope John II highlighted the importance of interreligious dialogue in today’s world where believers of different religions and cultures live side by side. Jacques Dupuis, as a systematic theologian who has spent nearly 40 years of his life in India, offers a shining example who has been supporting such a dialogue—not only through his *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* and *Christianity and the Religions* but also through other publications and activities. His theology of the religions converges with the official teaching and actions of John Paul II, and provides it with a massive theological underpinning.

¹¹ *Christianity and the Religions* 210–12.