

TRINITY AND THE PLURALITY OF RELIGIONS

Jacques Dupuis' Trinitarian Approach to Religious Pluralism

Inauguraldissertation

zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde

**an der Theologischen Fakultät
der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität**

Freiburg im Breisgau

vorgelegt von

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Freiburg 2008

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The completion of the examinations: 17th July 2008.

Foreword

The plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterize every part of the world today. Religious Pluralism is an ongoing challenge for Christian theology that requires further understanding its theological significance across the lines of differences that exist between the diverse religions of the world, without relativising the fundamental truths of faith. Father Jacques Dupuis (1923 – 2004), based on his thirty-six years of living encounter with the reality of religious plurality in India and a personal experience of the depth of God’s bountiful endowments in diverse religious traditions, has carved out a positive theological approach to religious plurality. In this pursuit, Dupuis gives special attention to the problem of the relationship between Christian faith and the other religious traditions of the world. He investigates the meaning of religious pluralism in God’s over all plan of salvation. Hence, his approach is primarily theological, that is, understanding and accounting for religious pluralism, from the standpoint of Christian faith and the Scriptures. Thus, reading the signs of the time, he articulates a contextual and a hermeneutic theology that is in dialogue with the reality of the plurality of religions and a theology for interreligious dialogue.

The Trinity and the Plurality of Religions is a dissertation submitted to the Theological Faculty of the Alberts-Ludwigs University, Freiburg in Breisgau, as a partial fulfilment of my doctoral studies. I extend a word of gratitude to the Dean of the Theological Faculty Prof. Dr. Magnus Striet. My very special thanks to my guide, Prof. Dr. Helmut Hoping, the Head of the Faculty of Dogma and Liturgy, whose availability, direction, suggestions, corrections and encouragement helped me to complete this research work. My sincere thanks to Prof. Dr. Peter Walter, the second reader of my thesis and to all the examiners. I convey my sincere thanks to Dr. Peter Lobo, Dr. Jan-Heiner Tück, Dr. Julia Knop, Frau Renate Müller for their assistance, corrections and suggestions. I extend my gratitude to fr. Dr. Dietmar Th. Schon, prior provincial and to the Dominican community in Freiburg. I also extend my thanks to fr. Paul Kuruvilla, fr. Dr. Dominic Mendonca and to all my brothers in the Province of India and in the Province of South Germany – Austria. A special word of gratitude to my parents, brothers and sisters, relations, friends and benefactors for their support and encouragement.

Fr. Albert Noronha O. P.

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Abbreviations

- AAS** : Acta Apostolicae Sedis
- CCC** : Catechism of the Catholic Church
- CBCI** : Catholic Bishops' Conference India
- DH** : Denzinger, A. / Schönmetzer, A., eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum: Definitionen et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*
- ER** : The Encyclopaedia of Religion
- FABC** : Federation of Asian Bishops' Corporation
- LThK** : Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche
- ND** : Neuner, J. / Dupuis, J. ed., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Church*
- PG** : Patrologia Graeca
- QD** : Questiones Disputatae
- ST** : Summa Theologiae
- TQ** : Theologische Quartalschrift
- VJTR** : Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection

A General Introduction to Trinity and Plurality of Religions

Religious experience of humanity, down through the centuries, indicates to the reality of religious and cultural pluralism. The world religions are many and varied, and they reflect the desire of people down through the ages to enter into relationship with God. In the whole religious history of humankind, people have been aware of the hidden power of the Divine, which directs the course of the events of human history, leading all humankind from “the unreal to the real, from darkness to light and from death to immortality.” In humankind’s quest for the Divine, the religious traditions are diverse paths of pilgrimage toward the Absolute – Supreme and Ultimate Reality – *Satcitananda*.¹ The believers of different religious traditions are close to one another in their common search for the Divine. They look to their religions, even though with a distinct faith response and in a trusting submission to the divine law, for answers to the great problems which confront them. Moreover, world’s diverse religions, down through the centuries, in the context of socio-cultural realities that they existed, have struggled to articulate meaningful responses to the humankind’s search for God. Believers find in their religions necessary strength and hope for their faith in the Divine. If we recognise this basic orientation of all humankind to God, we find that all believers are co-pilgrims of the Divine, on a pilgrimage to meet God.

1. A New Awareness of the Reality of the Plurality of Religions

Jacques Dupuis observes “the encounter of cultures and religions, which is increasingly becoming a fact of life in the First World countries themselves, has turned the theological debate on other religions into a primary concern in the Churches of the Western world as well.”² The modern world, with the development of the means of communication and movement and information technology, is reduced into a global village. We are living in a post-modern world, one that has become multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious. However, more and more Christians along with people of other faiths and ideologies, are experiencing religious

¹ Cf. Amalorananda, *Atma Purna Anubhva*, (Mysore: Anjali Ashram, 2000), p. 5.

² Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 1.

pluralism in a new way, that is, they are experiencing not only the reality of so many other religious paths, but also their vitality, their influence in our modern society, their depth, beauty and attractiveness. And because of this new experience of pluralism, there is an urgent need for a more productive dialogue with other religions and a new attitude toward them. Consequently, a negative attitude toward religious others and a negative evaluation of their religious traditions is a threat to religious peace and peace between the nations. However, when we look at the present situation of the world, we find that interreligious harmony and collaboration for common good is an important prerequisite to build bridges between the religions in order to work for justice and peace among the peoples.

In the post-modern world, globalisation has opened up new opportunities for interreligious and inter-cultural encounters, thereby facilitating a change, adoption and enrichment. Such a change in the global society has brought a new awareness regarding the originality and finality in each religious tradition. To what extent is true encounter and dialogue between the religions already a reality in the multi-religious world in which we are living? How does the Church in the modern world look at the need for a positive and constructive relationship with other religions, built on dialogue, collaboration, and a true encounter? However, understanding our time and the deep changes that our world is going through has become a compelling concern among scholars in our day.³ M. Barnes focuses on the fact that we are becoming more and more aware of the 'other', from all points of view, religious included. We are beginning to take our difference seriously. The existence of the other can no longer continue to be peripheral to our faith: we have to exist and coexist in a pluralistic religious context.⁴ Hence, there is a pressing need for a qualitative progress in the Christian theology, proportionate to the new awareness of religious pluralism and the new knowledge regarding the religious life of 'others' along with their religions and cultures, if we wish to enjoy positive and open mutual relations

³ A. Race, for instance, observes, "the future of the Christian theological enterprise is indeed at stake in the attitude the Christian adopts to the newly experienced religious pluralism." Cf. Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, (London, SCM, 1983), p. 4. For further details cf. *ibid.* pp. 1 – 9; cf. also, Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1986), pp. 1 – 21.

⁴ Michael Barnes, "On Not Including Everything: Christ, the Spirit and the Other," *The Way Supplement*, 78 (1993), pp. 3 – 4; cf. also, *idem.* *Religions in Conversation: Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 3–16.

characterised by dialogue and collaboration between the peoples, the cultures and the religions of the world.

2. A Theological Response to the Problematic of Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism has never been so evident as it is today. It demands of Christians a renewed understanding of the place occupied by other religions in God's plan of salvation. In this context, theology is asked to give a response that in the light of revelation and magisterium of the Church justifies the meaning and value of the other religions that continue to guide and animate the life of people down through the centuries in the whole world. The task of finding the meaning of the contemporary pluralistic religious context has become one of the major issues in modern theological reflection. It is an opportunity for a new theological reflection, that is, a movement toward becoming an interreligious theology revisiting the fundamental truths of Christian faith.⁵ Therefore, today theology must aim at seeking new understanding of Christian faith and doctrine in the light of the contemporary pluralistic context. It is called to pay attention to God's purpose and providence in the important events of human history in order to grasp his universal design for all humankind.⁶ It should focus on "the meaning in God's design for humankind of the plurality of living faiths and religious traditions with which we are surrounded."⁷ The new awareness of the reality of religious pluralism both at the theological and the spiritual level has become a basic concern of theology today. It entails a certain necessity in the Christian theology to look for the theological significance of religious pluralism and its meaning in the universal salvific plan of God, with new insights into how the whole humankind shares in God's economy of salvation, through the universal salvific

⁵ For instance, Claude Geffré writes, "The Church must face a religious pluralism that in human eyes seems insurmountable, and it must do so just when, at the outset of the third millennium, it is much more aware of the historic particularity of western culture, that culture which has been dominant and has underlain its theology for twenty centuries." Geffré, "From the Theology of Religious Pluralism to an Interreligious Theology" in Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 49.

⁶ David Tracy holds that the fact of religious pluralism should enter all theological assessment. Cf. Tracy, "Comparative Theology," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol. 14, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 446 – 455. Hans Küng accepts that there can be no dialogue between the religions without research into theological foundations. Cf. Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (London: SCM Press, 1991).

⁷ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 10.

mediation of Jesus Christ and by the universal operative presence of the Holy Spirit. This will give a broader outlook toward the diverse ways that God has chosen to lead all humankind to the eternal happiness.

A Christian theology, in dialogue with other religions, through the interaction of the Christian faith with the other living faiths, called to become interreligious theology. Moreover, “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.”⁸ In keeping with this vision, Jacques Dupuis seeks investigate in his theology of religious pluralism the salvific meaning and a theological significance of religious pluralism in God’s overall plan of salvation. He questions whether the reality of religious pluralism might not in fact force us to face a pluralism in principle willed by God. He seeks to contribute to a Christian theological interpretation of the phenomenon of religious pluralism, seeing it not only as a matter of historical fact but also as a principle.

3. Christian Perspective to the Diversity of Religions

The relationship of Christianity to other living religions has varied with the passage of time. In the past, besides the hostile attitudes toward religious others, Christian attitude toward them was marked with a negative evaluation of their religious traditions and cultures. Furthermore, Christian theology often evaluated other religious traditions in the light of what it knew about Christian traditions and the fundamental truths of Christian Faith, with little effort to study each tradition in itself and its value for the followers of that tradition. In this context, Dupuis notes the dark side of the relationship of Christianity with other religions: “Peoples and religions cannot be asked to forget how much they have suffered, even at the hand of Christianity, if not in the extermination of their populations, often in any case to the point of the destruction of their cultural and religious heritage. For them forgetting would be tantamount to betrayal. The personal identity of a human group is built up from a concrete historic past that in any case cannot be annulled, even if there were a will to do so. But even while not forgetting, memory can be healed and purified

⁸ *Dominus Iesus*, 14.

through a shared determination to begin new constructive mutual relations of dialogue and collaboration of encounter.”⁹

The Second Vatican Council marked a new beginning in the Catholic Church’s relations with other religions as it began to adopt a positive attitude toward religious others along with their religious traditions. A number of Catholic theologians,¹⁰ surrounding the Council, have sought to interpret the whole Christian theological reflection in the light of Church’s new awareness of the reality of religious pluralism. They have not hesitated to point out the existence of the elements of truth and grace in other religions with a positive appraisal for their spiritual value to religious others. Owing to this opening, the Catholic Church began to appreciate more deeply the distinctive values of the world religions. They are deeply imbued with religious beliefs, which influence the everyday life of their followers. At the beginning of the third millennium, the Church has become evermore aware of the reality of religious pluralism in her encounter with religious others, their religious traditions and cultures. Similarly, it has become an imperative for Christian theologians to understand the other religions from within and integrate their values into Christianity for our enrichment.

Christian encounter with other religions may raise questions regarding the problematic of the salvation of religious others and the salvific significance of the other religions for the salvation of their followers. The Christian attitude towards other religions has marked with changing perspectives. A first perspective consisted in asking whether salvation in Jesus Christ was possible for people who did not profess faith in him and were not members of the Church. However, a second and more open perspective to the theological significance of other religions consisted in going beyond a purely individual consideration of the possibility of salvation for individuals, to the assessment of the positive values to be found not merely in the religious life of persons outside the Church but in the religious traditions to which those persons belonged. However the Second Vatican Council has adopted both the perspectives. Falling in line with the first perspective, the Council continued to hold for the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ and the

⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 5.

¹⁰ For instance, to name some of them, Jean Danièlou, Henry De Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx and others.

necessity of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Hence, all salvation is through the paschal mystery of Christ; and it is ordained to the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation and the mystical body of Christ. Going in line with the second perspective, the Council acknowledged the possibility of salvation of religious others; but it did not state whether other religions can be means or ways of salvation for their followers. Its open attitude notwithstanding left the question of the theological significance of the diverse religions unanswered. In the post-conciliar period, the third perspective is no longer limited to the problem of “salvation” for the members of the other religious traditions or even to the role of those traditions in the salvation of their members. It searches more deeply, in the light of Christian faith, for the meaning of the plurality of living faiths and religious traditions in God’s design for humankind.¹¹

4. Jacques Dupuis’ Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

Jacques Dupuis, in his theological works,¹² brings together his lifetime study of Christian theology and the direct living experience of the diversity of religions during 36 years of his life and mission in India to demonstrate a profound theological shift in the Christian understanding of other religions.¹³ Dupuis’ living contact with religious others and the experience of the goodness in them and in their religious traditions enabled him to adopt an open theological approach to religious pluralism. He clearly upholds the universality of God’s plan of salvation for all humankind, which is actualised through his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ and by the universal presence and operation of the Spirit. The diverse religions in the world, according to him, have “a lasting role and a specific meaning in the overall mystery of the relationship between God and humanity.”¹⁴ Therefore, he revisits the deposit of Christian faith and co-relates it to the reality of religious diversity. He seeks to offer,

¹¹ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 10.

¹² Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997, reprinted in 2002); idem. *Christianity and Religions From Confrontation to Dialogue*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002); idem. *Who Do You Say I Am? An Introduction to Christology*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), idem. *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991).

¹³ Cf. Dupuis, “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 27 (2003), 4, pp. 168 – 171.

¹⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 211.

on the basis of this correlation, a tentative synthetic theological account of the Christian attitude toward religious pluralism. Instead of merely asking whether salvation can occur for religious others, he struggles with the question of how in God's providence their religions become channels of God's gift of salvation to their members.

Dupuis, in his book: *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, addresses to the challenge of developing a comprehensive theology of religious pluralism, which is Christian and inclusivist. While defending the Catholic inclusivist position regarding religious pluralism, he ventures to go beyond the well-trod paths marked out by some of his inclusivist predecessors.¹⁵ He explores several avenues of thought that go beyond the traditional frontiers of inclusivist theology. His theology searches more deeply, in the light of Christian faith, for the meaning of the plurality of religious traditions in God's design for humankind. It turns on not only to the question of salvation and its mediation to those outside the Christian dispensation, but also to the value of other religions in God's overall plan of salvation. He considers, in the context of the diversity of religions, the universal salvific implication of the Christ-event and the presence of the Spirit. He expounds the two key affirmations of Christian faith, namely, Jesus is the unique and universal Saviour, "the only name by which we can be saved" (Acts 4:12); and the divine self-witness is available to all people (cf. Acts 4:17). Hence, he seeks to hold together the two affirmations of Christian faith, namely, God's will to salvation all humankind (cf. 1Tim 2:4) and the universal salvific mediation of Jesus Christ (cf. 1Tim 2:5).

Dupuis structures his Christian theology of religious pluralism on the *Trinitarian-Spirit Christology* model, that is, the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God, namely, God as the Father of all the nations and his universal plan of salvation is for all humankind. Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, is universal and constitutive for the salvation of all humankind. The Christ-event and the universal presence and operation actualise the one and same salvific economy in the world of

¹⁵ Dupuis, in his debate over the theological significance of religious pluralism, throws light on how theologians surrounding the Second Vatican Council have devised "theological substitutes" for the Gospel. He takes into account Catholic perspective regarding the diversity of religious traditions, especially, theologians like Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, Raimon Panikkar, Hans Küng and Gustave Thils. Cf. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 130 – 157.

diverse religions. He develops a constructive theological synthesis, namely, *inclusivist-pluralism* is capable of holding together in creative tension the depth of God's commitment to humankind in Jesus and the authenticity of other paths in accordance with God's providence. The synthesis of inclusivist-pluralism helps him to consider how the diverse religions are channels of God's gift of salvation, as the paths that converge in the Reign of God. He proposes a theology of religions, which is relational in scope and intent, one that opens up areas of complementarity and mutual enrichment between the religions. His concern is to show that such a theology of religious pluralism is possible not just in a general Christian sense, but especially within the doctrinal traditions of the Church.

5. A Brief Overview Regarding *Trinity and the Plurality of Religions*

The declaration *Dominus Iesus* states, "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."¹⁶ It encourages theologians to explore as to how God's saving grace comes to those who are outside the Christian dispensation.¹⁷ In this study: *The Trinity and the Plurality of Religions*, my objective is to investigate, *Dupuis' Trinitarian Approach to Religious Pluralism*. The following parameters of faith direct the progress of the thought in this theological investigation: firstly, the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ; secondly, the universal presence and action of the Holy Spirit, Thirdly, the salvific economy of the Triune God and his universal plan of salvation; and finally, the salvific necessity of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation and the convergence of the diverse religions in the Reign of God.

Christian theology, in dialogue with the religious others, needs to be relevant in indicating God's design for the salvation of all humankind with its distinct religious memories and experiences, rituals and codes, traditions and cultures. The first chapter, *The Different Perspectives in the Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, gives an overview of the different approaches in the Christian theology of religions. In particular, it brings out Dupuis' methodology, his objective, his approach

¹⁶ Cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 14.

¹⁷ Cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 21.

to other religions, and his point of departure from a Christian perspective and his nuances. Finally, it also summarises briefly Church's attitude towards the diversity of religions in the conciliar and post-conciliar theology as an aid to reflect further on the changing trends in the theology of religions along with the new awareness and knowledge of religious pluralism.

The second chapter, *Jesus the Christ and Religious Plurality*, expounds a *Christological debate* in the theology of religions. In the case of the contemporary Christian experience of religious pluralism, however, its absorption into theological reflection has far-reaching implications for future Christology. The new frontier for Christology will involve struggling with questions concerning the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ's salvific mediation in the context of religious pluralism. Jesus Christ, the sole and universal mediator in the overall economy of salvation, is always implicated in the salvation of the believers of other religions.

The third chapter, *The Holy Spirit in the World of Religious Plurality*, deals with *Dupuis' pneumatological perspective* to the reality of religious plurality. As the teaching authority of the Church has acknowledged the presence and work of God's Spirit in other religions, we need to consider how the Spirit leads, along with the Christians, the religious others, through the channel of their own religions, to partake in the paschal mystery of Christ, in order to share in God's mystery of salvation.¹⁸ The Spirit has been active at the time of creation; he is present and active in the whole creation; and he continues to be active in the work of salvation. He has been active in the earthly life and mission of Jesus; he has been present and active in the early Church and remains active in the Church today; he is also present and active in the religious others and in their religions. In the Spirit, we see the respectful penetration of God's love; the Spirit "acts in the depth of people's consciences and accompanies them on the secret path of hearts toward the truth."¹⁹ The willingness to accord the other religions a positive role in the divine economy of salvation is a willingness that is inspired by the actual experience of the fruits of the Spirit visible among them.

The fourth chapter, *The Trinity and the World Religions*, attempts to trace the meaning of religious pluralism in the Trinity. "In the Trinitarian mystery, Christian

¹⁸ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

¹⁹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22; cf. also, *Dialogue and Mission*, 24.

revelation allows us to glimpse in God a life of communion and interchange.”²⁰ In this Trinitarian bestowal of love and life, unity of being and the diversity of persons indicate a possible convergence of diverse religions. The works of the Trinity *ad extra* (outward) are undivided; the presence of Jesus Christ and the Spirit among other religions implies the presence of the triune God. Hence, in the persons of the Trinity, the religious traditions of humankind find their unity of reaching the divine goal. The religions cannot be salvific apart from salvific mediation of Christ and the universal operation of the Holy Spirit. The religions do not save in the sense that God saves through his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ and in the universal operative presence of the Spirit. Thus, through Christ and in the Spirit, God has called all humankind to intimate and eternal union with him in the life of the Holy Trinity. However, the Triune God is the meeting point of diverse religions that converge, in the unbound work of the Spirit, through universal salvific mediation Jesus Christ, in the Reign of God.

The fifth and the final chapter, *The Church, the Reign of God and the Religions*, deals with the question regarding the compatibility of the position on the salvific necessity of the Church with the twofold affirmations of Christian faith, namely, the universal salvific will of God and the universal salvific mediation of Jesus Christ. The Church, being the universal sacrament of salvation, has “unique and special relationship”²¹ with the Reign of God. The salvific grace of God, though available outside the visible boundaries of the Church, has mysterious relationship with the Church. From the fact that God bestows his grace of salvation through Christ, in the power of the Spirit, outside the visible confines of the Church, the religious others receive the grace of salvation without formally becoming the members of the Church. Their salvation, though ordained to the Church, does not depend on the efficient causality of the Church, as they do not share in the sacramental life of the Church. Yet, the religious others, through opening themselves up to the action of the Spirit, share the reality of the Reign of God.

²⁰ *Dialogue and Mission*, 22.

²¹ *Redemptoris Missio*, 18.

Chapter I

The Different Perspectives in the Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

In the threshold of the new millennium, Christian theology has opened itself with a renewed vigour to the new horizons of interreligious sphere. This is in keeping with the new awareness of the reality of religious pluralism due to the interreligious encounter that is taking place in all spheres in a global way. Religious pluralism has become the new horizon for the theology of the twenty-first century, inviting us to revisit the major chapters of dogmatic theology.²² The new awareness of religious pluralism has raised a number of questions with regard to the relationship between Christianity and other religions. Does religious pluralism have a positive meaning in God's universal plan of salvation? It will be one of the important tasks of future Christian theology of religious pluralism to reflect how the religious traditions themselves are made partners of God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ for all humankind. In the process of finding answers to many questions that are raised with regard to the theological significance of religious pluralism, one finds that such an effort will open up countless new questions and new avenues for further theological reflection.

In many of its Christian instances, however, it seems to have designated what today might simply be called the "theology of religions," that is, Christian reflection on the general idea of other religions, in light of some particular understanding of the Christian faith.²³ Christian Theology of Religion is that branch of Theology, which considers the nature and function of the other religious traditions, in the light of Christian faith in the salvific character of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It begins its reflection on the other religious traditions in the conviction that

²² Cf. Claude Geffré, "From the Theology of Religious Pluralism to an Interreligious Theology" in Daniel Kendall / Gerald O'Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 45.

²³ Francis X. Clooney, "Comparative Theology: A Review Of Recent Books (1989 – 1995)", *Theological Studies*, 9 (1995), p. 1.

God has acted to save humankind in Christ.²⁴ However, Christian theology of religions turns not only on the question of salvation and its mediation to those outside the Christian dispensation, but also, the significance of other religious traditions in God's overall plan of salvation. It asks what religion is and seeks, in the light of Christian faith, to interpret the universal religious experience of humankind; it further studies the relationship between revelation and faith, faith and religion, and faith and salvation.²⁵

The objective of the theology of religions is to investigate theologically of the salvific meaning and the spiritual value of other religions. A theology in the context of the reality of religious pluralism could not limit the consideration of theological topics to the Christian sphere. It needs to respond to the questions and answers posed by other religions in the interreligious encounter. May the complex socio-doctrinal realities of the religions be considered as legitimate means of relating to God? Are they, then, providentially devised (*disposti*) by him as efficaciously promoting the salvation of their members? Christian theology of religions attempts to think theologically about what it means for Christians to live with people of other faiths and about the relationship of Christianity to other religions.²⁶ The International Theological Commission notes the following objectives for a Christian Theology of Religion towards understanding the reality of religious pluralism in God's overall plan of salvation: "A Christian theology of religions is faced with tasks. In the first place, Christianity will have to try to understand and evaluate itself in the context of a plurality of religions; it will have think specifically about the truth and the universality to which it lays a claim. In the second place it will have to seek the meaning, function and specific value of religions in the overall history of salvation.

²⁴ Cf. Terrence Merrigan, "Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," *Louvain Studies*, 23 (1998), pp. 338 – 359.

²⁵ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 7.

²⁶ Alan Race is of the opinion that "the Christian theology of religions has come to be the name for that area of Christian studies which aims to give some definition and shape to Christian reflection on the theological implications of living in a religiously plural world." Idem. *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982), p. ix.

Finally Christian theology will have to study and examine religions themselves, with their very specific contents and confront them with contents of the Christian faith.”²⁷

According to Dupuis, religious pluralism is a characteristic of today’s world, and so, cannot be left without theological reflection. There can be little doubt that the relationship between Christianity and the world’s other religious traditions will dominate the theological reflection in following years. In fact, the theological investigation regarding significance of religious pluralism has already taken a central position in contemporary theological discussion.²⁸ Dupuis defines the domain of the Christian theology of religious pluralism as “It searches more deeply, in the light of Christian faith, for the meaning of God’s design for humankind of the plurality of living faiths and religious traditions with which we are surrounded.”²⁹ It is interested not only in pluralism *de facto*, but in pluralism *de iure*, which means that it searches “for the root-cause of pluralism itself, for its significance in God’s own plan for humankind, for the possibility of mutual convergence of the various traditions in full respect of their differences, for their mutual enrichment and cross-fertilization.”³⁰ It is precisely the task of future theology of religious pluralism to revisit the deposits of Christian faith and tradition in order to respond to Church’s new awareness of the reality and religious pluralism.

1. An Overview of the Different Approaches in the Theology of Religions

In the theology of religions, in fact, the problem is not precisely of the possibility of the justification and salvation of the religious others as such, but of the

²⁷ The International Theological Commission, “Christianity and the World Religions,” *Origins*, 27 (1997), 10, p. 152.

²⁸ For a detailed discussion on the theological significance of diversity of religions cf. Karl Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), pp. 115 – 134. Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981). Michael Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); idem. *Theology and Dialogue of the Religions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2002). J. A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992). Gavin D’Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986); idem. *The Meeting of the Religions and The Trinity*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000). Paul J. Griffith, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

²⁹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 10.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 11.

salvific value of the other religions as such. However, it has become standard practice in the theology of religions to note three main approaches by which theologians have responded to religious pluralism: 1. exclusivism, 2. inclusivism and 3. pluralism.³¹ These three approaches respectively adopt the following three perspectives regarding Christian attitude toward other religions in view of the problematic of salvation of religious others, namely, 1. ecclesiocentric, 2. Christocentric and 3. Theocentric.³² Ecclesiocentrism or exclusivism holds that salvation is possible only through explicit faith in Jesus Christ professed in the Church community. Christocentrism or inclusivism affirms the possibility of salvation in Jesus Christ without explicit faith in him professed in the Church. Pluralist Theocentrism holds that all religions are equally conducive to the salvation of their members, without any normative or constitutive character belonging to Jesus Christ and Christianity. In the theology of religions, further discussion on Christian attitude to religious pluralism has inspired theologians to suggest new models for assessing the value of different religions, namely, Regnocentrism and Soteriocentrism, Logocentrism and Pneumatocentrism.³³

These approaches merely help us to see the point of emphasis in different perspectives towards understanding the salvific meaning of religious plurality. Thus, for example, the ecclesiocentric approach insists that the only possible mediation of salvation is through knowledge of Christ, and that salvation must be defined primarily in terms of Jesus' atoning death and the necessity of the Church for the mediation of salvation. Similarly, the Christocentric approach, in view of its conviction that all salvation is through the mediation of Christ, acknowledges that his saving power can be mediated by a variety of participated mediations. But it insists on the necessity of implicit faith in Jesus Christ. However, it does not insist on the explicit confession of Christ and defines salvation as a process within which God's salvific presence is gradually realized in human hearts and in human history, though its final achievement will be eschatological. The Theocentric perspective focuses on a reality beyond any particular mediator or mediation. Hence, it cannot ascribe any salvific superiority to Christ or to the Christian religion, or indeed to any historical religious tradition. Instead, it appeals to all traditions to cooperate in the promotion of a common

³¹ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at The Encounter of World Religions*, pp. 105 – 110.

³² Cf. Schineller, "Christ and Church", *Theological Studies*, 37 (1976), p. 550.

³³ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 193 – 198.

concern, whether this is human or ecological well-being. What unites all three approaches is the recognition that God wills the salvation of all humanity (1 Tim 2:4) and, in consequence, has acted to effect this salvation in history. What distinguishes them, however, is their determination to approach the history of salvation from different perspectives. However, these perspectives can be outlined in terms of a particular point of focus, which is characteristic of each. More concretely, while exclusivism focuses on the mediator of salvation, and inclusivism focuses on the concrete mediation of salvation, pluralism can be said to focus on the ultimate goal beyond every particular mediator or mediation. However, the analysis of the unity and differences between the different perspectives that follows will help us to understand Dupuis approach to the theology of religious pluralism, especially his new synthesis of *Pluralistic Inclusivism*.

1.1 An Ecclesiocentric Approach: *Exclusivism*

The first perspective, the exclusivist position, consists in asking whether salvation in Jesus Christ was possible for people who do not profess faith in him and are not members of the Church. For many centuries the main issue of discussion regarding the Christian attitude toward other religions was regarding the possibility of salvation in Jesus Christ for the religious others. This is based on a the twofold belief, namely, God's universal will to save all humankind in Jesus Christ and the necessity of the Church for salvation. However, starting from the clear affirmation of the necessity faith in Jesus Christ as the universal Saviour, an emphasis on the necessity of the Church for salvation of religious others. At some stage, the Church began to adopt that no one could be saved without an explicit confession of faith in Jesus Christ.³⁴ Jesus Christ is understood as the exclusive centre of the universe. In order to obtain salvation, it is necessary to have an explicit knowledge of, and personal commitment to, Jesus Christ who is the one and only mediator of salvation. Thus,

³⁴ Karl Barth may be considered the main exponent of an exclusive Christology, or one may rightly call it Christomonism, as he upholds the unique salvific mediation of Jesus Christ to the exclusion of any other mediation of salvation. For the New Testament support cf. Mk 16:16; Mt 28:18-20; Lk 24:46-48; Jn 14:6, 17:18, 29, 21; Acts 1:8; 4:12; 1Tim 2: 5; Rom 2:21-26; Phil 2:10-11. In addition to these Biblical texts, the sources for exclusive theology include the works of Karl Bath, and his disciples like, Hendrik Krämer and Emil Brunner, and in the later stage to some extent in the evangelical circles, as evident in the recent works, such as those of H. A. Netland, A. D. Clarke and B. M. Winter.

exclusivism stresses the need for explicit faith in Jesus Christ, in the saving power of the Christ-event and necessity of the sacrament of the Church being joined with the mystery of Christ. In short, a radical Christocentrism is at the heart of exclusivism.

The ecclesiocentric approach is characteristic of the traditional axiom of exclusivism: ‘*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*’ (Outside the Church, no salvation).³⁵ This axiom was clearly emphasised in the Council of Florence, as it stated “no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of life; but they will go to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before the end of their life they are joined to it.”³⁶ Though exclusivism relies on the basic affirmation of the Christian tradition’s faith – the necessary mediation of Jesus Christ, it ignores the equally important affirmation of the universal will of God to save all people. The exclusivist approach represents the most restrictive position regarding the relationship of Christianity to other religions. Consequently, exclusivism fails to recognize the salvific values of other religions, especially concerning the salvation of their adherents.

1.2. A Christocentric Approach: *Inclusivism*

The inclusivist approach no longer simply asks whether salvation is possible for religious others, nor do they ask whether positive values, either natural or even supernatural, can be found in their religious traditions. They ask whether Christian theology can have a positive significance in God’s eternal plan for all humankind of the reality of religious pluralism. Whether other religious traditions in themselves are for their followers ways or means and channels of salvation willed and devised by God. It considers the meaning of the religious pluralism in God’s own mind. The question regarding the possibility of a positive relationship of the other religions to Christianity, and the role which eventually they play in the mystery of the salvation of their followers, have led the development of the inclusivist position. The inclusivist

³⁵ The axiom found its way into the Church’s official doctrine, indeed in its rigid form, at the council of Florence (1442), to the effect that all those outside the visible Catholic Church are destined for eternal damnation. The axiom ‘*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*’ was borrowed from Fulgentius of Ruspe (467 – 533). Formerly, this principle was applied to situations of schisms and heresy in the Christian fold. The document of the Council of Florence began to apply this to the other religions with a negative attitude as regards the role of ‘*pagan*’ religions in the objective economy of salvation.

³⁶ Neuner / Dupuis, (ed.), *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, (New York: Alba House, 2001), no. 1005. (Henceforth N. D.).

approach is guided by a growing awareness that God's universal salvific will can find expression in a variety of forms, including organized religious life of religious others. Going beyond a purely individual consideration of the possibility of salvation for individual persons, inclusivist theologians speak of positive elements and salvific values, found not merely in the religious others, but also in their religious traditions. They ask whether other religious traditions can be appreciated in themselves as constituting media for the operation of the salvific grace abounding in Christ. Some of the protagonists of inclusivism accept that the values found in those religious traditions are, in fact, supernatural gifts of God. They are elements of "truth and grace" endowed by God's gracious initiative into the various religious traditions of the world and are conducive to human salvation.

The inclusivists hold that the gift of salvation in Christ is present implicitly in other religions. The foundation of this truth is to be sought in the basic structure of humans as spiritual beings, being created by God in his own image and likeness. Furthermore, inclusivism holds for the presence of Christ in religious others and in their religions, even when they are committed to the founders of their own religions and acknowledge the presence of Christ neither in their religious life, nor in their religious traditions. However, to assert that Christ is essential for true religiosity and to affirm the universal presence of Christ in other religions is not to deny the value of other religious traditions. In fact the conviction that Christ is at work in other religious traditions can promote a new respect for them. Inclusivism looks at the possibility of the salvation of religious others through an implicit acceptance of Christ. Thus, while the inclusivist position has characterized the Catholic Church's approach, of late there has been increasing recognition among theologians that this position does not take seriously enough the fact of the religious otherness of the religious others.³⁷ They, nevertheless, have the merit of showing clearly that the

³⁷ Terrence Merrigan notes the following critic regarding the inclusivist approach for "its insistence on the saving presence of Christ, even where that presence is not acknowledged and especially where non-Christian men and women explicitly attribute their religious lives to other sources. To many critics this insistence on Christ seems imperialistic, a relic of an age when Christianity was the undisputed religious authority in the West. Moreover, it is argued, if Christians are convinced that Christ is the source and/or goal of all genuine religious life, they cannot enter into meaningful dialogue with non-Christians." Cf. idem., "Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," *Louvain Studies*, 23 (1998), p. 342. For the complete text cf. pp. 340–342.

universality of the mediation of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation is at the centre of the theology of religions.

1.3. A Theocentric Approach: *Pluralism*

The theocentric approach presents a radical change of paradigm. The mediation Jesus Christ is considered as neither constitutive nor normative for the salvation of all humankind.³⁸ The theocentric approach is considered as opposed to Christocentric, inasmuch as, it holds that salvation ultimately comes from God who has manifested himself in different religious traditions. Jesus Christ is perceived as one among many mediators of salvation. Judgements about claims to uniqueness or normativeness are unverifiable and therefore lacking in basis. The great appeal of pluralist theology is its claim to take the world's religious traditions seriously in their distinctiveness. The religious pluralism, which we find in the present world, is a pluralism that exists not simply '*de facto*', but '*de jure*'. However, generally, pluralist theologians insist that salvation is possible in and through a variety of independent and equally valid religious traditions. Religious pluralism suggests that there are only superficial differences among the religions and that these differences are greatly overshadowed by their similarities.

The pluralists hold that all religions share a fundamental unity that renders them equally valid but diverse approaches to God.³⁹ However, in spite of some

³⁸ John Hick is the protagonist of radical pluralism. The other pluralists are W. C. Smith and P. Schmidt-Leukel. The Pluralists of the Catholic tradition are Raimon Panikkar and Paul F. Knitter. Hick advocates a "Copernican revolution" in Christology, that is, a paradigm shift from Christ-centred to a God-centred model of the universe of faiths. Hick considers the world religions, including Christianity, to be so many different human responses to the one divine Reality. He finds that it is inconceivable that the God who wills the salvation of all could have "ordained that [people] must be saved in such a way that only a small minority can in fact receive this salvation." Idem, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, (Oxford: One World, 1993), p. 122.

³⁹ For a comprehensive study on John Hick's position cf. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982); idem. *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, (London: Macmillan, 1985); idem. *An Interpretation of Religion*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); idem. *The Rainbow of Faiths*, (London: SCM Press, 1995). Panikkar, *Salvation in Christ* (Santa Barbara, Calif, 1972), pp. 62 – 72; cf. also, idem. *The Trinity and Religious Experience of Man*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973) pp. 53 – 54. Panikkar, et al., *Pluralism and Oppression: Theology in World Perspective*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991); idem. *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1993); idem. *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, (Mahwah, 1999). For Paul F. Knitter's position cf. idem., *Jesus and the Other Names* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis

differences, if the various religions foster a common “religious experience” or result in the moral and ethical improvement of man, this is enough to show that they are valid ways to God. The pluralists consider all religions to be equally valid ways of salvation to their adherents. Christianity is one among many religions. The salvation offered by Christ is equally available in other religions. Jesus is the Saviour for Christians while the founders of other religions are respectively saviours for their adherents. This position is based on the historical consciousness, as they understand it, makes it impossible to evaluate the truth of claims of different religions, while the mystery of God is incomprehensible and therefore no religion can claim to have the final word. There exists so much of suffering and injustice in the world today, often caused by the exclusivist claims of different religions. They are of the view that by adopting a pluralists understanding of religions, there is better chance for a effective dialogue between the equal partners, with a opportunity to work together towards the elimination of suffering and injustices in the world.

The pluralist approach, even though, gives total emphasis to the Christian belief regarding God’s universal salvific will to save all humankind, rejects the truth of Christian faith and tradition that Jesus Christ as the one and universal mediator, through whom God’s universal plan of salvation is actualised (cf. 1Tim 2:4-6). However, the most immediate difficulty posed by religious pluralism for the Christian position is that it denies any claims to the uniqueness of Christ or of Christianity. Dupuis notes that one of the main criticisms against the theocentric paradigm is “its uncritical assumption of a concept of the absolute reality akin to the monotheistic and prophetic religions of the western hemisphere, but completely alien to the mystical traditions of the East. A preconceived idea of God is being imposed on all religions in an attempt to show how even in their differences, they converge on the same Divine Centre.”⁴⁰ Pluralists significantly underestimate the identity of each individual religious tradition and the differences between them due to the teachings of the various religions.⁴¹ They begin by insisting that they take each religion seriously in its particularity and end by treating them all in terms of its own universalistic vision.⁴²

Books, 1996); idem. *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985); idem. *One Earth, Many Religions*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995).

⁴⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 79.

⁴¹ Hans Kessler kritisiert die Perspektive des Pluralismus als: Der Pluralismus bezieht – in beiden seiner Formen – eine Außenperspektive, einen abstrakten Metastandpunkt jenseits der konkreten

The document of the congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, indicates the dangers of the relativising of the fundamental truths of Christian Faith by the theories of radical pluralism, as it places all the religions on an equal par, ignoring the reality of the differences existing between the different religious traditions.⁴³ However, pluralists overemphasize the affirmation of the universal will of God for human salvation and neglect or even reject the necessary role of Jesus Christ in human salvation.⁴⁴ Moreover, critics see the pluralist position as self-contradictory, since they propose “religious pluralism”, but end up with narrow homogeneity in postulating the sameness or uniformity of religions. Some of the pluralists have the tendency to separate “the Christ” from Jesus of Nazareth or seem to deny the universal salvific significance of the Christ event in its totality.⁴⁵ The implication seems to be that the theocentric paradigm, in its rejection of the truth

religiösen Standpunkte und Überzeugungen. Er urteilt über alle Religionen sozusagen aus der Vogelperspektiv, die wir nicht haben. Die Pluralistische Religionstheologie, die mit wenige konkrete religiöse Erfahrung anderer Religionen einen abstrakten Standpunkt einnimmt, ist deshalb auch weniger eine Theologie als vielmehr eine religionswissenschaftliche Theorie. Vgl. „Der universale Jesus Christus und die Religionen“, *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 181 (2001), p. 217.

⁴² Terrence Merrigan observes that in the pluralists theology, salvation history does not ultimately possess any particular content. It cannot yield any distinctive doctrine of God. Moreover it cannot provide any clearly defined goal which is able to motivate concrete religious practice. Thus within pluralist theology both salvation history, and the goal of salvation history become vague. See idem, “‘For us and for our Salvation’: The Notion of salvation History in the Contemporary Theology of Religions”, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 64 (1999) pp. 347 – 348.

⁴³ Cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 4.

⁴⁴ J. J. Lipner considers Hick’s position as ingenious relativism and ahistorical idealism. Cf. Lippner, “Does Copernicus Help?” in Richard W. Rousseau, (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue* (Scranton: Ridge Row, 1981) pp. 154 – 174. According to Wohlfart Pannenberg, Hick’s real problem with Christian inclusivism is the problem of Christology. Hick’s proposal of religious pluralism hinges on the condition of a prior rejection of the doctrine of incarnation. Cf. Pannenberg, “Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims: the Problem of the theology of World Religions” in D’Costa, (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, pp. 96 – 106.

⁴⁵ Raimon Panikkar, in the process of formulating an universal Christology, affirms that there is universal salvation in Christ, but the Saviour (Christ) is not an individual, not merely historical figure. The statement “Jesus is Christ” cannot be identical to the statement “Christ is Jesus.” Jesus is simply one concrete historical name for the “Supername” – Christ, which can also be called by other historical names. Jesus is only one expression of the cosmotheandric principle (Christ) which finds an historically *sui-generis* epiphany Jesus of Nazareth. Cf. Panikkar, *Salvation in Christ* (Santa Barbara, Calif, 1972), pp. 62 – 72; cf. also, idem. *The Trinity and Religious Experience of Man*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), pp. 53 – 54.

regarding normative and constitutive mediation of Christ for the salvation all humankind, has become completely incongruous for a Christian theology of religions.

According to the theological positions of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism we can see the following differences of opinions in the Christian theology of religions. The exclusivists hold that an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and membership of the Church are required for salvation. The inclusivism seeks to combine the twofold New Testament affirmations of the concrete and universal salvific will of God, on the one hand, and of the finality of Jesus Christ as universal Saviour, on the other. It affirms that the mystery of Jesus Christ and of his Spirit is present and operative outside the boundaries of the Church, both in the life of individual persons and in the religious traditions to which they belong and which they sincerely practice. The pluralistic position maintains that God has manifested and revealed himself in various ways to different peoples in their respective situations. It upholds no finality of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation, for God saves people through their own tradition, even as he saves Christians through Jesus Christ. Thus, according to the exclusivist position, Jesus Christ and the Church are the necessary way to salvation. For the inclusivists, Jesus Christ is the mediator for all. According to the pluralist model, Jesus Christ is the way for Christians, while the other religious traditions constitute the way for the others.⁴⁶

There can be no doubt that the three-fold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism has helped to sharpen the focus of the debate on Christology in the context of religious pluralism. These three categories have an indicative value, if they are not taken rigidly. When they are taken rigidly, they would become misleading, as they would set theological opinions in three watertight categories as opposed to each other. One of the most serious difficulties with these models is that they advance only marginally the dialogue between the religions, because they have created premature parameters among the participants in the debate. These parameters, each in their own way, has claimed too much.⁴⁷ A considerable number of authors, belonging especially to the Asian continent, have also denounced recently the inadequacies of the problematic at work in the Christocentric paradigm. This typology is perhaps more

⁴⁶ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 75 – 95; cf. also, idem. “Christological Debate in the Context of Religious Plurality,” *Current Dialogue*, 19 (1991), pp. 18 – 31.

⁴⁷ Cf. Dermot A. Lane, “Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions,” *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 153 –54.

helpful to see them as three points of reference on a wide spectrum. Such an approach takes into account many positions that appear to fall in between the three defined points. However, it may be more helpful to reject this typology altogether in order to move into that theological zone which was in fact not open due to the boundaries set by this typology.⁴⁸

2. Jacques Dupuis' Frontiers in the Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

Jacques Dupuis, in his masterly work: *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, seeks to explore certain new frontiers in the theology of religions,⁴⁹ nevertheless, carefully balancing the new insights gathered from personal experience of being constantly challenged by the vitality of the living religious traditions and their influence on the daily life of the believers of these religions, from the core of Christian tradition with an openness to the holy mystery of God's presence in the world that includes all humankind with their diverse religious traditions and cultures. As Revealer and Redeemer, Jesus is one and universal, yet in practice the visible paths to salvation have remained many. They are neither parallel to Jesus the way, the truth and the life, nor complementary to him. They are ways of salvation in so far as they participate in the paschal mystery of Christ, as part of God's overall plan of salvation for all humankind. Furthermore, Dupuis appeals consistently to the universal presence and action of the Word of God and of the Divine Spirit in the believers of other religions and in their religious traditions. In his Christian faith, he hopes that all the diverse religious paths will converge towards the final, universal reign of God in Jesus Christ.

Dupuis, in his theology of religious pluralism, tries to investigate theologically a Christian perspective to the plurality of religions. For him, "the theology of religion asks what religion is and seeks, in the light of Christian faith, to interpret the

⁴⁸ Aloysius Pieris wrote: "I have found myself gradually appropriating a trend in Asia, which adopts a paradigm wherein the three categories mentioned above do not make sense." Cf. idem, "An Asian Paradigm: Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," *The Month* 26 (1993), pp. 129 – 134.

⁴⁹ Dupuis chooses to use the term "Religious Pluralism, taking into account the new awareness that has been dawning upon theologians, including himself, of the reality of "religious pluralism," characteristic of today's world. Dupuis observes that the expression, "theology of religions," has largely given way to the expression, "theology of religious pluralism." "The change in terminology," he reflects, "indicates a change in theological perspective." Cf. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 10.

universal religious experience of humankind.”⁵⁰ This is how Dupuis defines the domain of the theology of religious pluralism, “it searches more deeply, in the light of Christian faith, for the meaning of God’s design for humankind of the plurality of living faiths and religious traditions with which we are surrounded.”⁵¹ It is interested not only in pluralism *de facto*, but in pluralism *de iure*, which means that it searches “for the root-cause of pluralism itself, for its significance in God’s own plan for humankind, for the possibility of mutual convergence of the various traditions in full respect of their differences, for their mutual enrichment and cross-fertilization.”⁵² He is of the conviction that in God’s providence religious pluralism exists not merely as a fact but also as principle in his economy of salvation for all humankind. A quick survey follows of Dupuis’ explorations in the theology of religions, his method of doing a theology of religious pluralism, his objective of discovering the theological significance of the reality of religious pluralism and his position regarding Christianity’s doctrinal attitude towards other religions.

2.1. A Theological Approach to the Problematic of Religious Pluralism

Religious plurality is a reality in the historical and contemporary experience of the human community. One of the indirect consequences of globalisation is the emergence of religious pluralism as the major issue of theological investigation in the twenty-first century for all the major world religions. Hence, the question arises: how are we to live together in a world, which is becoming increasingly aware of its religious diversity? An ongoing interreligious and inter-cultural encounter and enrichment has resulted in the new awareness of the reality of religious plurality. While religious plurality can be a source of spiritual and social renewal for human communities in the struggle for justice, peace, and a sustainable environment, it can also disrupt the way we have so far understood and looked upon religion and culture. While in the continents of Asia and Africa men and women always lived in a religiously pluralistic society, the encounter of cultures and religions has become a fact even in the western continents. However, such a historical perspective calls for

⁵⁰ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 10.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 11.

the close and sustained attention to the need for a theology of religious pluralism that seeks to discover the meaning of religious pluralism in God's overall plan of salvation, accomplished in his Son Jesus Christ, in the work of the Holy Spirit. Dupuis articulates prevalent new awareness of religious pluralism as follows:

“Barriers had begun to crumble, and communication was gradually developing, which brought home a new awareness of what the other traditions proposed to the adherents by way of salvation and liberation. Nor were those traditions on the decline, as earlier ages had anticipated, as they would be. They were in fact very much alive and continued to respond to and fulfil the aspirations of their adherents. Indeed, with the means of communication on the increase, they made their presence in the Western world felt ever more deeply. The irreversible process had begun by which the world would shrink into a ‘global village,’ bringing with it a new awareness that Christianity was one of many traditions, which claim adherents and disciples. In such a context the question could not but arise as to how the other traditions stood in relation to Christianity and, from the vantage point of Christian faith, what role they might be playing in relation to the salvation of their followers.”⁵³

In this contemporary pluralistic context, Dupuis articulates his theological reflection from a catholic perspective on religious pluralism. Nevertheless, he does not approach toward the reality of religious pluralism as a problem to be conquered with defensive theological concepts and structures. He understands it as God's gift: the diverse riches, which God has bestowed upon the whole of humankind, in order to seek and find him. He understands the diversity of religious traditions as God speaking to his people in many and various ways, through the person of Jesus Christ, in the universal working of the Holy Spirit. He expresses a conscientious willingness to accord the other religions a positive role in the divine economy of salvation, a willingness inspired by the actual experience of the fruits of the Spirit visible among them. In a pluralistic society, genuine religion necessarily entails a relationship with the other religions; and so, in short, to be religious is to be interreligious.

However, the theology of religions studies the various religious traditions from the perspective of Christian faith and its fundamental affirmation concerning Jesus Christ. Theology of religions culminates simply in two basic affirmations, namely, the boundless mercy of God that makes possible the salvation for all: God desires all men and women to be saved; hence God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a

⁵³ Ibid. pp. 130 – 132.

knowledge of truth.” (1 Tim 2:4); “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (Jn 3:16); “This is how he showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him” (1Jn 4:9); this impels us to discover the meaning of religious pluralism in the superabundant richness of God’s one and universal plan of salvation for all humankind; and only in Jesus Christ can salvation be found; in other words, God’s universal offer of salvation is efficacious in and through particularity of the mediation and the merits of the event of Jesus Christ. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (Jn 14:6). Nevertheless, both of these principles of Christian faith, perhaps most explicitly summarised in a single statement in official Catholic doctrine regarding the possibility of salvation for the believers of other religions: “This holds true not for Christians only but also for all persons of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all are in fact called one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal mystery.”⁵⁴

Much of recent theology of religions in Catholic circles has been a response to the demands to take religious pluralism seriously as a cultural and religious fact, and to recognize the spiritual and moral goods found in other religions. In both cases, what is being demanded is nothing less than a wholehearted recognition of the others’ intrinsic right to be “other,” and of the intrinsic value of their “otherness.” To accept the first is to accept the fact that most people in the world are not and will likely never be Christians. To accept the second means accepting that the doctrines and the spirituality found in other religious traditions are also capable of engendering an impressive practice of virtue.⁵⁵ From Dupuis’ point of view, religious pluralism must not be viewed as a mere fact of life to be reckoned with, much less as an impediment to Christian mission and identity, but as a divine grace to be thankful for and an opportunity to be seized – a gift and a task. Religious pluralism in principle is based on God’s initiative in searching for people throughout history in order to share with

⁵⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁵⁵ Terrence Merrigan, “Jacques Dupuis and the Redefinition of Inclusivism,” in Daniel Kendall / Gerald O’Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways*, p. 61.

them “in many and diverse ways” (Heb 1: 1) God’s own life, even before human beings could ever search for God. It follows that the other religious traditions play a positive role in God’s plan for humankind. It also follows that Christianity may be enriched – or even renewed - through contact with them. Dupuis writes, “The religious traditions of the world did not represent primarily the search of people and peoples for God through their history but the search of God for them. The theology of religions, which was still taking its first steps, would have to make a complete turn from a Christian-centred perspective to one centred on the personal dealings of God with humankind throughout the history of salvation.”⁵⁶

Dupuis, in his Christian theology of religious pluralism, looks at religious pluralism as willed by God in his plan of salvation of humankind. The willingness to accord the other religions a positive role in the divine economy of salvation – a willingness, inspired by the actual experience of the fruits visible among them – is a major feature of Dupuis’ own approach. He is not satisfied to allot to other religious traditions merely an accidental role in God’s universal salvific plan for human kind, namely, “a preparation for the Gospel” or “a stepping stone,” since the other religious traditions contain in them “the seeds of the Word of God” and “elements of truth and grace”, often reflecting “a ray of truth that enlightens everyone”. Therefore, he reflects on the concrete place other religions have in God’s universal salvific plan, without taking away the religious identity of the followers of other religious traditions. Dupuis’ perspective towards understanding the theological significance of religious pluralism is “no longer limited to the problem of “salvation” for members of the other religious traditions or even to the role of those traditions in the salvation of their members. It searches more deeply, in the light of Christian faith, for the meaning in God’s design for humankind of the plurality of living faiths and religious traditions with which we are surrounded.”⁵⁷ The new perspective that Dupuis adopts for a Christian theology of religions makes it clear that he cannot provide definitive solutions to all the questions that are being asked regarding the theological significance of religious pluralism and subsequent Christian attitude toward it. In his theological response to the problematic of religious pluralism in the Christian

⁵⁶ Cf. Dupuis, “My Pilgrimage in Mission” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 27 (2003), 4, pp. 168 – 171.

⁵⁷ Cf. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 10

theology, Dupuis' *Theology of Religious Pluralism* may raise as many questions as it will propose solutions. He attempts to sort out the issues clearly in the light of recent discussions and advances and indicates avenues for solutions to new questions, consonant with the profession of Christian faith. In this task, he takes a challenge to explore the frontiers of Christian theology of religions, going "beyond the past solutions that no longer square with reality and leave behind the negative attitudes that have characterised centuries of Christian relations with other religions."⁵⁸

2.2 A Methodology for a Christian Theology in the Context of Religious Pluralism

Dupuis sees the theology of religious pluralism not as a new topic, but as a new way of doing theology. He writes, "More than a new topic for theologising, the theology of religions must be viewed as a new way of doing theology, in an interfaith context; an new method of theologising in a situation of religious pluralism."⁵⁹ On the one hand, this theology of religious pluralism will remain a theological, that is, confessional, approach that does not hide its Christian identity. On the other hand, it has to be open to other religions. In one of his most radical statements, Dupuis says that this implies that religious pluralism is not only considered as a matter of fact, but also as being in accordance with the will of God.⁶⁰ While no one is excluded from the salvific will of God, leave alone a particular people or religion stands outside the salvific act of God, the grace of God is available to all believers in all religions and cultures, through the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. God's grace and God's love are not exclusive claims of any one people, religion or culture. Moreover, any recognition of the presence of God or Christ or the Spirit in the lives of religious other should free us from the prejudice and a fear of acknowledging the "salvific significance" in the religious life of believers of other religions and in their traditions.

He suggests that today's theology of religions should be marked with a change of terminology; and consequently, a change of outlook toward the reality of religious pluralism with a change of methodology. Hence, along with purification of memory,

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 11.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 11. Cf. also, E. Schillebeeckx, *Church: the Human Story of God*, (London: SCM Press 1990), p.171 –182.

he points out the need for right methodology for a purification of the theological language. He suggests a theological method that can contribute us in our task of interpreting the relevance of the person and message of Christ in the world of religious plurality. Consequently he adopts theological method that seeks to maintain a balance between the parameters of Christian faith and the contemporary awareness of religious pluralism. He takes the challenge of granting the religious traditions the existence on their own right; in other words, he accepts religious pluralism, not only as a reality, but also in principle. In the light of this experience of the reality, he proceeds to do his theological reflection; that is a hermeneutic theology, which remains always in encounter with the perceived reality, interpreting the fundamental truths of Christian Faith in the light of the existing reality. Theology in the context of religious pluralism needs to be arrived at by a process of interreligious dialogue and collaboration, with an objective of mutual enrichment through encounter between different religious traditions.

However, Dupuis shows the inadequacy of the deductive method in the theology of religions.⁶¹ In contrast with the traditional theological methods, which were deductive, dogmatic and genetic,⁶² Dupuis proposes an inductive, contextual and hermeneutic theology. It means starting from the concrete context in which the Church lives its faith and interpreting the surrounding reality with the help of the Gospel message.⁶³ He states that unlike the dogmatic theologies of the past, the

⁶¹ Dupuis observes that the reaction to an exclusively deductive method, an aprioristic one, and as such necessarily inadequate, has arisen, as might be expected, in the Churches in which coexistence with other religious traditions is an integral part of daily life, as in India, where the great world religions mingle on a daily basis. Consequently, one begins with a praxis of interreligious dialogue among various traditions – lived, on either side, in ones own faith, as is fitting – and theological conclusions concerning the relationship of these traditions follow as ‘second act’. Cf. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 5.

⁶² The process of *deductive method* consisted of starting from general principles to reach their concrete applications to the problems of today. In accordance with the deductive method, Christian theology begins to investigate the problematic of religious pluralism, in the light of certain statements of revelation that are judged to be clear and indisputable in their meaning, and then asks what meaning Christian faith can grant to the other religious traditions. Both the *dogmatic* and the *genetic* methods employed in Christian theology share a common principle of deductive method. Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 5; Cf. also, idem. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 16 – 19.

⁶³ Claude Geffré holds that the new interpretation of the Christian message is born “on the basis of the circle between reading in faith the founding texts that bear witness to the original Christian

theology of religious pluralism is inductive, i.e. it starts from the reality as experienced today, and reading the “signs of the times,” searches for a Christian solution to the problems that are raised. Dupuis’ Christian theology of religious pluralism is hermeneutics (interpretation),⁶⁴ as it begins from the experience of the context of religious plurality and the questions that the context raises, thereafter inquires for a theological investigation in the light of the revealed message and tradition. Theology has become interpretation in context, and this understanding involves a reinterpretation. Such a way of theologising is much more problematic than had been the traditional way, which followed a purely a priori and dogmatic method. It did imply some risks and dangers, against which one had to guard oneself carefully. But it seemed also to be the only way of doing theology that would really meet the concrete reality of the world in which we are living. Where the theology of religions was concerned, it meant that those could not claim to engage in it seriously who had not been exposed at length to the concrete reality of the other religious traditions and of the religious life of their followers.⁶⁵

Christian existence is everywhere conditioned by the historical context in which it is lived, with its cultural, economic, social, political and religious components. Hence, Dupuis writes: “This being so, it should become clear that the lead for building up a theological hermeneutics of religious pluralism will belong primarily, though not exclusively, to the churches in the African, and even more so in the Asian, continent; where the encounter and conversation between people belonging to distinct religious traditions is an important dimension of everyday life”.⁶⁶ However, hermeneutical theology will therefore consist of a progressive and continuous interaction between the present contextual experience and the witness of the foundational experience entrusted to the memory of Church tradition. Hence, Dupuis opts for a ‘*hermeneutical triangle*,’ consisting of the mutual interaction

experience on the one hand and Christian existence today on the other.” Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 53.

⁶⁴ Claude Geffré defines ‘*Hermeneutic Theology*’ as “a new act of interpretation of the event of Jesus Christ on the basis of critical correlation between the fundamental Christian experience to which tradition bears witness and contemporary human experience.” *The Risk of Interpretation: On Being Faithful to the Christian Tradition in a Non-Christian Age*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1987), P. 50.

⁶⁵ Cf. Dupuis “My Pilgrimage in Mission” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 27 (2003) 4, pp. 168 - 171.

⁶⁶ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 19.

between 'text,' 'context' and 'interpreter.' In this hermeneutic model, there is mutual interaction between three angles: the 'text' or the 'given' of faith, the historical 'context' and today's 'interpreter.'⁶⁷ Here, each of the three poles is in mutual interaction, each of the constitutive elements of the triangle, needs to be viewed in the integrity of its complex reality. Dupuis is of the opinion that 'text' includes not only the revealed data in the Bible, but also, everything contained in 'Christian memory'. In other words, it includes scripture, Church' tradition and the magisterium. The 'context' is both a concrete place and time in the human history and its complex realities, including socio-political, economic, cultural and religious realities. The 'interpreter' is not so much the individual theologian but the community of faith to which the theologian belongs, and at whose service he or she is placed.⁶⁸ Thus, the hermeneutical triangle consists of the mutual interaction among text, context and interpreter, that is the interaction among the Christian memory, the surrounding cultural and religious realities and the local Church. The context acts upon the interpreter by raising specific questions, it influences the pre-comprehension of faith with which the interpreter reads the text. The text, acts on the interpreter, whose reading of it will provide a direction for Christian praxis.

When it comes to doing a theology of religious pluralism, Dupuis suggests for a new methodology, which is a combination of the deductive and inductive methods. He goes a step ahead to opt for a midway between the deductive and inductive methods. He seems to combine both the methods in order to maintain a balance between Christian Revelation and the context of religious pluralism. According to him a Christian theology of religious pluralism that seeks to give fitting solutions to the contemporary experience of the problematic of religious pluralism, must "keep in touch with the living tradition of the Church – itself the outcome of past tradition – and build upon what the Christian centuries, first in the revealed word and later in the post-biblical tradition, offer that remains valuable by way of an open attitude likely to lead to a positive theological assessment."⁶⁹ This can take place through the combination of the deductive and inductive methods. Since the deductive method is based on principles, it is in danger of remaining abstract and of not really

⁶⁷ Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, p. 8 – 9.

⁶⁸ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 16

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 11.

encountering the concrete reality of religious pluralism. Similarly, the inductive method, based on the praxis of dialogue, and driven by the personal experience of the reality may not be able to do justice to the Christian memory and so fail to attain its goal. He considers that the deposit of faith and the living context of religious pluralism must be brought together. According to him “a treatment of the theology of religions cannot proceed simply a priori in a deductive way, but must first be based on the contact with the concrete reality of religious plurality through interreligious dialogue, and then proceed to interpret in the light of this reality the data of revelation and tradition.”⁷⁰ Their reciprocal movement would ensure the indispensable encounter between the datum of faith and the living reality of religious pluralism. This new method will be able to bring out the full import of the Christian memories and makes its point of departure the praxis of interreligious dialogue. Such an interreligious hermeneutical theology will hopefully lead to the discovery of cosmic dimensions of the mystery of God, Christ and the Spirit at a new depth. This reflection on and within interfaith dialogue will lead to the discovery of new understanding of God’s revelation in the contemporary world.⁷¹

However, even though Dupuis tries to combine an inductive and a deductive method in theology and considers that the treatment of the theology of religions cannot proceed simply a priori in a deductive way, does not keep up to this method. While his intention is to maintain a balance between inductive and deductive methods in theology, the way he precedes remains to a greater extent a priori. His theological method, strictly speaking, does not meet the standards of hermeneutical theology, as he largely depends on a theology from above with a priori conclusions. Even though, he calls for a reinterpretation of the traditional Christian doctrine, accommodating the

⁷⁰ Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 28 (2003), p. 364.

⁷¹ Paul F. Knitter has a similar opinion. According to him any viable method of theology will have to make use of two sources – Christian tradition (Scripture and its living interpretation through history) and human experience (which includes both thought and praxis). ... Applying the two-source approach to a method for a theology of religions, we must recognise that a Christian understanding of and approach to other religions cannot be fashioned only from the fabric of Christian beliefs. We will want to start with what the Bible or the official statements of the councils have to say about other religions. And what we find must be taken seriously. But no final conclusions as to the value of the truth of other traditions can be reached until our Christian “data” is brought into relationship with a concrete knowledge (theory) and experience (praxis) of other religions. Cf. Knitter, *No Other Name*, pp. 91 – 92.

new awareness of religious pluralism through the practice of interreligious dialogue, he begins with a theology from above and remains with it.

2.3. The Models and the Paradigms in the Theology of Religions

Dupuis intends to identify the main paradigms according to which attempts have been made to construct a theology of religions. The distinctive paradigms have helped to determine the fundamental perspective, the principle of intelligibility, according to which theories are being proposed as to how the various religious traditions, including Christianity, relate to each other. For Dupuis, a “model” is different from a “paradigm;” the latter excludes any other, whereas the former can combine and even complete others.⁷² He uses the term ‘*paradigm*’ intentionally as opposed to “*model*,” of which use is also made. He maintains a distinction between the two. ‘Models’ are descriptive; they call attention to aspects of some reality without claiming to define adequately or distinctly. Consequently various models do not exclude one another; rather, they must be viewed as complementing each other and need to be combined in order to yield a comprehensive view of the reality concerned.⁷³ The opposite is the case where ‘paradigms’ are concerned. Hence the need, if one paradigm is judged unusable, to abandon it and to shift to another. In the Christian theology of religions, theologians distinguish three fundamental perspectives: ecclesiocentric, Christocentric, and theocentric, and, in parallel fashion, three basic positions, respectively designated as “exclusivism,” “inclusivism” and “pluralism”.⁷⁴ These paradigms, being understood as mutually opposed, have marked twofold paradigm shift. Paradigm shifts are based on the contradiction existing between different perspectives, presented as if in opposition with each other. Consequently, in virtue of the change of the problematic of salvation of religious others to assessing the positive value of the religious traditions in the over all plan of

⁷² Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 75 – 95, 138 – 194; Cf. also, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 180 – 201.

⁷³ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 226.

⁷⁴ Cf. for instance, Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*; Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985). Aloysius Pieris, “Speaking of the Son of God”, *Concilium*, 152 (1982), 3, pp. 65 – 70.

God, has called for a paradigm shift. In virtue of which a new paradigm is substituted for the other, which is henceforth disavowed.

2.3.1. A Paradigm Shift from Ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism

The ecclesiocentric paradigm is too narrow a perspective to account for the presence of God and of his saving grace outside the Church. Therefore a paradigm shift is called for from the ecclesiocentric to a Christocentric perspective. The paradigm shift from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism represents, in fact, significant reversal, with weighty consequences, not merely for theology of religions but for theology as a whole. It implies radical “decentering” of the Church, which now finds itself “recentered” on the mystery of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, indeed, is at the centre of the Christian mystery. The Church, by contrast, is a derived and a related mystery, which finds in him its *raison d’être*. Dupuis affirms, such a decentering of the Church and its consequent re-centering on the Jesus Christ are absolutely necessary if theology wants to avoid maximalist ecclesiological tendencies, of which the axiom “outside the Church no salvation” represents an extreme example. According to him a narrow ecclesiocentric approach must be replaced by broader Christocentric perspective. For the theology of religions, the paradigm shift from exclusivism to inclusivism implies a clear-cut distinction between the role of Jesus Christ and that of the Church in the order of salvation. In the order of salvation, *Church* can never be placed on a par with that of Jesus Christ; nor can the same necessity be attributed to it. This demonstrates the need to transcend an overly narrow ecclesiocentric outlook. A theology of religions cannot be built on an ecclesiological emphasis that would falsify perspectives.⁷⁵

The inclusivist theology of religions insists on the universal significance of the mystery of Jesus Christ, constitutive of salvation, as affirmed by the New Testament. While, however, the saving mystery of Jesus Christ is available to Christians in and through the Church, it reaches out to the followers of the other religious traditions, in some mysterious way, through these traditions themselves. There is thus one mediator between God and people, the man Jesus Christ; but there exist different channels through which the saving action of the one mediator reaches people inside and outside the Church through his Spirit. Admittedly, the Church, as the eschatological

⁷⁵ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 77.

community that is the sacrament of the mystery of Christ, mediates the mystery of salvation in an eminent way; but it is not the only channel of the mystery. The same attains people outside the Church in the concrete situations in which they find themselves; that is, in and through the religious traditions to which they belong, which inspire their faith-response to God and in which this response finds concrete expression. For the inclusivist theory, therefore, the task to be accomplished by a theology of religions consists in showing that the Christ-event, its particularity in time and space notwithstanding, has universal value and cosmic consequences in such wise that the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ is everywhere present and operative through the Spirit. However, whether the Christocentric inclusivism is a suitable model for a Christian theology of religions or a further paradigm shift towards a theocentric model is necessary, is a debated question among Christologists. While low Christologists will be inclined to agree, their high counterparts will insist that a theocentric perspective is intrinsic in the Christocentric model itself. Hence it must not be construed as a distinct paradigm.⁷⁶ But if a Christian theology of religions needs to be Christocentric, it must bring out the full dimension of the mystery of Jesus Christ and put in evidence its cosmic significance.

The main objection to inclusivist theology is its insistence on the saving presence of Christ, even where that presence is not acknowledged and especially where the people of other faith attribute their religious lives to the founders or saving figures of their own religions. To many critics this insistence on Christ seems imperialistic attitude towards other religions with a fact of holding on to the unique and privileged position for Christianity. Despite these objections, the inclusivist perspective gives a proper orientation in centring the Church on the Christ event with a right emphasis to the mystery of Christ in the history of human salvation. The perspective of inclusivism has been able to propose a positive value to the other religious traditions, being enriched and brought to completion in the Christian tradition. But it has not been able to allot the saving value to the other religions to their members. From this paradigm shift it is clear that a theology of religions cannot be built on an ecclesiological emphasis that would falsify perspectives. The Church, as a derived mystery and utterly relative to the mystery of Christ, cannot be the

⁷⁶ Cf. Terrence Merrigan, "Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement Toward a Christian Theology of Religions", *Louvain Studies*, 23 (1998), p. 342.

yardstick by which the salvation of others is measured. God has placed Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, as the summit of the economy of salvation. And so he is normative for the salvation of all humankind.

2.3.2. A Paradigm Shift from Christocentrism to Theocentrism

A Paradigm shift consists in substituting for the Christocentric perspective, a Theocentric one, according to which, Jesus Christ and his saving mystery, no longer stand at the centre of God's saving design for humankind. That place belongs to God alone, towards whom all the religious traditions, Christianity included, tend as to their end. It calls for Christianity to give up all claims to uniqueness or finality for Jesus Christ in the order of God's relationship with humankind. Universality can only be understood in the sense that the person of Jesus Christ and his message is capable, as other saving figures also are, of a universal appeal to people, that is, of arousing in them a response to God and to that, which is truly human. But such a universal appeal is in no way a distinctive or exclusive feature of Christianity. The pluralist position finds the inclusivist theological agenda impracticable and unnecessary. It criticises the inclusivist model for pre-empting the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ and thereby affirming a priori the superiority of Christianity over the other religious traditions. It also accuses inclusivism for evaluating the other traditions not in themselves but in relation to Christianity; for seeing them not as they see themselves but as pale and incomplete realisations of what Christianity embodies in its fullness. In the present context of religious plurality and dialogue, such a position would seem untenable, for it assumes that Christianity is the yardstick by which all religious traditions must be theologically evaluated and closes the door in advance to an inter-religious dialogue on a basis of equality. It needs to be recognised plainly that God, who "shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34), has manifested and revealed himself in various ways to different peoples in different cultures. The various religious traditions of the world embody, each in its own way, such divine self-revelation. It follows that the various religious traditions complement each other in their differences; what is required between them is neither mutual exclusion nor inclusion of the many into one, but reciprocal enrichment through open interaction and sincere dialogue.

Proposing a 'common idea of God' to be shared by all religions, as the protagonists of the pluralist paradigm have done, is seen as an over-simplification of differences, leading to a dangerous religious reductionism and relativism. In fact, all

religious reflection is situated in a specific 'faith context', and only in such a context it can be properly understood. Faced with the objections levelled at the theocentric paradigm, recent theologians have sought to take middle position between exclusivism and pluralism, to endow the theology of religions with an inclusive and open Christocentrism capable of combining, on the one hand, the "constitutive" sense of the Jesus Christ event for the salvation of humanity, with, on the other hand, the value of other religious traditions as representing interventions of God in the history of human cultures as symbols of "truth and grace" and salvation for their members. Other versions of the pluralist model are more restrained. According to some moderate pluralists, once the claim for the universal constitutive mediation of Jesus Christ is abandoned, Jesus Christ keeps a relative prominence, compared with other saving figures and paths. He remains the ideal symbol of the way in which God has been dealing with humankind for its salvation. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ remains "normative" as the most perfect symbol and ideal model of human-divine relations.⁷⁷ The shifting of paradigms in the theology of religions, however, is becoming obsolete, as one moves beyond the paradigms that often placed against each other.⁷⁸ Therefore instead of starting from a preset theological paradigm it is better to build an interreligious theology on the basis of an actual interreligious dialogue.

2.3.3. The Model of Trinitarian-Spirit Christology: *Pluralistic Inclusivism*

A Christian theology of religions that seeks to understand God's response to the religious longings of humankind needs to be Trinitarian in its approach to the theological significance of diversity of religions, and Christological in its perspective. Dupuis makes a valid observation that a Christian theology of religious pluralism should be built not on mutual contradictions and confrontation but on harmony, convergence, and unity. Only then shall we be able to discover the specificity and singularity of each religious tradition, as well as the positive significance of the plurality of those traditions. Dupuis questions whether it is necessary, or even possible to make a choice between theocentrism and Christocentrism. He asks, is not the option for either theocentric paradigm or Christocentric paradigm a false

⁷⁷ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 77 – 79.

⁷⁸ For further details cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp.180 – 201; Barnes, *Religions in Conversation*, pp.111 – 131.

dilemma? A theology of religions founded on mutual opposition may not be a suitable theological method to evaluate salvific meaning of other religions. Hence, he proposes his synthesis of *pluralistic inclusivism*, for a Christian theology of religious pluralism. For Christians, the only adequate knowledge of God is God the Father of Jesus Christ. For this Christian theology is theocentric inasmuch as it is Christocentric, and vice versa.⁷⁹ Christ, being one and complete revelation of God, is for us Christians the one and the only point of departure into the mystery of Godhead.

Dupuis proposes a Trinitarian Christology as a suitable “model” for a Christian theology of religious pluralism. Dupuis’ model is different from the pluralist “paradigm” that denies the universal saving action of Jesus Christ. It is also different from exclusivism, which denies other paths of salvation. In this way, Dupuis goes beyond the dilemma of a choice between a theology of religion that is either Christocentric or theocentric. In Christian theology Christocentrism and theocentrism cannot be considered as contradicting each other; Christian theology is Christocentric by being theocentric, and vice versa. Thus the paradigm of *pluralistic inclusivism* seeks to combine and hold together, in a fruitful tension, an unimpaired faith in Jesus Christ universal Saviour of humankind, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a positive, salvific significance of the other religious traditions of the world for their followers, in accordance with the eternal plan of God for humanity. Dupuis writes “If the perspective of religious pluralism in principle must be expressed in the usual terminology in the debate over the theology of religions, the most suitable expression ... will be that of a pluralistic inclusivism or of an inclusive pluralism, which upholds both the universal constitutive character of the Christ event in the order of salvation and the positive saving significance of the religious traditions within the single manifold plan of God for humankind.”⁸⁰

However, even though Dupuis remains in the camp of the open inclusivists, he does not consider theocentric pluralism as standing in opposition to Christocentric inclusivism; instead, they seem to complement and enrich each other. Consequently, pluralistic inclusivism needs to be distinguished from the “pluralist paradigm” of theologians such as John Hick and Paul Knitter, as it is clear from the fact that Dupuis has repeatedly distanced himself from their radical pluralists position. The model of

⁷⁹ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 110.

⁸⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 255.

pluralistic inclusivism goes beyond the dilemma of threefold traditional paradigms, as implying mutual contradictions, in proposing a theology of religious pluralism in keeping with Christian faith.⁸¹ However, the new synthesis of pluralistic inclusivism or inclusivist pluralism is a suitable way out of the “current impasse” of the threefold paradigm. It is a fitting response to a theology of religious pluralism with Trinitarian hermeneutic that provides a theological interpretation of religious pluralism. In theological terminology, it also called *Trinitarian Pneumatic-Christology*. In the process of doing theology in the context of the reality of religious pluralism, justice must be done to the specific character of each religious tradition, with its irreducible identity and difference, instead of trying to make the other traditions fit into preconceived schemes that view them as “evangelical preparations” that fulfilled in Christianity. Nevertheless, while a certain convergence between Christianity and the other traditions is already partly operative in history, the final convergence will be realized only in the *eschaton*.

3. A Personal Assessment on Jacques Dupuis’ Theology of Religious Pluralism

Dupuis, while attempting in his book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, to offer a theological response to the question of the meaning and value of the plurality of religious traditions in God’s plan of salvation, explicitly professes his intention to remain faithful to the Church’s doctrine and the teaching of the magisterium. However, he is aware of the potential problems in his approach, and does not conceal the fact that as many questions may be raised as he seeks to answer. Dupuis aims at promoting a *qualitative leap* in the Christian theology of religious pluralism. His theology is essentially a theology written within the context of the Christian faith, of reinforcing the foundation in the Christian revelation and tradition of some affirmations with a courageous and creative attempt to translate the heart of Catholic faith into a language that resonates with our contemporary sense of the value

⁸¹ Claude Geffré writes: “The most promising current inside Catholicism is that which seeks to overcome a theology of fulfilment with a theology of religious pluralism. Without compromising the unicity of the mystery of Christ, that is, a constitutive Christocentrism, such a theology does not hesitate to speak of an inclusive pluralism in the sense of a recognition of the values proper to other religions.” See Claude Geffré “Verso una nuova teologia delle religioni” in Rosino Gibellini (ed.), *Prospettive teologiche per il XXI secolo*, Brescia, *Queriniana*, Biblioteca di teologia, 123 (2003), p. 359. For the complete article cf. *ibid.* pp. 353 – 372.

and respect due to other religions. What he intended is to give “an introduction to a theology of religions, at once historical and synthetic, genetic and up-to-date.”⁸² Dupuis is certainly not content with *a priori* theological formulations; neither is he content with seeing the other religious traditions as awaiting fulfilment in Christianity, nor prepared to accept them as merely a preparation for the Gospel. Hence, Dupuis has deliberately opted for inductive method for his theology of religious pluralism, but not one that is opposed to deductive method. His methodology seems to be a combination of the deductive and inductive methods.

3.1. The Attitude of the Church Towards Other Religions

Christians, theologians in particular and people in general, have been moved by the new awareness regarding one's own religion and that of the other, along with the change that is taking place in the world. This has brought a changed outlook towards believers of other religious traditions. The attitude of Christians toward the members of other religious traditions and subsequent interreligious dialogue can only be based on a positive evaluation of those religions themselves. Moreover, Christian theology of religions needs to search for the signs of God's action, for the “seeds of the Word,” and for the imprint of his Spirit, in the foundational experience and the events upon which religious traditions have been built, and for the traces of it in the sacred books and the oral traditions that constitute the official record and living memory of those traditions. The world religions are many and varied, and they reflect the desire of people down through the ages to enter into relationship with God. *Dialogue and Proclamation* states: “These traditions are to be approached with great sensitivity, on account of the spiritual and human values enshrined in them.”⁸³ The Second Vatican Council had already acknowledged the positive values and divine endowments contained in the other religions, namely, “elements of truth and grace,”⁸⁴ of “seeds of the Word,”⁸⁵ and of “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.”⁸⁶ Hence, *Dominus Iesus* notes that “various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God and which are part of what the Spirit brings

⁸² Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 2.

⁸³ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 14.

⁸⁴ *Ad Gentes*, 9.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 11, 15.

⁸⁶ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions.”⁸⁷ The meeting of the Church with the world religions is situated in the broad context of the common origin and destiny of all people in God and the search, common to all religious traditions, to answer the ultimate questions that beset the human spirit.⁸⁸

The Council promoted a new attitude and a positive approach towards other religious traditions; but it did not commit itself to stating whether other religions can be means or ways of salvation for their followers.⁸⁹ The post-conciliar teaching of the Church clearly acknowledges that God is present to people of other religions through the spiritual riches that their religions possess and express. However, the presence and activity of the Spirit touch not only individuals but also cultures and religions; and the elements of religiosity found in the diverse religious traditions come from God. Consequently, God’s salvific will actually finds expression in the social and structural forms that characterize religious life of the people of other religions.⁹⁰ Hence, being grounded on the teaching of Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar magisterium, one can appreciate religious traditions in themselves as constituting media for the operation of the salvific grace poured out in Christ. Yet, the theological quality and salvific meaning of other religions to their followers remains undefined. God’s universal salvific will to save all humankind in his Son, Jesus Christ, is not an abstract possibility but it is a concrete reality, operative among people in their actual living situations. God’s saving grace or the faith that justifies has, even outside the Church, a Christological and pneumatological dimension. The concrete possibility of salvation for all humankind is salvation through Jesus Christ, in the universal action of the Holy Spirit, which extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church but always ordained to it. Thus *Redemptoris Missio* states: “In Christ God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love.”⁹¹

Salvation obtained as the gift of God through Christ, in the Spirit, is not without human response and acceptance. The other religions do help the human

⁸⁷ *Dominus Iesus*, 21.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 1 – 2; *Lumen Gentium*, 16 – 17; *Ad Gentes*, 3, 9, 11.

⁹⁰ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 8.

⁹¹ *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

response, insofar as they impel people to seek God, to act in accord with their conscience, and to live a good life.⁹² The moral sense of the peoples and the religious traditions put the action of the Spirit of God into relief.⁹³ The search for good in its ultimate sense is a religious attitude.⁹⁴ Furthermore, *Dialogue and Proclamation* clearly indicates the theological significance of the other religious traditions: “Concretely all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit. Christians know this through their faith, while others remain unaware that Jesus Christ is the source of their salvation. The mystery of salvation reaches out to them, in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ. Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious tradition and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their Saviour.”⁹⁵ For Dupuis, “it means in effect, that the members of the other religions are not saved in spite of, or beside, their own tradition, but in it and, in some mysterious way “known to God,” through it. If further elaborated theologically, this statement would be seen to imply some hidden presence – no matter how imperfect – of the mystery of Jesus Christ in these religious traditions in which salvation reaches their adherents.”⁹⁶ The other religions, although operate as channels of salvation to their followers, they “acquire meaning and value only from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his mediation.”⁹⁷

Dupuis adopts an open perspective to the theological significance of other religions consisted in going beyond a purely individual consideration of the possibility of salvation for individuals, to the assessment of the positive values to be found not merely in the religious life of persons outside the Church but in the religious traditions to which those persons belonged. His theological investigation is

⁹² Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

⁹³ Cf. *Veritatis Splendour*, 94.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* 9, 12.

⁹⁵ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

⁹⁶ Dupuis, “A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation”, in W. R. Burrows, (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), p. 137.

⁹⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, 5.

no longer limited to the problematic of salvation for members of the other religious traditions or even to the role of those traditions in the salvation of their members. His theology searches more deeply, in the light of Christian faith, for the meaning in God's design for humankind of the plurality of living faiths and religious traditions with which we are surrounded.⁹⁸ Dupuis holds that the endowments found in those traditions cannot be reduced to mere "stepping-stones" towards the Christian revelation and religion, since in other traditions some divine truth and grace can be discovered which is not brought out with the same vigour and clarity in God's revelation and manifestation in Jesus Christ. This does not in any way contradict the transcendence of God's unique manifestation in Jesus or the essential "relatedness", in God's unique plan of salvation, of such endowments of truth and grace to the historical event in which God's self-manifestation to humankind culminates. Autonomy is not here opposed to relatedness. Divine truth and grace in other religious traditions are not absorbed by Christian revelation and salvation. Christians can truly learn some divine truth and encounter some divine deeds in interreligious dialogue. All truth comes from God who is Truth and needs to be honoured as such, whatever the channel through which it comes to us. More divine truth and grace are found operative in the entire history of God's dealings with humankind than are available simply in the Christian tradition.⁹⁹

3.2. Some of the Nuances in the Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

Dupuis' Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism invites us to revisit the theological parameters to understand them in the light of the new awareness of the reality of religious pluralism. This seems to be a new situation in the theology – even though the reality of religious pluralism is as old as the religious traditions themselves – which, while analysing the doctrinal truths of Christian faith and tradition in the context of the reality of religious pluralism, opens a door for interreligious dialogue, mutual encounter and enrichment. He attempts to address the challenges which Christian theology faces in its encounter with the plurality of religious traditions. In response to this challenge, he attempts for a comprehensive theology of religions,

⁹⁸ Cf. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 10.

⁹⁹ Cf. Dupuis, "Renewal of Christianity through Interreligious Dialogue," *International Journal in Philosophy and Theology*, 65 (2004), 2, pp. 131 – 143.

which is avowedly Christian and indeed inclusive, but which also explores several avenues of thought that lead beyond the traditional frontiers of inclusivism. While defending his 'inclusive' position, he also ventures to go beyond the well-trod paths marked out by some of his inclusivist predecessors. Nevertheless, giving proper emphasis to the fundamental truths of Christian Faith and Revelation, Dupuis ventures to take the risk of exploring the new frontiers in the Christian theology of religions. He evaluates the traditional perspectives and the new models in the Christian theology of religions with a personal insight into the reality of religious pluralism and the constitutive character of the Christ event in the mystery of the salvation of humankind. Dupuis has opened up a new perspective of *inclusive pluralism*, which is his point of departure to situate the reality of religious pluralism in God's overall plan of salvation, revealed through his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, in the universal operative presence of the Holy Spirit. It is indeed a qualitative leap towards greater acceptance of other religions as part of God's single divine plan for salvation for all humankind.

Dupuis' theological achievement consists in moving into a *theological-no-entry-zone* through his synthesis of *inclusive pluralism*. It is a step forward in the Christian theology of religious pluralism, beyond a rational application of the doctrine of Christian faith through *a priori* concepts, taking into account the context of surrounding reality in which the doctrine ought to be interpreted with its relevance to the newly found historical truths and new knowledge. When all has been observed with regard to his person and theological contribution, however, Dupuis' theological contribution stands as a courageous and creative attempt to translate the heart of Catholic faith into a language that resonates with our contemporary sense of the value and respect due to other religions.¹⁰⁰ A special feature of Dupuis' insight into religious pluralism is that all the religious traditions originate from the one divine plan for all peoples, which embraces the whole universe. In other words, the religious traditions being the gifts of God to the peoples of the world and could not but have a positive significance in God's overall plan for humanity and a saving significance for their members. With this discovery, Dupuis takes the challenge of combining the Christian faith in Jesus Christ the universal Saviour with the positive meaning in

¹⁰⁰ For a brief summary of Dupuis' person and theological contribution, cf. Daniel Kendall / Gerald O'Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways*, pp. 211 – 229.

God's plan of salvation of the other religious traditions and their saving value for their adherents. In his theology of religious pluralism, he sought to overcome the apparent either – or dilemma between these two affirmations. His theological investigation shows that, these two affirmations, far from contradicting each other, they are complementary, if one succeeds in going beyond the appearances.

Dupuis enters into a critical assessment of several existing approaches to theology of religions and finds them wanting in their Trinitarian structure. Going beyond both exclusivist and pluralist paradigms, he takes recourse to inclusivist paradigm but seeks to combine it with certain features of the pluralist paradigm, certainly without downplaying the universal salvific necessity of the mediation of Jesus Christ. In his theological synthesis, he has shown the existence of the mutual relationship and reciprocal implication in a Christian theology of religions, of various models, often wrongly viewed as mutually exclusive paradigms. To separate these various aspects from each other is to fall short of the complexity and the richness of the Christian experience. In order to arrive at a balanced Trinitarian approach to religious plurality, he first seeks to overcome the apparent dilemma in the theocentric model, namely, one which puts God and Christ in opposition with each other and so down plays the universality of Christ, while clearly emphasise the universality of the Father. Dupuis rejects such a dualism, as for him, Christocentrism of Christian tradition is, in fact, not opposed to theocentrism, but rather calls for it: “Christocentrism never places Jesus Christ in the place of God; it merely affirms that God has placed him at the centre of his saving plan of humankind, not as an end but the way, not as the goal of every human quest for God but as the universal mediator of God's saving action toward people.”¹⁰¹ Christian theology may not choose either theocentrism or Christocentrism, but rather is theocentric by being Christocentric and vice versa. Dupuis maintains that the theocentrism of Jesus Christ, from the fact that Jesus was entirely *God-centred*, cannot be put in antithesis with the equally valid biblical affirmation that Christ is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). Therefore pluralistic theocentrism is one-sided in divorcing the Son from the Father. There is a distinction, yet an integral connection. Consequently, Dupuis holds “while it is true that Jesus the Man is uniquely the Son of God, it is equally true that God stands

¹⁰¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 191.

beyond Jesus.”¹⁰² He finds that Trinitarian Christology can best express the meaning of religious pluralism in God’s over all plan of salvation. Such a model, while clearly affirming Jesus Christ as the ‘constitutive’ universal Saviour of humankind, is open to the positive meaning and the salvific value of other religious traditions for their adherents, in the sole salvific plan for all humankind.

Dupuis’ Christian theology of religious pluralism seeks to respond to the question of precisely how God’s saving presence is mediated to the world as a whole. The fundamental question, which Dupuis asks, is precisely how this presence is mediated to the believers of other religions. His answer is that the most likely means is their religious traditions, seen as participating in the single mediation of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that Dupuis regards other religions as equal partners with Christianity in God’s plan of salvation. Whatever value they possess, they owe to their “participation” in the saving work of the one mediator, Jesus Christ. In making this claim, Dupuis places himself squarely within the camp of the “inclusivist” theology of religions elaborated by the Second Vatican Council. He sees possibility of “participated mediation” in the work of Christ without, however, extending this to other religions. Dupuis finds inspiration in the Second Vatican Council, which states: “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.”¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the content of this participated mediation must remain always consistent with the principle of Christ’s unique mediation.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, “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 mediation.”¹⁰⁵ However, Dupuis, while accepting the universal mediation of Jesus Christ as constitutive of all salvation, ventures to go beyond the traditional position, by ascribing to other religions a real mediatory role on behalf of their members.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 206.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 14.

¹⁰⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, 5. Cf. also, *Dominus Iesus*, 14.

3.3. A Theological Response to the Problematic of Religious Pluralism

Dupuis has proposed that the plurality of religions ought to be seen as an integral element of God's universal will to save, namely, the existence of *pluralism in principle*. Religious pluralism is not merely an accident of history or an obstacle to be overcome by Christian missionary activity, namely, *pluralism in fact*. Dupuis' acceptance of the existence of religious pluralism not only as a fact but also in principle has drawn the attention of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹⁰⁶ The document of the congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* has challenged certain trends in the theology of religions and has explicitly rejected the notion of pluralism *de jure*. It states: "The Church's constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also in principle."¹⁰⁷ It rejects the notion of religious pluralism in principle indiscriminately, considering it as doctrinal relativism. Claude Geffré writes, "Without claiming to know the reasons for the multiplicity of the ways of God, these theologians are simply seeking to interpret an apparently insurmountable pluralism in the light of what we know of God's universal will of salvation. This pluralism cannot be simply a consequence of culpable human blindness over the centuries, and even less the sign that after twenty centuries the Church's mission has met defeat. Hence, it is theologically permissible to interpret it as a pluralism that corresponds to a mysterious divine design."¹⁰⁸

Dupuis accepts – not without good theological reasons – that religious pluralism *in principle* need not be opposed to Christian faith.¹⁰⁹ The uniqueness of

¹⁰⁶ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith subjected to the doctrinal examination of the book: *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* served a *notification* as it found several "notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points which could lead a reader to erroneous or harmful opinions." Nevertheless, the author attempts to remain within the limits of orthodoxy in his study of questions that remain largely unexplored. Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 434 – 437. Cf. also, Daniel Kendall / Gerald O'Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways*, pp.18 – 19.

¹⁰⁷ *Dominus Iesus*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Claude Geffré, "From the Theology of Religious Pluralism to an Interreligious Theology" in Daniel Kendall, / Gerald O'Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways*, pp. 49 – 50.

¹⁰⁹ Gerald O'Collins affirms, "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." O'Collins, "Jacques Dupuis: His Person and Work," in Kendall, Daniel / Gerald O'Collins, (ed.), *In Many and*

Jesus Christ as universal Saviour does not exclude a positive meaning of the other religious traditions in God's plan for humankind. The Declaration is, no doubt, right in rejecting any theory of religious pluralism, which in principle, is founded on the rejection of the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁰ But it is wrong, however, where it seems to imply that any theological theory of religious pluralism in principle is based on the denial of what is in fact the very core of the Christian faith. Dupuis distances himself from the pluralist and relativist theories that rejects the truth of Christian faith and tradition regarding Jesus Christ as the one and universal mediator, through whom God's universal plan of salvation is actualised. Dupuis seeks to combine and hold together, in a fruitful tension, on the one hand, the truth of Jesus Christ as the unique and universal Saviour of humankind, and, on the other hand, the positive, salvific significance of the other religious traditions of the world for their followers, in accordance with God's eternal plan of salvation for all humankind. However, one needs to distinguish between *pluralists* and the notion of *pluralism*. Dupuis, remaining securely in an inclusivist camp, clearly distances himself from those pluralists, who put Christ on a par with other religious founders. Dupuis, even though accepts the existence of religious pluralism in principle, clearly rejects the position of such pluralists, who assert that in principle all major religions have equal authority, and hence equally valid, and are separate paths to salvation.

So to sum up, Dupuis, with his Pneumatic-Christocentric-theocentrism, that is, an approach of *pluralist-inclusivism*, takes the challenge of theologically investigating the religious pluralism, not merely as fact of history (pluralism *de facto*) but as having a *raison d'être* in its own right (pluralism *de jure* or "in principle"). According to him, the question no longer simply consists of asking what role Christianity can assign to the other historical religious traditions but in searching for the root-cause of pluralism itself, for its significance in God's own plan for humankind, thereby investigating theologically the possibility for a mutual convergence of the various traditions in full respect to their differences, as a pre-requisite for interreligious dialogue aimed at mutual enrichment and cross-fertilization.¹¹¹ There is an urgent need to seek theological enlightenment regarding the meaning of religious pluralism

Diverse Ways, p. 25. Cf. also O'Collins, "Jacques Dupuis' Contribution to Interreligious Dialogue," *Theological Studies*, 64 (2003), pp. 388 – 397.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 4.

¹¹¹ Cf. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p.11.

in God's design for all humankind, in order to cater to the problems and needs affecting the whole humanity, namely, a collaboration to bring about a common action for peace and justice in the world. The Church cannot remain on the margins of its mission of interreligious dialogue and the work of collaborating with other religions for common good.

Chapter II

Jesus the Christ and the Religious Pluralism

A Christological Debate in the Theology of Religions

The Christian theology of religions reflects on the nature and function of other religious traditions in the light of Christian faith in God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, which is universally offered to all. It reflects on how God has acted in the person of Christ to save all humankind. In other words, God wills the salvation of all humanity (cf. 1Tim 2:4) and in consequence, has acted to effect this salvation in and through his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The place and significance attributed to Jesus Christ by the Christian tradition appears distinct and original from the viewpoint taken by many who do a comparative study of religion. A religion is often identified with the founder of that religion and finds its *raison d'être* and its meaning from the founder. Similarly, Christianity, too, finds its *raison d'être* and her meaning in the person of Jesus Christ, since he established the Church, and to whom she is entirely related and subservient. Therefore, "the person and work of Jesus Christ is the source, the centre and the end – the alpha and omega – of what Christianity stands for and announced to the world."¹¹² The event of Jesus Christ, namely, his incarnation, life, death and resurrection are at the centre of Christianity.

Jacques Dupuis, while clearly holding to the full meaning of Jesus Christ with regard to the universal salvation of humankind, also opens the door to recognition of the salvific value of way or paths put forward by other religious traditions for their followers. He seeks to resolve the apparently insoluble contradiction between these two affirmations by putting together and emphasising three complementary and converging aspects by which, in the divine plan for humanity, salvation reaches the persons according to their actual circumstances in history and the world. These three elements are as follows: firstly, the universal reality and the effectiveness of the event of Jesus Christ, notwithstanding the historical particularity of this event; secondly, the universal operative presence of the divine Word whose action is not contained by the human nature assumed by him in the mystery of incarnation; thirdly, the equally

¹¹² Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, p. 2.

universal work of the Spirit of God, which is neither limited nor exhausted by the effusion of the Spirit through the glorified and risen Christ.¹¹³

Dupuis holds that in the Christian theology of religions, the question has shifted from whether salvation is available for members of other religious traditions, to how in God's plan these traditions mediate salvation to their members. Such a shift in the theological outlook regarding the theological significance of other religious traditions opens up the whole Christological problematic in the theology of religions. Jesus' question to Simon "Who do you say I am?" (Mk 8:29) remains compelling even today. Innumerable responses have emerged over the centuries. The answers which came to dominate Christian belief were those enshrined in the fourth and fifth century creeds: Jesus as *homoousios* with the Father, and as having two natures, divine and human, united in one person. Since then and until more recent times, these definitions have been repeated, re-appropriated and revised. It is only in the context of the plurality religious traditions along with their cosmic counterclaims that the Christian theologians have come to the realisation that the universal significance of Jesus Christ can no longer be assumed merely based on the dogmatic accomplishments of the Patristic Church, but have to be argued afresh. Since the universal significance of Jesus Christ is no longer self-evident in the new situations arising from the global experience of religious and cultural plurality.

This chapter considers Dupuis' Christological perspectives in the context of religious pluralism. It also considers Dupuis' nuances regarding the relationship between the Word of God and the Man Jesus Christ, as well as that between the pre Easter Jesus and the Easter Christ. For him as the event of Jesus. It deals with the meaning of mystery of Christ with regard to its salvific centrality, the unicity and universality of Christ and his significance in the world of religious pluralism. Before one goes into the whole Christological debate, it may be necessary to glean through the Vatican II and post-Vatican II theology regarding Jesus the Christ and religious pluralism. This may help us to draw certain Christological parameters that guide the Christological debate in the Christian theology of religions. These may also help us to take note of Dupuis' nuances and ground breaking suggestions contributing towards Christological problematic in the theology of religions.

¹¹³ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and the Religions*, p. 138.

1. Jesus Christ and the Religions in the Vatican II and the Post-Vatican II Theology

The Second Vatican Council, with its openness and positive outlook towards religious others, marked a new beginning in the Church's understanding of other religions and thereby promoted an openness towards the spiritual values found in them. Inasmuch as the mystery of Christ is at the centre of Christian faith, a theological evaluation of the salvific values contained in other religions must be based on their relationship to this mystery. Shortly before the Second Vatican Council, some theologians¹¹⁴ adopted a more open perspective seeking to understand the value of other religious traditions and their meaning in God's plan of salvation revealed in Jesus Christ. Going beyond the consideration of a purely the possibility of salvation for individuals, they considered the positive values to be found not merely in the religious life of persons outside the Church but in the religious traditions to which those persons belonged.

Dupuis has classified these positions under two headings, which, in fact, represent two contrasting mutually exclusive standpoints. The protagonists of the fulfilment theories¹¹⁵ held that the various religions of humanity represent the human beings innate desire for union with the Divine, of which there exist various expressions in diverse cultures and in the different geographical areas of the world. Jesus Christ and Christianity, however, denote God's personal response to this universal human aspiration. According to this theory, salvation in Jesus Christ reaches to members of other religions as the divine response to human religious aspiration expressed through their own tradition, but these religious traditions in themselves play no role in the mystery of salvation. The protagonist of "the presence of Christ theories"¹¹⁶ held that humanity's various religions represent in themselves

¹¹⁴ For instance, to name just some of them, Jean Daniélou and Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Edward Schillebeeckx and Raimon Panikkar and others.

¹¹⁵ Jean Daniélou and Henri de Lubac held for the fulfilment of religious traditions in Jesus Christ. Cf. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp.134 – 137; for a study of Jean Daniélou's approach to other religions, Cf. Dominic Velieth, *Theological Approaches and Understanding of Religions: Jean Daniélou and et Raimon Panikkar: A Study in Contrast*, (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti College, 1988). Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, (New York: Alba House, 1969), pp. 152 – 156.

¹¹⁶ Karl Rahner held for the operative presence of the mystery of Christ in other religions. Cf. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978). Raimon Panikkar held for the presence of Christ in other religions. Cf. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*,

distinct interventions of God in salvation history. However, these divine interventions in history are ordained to the decisive salvific event in Jesus Christ. As such, they played a positive role before the Christ-event as *preparatio evangelica*; indeed, they keep even today, a positive value in the order of salvation by virtue of the operative presence in them, of the saving mystery of Jesus Christ. Dupuis calls this second theory, “theory of the presence of Christ in the religions” or of “Christ’s inclusive presence.” Admittedly, the saving mystery of Christ is unique. But all other religious traditions, in virtue of the divine plan of salvation of which they are part, are set in relation to this mystery, in respect of which they represent, each in its own way, an ordering of mediation. Thus, no religion is purely natural. In every religion, historically, a divine intervention in the history of the nations is to be found and an existential mediation of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ acknowledged. All religions, then, for more than one reason are supernatural.¹¹⁷

The two streams of thoughts dealt with here, were alive at the time of the Council, influenced the Vatican II and post-Vatican theology of religions. Both the views see the other religions as oriented to the Christ-event in the history of salvation. Since both the theories are centred on God’s universal plan of salvation being revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, in this sense both could be called fulfilment theories. But they retain a sharp contrast; for while the first holds on to the dialectic nature – supernatural – human search – of the divine gift, the other overcomes such dichotomies to visualise the unfolding of God’s saving history as a process implying diverse modalities of God’s revelation and personal involvement in human history. While, for the first, the other religious traditions, apart from Judaism and Islam, are merely a preparation for the coming of Christ-event, for the other, their positive role in the order of salvation is rooted in their organic link to the all embracing mystery of Christ. Even though both differ in the evaluation of the religious traditions in themselves, both affirm without qualification the possibility for people outside the Church to be saved in Jesus Christ. Dupuis is quite doubtful here, whether ascribing

(London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964); idem. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981).

¹¹⁷ Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 132 – 133. In the above noted two mainline positions, Dupuis observes, that the debate has now shifted from the prominently ecclesiological question of salvation in or outside the Church to that of Christological question of all salvation in Jesus Christ. (Ibid. p. 133).

to other religious traditions a positive role in the salvation of their followers necessarily place them in competition with Christ and the religion founded by him. He asks, can there be various non-parallel modalities of the mediation of the mystery of salvation, all in relationship with the mystery of Christ? He observes that according to the fulfilment theory, there is no salvation without the Gospel and any such thing as “anonymous Christianity.”¹¹⁸

1.1. The Centrality of the Mystery of Christ for the Salvation of all Humankind

The Second Vatican Council adopted a Christocentric approach to the problematic of salvation for the believers of other religions. *Nostra Aetate* clearly recognizes the universality of God’s plan of salvation by indicating that “His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all.”¹¹⁹ God’s universal plan of salvation in Jesus Christ includes all humankind. Being created in the image and likeness of God, all humankind inherently oriented to God as their ultimate end. God, in ways known to himself, can lead those who no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please him (cf. Heb 11:6).¹²⁰ The general attitude in the conciliar documents regarding the significance of the mystery of Christ to the believers of other religions is that they find their salvation in Christ, since God has placed Jesus Christ at the centre of this plan of salvation.

The Council seeks to combine the twofold New Testament affirmation of the concrete and universal salvific will of God, on the one hand, and the finality of Jesus Christ as the universal Saviour, on the other. The divine plan, which is unique and definitive, has its centre in Jesus Christ, who is God and Man. In the person of Jesus Christ, along with the Christians, believers of other religious traditions find fullness of their religious life, since in Christ God has reconciled all things to himself. God has called everyone to this final destiny in his Son Jesus Christ, who wills all to be saved (cf. 1Tim 2:4). Through paschal mystery of Christ, all people are drawn to God and find their salvation in him. Since the entire humanity is the people of God and the Christ event is the soteriological axis, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God, offers to every person the possibility of being associated

¹¹⁸ Cf. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 139.

¹¹⁹ *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

¹²⁰ *Ad Gentes*, 7.

with the paschal mystery. Consequently, the followers of other religions too find salvation in Jesus Christ, who becomes the way for all to go to the Father, in order to share his gift of salvation. The gift of salvation cannot be limited to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church.

Jesus Christ is always implicated for the salvation of all humankind, apart from whom there is no salvation. Hence, Jesus Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation for Christians as well as others who are saved. The document, *Gaudium et Spes*, after stating how Christians come in contact with the Paschal Mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, opens up to a wider Christological, Pneumatological and soteriological perspective towards the salvation outside. It states, “All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.”¹²¹ However, the council gives an insight into how this salvation is shared by the religious others, as it notes that the grace is invisibly active all individuals of good will.¹²² The council holds that this takes place through the universal action of the Spirit of God: “For since Christ died for all [cf. Rom 8:32], and since all human beings are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being associated, in a way known to God, with the Paschal Mystery.”¹²³ In this way, “the grace is at work in the hearts of all persons in an unseen way.”¹²⁴

Lumen Gentium asserts that those who have not yet received the gospel are related to the people of God. They are sharing the gift of salvation through right conduct that is acceptable to God, since “at all times and in every race, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to God.”¹²⁵ But those who hear the Christian message and “know that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary

¹²¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

¹²² *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

¹²³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 22.

¹²⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 9.

by God through Christ but explicitly reject the Church”, cannot attain salvation.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, those who do not know the Gospel and do not enter into the Church, but “seek God with sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their action to do God’s will, as they know it through the dictates of their conscience” can obtain salvation.¹²⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, concerning the possibility of salvation of others, indicates that God’s salvific grace extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church. Divine providence will not deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who without any fault of theirs have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who not without grace strive to lead a good life. Those who “through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation”.¹²⁸ Consequently, the Catholic Church explicitly acknowledged the possibility of salvation of the believers of other religions. However, although the Catholic Church acknowledged the possibility of salvation for the followers of other religions, it did not recognise the other religious traditions as *ways of salvation* for their members.

However, salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace, which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way that is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. The mystery of salvation reaches out to them, in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ. Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their saviour. Nevertheless, the grace of salvation comes from Christ; it is the result of his Sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. It enables each person to attain salvation through his or her free co-operation.¹²⁹ The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* moves on to explain the role of other religious traditions for the salvation of their members, as it states:

¹²⁶ Ibid. 14.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 16.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 16.

¹²⁹ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 10.

“Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s initiation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognise or acknowledge him as their saviour.”¹³⁰ Dupuis, commenting on this text, notes: firstly, Christians and others who are saved share “though differently” in the same mystery of salvation; secondly, this is salvation in Jesus Christ through the Spirit; thirdly, the mystery of salvation reaches out to them through the invisible action of the Spirit; fourthly, it is in the sincere practice of what is good in their traditions and following the dictates of their conscience that they reach salvation in Jesus Christ; finally, for such is the manner in which they respond positively to God’s invitation of grace in Jesus Christ.¹³¹ Thus, religious others can attain salvation through Jesus Christ, not in spite of their religious traditions but in and through them. In the case of people of other religions, whose social and cultural conditions do not allow them to accept the Gospel message and become visible members of the Church, salvation is available through the grace of Christ by the help of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the members of other religions are saved by Jesus Christ “in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions.”¹³² Therefore, “to say that other religious traditions include elements of grace does not imply that everything in them is good and is the result of grace, although it indicates that those religions embrace God’s grace and may bring their followers to salvation.”¹³³

All humankind, without any exception whatever has been redeemed by Christ; and with every person Christ is in a way united, even when one is unaware of it. Christ, who died and was raised up for all, provides each and every one, with the light

¹³⁰ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29. Dupuis makes here a valid observation regarding the above noted statement. For him, this is “a weighty statement, not found before in official documents of the central teaching authority, and whose theological import must not be underestimated.” Dupuis, “A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation,” in W. R. Burrows, (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading ‘Redemptoris Missio’ and ‘Dialogue and Proclamation’*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), p. 137.

¹³¹ Dupuis, “A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation,” in W. R. Burrows, (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading ‘Redemptoris Missio’ and ‘Dialogue and Proclamation’*, p. 136.

¹³² *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 29.

and strength to measure up to our supreme calling.¹³⁴ Jesus Christ is the “one saviour of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God”, because, “salvation can only come from” him.¹³⁵ In other words, “Christ is the one mediator between God and humankind, and the sole redeemer of the world.”¹³⁶ It is because, “In Christ, God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love.”¹³⁷ Salvation in Christ reaches out to concrete human beings, in their concrete living situations; this includes their real, existential, historical struggles and hungers for salvation. And so, in every new historical-cultural situation with its new challenges and questions, Christology, which might be defined as “faith in Christ seeking understanding,” must pose the question of salvation in Christ anew. Between Christology and soteriology, there exists a dialectic or mutual interaction. Christology in the context of religious plurality needs to keep in touch with its soteriological foundation at every step of its elaboration. A more profound understanding of who Jesus Christ is, in the broader context of religious plurality with its salvific significance in God’s overall plan of salvation, will give us new insights into the truth of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ for all humankind in spite of their diverse religious traditions. In other words, it will lead us to a deeper perception of the inner significance of mystery of Christ in God’s overall plan for humankind in the one and universal history of salvation.

1.2. A Christocentric Outlook Towards the Diversity of Religious Traditions

The Second Vatican Council has acknowledged the presence of positive values not only in the religious life of individual believers of other religious traditions, but also in the religious traditions to which they belong. It acknowledges that the other religions contain in them the “rays of that truth which enlightens all,”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 14.

¹³⁵ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 5. Knitter indicates that by stressing this absoluteness and superiority of Jesus for salvation, as the document states, “whatever other ‘mediations’ of God’s love there may be in other religions, ‘they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his’”. Knitter further clarifies that with this argument the document not only rejects “just parallel revelations that would be equalised, but also rejects complementary revelations that could learn from each other.” *Jesus and the Other Names*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 133.

¹³⁶ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 52.

¹³⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

¹³⁸ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

“seeds of the Word”¹³⁹ and “elements of truth and grace,”¹⁴⁰ which are “found sown” not only “in minds and hearts,” but also “in the rites and customs of peoples.”¹⁴¹ The council attributed these positive values “to the active presence of God through his Word, pointing also to the universal action of the Spirit” who, without doubt “was at work in the world before Christ was glorified.”¹⁴² However, the Church acknowledges with respect the spiritual and moral values found in various religions and desires to join with them in promoting those values for the common good.¹⁴³

The post-conciliar teaching adopts a Christocentric approach towards the theological complexities of religious pluralism. It is in Jesus Christ that the Church experiences the fullness of the revelation of God and fulfilment of the religious history of all humankind. “In Christ and through Christ God has revealed himself fully to humankind and has definitively drawn close to it; at the same time in Christ and through Christ humankind has acquired full awareness of its dignity and the meaning of its existence.”¹⁴⁴ The Church firmly believes that it is in Jesus Christ that “God has revealed the perfect and definitive form in which he wishes to be known.”¹⁴⁵ The diversity of religions find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ: “The Incarnate Word is the fulfilment of the yearning present in all the religions of mankind: this fulfilment is brought about by God himself and transcends all human expectations. Christ is the fulfilment of the yearning of all world religions, and as such, he is their sole and the definitive completion.”¹⁴⁶ The other religions find their fulfilment and completion in Christianity. This position is clearly upheld in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*: “Jesus Christ is the new beginning of everything. In him all things come into their total dignity; they are taken up and given back to the Creator from whom they first came. Christ is thus the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world’s religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion. ... Jesus Christ is the recapitulation of everything (cf. Eph 1:10) and at the same time the

¹³⁹ *Ad Gentes*, 11.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁴¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 15.

¹⁴² *Ad Gentes*, 4.

¹⁴³ *Ecclesiam Suam*, 108.

¹⁴⁴ *Redemptor Hominis*, 11.

¹⁴⁵ *Ecclesiam Suam*, 107.

¹⁴⁶ *Interreligious Dialogue*, 108.

fulfilment of all things in God: a fulfilment, which is the glory of God. The religion founded upon Jesus Christ is a religion of glory; it is a newness of life for the praise of the glory of God (cf. Eph 1:12).”¹⁴⁷

The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* points out how we should approach these religions. The world religions “are to be approached with great sensitivity on the account of the spiritual and human values enshrined in them.”¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the document acknowledges that God’s gift of salvation in Jesus Christ reaches to the believers of other religions “in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by the following of the dictates of their conscience.”¹⁴⁹ The question arises whether the sincere practice of their religious tradition plays any part in the mystery of their salvation. In attempting to answer this question it may first be noted that the religious life of individual persons cannot in reality be separated from their practice of the religious tradition to which they belong. There is no religious life, which is not expressed in a tradition; nor does a religious tradition exist outside the person and community that uphold it and practice it.¹⁵⁰ Thus, Christological perspective is not consistently maintained in the conciliar and post-conciliar documents, particularly when it is not a matter of the individual mystery of the salvation of persons, but of the religious traditions themselves, taken in their objective, historical reality.

2. The Christological Debate in the Theology of Religions

In the post-modern world of today, not only has cultural pluralism increased, but we are also much more conscious of religious diversity. In the circumstances of the new consciousness of religious pluralism, the question arises about the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ. In view of the strong emphasis on the unicity and universality of Jesus Christ, on the one hand and the pluralistic condition of the post-modern world, on the other hand, it is not surprising that a broad and bitter discussion on the very question of the unity and unicity of Jesus Christ has developed both inside

¹⁴⁷ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 6

¹⁴⁸ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 14.

¹⁴⁹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Dupuis, “A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation,” in W. R. Burrows, (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue*, p. 136.

and outside the realm of theology. The way one understands Christology will shape a Christian Theology of Religions. Until recently, most Christologies were premised on a negative evaluation of world religions. The positive appreciation of other religions, given by the Second Vatican Council creates a new context for Christology today. This new situation requires a different kind of Christology. It will have to enter into a respectful dialogue with other religions without losing contact with the substance of classical Christology.¹⁵¹ Dupuis accepts that the plurality of religions is rooted in the superabundant richness of the universal salvific will of God. Dupuis expressly wants to contribute to the christological problematic in the Christian theology of religious pluralism as a priority before, one proceeds to its pastoral praxis in interreligious dialogue.

Dupuis deals with the Christological debate in the context of religious pluralism from an inclusivistic perspective. At the same time, he tries to explore the new frontiers in the theology of religious pluralism by adopting the theocentric approach of the pluralists, considered not as contrary to Christocentric approach of the inclusivists. He considers both these approaches as complementary. He clearly rejects the narrow paradigm of exclusivism that sees other religions as human efforts to meet God. He also rejects radical pluralism that bases itself on relativism and places all the religious traditions on an equal par, in view of facilitating a meaningful dialogue between equal partners. The decisive question that governs everything else is whether a theology of religions that wants to be Christian has any choice between a Christocentric perspective, which acknowledges Jesus Christ event as constitutive of universal salvation, and a theocentric perspective, which in one fashion or another, places in doubt or explicitly rejects this central datum of traditional faith. He proposes that a perspective of *pluralistic inclusivism* is able to give a proper place to other religious traditions in God's salvific plan for all humankind, without putting at stake the fundamental truths of Christian faith.

2.1. Doing Christology in the Context of Religious Plurality

In the Christian theology of religious pluralism, there is a need for a theological investigation of the relationship of the religious traditions of humankind

¹⁵¹ Cf. Dermot A. Lane, "Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions", *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 149.

to the primordial mystery of Jesus Christ, through a Christological re-centring of the theology of religions. In this task, Dupuis asks: Is a Christocentric perspective of universal and cosmic dimensions adequate to the challenge of the context of the theological reflection today, with its new historical and geographical proportions, its pluralism of cultures and religious traditions, and its interreligious encounter and dialogue? He finds that in the Christian theology of religions, Christology is the most central to its theological reflection. Hence it calls for a re-visitation of the Christian doctrine of the faith in order to interpret the identity of Christ vis-à-vis the other major traditions. Such a reinterpretation is bound to affect how Christianity understands Christ in the light of the world religions.¹⁵² The idea of doing Christology in the context of religious pluralism does not mean abandoning Christian identity. Nor does it mean abandoning the basic tenets of faith or the parameters of Christian faith and revelation. As David Tracy puts it, it aims at “finding a way to formulate a Christian theological question on religious pluralism in such a manner that a genuinely new answer may be forthcoming without abandoning Christian identity.”¹⁵³ An important part of the revision process is the development of a Christology that is compatible with a vision of theology in which Christianity is understood in the context not only of its own history, but also of the history of religions. Placing Christianity in such a context helps us to situate Christianity’s claims with such similar claims made by other religions for their followers in the order of salvation.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Raimon Panikkar makes following observation regarding the Christological concerns in the context of the experience of religious pluralism: “The dilemma is this: many Christians will feel that are betraying their deepest beliefs if they give up the conviction that the Christic dimension of their faith is meant to be universal. On the other hand, an increasing number of Christians are becoming painfully aware that the claim to universality is an imperialistic remnant of the times that should be past, and that most followers of other religions feel this claim as a threat – and an insult – to their beliefs.” Panikkar, “The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness” in Hick and Knitter, (ed.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), pp. 91 – 92.

¹⁵³ David Tracy, *Dialogue with Other Religions*, (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990), p. 96.

¹⁵⁴ J. Peter Schineller observes: “It is no longer possible to live as a Christian, or to do Christian theology, without considering the questions asked of the Christian, and claims made, by non-Christians. When these questions and claims enter deeply into our framework of living and thinking, they cause us to examine our theological stances. Many of the older theories and positions simply do not fit the new experiences, and adjustments must be made.” Schineller, “Christ and Church: a Spectrum of Views,” in *Theological Studies*, 37 (1976), pp. 545 – 546.

However, while doing Christology in the context of religious pluralism, unless a Christology specifically takes into account Christianity's relationship with other major traditions it will not be an adequate response to the contemporary theological problematic. Christology today needs to take into account a larger historical vision than it had in the past, in order to properly assess the contemporary climate in which Christianity finds itself. It must situate its revelation and history alongside other claims to revelation and their histories. This does not necessarily imply that these other claims to revelation are a priori equal to the Christian claim. It does mean, however, that they are to be taken seriously, a disposition not readily found in the past. Further, it means that the claims that Christianity makes must be understood not only in their intention to guide the Christian community but also in what they imply toward other religions.¹⁵⁵ For instance, the claim that Christians are saved by the merits of the death and resurrection of Jesus is perfectly appropriate for Christians; when we apply the same affirmation to believers of other religions, that they too acquire salvation through the merits of the event of Jesus Christ, such an affirmation poses the difficulties regarding the theological value of other religious tradition in the order of salvation of their followers.

Christology, in the context of the reality of religious pluralism, needs to revisit the traditional parameters of faith, which, in the past, were often interpreted through the Circular Image. These parameters of Christian faith and revelation need to be reinterpreted through a method of *hermeneutical triangle*. Dupuis makes a following observation on the theological method for a Christology in the context of religious pluralism: "To the dialectic of two elements it seems preferable to substitute, for clarity's sake, the mutual action and reaction of three components: the text, the context, and the interpreter. The circular image will be replaced by the graphic representation of a triangle, needs to be viewed in the integrity of its complex reality. ...The *hermeneutical triangle* consists in the mutual interaction among text, context and interpreter. That is among Christian memory, the surrounding, the cultural reality and the local Church. The context acts upon the interpreter by raising specific questions; it influences the pre-comprehension of faith with which the interpreter reads the text. The text, in turn, acts on the interpreter, whose reading of it will

¹⁵⁵ Chester Gillis, *Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology*, (Louvain: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 70 – 71.

provide a direction for Christian praxis.”¹⁵⁶ He asks whether it is necessary to do Christology by starting from the data of faith, hoping to reach out to the reality of the context. Or should it start from the lived reality, and then seek a direction for a Christian praxis in the revealed data. For a more effective interpretation, Dupuis suggests, “the circular image will be replaced by the graphic representation of a *hermeneutical triangle*.”¹⁵⁷ We need to ask: Is the data of faith ever available to us in naked form, as mere objective truth, entirely pure and unadulterated? Or must we admit that the revealed data always reaches us already interpreted? For Dupuis “the entire New Testament Christology, that of the apostolic *Kerygma* included, is hermeneutics of the story of Jesus done from the vantage point of the disciples’ paschal experience. The diverse Christologies of the New Testament represent distinct interpretation of the event in the light of Easter, each conditioned by the particular context of a Church to which it is addressed and by the singular personality of the author or editor of the material. If, then, as seems to be the case, the revealed data is always a faith interpretation of the event, “doing theology” in the context will consist of pursuing in today’s situation the process of interpretation of the Christ-event already initiated by the apostolic Church.”¹⁵⁸

A Christology would not be relevant to the present context of the new awareness of the religious diversity, if it merely repeats the traditional doctrines that had been formulated to address to the needs of the past. But often the traditional and contemporary interpretations of those formulations are not the same. Because language, history and context limit and define doctrines, what have been proposed as immutable testimony to the truth in actuality turn out to be mutable. Thorough hermeneutical analysis can help to disclose new and even different meanings.¹⁵⁹ However, “in order for text and doctrines to be living documents they must be disposed to fresh insights and interpretations. History itself is not stagnant but must be interpreted for each generation. The interplay between text, context and the reader

¹⁵⁶ Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, pp. 8 – 9.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 9.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ For details on hermeneutical theology and its advantages and disadvantages cf. Claude Geffré, *The Risk of Interpretation: On Being Faithful to the Christian Tradition in a Non-Christian Age*, (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1987).

needs to be taken into account.”¹⁶⁰ This means that not only the historical context has to be examined but also the contemporary situation in which a reader appropriates a text.

So to sum up, Dupuis tries to show that Christology must start from below, that is from the discovery of the human person of Jesus, but the dynamism of the faith naturally calls at a certain stage for a reversal of perspective: from the risen Christ to the eternal Son. He maintains that only a “high” Christology is able to account for the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ in the order of human salvation; that is, a Christology which affirms without compromise the personal identity of Jesus as the Only-Begotten of the Father. According to him, “the New Testament unambiguously testifies to Jesus’ unique divine sonship. Hermeneutics of the revealed data cannot consist in choosing among the different Christologies of the New Testament, some sort of lowest common denominator. It must, on the contrary, take the entire New Testament witness and recognise the substantial agreement which exist between the various witnesses notwithstanding the variety of approaches and different perspectives proper to each author.”¹⁶¹ Even though Dupuis calls for the reinterpretation of the classical Christian doctrine, his hermeneutic theology continues to hold on to the traditional formulations of faith with no ground-breaking nuances.

2.2 The Christological Problematic in the Theology of Religions

A Christological reflection in the recent decades has seen the emergence of two distinct ways of reflecting on the mystery of Jesus Christ, namely, Christology from above and from below. Dupuis, by combining Christology from above with Christology from below, has affirmed the divinity of Jesus Christ and at the same time affirmed the humanity of Jesus Christ. As a result, he holds on to a “high Christology” and opposes severing the *universal Christ* from the *particular Jesus* as: “A universal Christ severed from the particular Jesus, would no longer be the Christ

¹⁶⁰ Chester Gillis, *Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology*, p. 71.

¹⁶¹ Dupuis, “The Truth Will make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 217.

of Christian revelation.”¹⁶² Dupuis clearly indicates that the constitutive uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ must rest on his personal identity as the Son of God. Nevertheless, Dupuis gives a proper emphasis to the Christology from below, keeping in focus the human figure of Jesus of Nazareth, while not neglecting Jesus as the Christ, as the Son of God.

Dupuis sees that the Christological problematic, which is at the heart of the Christian theology of religious pluralism, has in the present context of religious plurality has received a new emphasis and urgency. He investigates in his Christological debate, the possibility to combining the Christian faith in Jesus Christ as universal Saviour with a positive meaning of the other religions in God’s plan of salvation for humankind.¹⁶³ The New Testament bears an unequivocal witness to the finality of Jesus Christ as universal Saviour of humankind. The Gospel according to John recounts Jesus as “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6). Paul affirms that he is the “one mediator between God and men” (1 Tim 2:5), and Peter is of the conviction that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (cf. Acts 4:12). This affirmation needs to be re-examined and reinterpreted in the context of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue.

A theological analysis on the paradigm shifts with their implications to the Christian theology of religions clearly indicates that the Christological question is involved in it. “Involved in the first paradigm shift from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism is the centrality that the Christian Church attributes to Jesus Christ in relation to the role of the church itself (which in relation to Jesus Christ is a derived mystery); in the second shift from Christocentrism to theocentrism what is at stake is the universal constitutive mediation that Christian faith has traditionally assigned to him in God’s plan of salvation for humankind”¹⁶⁴ The protagonists of the theocentric perspective base their paradigm shift on a Christology “revised” or “reinterpreted” in the context of religious pluralism. Here, at stake, is the universal constitutive mediation of Jesus Christ in God’s plan of salvation for humankind. The main reasons for a revised Christology are as follows: “a newly acquired historical

¹⁶² Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 297.

¹⁶³ Dupuis proposes a Trinitarian and Pneumatic Christology as a model for a Christian theology of religions. Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism”, in T. Merrigan / J. Haers (eds), *The Myriad Christ*, pp. 83 – 97.

¹⁶⁴ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 87.

consciousness; the inseparability in every human experience between content and context; the relativity of every experience of the Divine Mystery, which in itself remains [ineffable] inexhaustible; the particularity and contingency of the historical event Jesus of Nazareth; the “theocentric” outlook of Jesus himself as against the Christocentric approach of the Apostolic Church; the total discontinuity between Jesus’ own self understanding and the kerygmatic proclamation of him; the “mythical” and “metaphorical” language of the late new Testament Christology and its sequels in the post-biblical tradition.”¹⁶⁵

Dupuis, in this regard, makes two valuable observations on the Christological problematic in the theology of religions:

“The first is that the assumption made by the growing number of theologians that a Christocentric perspective is no longer tenable calls for some clarifications. Are Christocentrism and Theocentrism mutually opposed as two distinct paradigms? To affirm it constitutes by itself a theological and Christological option. The Christocentrism of Christian tradition is not, in fact, opposed to theocentrism. It never places Jesus Christ in the place of God; it merely affirms that God has placed him at the centre of his saving plan for humankind, not as the end but as the way, not as the goal of every human quest for God but as the universal mediator of God’s saving action towards people. Christian theology is not faced with the dilemma of being either Christocentric or theocentric; it is theocentric by being Christocentric and vice-versa. This amounts to saying that Jesus Christ is the sacrament of God’s encounter with people. The man, Jesus, belongs, no doubt, to the order of signs and symbols; but in him who has been constituted the Christ by God, who raised him from the dead (cf. Acts 2:32); God’s saving action reaches out to people in various ways, knowingly to some and to others unknowingly.”¹⁶⁶

However, Dupuis’ second observation has to do with the kind of Christology that underlies the Christocentric and the theocentric paradigms. He notes as follows:

“All recent contemporary Christologies get their bearings “from below” that is, starting out from the human Jesus and his historic event, rather than “from above,” that is from his personal identity as the “only-begotten” pre-existent Son of God. But even starting “from below”, Christological reflection must let itself be brought through the dynamism of faith itself toward a “high” Christology. Some Christologists, however, refuse this ontological ascent, and therefore remain on the level of a

¹⁶⁵ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 190.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 191. Cf. also, Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 88.

“low” Christology. Using this distinction between “high” and “low” Christology, it is clear that the inclusivist or Christocentric model of theology of religions is consonant with a “high” Christology in which the personal identity of Jesus Christ as the “only-begotten” Son of God is unambiguously recognized; by contrast, the pluralist or theocentric model postulates a “low” Christology which questions and ultimately denies such ontological affirmations about Jesus Christ. The Christian tradition amply attests, however, that the only adequate foundation on which the singular uniqueness of Jesus Christ can be based is his personal identity as the Son of God made man, as God’s incarnate Word. No other Christology can ultimately provide a persuasive account of Christ’s universal mediatorship in the order of salvation.”¹⁶⁷

Thus, for Dupuis, “the choice between the Christocentric and theocentric paradigm in the theology of religions depends on the option between a “high” Christology and a “low” Christology, deliberately anchored at the functional level. Such a choice has weighty consequences. The price that traditional Christian faith finds itself paying in terms of the mystery of the person and work of Jesus Christ is considerable.”¹⁶⁸ The option set by the pluralists of a choice between two paradigms is not a theological solution to the Christological problematic in the theology of religions.¹⁶⁹ A Christian theology must transcend the dilemma between inclusivism and pluralism, or, equivalently, between Christocentrism and theocentrism.¹⁷⁰ In spite

¹⁶⁷ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 89.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 89.

¹⁶⁹ For instance, Gavin D’Costa recalls two basic axioms of traditional Christian faith: the universal salvific will of God (cf. 1Tim 2:5) and the necessity of the mediation of Jesus Christ (cf., 1Tim 2:5). He shows that contrasting attitudes toward these two axioms account for the three basic positions of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. While exclusivism relies on the second axiom and neglects the first, the pluralism relies on the first to the detriment of the second; inclusivism alone succeeds in accounting for and holding both at once. A unilateral emphasis on one of the two crucial axioms that ought to govern a Christian theology of religions leads to theological positions that are unsustainable. Hence, the model of inclusivism is a suitable perspective for a Christian theology of religions. Cf. D’Costa, *Theology of Religions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 1986.

¹⁷⁰ Joseph A. DiNoia, in his book, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), notes that both inclusivists and pluralists minimize the differences of the others and hence the import of the interreligious conversation (p.127). The order of the day is not a “theology for dialogue” but a “theology in dialogue” (p.111). On the one hand, interreligious conversations must not “serve the purpose of disclosing Christian-like virtualities” in the doctrines of other religious communities, as the inclusivist thesis is prone to do, but should “entertain such doctrines as self-consistent alternative teachings about that upon which human life should be focused.” (p.138). On the other hand, the pluralistic accounts of religious predications also appear to “attenuate the significance of religious differences in the course

of diverse views regarding the way ahead beyond the contradictory inclusivist and pluralistic claims, a certain consensus seems to be emerging as to the need to avoid on all sides absolutism as well as relativism. Plurality needs to be welcomed and taken seriously not only as a matter of fact but in principle. Its place in God's plan of salvation must be stressed. It must also be shown that commitment to one's faith is compatible with openness to that of others; that the affirmation of one's religious identity does not build on confrontation with other identities. Dupuis is of the opinion that a theology of religions must be a theology of religious pluralism.¹⁷¹ Claude Geffré looks at the current developments in the theology of religions and notes on the evolution of the theology of religions, "which has moved from being a theology of the salvation of unbelievers to a theology of religious pluralism. ... But within this logic such a theology of religions ... must move towards becoming an interreligious theology."¹⁷² In his effort at finding a suitable model for a Christian theology of religious pluralism, Dupuis explores further as to what model offers itself for such a theology to follow in order that it be truly Christian? Is combining an inclusivist approach with a pluralistic one excluded a priori?

2.3. Toward a Trinitarian Christological Model – *Inclusivist Pluralism*

Jacques Dupuis' theology of religious pluralism is clearly inclusivist. The inclusivist theologians themselves differ in their theological perspective on religious pluralism.¹⁷³ In the present context of the reality of religious pluralism, Dupuis is of the opinion that a theology of religious pluralism must be situated beyond the 'inclusivist', as well as, the 'pluralist' paradigms, often understood to be mutually contradictory. While doing so, it must be affirmed that inclusive Christocentrism is non-negotiable for a Christian theology. Nevertheless, it can be combined with a theocentric pluralism, both aspects being complementary in a single reality. Hence, Dupuis argues,

of trying to account for them." (p.152). The way out of the "current impasse" in the theology of religions consists in recognizing squarely that distinct religious communities actually propose distinct aims for human life, as well as the legitimacy of such claims from the point of view of their faith (cf. pp.163 – 165).

¹⁷¹ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 7 – 13.

¹⁷² Claude Geffré, "From the Theology of Religious Pluralism to an Interreligious Theology" in Daniel Kendall / Gerald O'Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways*, p. 45.

¹⁷³ Cf. Dupuis, *Towards a Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp.130 –157, 180 – 201.

“The relationship between Christianity and the other religions can no longer be viewed in terms of contradiction and opposition between realization here and stepping-stones there, much less between absoluteness on one side and only potentialities on the other. It must henceforth be thought of in terms of the relational interdependence, within the organic whole of universal reality, between diverse modalities of encounter of the human existence with the Divine Mystery. The Catholic Church will, no doubt, continue to hold that the mystery of the Church willed by Jesus Christ ‘subsists’ (*subsistit*) in it while it ‘exists’ to a lesser extent in other churches. Similarly, the Christian faith will continue to imply a “fullness” of divine manifestation and revelation in Jesus Christ not realized elsewhere with the same fullness of sacramentality. Nevertheless, in both cases, the realities involved will have to be viewed as mutually related and interdependent, constituting together the complete whole of human-divine relationships. It is in this direction that a Christian theology of religious pluralism must seek to overcome the dilemma between Christocentric inclusivism and theocentric pluralism, understood as contradictory paradigms.”¹⁷⁴

In accordance with the above analysis, Dupuis holds that, a suitable model toward a Christian theology of religious pluralism is *Pluralistic-inclusivism*. He observes that the models, which ought to have been seen as mutually complementary, have in effect been construed into contradictory paradigms. In the Christian theology, Christocentrism, if correctly understood, must not be viewed as contradicting theocentrism; on the contrary, it presupposes it and calls for it. This position is able to assume and harmonize the traditional axioms of Christian faith that remain obligatory for any Christian theology of religions. On the one hand, in inclusivism, Jesus Christ is clearly asserted to be God’s decisive revelation and constitutive Saviour; on the other hand, the door is open to a sincere acknowledgement of divine manifestations in the history of humanity, in various cultures and of efficacious “elements of truth and grace” to be found in other religious traditions, elements that are of saving value for their members. Nevertheless, God is ever present and at work in other religious traditions, but he is revealed in a decisive manner in Jesus Christ. According to Dupuis, the perspective of ‘*inclusive pluralism*’ or ‘*pluralistic inclusivism*’ is capable of holding together the universal constitutive character of the Christ event in the order of salvation and the saving significance of the plurality of religious traditions within one salvific plan of God for all humankind. This perspective can enable us to give a

¹⁷⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 204.

Christian interpretation of religious pluralism, seeing other religions, not only in fact but in principle willed by God for whole humankind, to share in a common religious history of 'human-Divine and the Divine-human' relationships, originating from and finding their consummation in the Trinity.

2.4 Toward an Open Christocentric Approach Regarding Religious Pluralism

According to Dupuis, "Christian theology will be essentially christocentric. This does not mean that Christology exhausts the whole theology but it provides it with the necessary key of understanding; it is the interpretation of the entire edifice."¹⁷⁵ The event of Jesus Christ is the hermeneutical key to understand the mystery of God: "In him Christians learn to discover who God really is, who human beings are, what is their destiny, the meaning and worth of their world and history, and the role of the Church as she accompanies humankind on its pilgrimage through the ages."¹⁷⁶ Jesus Christ, the Son incarnate is the 'way' to the Father who stands beyond the mediator, as it is clearly expressed in the Gospel according to John, "I am the way, truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (Jn 14:6). However, even though we meet God in Jesus Christ, but at the same time, God the Father of Jesus Christ, abides beyond the man, Jesus Christ. But, "no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (Jn 1:18). The Son incarnate is the exegete, the interpreter of the Father. In him God stands revealed and manifested, while yet remaining invisible and unseen. Jesus Christ, being the mystery of salvation, is the 'primordial sacrament' (*Ursakrament*) of humankind's encounter with God. Christ-the-sacrament does not, however, exhaust the mystery of God; it rather points towards it. In this regard Dupuis notes:

"The mystery of God remains secret and hidden, even while in Jesus Christ it is manifested to us in a unique, qualitatively unsurpassable, manner. Jesus revealed the mystery of God as experienced personally by him in human awareness. Once transposed to the human awareness of the man Jesus, the ineffable mystery of God's inner life could be enunciated in human terms; it thus became the object of divine revelation. Yet for all its unique character, God's revelation in Jesus Christ could not exhaust the human mystery, nor did Jesus' own human awareness.

¹⁷⁵ Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 2.

Nor does Jesus, the mediator who is the way to the Father, ever take the place of or substitute for the Father. On the contrary, he refers everything, including himself to the God, whom he calls Father. Never, in fact, Jesus calls himself God. The title *God*, in his language, refers exclusively to the Father.”¹⁷⁷

However, Christocentrism is not opposed to theocentrism; it implies it and calls for it. Jesus the Man is the “sacrament of the encounter with God.”¹⁷⁸ This means that in Jesus humanity and human countenance we come in contact with God, as the Gospel according to John notes, “No one can come to the Father except through me” (14:6) and “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9); and “If you know me you will know my Father too.” (14:7). The Godhead and humankind are indissolubly united in Jesus as the Son of God made human, as Jesus testifies it further, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” (Jn 14:10). However, through the Son we are directed to God who is Father. Thus Christocentrism calls for theocentrism. Jesus has revealed God by revealing himself as Son, by living his Sonship of the Father. In him and through him the unfathomable mystery of God as our Father is unveiled to us. Similarly, in the theological perspective, it follows that Christology leads us to theology. In other words, “theological reflection ascends from the Christ of God to the God of Jesus; from Christology to theology”.¹⁷⁹

The Christocentrism of Christian tradition is not opposed to theocentrism. It never puts Jesus Christ in the place of God. It only affirms that God has placed Jesus Christ at the centre, not as the last goal but as the way. The Christian theology of religions today argues for what is called Christocentrism, which describes the absolutely central place of Christ in God – world relationship. However, Jesus Christ’s posture at the centre of the Christian mystery does not make him usurp the place of God. God remains the origin and end of all things. If Jesus Christ, as the mediator, is at the centre of humankind’s relation with God, the reason is that God has placed him at the centre human – Divine relationship. The Christocentric perspective towards religious pluralism,¹⁸⁰ accepts the pre-existent Christology to evaluate the other religious

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 3.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. G. L. Müller, “Christocentrism,” in W. Beinert / F. S. Fiorenza (eds.), *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, (New York: Crossroad, 1995), p. 71. *Christocentrism* insists on the necessity of the mystery of Christ for the salvation of humanity. According to Carl Braaten, *Christocentrism*, which

traditions regarding their role in the mediation of salvation to their representatives. While fully aware of the divine unity of the humankind regarding their origin and search for God as their final destiny, inclusivist model seeks to discover the mystery of Christ present and active in other religious traditions and their representatives. For a fuller significance of the salvific mediation of the mystery of Jesus Christ for all humankind, one should not only affirm with full implications of the divinity but also of his humanity, without attempting to divide the mystery of the incarnation into two sons. In the theology of religions, it is not sufficient to indicate who Jesus Christ is, but also what the significance of the event of Jesus Christ is: his earthly life, his crucifixion and death on the Calvary and his glorious resurrection and ascension.¹⁸¹

Dupuis, in his Christological analysis in the context of the plurality of religions, gives a further insight to “a new way of doing theology in an inter-religious context: a new method of doing theology in a situation of religious pluralism.”¹⁸² This method begins with inter-religious dialogue as a point of departure, “on the basis of which it goes in search of a Christian interpretation of the surrounding manifold religious reality. Indeed this theology does not simply observe the practice of inter-religious dialogue as a necessary condition, as premise, or even a first step of its activity; rather it maintains a dialogical stance at every stage of its reflection. It is theological reflection on dialogue and in dialogue; it is dialogical inter-religious theology.”¹⁸³

is also the central message of the New Testament, depicts Jesus Christ as the “only begotten Son of God not as a saviour, but as *the Saviour*.” He affirms further, Jesus “is the *one* and *the only* Saviour or he is no Saviour at all.” Cf. Braaten, “The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ,” in G. S. Anderson / T. S. Stransky (eds.), *Faith Meets: Mission Trends* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), pp. 74 – 75. For a helpful discussion on the theologians, who argue for this position, cf. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), pp.75 – 140.

¹⁸¹ Gerald O’Collins commenting on the *Symbol of Chalcedon* (451), a formula that has abiding value for providing a sure basis for understanding the mystery of Christ and eliminating all the heresies, appropriately points out, “everything that Chalcedon affirms could still be valid if Jesus had been miraculously snatched away from this world and never died on Calvary. Chalcedon does not spell out the distinction between the earthly and glorified state of Jesus, let alone fill in the details of his historical life.” *Interpreting Jesus*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), p. 173. S. Arul Pragasam observes, “In the post-modern de-constructive world, where the language of Chalcedon has not been clearly elucidated, a retelling of the Jesus story is imperative. Retelling the story of Jesus merely postulating a God at the centre of the religious universe with many satellites is not a viable option. Any retelling of the Jesus story should be faithful to the original witness and credible for today.” Cf. “Dominus Iesus and its Invitation to Theology,” *VJTR*, 65 (2001) pp. 587 – 588.

¹⁸² Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 11.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 11.

Dupuis affirms the centrality of the event of Jesus Christ as the summit of God's overall plan of salvation that includes all humankind with their diverse religious traditions. Hence, Jesus Christ is constitutive in the salvation of the believers of other religions. He asks whether it is possible to hold on to the uniqueness and the universality of Jesus Christ in the presence of religious pluralism.¹⁸⁴ He continues to affirm Christocentrism because of the continuity that Jesus Christ makes between the reign of God and his own person, on the one hand, and the explicit Christologies of the Christian tradition, on the other. He clearly distinguishes this Christocentrism from ecclesiocentrism, which puts the Church on a par with Christ. Consequently, he replaces the axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* by a new one, namely, *all salvation is through Christ*.¹⁸⁵ At the same time, Dupuis tries to combine a normative Christology with some elements of theocentrism in his theology of religions, as he understands that in the overall economy of salvation the Christocentrism of Christian faith is not opposed to theocentrism. However, the uniqueness and universality of Christ and subsequent affirmation of normative Christology is based on the personal identity of Jesus Christ as Son of God. Hence, he rejects the radical pluralist model that constructs a theocentric theology of religions, built around the notion of the Reign of God instead of the person of Christ, which also rejects the unicity and universality of Jesus Christ. Dupuis concedes that the eschatological reality of the Reign of God is greater than the Church, but the uniqueness of Jesus Christ remains the only norm for a Catholic theology of religions.¹⁸⁶

3. The Centrality of the Event of Jesus Christ in the World of Religious Plurality

The first century Christianity was utterly convinced that Jesus Christ was universally and absolutely significant for the redemption of all human beings. The following texts reflect such a conviction of the Church in first century: "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave as a ransom for all" (1Tim 2:5); and "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 192.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 97.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 206.

4:2). The second Vatican council summarised this New Testament conviction, when it affirmed that “Christ is source of salvation for the whole World”¹⁸⁷ This is also our conviction today that God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself. Christology proper cannot, however, dispense with asking questions about the significance of the mystery of Jesus Christ and its implications to religious others. Dupuis, however, points out two aspects in this consideration, namely, “One consists in asking what God’s intention is in devising an order of things in which God’s self communication to human beings is made dependent on the historical incarnation and death on the cross of God’s own Son. Why has God placed Jesus Christ at the centre of the plan of salvation for humankind? Another is to seek how the divine plan unfolds itself through the history of humankind and the world. Assuming that God has placed Jesus Christ at the centre of the plan, what place does the historical event of Jesus Christ occupy in the history of salvation through which God’s plan unfolds in history?”¹⁸⁸

3.1. Theological Foundations for the Centrality of the Event of Jesus Christ

The New Testament shows us at once the universality of the salvific will of God and the link between salvation and the redemptive work of Christ Jesus, the only mediator between God and humans. Human beings attain salvation in recognising and accepting in faith Jesus, the Son of God. This message is directed to all without exception. Jesus has a salvific significance for each human being, which may apply even to those who do not know him. The New Testament message is not compatible with any limiting of the salvific will of God, or with admitting mediations parallel to that of Jesus or with attributing this universal mediation to the eternal Logos in isolation from Jesus.¹⁸⁹ The salvation, only through faith in Jesus Christ is a constant affirmation in the New Testament. God the Father’s salvific will is linked to faith in his Son, Jesus Christ, in whom the saving plan is realised: “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus does not exclude the gentiles from salvation. He praises the faith of some of them, especially the centurion (cf. Mt 8:10; Lk 7:9) and the Syrophenician woman (cf. Mt

¹⁸⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 17.

¹⁸⁸ Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, p. 140.

¹⁸⁹ *International Theological Commission*, “Christianity and Religious Pluralism,” *Origins*, 27(1997), p. 156.

15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30). Jesus affirms that many will come from the East and the West to sit at Table in the Kingdom while the children of the Kingdom will be thrown outside (Cf. Mt 8:11-12; Lk 13:18-29; 11:20-24).

The unique and definitive mediation of Jesus is part of the salvific will of God: “For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself a human, Christ Jesus, who offered himself a ransom for all” (1Tim 2:5-6). The uniqueness of the mediator corresponds to the uniqueness of God who desires the salvation of all (cf. Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), has placed Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son as the centre and summit of his overall plan of salvation for all humankind. Jesus Christ, the only mediator of the salvific will of God, has a universal significance since he is the God incarnate. He is the Word, who existed before all times, who was with God and who was God, “through him all things came into being” (cf. Jn 1:1; 1:1-3) and he is the “the real light that gives light to everyone” (Jn 1:9). The unicity and universality of the mediation of Christ is understood from the fact that it is Jesus, as the Logos incarnate, who enlightens all humankind. Indeed, “grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ” (Jn 1:17), who is “the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (Jn 1:18). Thus Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and humankind because he is the Son, become man, who has given himself up to death as a ransom for all (cf. Tim 2:5-6). Only in Jesus Christ can human beings be saved, and therefore the mystery of Christ has a universal significance. With his coming into the world, Jesus enlightens every human being. The mystery of Christ is universally present among all as a light that enlightens all. Jesus is the full and definitive appearance of the Logos, who became flesh and dwelt among us. We can understand the closeness of the Word to all human beings only because of Jesus’ coming into the world, and above all because of his death and resurrection.

However, a Christian theology of religions, from an inclusivist perspective, has sought to reassess the role of Christ as the unique and universal Saviour and the function of other religions themselves within God’s plan of salvation. The New Testament texts, for instance, Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1Cor. 3:11; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1Jn 5:12 are explicit on the role of Jesus Christ as the universal mediator between God and humanity. God has chosen to save all humankind in him. Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation and resurrection indicate ways of Christ’s saving contact with all humankind that existed in all ages with their diverse cultures and religious traditions.

Whenever, in the created world and its history, people experience salvation in some form or another, this is happening through Christ the universal mediator of salvation.¹⁹⁰ However, in the Christian tradition, the person of Jesus Christ and his role in the creation and redemption indicate a broader outlook toward implicating him as the sole mediator for the salvation all humankind. Jesus Christ, indeed, occupies in Christian faith a central and unique place such as no other religion attributes to its founder. The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* states, “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.”¹⁹¹ To assert the “constitutive” uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the Christian tradition seems to require does not necessarily lead to the result of making insignificant other religions and their “saving figures”. To the contrary, faith in Jesus Christ requires being open and committed to encountering them.¹⁹²

The whole of Christian tradition, biblical and post-biblical alike, has inquired about the meaning of Jesus Christ in the divine plan. God has freely and gratuitously created us and has called us to share his divine life, by redeeming the sinful humanity, in his Son, Jesus Christ. However, in the words of Dupuis, “God’s formal intent in Jesus Christ is to inject the gift of self to humanity as deeply as can be, into the very stuff of humanity that is called to share in the divine life. In other words, [this is] to make the divine self-bestowal as immanent as possible. The plenary insertion of God’s self-communication into the human race – the total immanence of the divine self-bestowal upon humanity – consists precisely in God’s personal self-insertion into the human family and its history, that is, in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. This can be called the principle of God’s creative and restorative “immanent self-communication”.”¹⁹³ In this personal insertion of himself as Son of God into our human condition and history, Jesus Christ has actually placed

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Gerald O’Collins, *Interpreting Jesus*, p. 202 – 207.

¹⁹¹ *Redemptoris Missio*, 5.

¹⁹² Thomas Ryan, Catholic Perspectives on Interreligious Relations, *Ecumenical Trends*, 33 (2004), 6, pp.1 – 8.

¹⁹³ Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, pp. 146 – 147.

God within our reach, along with the gift of divine life itself given to us in a way suited to us, namely as created gift.¹⁹⁴

3.2. The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus the Christ

The uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the universal meaning of the event of Jesus Christ represent more than a central belief for Christian tradition. These truths are seen as the very foundations of faith. In the strict sense, regarding the “uniqueness” of Jesus Christ, Dupuis affirms in the light of Christian faith and tradition that “Jesus is unique, not only as the person whom God chose as the vehicle of divine self-revelation and self-manifestation would necessarily be unique – so that consequently any divine revelation resulting from this would also be unique – but also in the sense that, by and in Jesus Christ, God effected a self-manifestation in a manner that is decisive and can be neither surpassed nor repeated.”¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, “Traditionally, for the Christians that meaning includes not only the irresistible call represented by the [man] Jesus for all those who draw near to him, but also the scope and influence of Jesus [the Christ] and his work for the salvation of women and men in every time and place. Jesus is at the centre of God’s design for the world and of the process by which this design is deployed in history. In Jesus, God undertook an irrevocable commitment to humanity, in an irrevocable acceptance of that humanity. The human condition of the human Jesus – his words, his deeds, his life, his death, and his resurrection – constitute God’s decisive, and in this sense, final, revelation.”¹⁹⁶ Thus, Christ is the centre of God’s design for humankind in the one and universal history of salvation.

In the Christian theology of religions, it is true, the uniqueness and universal meaning of Jesus Christ is an inescapable theological problem. Dupuis holds that “inasmuch as, and to the extent that, the Christic mystery is bound up with the Jesus of history, faith in Christ as the center involves a claim that may appear incongruous:

¹⁹⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx puts it as, while in the Old Testament itself God is already a God-of-humanity, in Jesus Christ, God becomes a God-of-human-beings-in-human-fashion. He writes, “Christ is God in a human way, and a human in a divine way.” Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of Encounter with God*, (London: Sheed & ward, 1963), pp. 32 – 38. Cf. also, idem, *Jesus: an Experiment in Christology*, (New York: Crossroad, 1979), pp. 626 – 669.

¹⁹⁵ Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, p. 141.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 141.

the attribution of universal meaning to a particular historical event!”¹⁹⁷ He finds that the empirical fact of Jesus of Nazareth is essentially conditioned by time and space. However, Dupuis considers that “the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ are not exclusive, but inclusive; not closed, but open; not sectarian, but cosmic.”¹⁹⁸ Thus, as regards religious pluralism, he finds that several theologies present a Christ who is either “hidden” or “unknown” in the world’s diverse religious traditions, or of an “anonymous Christianity”. Some theologies, in the light of the new awareness of the reality of religious plurality, seek to reconcile the traditional Christian position regarding the mystery of Christ with the reality of other manifestations. In Dupuis’ opinion, “Christ is the mystery of God turning toward men and women in self-manifestation and self-revelation. The Christic mystery, therefore, is present wherever God enters into life of human beings in an experience of the divine presence. Nevertheless, this mystery remains anonymous in a certain sense for whoever has not been enabled, thanks to the Christian revelation, to recognize it in the human condition of Jesus of Nazareth. All have the experience of the Christic mystery, but Christians alone are in a position to give it its name.”¹⁹⁹ Dupuis holds that “the Christ of faith is inseparable from the Jesus of history; but his presence and activity are not limited to the confines of the Christian fold.”²⁰⁰

The Second Vatican Council, in seeking to grasp the mystery of the Church in greater depth, felt the need to return to the mystery of Jesus Christ that is its source and *raison d’être*. Consequently, the Church, in union with Christ, is seen as the universal sacrament of salvation.²⁰¹ The Church is “in some way in Christ the sacrament, both the sign and means of intimate union with God and the unity of all human race.”²⁰² In other words, since all salvation is in Christ, the Church, being the mystical body of Christ, is the universal sacrament of salvation. Just as Christ himself is the primordial sacrament of the encounter with God, so the Church in turn is the sacrament of Jesus Christ.²⁰³ Keeping in mind the Christocentric perspective of the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 142.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. pp. 141 – 142.

¹⁹⁹ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 92.

²⁰⁰ Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, p. 142.

²⁰¹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1, 48; cf. also, *Ad Gentes*, 1; *Gaudium et Spes*, 42, 45.

²⁰² *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

²⁰³ Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of Encounter with God*, pp. 47 – 82.

conciliar theology, any re-interpretation of the doctrine of the universality and uniqueness of Jesus as Saviour within a Christian theology of religions must take into account the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the possibility of salvation in Christ for the believers of other religions and the positive appraisal of other religious traditions, since they have “elements of truth and grace”.

The Christ-event is the *Ursakrament* of God’s decisive and everlasting covenant all humankind. The Incarnation represents the deepest and most immanent possible manner of God’s personal involvement with humankind in history. Through the incarnation, Christ has moved into a new historical solidarity with all human beings, as well as with the created world. By his Incarnation, Christ has not separated himself from the Logos, so also the universal presence of the Spirit not separated from the spirit of the risen Christ. Jesus Christ is the “one mediator between God and men” (1 Tim 2:5).²⁰⁴ He has entered history to become the focus of the human and material universe. In other words, by his incarnation “the Son of God has in a certain way united himself with each man”.²⁰⁵ Similarly, the resurrection transformed Christ’s humanity and set it beyond the normal limits of space and time. Hence in his risen state Christ can “show the way to” and “strengthen” every person through his Holy Spirit, offering “to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.”²⁰⁶ The omnipresent activity of the risen Christ universally mediates divine life.²⁰⁷ Hence, Christ is invisibly active in all human experience of salvation. Consequently, to receive salvation in and through other participated mediums is to receive salvation through the incarnate and glorified Christ. In Jesus Christ, all are recreated in the image and likeness of God and called to have communion with him. Christian encounter with other religions, therefore, is not one of making Christ present in other religions and cultures, but rather, of meeting Christ who is already present and at work in them through his Holy Spirit, helping them to meet God. Even though other religions are endowed with truth and holiness, they become salvific only through the mediation of Christ, since there can

²⁰⁴ Cf. Helmut Hoping, „Die Pluralität der Religionen und der Wahrheitsanspruch des Christentums“, im Münk, H. J. / Durst, M. (Hg.), *Christliche Theologie und Weltreligionen*, (Freiburg Schweiz: Paulusverlag, 2003), pp. 117 – 159.

²⁰⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

²⁰⁶ Cf. *Ibid*, 10, 22.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Gerald O’Collins, *Interpreting Jesus*, p. 202 – 207.

be only one economy of salvation. Religious others, though remain outside the visible membership of the Church, obtain salvation only through the mediation of Christ. With an openly reflected *inclusivism*, which holds for the one economy of salvation realized in Christ, there can be no parallel and equal ways of salvation.²⁰⁸

3.3 Dupuis' Approach to the Unicity and Universality of Jesus Christ

The Christ-event represents the deepest and most immanent possible manner of God's personal involvement with humankind in history. It is, therefore, unique and irreplaceable in the history of salvation for all humankind. Jesus Christ is constitutive of universal salvation; he is truly the Saviour of the world. This unique and universal significance of the event of Jesus Christ, as constitutive of universal salvation, is based on the personal identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. By being raised from the dead by the Father, the human existence of Jesus, the Word incarnate, is no longer subject to conditioning by time and space. It is this real transformation of the human being of Jesus through his resurrection which confers upon his human existence, and in particular, upon the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection, universal salvific value. His resurrection that transcends human history introduces the human being of Jesus into a condition that extends beyond history. In and through the glorified state of the Risen Christ, the historical event of Jesus Christ becomes meta-historical; and so it is unique and universally implicated for the salvation all humankind.

3.3.1. The Constitutive Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ

Dupuis, in the light of an uninterrupted and mainline Christian tradition, maintains the constitutive uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. He suggests that the constitutive uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ must be made to rest on his personal identity as the Son of God.²⁰⁹ According to him, "No other consideration seems to provide such an adequate theological foundation. The Gospel values which Jesus upholds, the reign of god which he announces, the human project or "program" which he puts forward, his option for the poor and the marginalized, his denouncing of injustice, his message of universal love: all these, no doubt, contribute

²⁰⁸ Cf. Helmut Hoping, „Die Pluralität der Religionen und der Wahrheitsanspruch des Christentums“, im Münk, H. J. / Durst, M. (Hg.), *Christliche Theologie und Weltreligionen*, p. 129.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 192 – 197.

to the difference and specificity of Jesus' personality; none of them, however, would be decisive for making him or recognising him as "constitutively unique".²¹⁰ The constitutive uniqueness and universality means that Jesus Christ and the Christ-event are "*constitutive*" of salvation for the whole of humankind; in particular, the event of his death and resurrection opens access to God for all human beings, independently of their historical situation. To say that Jesus Christ is the "*constitutive universal Saviour*" means that the Christ event belongs to the essence of salvation for all human beings; in particular, that the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection are truly "cause" of salvation for all human beings. The Christ event seals a bond of union between the divinity and humankind that can never be broken, and it *constitutes* the privileged channel through which God has chosen to share the divine life with human beings. Correctly understood, faith in Jesus Christ then does not simply consist in trusting that he is the way of salvation "for me". It means believing that the world and humankind have been saved and find their salvation in him and through him. Nothing less than this is sufficient to do justice to the firm claims of the New Testament.²¹¹

The 'constitutive' uniqueness and salvific universality of the event of Jesus Christ must be based on his personal identity as the Son of God. This identity of Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God provides the adequate theological foundation for his salvific uniqueness and universality.²¹² It is not enough to show that Jesus Christ is a man in whom the Word of God is fully present; rather, we must show that he is God's eternal Word, the Son of God, who in time became man to reveal the Father fully. He is not a human person receiving the divine presence, but a divine person, the Word of God, accepting human becoming in time and space.²¹³ Therefore, the unique significance of the event of Jesus Christ, as constitutive of universal salvation, must be clearly established on its true theological foundation. In the last analysis, it needs to be based on the personal identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. No other consideration will do, as is clear from Dupuis' following articulation:

"The theological foundation of the unique meaning of the Jesus Christ event rests, therefore, on the fact that through the mystery of the incarnation the Word of God became, once for all (*ephapax*), personally

²¹⁰ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 297.

²¹¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp.167, 171.

²¹² Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 157-159.

²¹³ Cf. N. D., no. 670.

inserted in human reality and in the history of the world. Through him God has established an unbreakable bond of union with the whole humanity. ...The incarnation represents the most profound and immanent way in which God committed himself to humanity in history. It follows from this that the Jesus Christ event in its entirety, from the incarnation to the resurrection and glorification, seals the decisive pact, which God institutes with humanity. It is, and remains, throughout history the sacrament and seal of that pact. In this quality Jesus Christ event obtains, in the history of salvation, a unique and irreplaceable place. It is a truly 'constitutive' element in the mystery of salvation for the whole humanity."²¹⁴

In other words, in and through the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word of God has inserted himself personally, once for all, in to the human reality and the history of the world. In him God has established a bond of union with the entire human race, which can never be broken. The Christ-event is the sacrament of that decisive and everlasting covenant. The Incarnation represents the deepest and most immanent possible manner of God's personal involvement with humankind in history. The event of Jesus Christ, therefore, is unique and irreplaceable in the history of salvation for all mankind. The Christ event marks the apex and the summit of the divine manifestations of God through his Word and his Spirit. God's self-revelation and self-gift to human beings in Jesus Christ are the centre of history and the key for interpreting the entire process of salvation. Jesus Christ is constitutive of universal salvation.²¹⁵

The uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, may be better understood, not in exclusive or absolute language but, as Dupuis says, in inclusive language, namely, the event of Jesus Christ as "constitutive" for human salvation, that is, Jesus Christ remains for us "constitutionally way to the Father".²¹⁶ He further clarifies his terminology regarding the uniqueness of Christ in the context of other saving figures: "where "oneness" or ("uniqueness") and "universality" are concerned, both terms can be understood in a "relative" or a "singular" sense. "Relative uniqueness" refers to the

²¹⁴ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 158.

²¹⁵ Walter Kasper notes in Jesus Christ salvation has come to all people in a universal way that includes everything that is true and good in the other religions. That means that salvation, which non-Christians can share in if they live according to their conscience, is not some other type of salvation outside of and without Jesus Christ, but more of a salvation in and through Jesus Christ. Cf. Kasper, "The Unicity and Universality of Jesus Christ", *Origins*, 30 (2000) 21, pp. 321 – 327.

²¹⁶ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 199.

original character of every person or tradition, in its difference from others; “singular uniqueness” is said of Jesus Christ as the constitutive Saviour of humankind. Similarly, “relative universality” indicates the universal appeal which various saving figures or religious traditions can possibly make on people as representing diverse paths to salvation; “singular universality” implies once again that Jesus Christ is the constitutive universal Saviour. In both cases, the “relative” usage runs the risk of leading to a broad pluralism, falling short of the Christian claim, while the restricted usage may be exposed to narrow exclusivism.”²¹⁷ Hence he suggests that uniqueness and universality need to be combined if we would wish to construct an open theology of religions: “Oneness and universality: we must find a way combining both and holding them together. ... Without universality, uniqueness is exclusivism. Without uniqueness universality would lead us down the pluralist path. In combination, however, the notes of uniqueness and universality accord with ... inclusive Christology.”²¹⁸ With this perspective he considers the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ:

“The uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ are neither “relative” nor “absolute.” They are “constitutive,” insofar as Jesus Christ holds saving significance for the whole of humankind and the Christ-event – in particular the Paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection – is “cause” of salvation. It is “relational” in so far as the person and event insert themselves in an overall design of God for humankind which is multifaceted and whose realization in history is made up of diverse times and moments. Jesus Christ is among different saving figures in whom God is hiddenly present and operative, “the human face” in whom God, while remaining unseen, is fully disclosed and revealed. Throughout human history god has willed to be “in many and various ways” (Heb 1:1) a God-of-people; in Jesus Christ he became God-of-people-in-a-fully-human-way (cf. Jn1:14): the Em-manu-el (Mt 1:23).”²¹⁹

Thus, Dupuis holds that the humanity of Jesus Christ, God’s Son made flesh, is the sacrament of God’s universal will to save. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ must not, however, be construed as absolute: what is absolute is God’s saving will.²²⁰ For Dupuis, “the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is neither absolute nor relative, but in precise

²¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 282 – 283.

²¹⁸ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 192.

²¹⁹ Ibid. p. 101 – 102.

²²⁰ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 387 – 388.

terms at once “constitutive” and “relational.”²²¹ Here by “constitutive uniqueness” he means that, for Christian faith, the paschal mystery of the death-resurrection of Jesus Christ has, according to God’s saving design for humankind, a universal significance: it seals between the Godhead and the human race a bond of union that can never be broken; it constitutes the privileged channel through which God has chosen to share his divine life with human beings. Similarly, by using the term “relational”, he intends to insert the universal significance of the Christ-event into the overall plan of God for humankind and the manner it unfolds in salvation history. In particular, the term is designed to assert the reciprocal relationship that exists between the path that is in Jesus Christ and the various paths to salvation proposed by the religious traditions to their members.²²² Furthermore, Dupuis chooses to call the uniqueness of Christ as “relational,” in the sense that “the historical event of God’s becoming flesh marks the deepest and most decisive engagement of God with humankind; it establishes with it a bond of union that can never be severed. But this event is of necessity and irremediably, marked by the particularity of every historical happening. The “trans-historical” character of the risen humanity of Jesus Christ notwithstanding, the event is limited by its insertion into history, without which its singular significance and density would vanish. It is, then, at once particular in time and universal in meaning, and, as such, “singularly unique,” yet related to all other divine manifestations to humankind in one history of salvation – that is relational.”²²³

3.3.2. The Event of Jesus Christ is Constitutive of all Salvation

The mystery of Christ is related to other religious traditions. Because the Christ-event belongs to and is the climax of God’s plan of salvation, Christ is constitutive of salvation in a very special manner. In him God has brought about salvation for all humanity in a most effective and intense manner. Moreover, because the religions themselves are a part of God’s plan of salvation of which Christ is the culminating point, Christ is related to these religions, and vice versa.²²⁴ Furthermore,

²²¹ Ibid. p. 305.

²²² Cf. Ibid. p. 305.

²²³ Ibid. 388.

²²⁴ The relational nature of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ has been brought out by recent authors sensitive to the demands of an open ended theology of religious pluralism. Thus Claude Geffré writes: “Without compromising the absolute commitment inherent to faith, Christianity can be

because the world religions possess an autonomous function in the history of salvation, different from that of Christianity, they and Christianity, though mutually related, cannot be reduced to each other.²²⁵ Dupuis' affirmation of Jesus Christ's uniqueness and universality does not prevent him from having a positive view of other religious traditions. The historical Jesus or the Christ-event, according to him, cannot exhaust either divine revelation or divine saving power. Jesus Christ is not a substitute for God.²²⁶ Rather, he is "the universal sacrament of God's will to save humankind." This, for Dupuis, does not necessarily make him "the only possible expression of that will." Dupuis says: "The mystery of the incarnation is unique; only the individual human existence of Jesus is assumed by the Son of God. But while he alone is thus constituted the 'image of God,' other 'saving figures' may be... enlightened by the Word or 'inspired' by the Spirit, to become pointers to salvation for their followers, in accordance with God's overall design for humankind."²²⁷ Furthermore, accepting the elements of "truth and grace" in the religious traditions and their function as paths of salvation, Dupuis places side by side the claims to 'uniqueness' that some great religions make for themselves or for their founders and those that are made for Jesus Christ in Christianity. According to him the claims of

considered as a relative reality; not, however, in the sense in which "relative" is opposed to "absolute," but in the sense of "relational." The truth to which Christianity witnesses, is neither exclusive nor inclusive of all other truth; it is related to all that is true in other religions." Cf. idem « La singularité du christianisme à l'âge du pluralisme religieux » J. Doré and C. Theobald (ed.), *Penser la foi: Recherches en théologie aujourd'hui: Mélanges offerts à Joseph Moingt*, (Paris: Cerf – Arras, 1993), p. 358.

²²⁵ Ramon Panikkar, in this regard, clearly indicates that what is called for is not a common theological enterprise which levels difference between the diverse religious traditions in a search for a common denominator, but a genuine admission of the plurality and diversity of beliefs and the mutual acceptance of the others in their very otherness. Hence, the question no longer simply consists of asking what role Christianity can assign to other historical religious traditions, but in searching for the root cause of pluralism itself, for its significance in God's own plan for humankind, for mutual convergence of religious traditions in full respect for their differences, and for their mutual enrichment and cross-fertilisation. Cf. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, (N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1978).

²²⁶ Cf. Dupuis, "God is Always Greater," *The Tablet*, 27 (2001), 10, p. 1521; cf. also, idem. "Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism", in T. Merrigan - J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 91; idem. "The Truth Will Make You Free the Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited", *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 235.

²²⁷ Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 298. Cf. also, idem. "God is Always Greater", *The Tablet*, 27 (2001), 10, p. 1521.

these religions about themselves and their founders more often than not contrast sharply with those made by Christianity about Jesus.

In determining the role of Jesus Christ among other religions, Dupuis takes a look at how other religions view their saving figures. In other religions, as in Christianity, the ‘saviour figures’ are claimed to be absolute. Also, along with Christianity, the other religions, despite alleged inclusiveness, argue for their own superiority. Hence Dupuis proposes that all talk of the absolute claims of Christianity for Jesus Christ should be discontinued. The reason is the “‘absolute’ is an attribute of the Ultimate Reality of infinite Being which must not be predicated of any finite reality, even the human existence of the Son-of-God-made-man. That Jesus Christ is “universal” Saviour does not make him the “Absolute Saviour” – who is God himself.”²²⁸ Furthermore, “the ‘constitutive’ uniqueness of Jesus Christ will stand as an affirmation of Christian faith, but it will not be absolutized by relying merely on the unilateral foundation of a few isolated texts.”²²⁹ Nevertheless, he affirms, “the New Testament witness to the oneness and universality of Jesus Christ needs to be taken seriously.”²³⁰ But he upholds that “the “constitutive” uniqueness of Jesus Christ does not necessarily result in “condemning” other religions and their “saving figures”. ... For the New Testament affirmation of Christ the Man’s uniqueness as “the way” (Jn 14:6), the “one mediator” (Tim 2:5), the “one name” (Acts 4:12) in whom human beings may find salvation does not cancel our faith in Logos *asarkos* ... through whom all people may be saved and in whom all ways may converge.”²³¹ In other words, Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate is “the true light that enlightens every human being by coming into the world” (Jn 1:9). Therefore faith in Jesus Christ, the unique and universal Saviour, far from contradicting religious plurality, calls for a commitment and openness to it. Similarly, in the Christian faith and doctrinal tradition of the Church, the identity of Jesus Christ – the “only begotten Son of God” in whom salvation is given to human beings – will be understood on a non-negotiable basis as a point of convergence toward meeting of all religious traditions in Jesus Christ. Dupuis writes, “the Christian claim for Jesus Christ, as traditionally

²²⁸ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 222.

²²⁹ Ibid. p. 294.

²³⁰ Ibid. p. 286.

²³¹ Ibid. p. 288.

understood, still stands: faith in Jesus Christ does not merely consist in trusting that he is “for me” the path to salvation; it means to believe that the world and humankind find salvation in and through him.”²³² The universal saving impact of Jesus Christ, as ‘constitutive’ of the salvation of the world, leaves space for other ‘saving figures’ and other religious traditions, where God is present and at work through God’s Word and Spirit.

The *inclusivistic-pluralist* understanding of Christ’s uniqueness and universality, as suggested by Dupuis, seems to contribute to the Christological problematic in the theology of religions. According to him, “this implies that Jesus Christ remains universal Saviour and the Christ-event is the climax of God’s self-manifestation in history. However, the universal operative presence of the Christic mystery guarantees the positive significance of other religious traditions as channels of divine mystery of salvation within the one, complex and manifold, plan of God for humankind.”²³³ The relationship of the other religious traditions with the mystery of Jesus Christ consists in their convergence. They all are various manifestations of the divine mystery and paths to salvation throughout history;²³⁴ yet, they are not equal.²³⁵ Thus Dupuis points to “a convergence between religious traditions and the mystery of Jesus Christ, as representing various, though not equal, paths along which, through history, God has sought and continues to seek human beings in his Word and his Spirit. Jesus Christ is the “integral figure (*figure intégrale*) of God’s salvation;” while the religious traditions “represent particular realizations of a universal process, which has become pre-eminently concrete in Jesus Christ.”²³⁶ Dupuis states, “Salvation is at work everywhere; but in the concrete figure of the crucified Christ the work of

²³² Ibid. p. 292 – 293.

²³³ Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism”, in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 84.

²³⁴ *Indian Theological Association* (1989) articulates the Indian Christian perspective regarding religious pluralism as follows: “The religions of the world are expressions of the human openness to God. They are signs of God’s presence in the world. Every religion is unique and through this uniqueness, religions enrich one another. In their specificity, they manifest the different faces of the supreme Mystery, which is never exhausted. In their diversity, they enable us to experience the richness of the One more profoundly.” Kuncheria Pathil, (ed.), *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1991), pp. 347 – 348.

²³⁵ Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, pp. 96 – 97.

²³⁶ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 328.

salvation is seen to be accomplished. Jesus Christ, then is the “unique Saviour,” not as the unique manifestation of the Word of God, who is God himself; not even in the sense that God’s revelation in him be complete and exhaustive – which it is not and cannot be; but in relation to the universal process of divine revelation which occurs through concrete limited manifestations.”²³⁷

So to sum up, in his Christological debate in the Christian theology religious pluralism, Dupuis, on the one hand, brings out the full meaning of the mystery of Jesus Christ with regard to the universal salvation of humankind, on the other hand, the door is open to a sincere acknowledgement of divine manifestations in the history of religions.²³⁸ He argues that a Christian claim for oneness and universality of Jesus Christ leaves room for an open theology of religious pluralism. He holds that the constitutive uniqueness of Jesus Christ will stand as an affirmation of Christian faith. He maintains that in the final analysis, the constitutive uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ must rest on his personal identity as the Son of God.²³⁹ Clearly, Dupuis holds for a ‘high Christology’ and opposes severing a ‘universal Christ’ from the ‘particular Christ’. According to him, “a universal Christ, severed from the particular Jesus, would no longer be the Christ of Christian revelation.”²⁴⁰ The unique mystery of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, in the opinion of Dupuis, helps Christian faith to appraise all the more positively the personal interventions of God in other religions. He indicates just as the human consciousness of Jesus the incarnate Son could not exhaust the mystery of God, so also the Christ-event does not exhaust God’s saving power. So while Jesus the Christ and Son of God is the constitutive Saviour of all humankind, the ‘saving figures’ in other religions may be enlightened by the Logos and inspired by the Spirit, to become pointers to salvation to their followers, in accordance with God’s overall design for humankind.²⁴¹

4. Revelation and the World Religions

²³⁷ Ibid. pp. 328 – 329.

²³⁸ Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 108.

²³⁹ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 297; cf. also, idem. *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, pp. 192 – 197.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 297.

²⁴¹ Ibid. p. 298.

A Christian theology of religions must take into account the difference between different religious traditions, without giving into the illusory presumption of a 'common essence' between the various religious traditions and their underlying ideas.²⁴² Nevertheless, Dupuis affirms that "due attention and respect for the differences do not do away with the right and duty for the Christian believer to interpret the data of their traditions from the vantage point of his or her own faith."²⁴³ For instance, according to Christian evaluation of divine revelation in other religions, framed in Christian categories, "an ineffable mystery, the centre and ground of reality and human life, is in different forms and manners active among all peoples of the world and gives ultimate meaning to human existence and aspirations." However, "this mystery, which is called by different names, but which no names can adequately represent, is definitively disclosed and communicated in Jesus of Nazareth."²⁴⁴ The dialectic of *revelatio* provides a basis for an inclusiveness, which not only recognises the value of other religions in the light of Christological criterion, but also acknowledges that the religions could have a value of salvific mediation. Although God's self-mediation is realised in fullness in Jesus Christ, this does not imply that the divine mystery is adequately manifested by human words and therefore that any participation in God's life is absent elsewhere.²⁴⁵ Dupuis affirms that the "ultimate mystery," universally present yet never adequately comprehended, is, for the Christian, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2Cor 1:3).

4.1. Unity and Completeness of God's Revelation in Jesus Christ

The Document of Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith *Dominus Iesus* holds that it is, contrary to the Catholic faith to maintain that revelation in Jesus Christ (or the revelation of Jesus Christ) is limited, incomplete or imperfect. Moreover, although full knowledge of divine revelation will be available only on the

²⁴² Cf. Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991); DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*; F.X. Clooney, *Theology After Vedanta*, (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1993.

²⁴³ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 116.

²⁴⁴ Cf. J. Pathrapankal, (ed.), "The Declaration of the International Theological Conference on Evangelization and Dialogue in India", in *Service and Salvation*, (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 1974), p. 4.

²⁴⁵ Cf. B. Forte, "Jesus of Nazareth, History of God, God of History," in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 116.

day of the Lord's coming in glory, the historical revelation of Jesus Christ offers everything necessary for man's salvation and has no need of completion by other religions.²⁴⁶ Dupuis affirms the idea of Letter to the Hebrews 1:1 and *Dei Verbum* 4 that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is "God's decisive word" to humankind, and that He "completes and perfects" revelation.²⁴⁷ However, Dupuis, in the light of *Dei Verbum* 4, distinguishes the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ-event²⁴⁸ from its "transmission" in the New Testament.²⁴⁹ He holds that "the authentic memorial transmitted by the New Testament is of course normative (*norma normans*) for the faith of the Church of all times. But this does not mean that it constitutes the fullness of the word of God to human beings."²⁵⁰ Dupuis insists upon the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ as the incarnation of God. For it is the event of the Incarnation which comprises the fullness of God's revelation. It is the very person of Jesus Christ, his deeds and his words, his life, his death, and his resurrection. In other words, the total Jesus Christ-event itself that constitutes the fullness of revelation. In him, God has uttered to the world his decisive word.²⁵¹

Dupuis affirms that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ does not exhaust and cannot exhaust the mystery of God. Since the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is based on his human finite consciousness of being the Son of the Father, it does not and cannot express fully the divine mystery. Only God's transcendent divine knowledge comprehends the divine mystery fully.²⁵² He emphasizes that the fullness of revelation in Jesus is a matter of "quality" rather than "quantity." Jesus' identity as Son of God makes him unique and the summit of divine revelation. Nevertheless, Dupuis prefers to accept the revelation in Jesus Christ, as "not

²⁴⁶ Cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 6. It states "certain theological proposals" in the theology of religions, which "are developed – at times presented as assertions, and at times as hypotheses – in which Christian revelation and the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church lose their character of absolute truth and salvific universality, or at least shadows of doubt and uncertainty are cast upon them." *Ibid.* 4.

²⁴⁷ Cf. *Dei Verbum*, 4. Cf. also, Dupuis, "God is Always Greater", *The Tablet*, 27 (2001), 10, pp. 1520 – 1521.

²⁴⁸ Cf. *Dei Verbum* 4.

²⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.* 4.

²⁵⁰ Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 249.

²⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 248 – 249.

²⁵² Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 130 – 132, 159, 176.

absolute.” For him the revelation in Christ “remains relative”²⁵³ or relational. This is because although in Jesus Christ, his human consciousness is that of the Son, it is still human and therefore limited. Furthermore, since “it is precisely this human experience that Jesus had of being the Son, in relation to the Father, that enabled him to translate into human words the mystery of God,” his revelation cannot exhaust the divine mystery.²⁵⁴ For Dupuis “the universality of the Christ event does not cancel out his particularity”, but rather, it imposes upon him “irremediable limitations.”²⁵⁵ Consequently, he holds that “the historical event of Jesus Christ is necessarily particular and circumscribed by the limits imposed upon it by time and space. The human story of Jesus belongs to a precise historical period.”²⁵⁶ The divine revelation in Jesus Christ remains unsurpassable in history, and it remains incomplete in the sense that it is waiting for its completion in the eschaton. God will be fully revealed only then.

With regard to the “qualitative fullness” of Jesus Christ’s revelation, Dupuis finds no obstacle to accepting “a continuing divine revelation” either before or after the incarnation. Here, Dupuis means that divine revelation has taken place and continues to occur in history “through the prophets and sages of other religious traditions.” However, no other revelation can surpass or equal that of Jesus Christ.²⁵⁷ Hence, *Dei Verbum* states, “By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.”²⁵⁸ Nevertheless, “the fullness of truth will appear with

²⁵³ Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism”, in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, pp. 90 – 91. Cf. also Merrigan, “Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement ‘Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism’”, *Louvain Studies*, 23 (1998), pp. 354 –355.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 249. Cf. also idem. “God is Always Greater”, *The Tablet*, 27 (2001), 10, p. 1521.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism”, in T. Merrigan / J. Haers (eds), *The Myriad Christ*, pp. 90 – 91.

²⁵⁶ Dupuis, “God is Always Greater”, *The Tablet*, 27 (2001), 10, p. 1521.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 249-250. Cf. also, idem. “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 233.

²⁵⁸ *Dei Verbum*, 2.

the final revelation of God.”²⁵⁹ This is implied in the words of the Scripture: “Now we see only reflections in a mirror, mere riddles, then we shall be seeing face to face. Now I can know only imperfectly; but then I shall be seeing face to face” (1Cor. 13:12). Hence, Dupuis’ refusal to speak of God’s historical communication in Christ as “absolute” is not to say that he holds for “relativism,” namely, that it is only relative and there are various, more or less equal saviours and revealers. Dupuis, while adopting the Christocentric unity of God’s plan of salvation for all humankind, affirms that the Christ-event is *constitutive* and *decisive* for the salvation of humankind, because God has placed his only begotten-Son, Jesus Christ, at the centre of his overall plan of salvation. Dupuis, in declining to use the terms “absolute” and “definitive”,²⁶⁰ the comparative terminology that supports Christian superiority rather than the spirit of the Gospel, adopts the language of *Dei Verbum*, and behind that language, the New Testament itself.

4.2. God’s Revelation in the World Religions

Dupuis deals with the question of God’s self-revelation in a broader perspective, situating it in the whole history of salvation and God’s covenantal relationship with the nations. Dupuis reflects on the different ways in which God spoke to humankind in history: “At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son.” (Heb 1:1-2). His concern is to clarify how Jesus Christ can be the “fullness” of divine revelation, if such revelation takes place both before and after Jesus.²⁶¹ This leads to the question of whether other religious traditions, their “sacred books” or “oral traditions” offer merely a human discourse about God, or, whether they also contain a “word spoken by God.”²⁶² If the divine relation is coextensive with the history of salvation, he seeks to investigate its fullness

²⁵⁹ *Fides et Ratio*, 2.

²⁶⁰ Gerald O’Collins suggests that “It is more accurate to call the revelation completed in Jesus Christ as “decisive” rather than “definitive,” a term that would too easily suggest (wrongly) that there is nothing more to come.” Cf. idem, “Jacques Dupuis: His Person and Work,” in D. Kendall / G. O’Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways*, p. 24.

²⁶¹ Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism”, in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 87.

²⁶² Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 235.

in Jesus Christ and its extension beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition. He inquires whether the “sacred books” and “oral traditions” of religious others contain a “word spoken by God.” He also asks: “If, moreover, Jesus Christ represents the “fullness” of divine revelation, has revelation come to a complete end with him? Or, on the contrary, can divine revelation in any way be conceived as an “ongoing process,” both inside and outside Christianity?”²⁶³

4.2.1. Universality of Divine Revelation

In order to present the universality of divine revelation, Dupuis first explains how and in what form “God’s self-manifestation” takes place. For him, it takes place both in God’s words and deeds throughout salvation history. Dupuis asserts that “God’s self-manifestation in history takes place inseparably under the double forms of words and deeds; it consists at once, necessarily, of revelation and salvation: God tells himself by giving himself; he shares himself by uttering himself. Hence to say the whole of history is salvation history implicitly entails the universality of revelation. Deeds and words, events and prophesy: both go hand in hand.”²⁶⁴ The biblical notion of the salvation-relation points out that the divine words and deeds go hand in hand. The document *Dei Verbum* confirms this unity, when it states: “This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having in inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them.”²⁶⁵

In all his discussions concerning the history of salvation, Dupuis affirms the validity of or, at least, provides the foundation for the legitimate place of the world religions in the divine economy of salvation. He seeks to demonstrate that other religious traditions also contain divine revelation. He also attempts to indicate their

²⁶³ Ibid. p. 236.

²⁶⁴ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 115. Gerald O’Collins, in this regard, makes the following observation about the self-communication of Christ: “God’s self-revelation which was completed with the resurrection and 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 (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 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 towards the future.” Cf. O’Collins, “Jacques Dupuis: His Person and Work,” in D. Kendall / G. O’Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways*, p. 24.

²⁶⁵ *Dei Verbum*, 2.

function as ways of salvation, while maintaining Jesus Christ as the one who constitutes human salvation. Dupuis, keeping in mind the concomitance of the divine words and deeds, asserts that it is theologically justified to search for divine speech in the non-biblical religious traditions, even as it was thought necessary to include those traditions within the ambit of salvation history.²⁶⁶ God has spoken to the whole of humankind, because he has offered his salvation to all humans. Revelation is universal, even as is the offer of salvation.²⁶⁷ This is true in as much as divine grace, which is universally offered, “discloses God as communicating himself and the human subject as tending toward transcendent self-fulfilment in union with God.”²⁶⁸ However, “to the extent that any individual or community, empowered by God’s presence, experiences itself as grounded in the divine, God’s revelation may be found in it.”²⁶⁹ Therefore, “the religions can be interpreted as expressions of a ‘searching memory’, which somehow anticipates God’s culminating gift in Jesus Christ.”²⁷⁰

Dupuis distinguishes three stages in the salvation history. 1. Cosmic or general revelation. In this stage God grants to the hearts of seers the hearing of a secret word, of which the sacred scriptures of the religious traditions of the world contain, at least, traces. 2. “Special” revelation to Israel. In this stage God speaks officially to Israel by the mouth of its prophets. In both of these two stages word of God is ordered, however differently in each, to the plenary revelation in Jesus Christ. 3. Plenary or special Christian revelation, in which, God utters his decisive word in him who is “the Word.”²⁷¹ Dupuis is convinced of the truth that “the history of salvation and

²⁶⁶ Gerald O’Collins writes, “while interpreting anyone’s situation before God, we need to recall the two inseparable dimensions of divine self-communication,” namely, revelation and salvation. Cf. O’Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1993), pp. 80 – 81.

²⁶⁷ The concept of revelation in recent Christian theology has under gone a clear shift of accent from revelation understood primarily as doctrine and communication of divine truths to revelation understood primarily as God’s self manifestation. Cf. O’Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology*.

²⁶⁸ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 100. Avery Dulles distinguishes five models of revelation. He sees these models as complementing and supporting one another, without being mutually exclusive. Among these models, alongside that of revelation as doctrine, he considers those of revelation as “inner experience” and as “new awareness,” both of which are based on divine intervention or aid. He notes that these two models help one to discover the possibility of a divine revelation in other religious traditions, outside the Judeo-Christian tradition.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 107.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 182.

²⁷¹ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 250 – 253.

revelation is one. In its various stages – cosmic, Israelite, and Christian – it bears, in different ways, the seal of the influence of the Holy Spirit.”²⁷² By this he means, “Throughout the stages of the divine revelation, God, in the disposition of divine providence, personally guides humanity toward the divinely set goal. The positive divine disposition of the cosmic revelation, as a personal revelation of God to the nations, includes the divine disposition of the sacred scriptures to those nations. The “seeds of the Word” contained in their scriptures are seminal words of God, from which the influence of the Spirit is not absent. The influence of the Spirit is universal. It extends to the Words uttered by God to humanity in all stages of the self-revelation by that God upon that humanity.”²⁷³

4.2.2. Asymmetrical Complementarity between Christianity and the Religions

Dupuis holds that “revelation is progressive and differentiated.”²⁷⁴ There exists between the revelation inside and outside the Judeo-Christian tradition a true complementarity, which he calls it as *asymmetrical complementarity* – without any prejudice to the decisiveness of the Christ-event.²⁷⁵ Dupuis finds “*asymmetrical complementarity*” between Christianity and other religions. His use of the adjective *asymmetrical* depicts the Christian belief that the divine revelation in Jesus Christ enjoys a unique fullness and completeness and that there is no void to be filled by other revelations and traditions. Dupuis, however, adds one more qualification to the complementarity at work between Christianity and the religions. The mutually asymmetric complementarity that obtains between them is of the *relational* order. This means that, notwithstanding the singular place and the unique significance, which is proper to the mystery of Jesus Christ and to the Christ event in the overall process of God’s involvement with humankind in history, this unique event must be viewed as essentially *relational* to all other divine manifestations in history. God in his eternity has conceived only one design for humankind; it is that unique plan of revelation-salvation which has been progressively unfolding through history and continues to unfold even today. An incomplete mutual complementarity and

²⁷² Ibid. p. 251.

²⁷³ Ibid, p. 251.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 251, cf. also, ibid, p. 247.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 252.

convergence are possible, the complete realization of which, however, will only be unveiled in the *eschaton*. Mutual complementarity, even partial and initial, makes a reciprocal convergence possible.²⁷⁶ The history of Israel and the Christian Church serves, so to speak, as the ‘prime analogue’ for the understanding of what is happening in the stage of cosmic revelation.²⁷⁷ Thus, for Dupuis, divine revelation in different stages throughout salvation history is differentiated, yet complementary.

The scriptures of the world religions, according to him, although they can be called a “divine word,” do not possess the “official character” of the Old Testament. The terms “word of God,” “sacred scriptures,” and “inspiration” are applicable to sacred writings of the religious traditions in a broad sense, but not without a “valid theological foundation.” They express the same reality, which the entire revelation carries at different stages of salvation history. Although the revelation in Jesus Christ is the decisive word of God, there is still room for a complementarity of that divine word, offered not only by the Old Testament, but also by the non-biblical scriptures.²⁷⁸ Dupuis goes further in asserting that the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ does not prevent the possibility of the word of God in other religions from possessing a salvific value both for their own members as well as for Christians.²⁷⁹ Dupuis’ understanding of salvation history and of God’s covenants is very similar to his view of divine revelation. In fact, Dupuis aims to show that both salvation history and divine revelation are mutually related. For him, there is only one history – that is, the history of salvation, which covers the entire history of humankind.²⁸⁰ Moreover, God not only made a covenant with Israel, but also with all the nations; the culmination of the divine-human covenant is achieved in Jesus Christ.²⁸¹ Likewise,

²⁷⁶ Cf. Gerald O’Collins “Jacques Dupuis: His Person and Work,” in D. Kendall / G. O’Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, p. 24. Cf. also, Dupuis, “The Truth Will make You Free: The Theology Religious Pluralism Revisited,” *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999) pp. 211 – 263.

²⁷⁷ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 233, cf. also, *ibid*, pp. 235, 211, 219.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” *Louvain Studies* 24 (1999), p. 236.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 251-253. Cf. also, *idem*. God is Always Greater, *The Tablet*, 27 (2001), 10, p. 1521.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 95.

²⁸¹ Cf. Dupuis, “God is Always Greater,” *The Tablet*, 27 (2001), 10, p. 1520.

Dupuis attempts to show that there is only one, universal divine revelation, which is not limited to biblical history, but extends to all of salvation history or the history of the world.

4.2.3. God's Self-Communication in Other Religions

The concept of revelation, Dupuis notes, is understood differently from one religion to another.²⁸² Within the Christian theology of revelation, the emphasis has shifted from revelation as “primarily doctrine or communication of divine truths” to “event and divine self-disclosure.”²⁸³ According to Rahner, there is a transcendental movement in divine revelation. Likewise, divine grace as divine self-communication is given to all human beings, who by themselves are oriented towards “transcendental fulfilment in union with God.” Thus, religious experiences are grounded in divine grace, and are the bearer of revelation whether they are individual or communal.²⁸⁴ For Rahner, the historical and social character of human beings means that grace must become “word, body, event, symbol.” Religions are the most appropriate expression for this offer of grace. Hence, other religions are, therefore, not excluded from grace. They can be considered legitimate despite the errors and corruptions they may contain. They can be a means for having a right relationship with God and for attaining salvation.²⁸⁵ Rahner considers “transcendence” the most distinctive characteristic of the human spirit, through which the absolute is encountered, non-reflectively in each human act of knowing or loving any particular object.²⁸⁶ Thus the human being is constantly and inevitably surrounded by and ordained to the mystery as the ground and goal of human transcendence.²⁸⁷ For him, there exists an inner

²⁸² For instance, Joseph A. DiNoia writes, “a Catholic theology of religions can affirm the distinctiveness of the aims fostered by other religions without prejudice to an affirmation of the unique valuation of the Christian community or of its doctrines about salvation.” Cf. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, p. 91.

²⁸³ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 238 – 239.

²⁸⁴ Cf. *Ibid*, p. 239.

²⁸⁵ Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol.5, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd), 1966, pp. 121 – 125.

²⁸⁶ Karl Rahner, starting from the truth that God desires to save all humankind, claims that grace must be offered to all. This is not an element that is accidental to human nature. It is part of what it means to be human. There is no “pure” nature. Cf. Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, p. 183.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Rahner, “Anonymous Christians,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, pp. 390 – 392.

unity between human transcendence, God's bestowal of grace, and the mystery of incarnation. Moreover, right from the beginning of creation, God communicates himself to humankind in a radical closeness through the bestowal of grace. This offer of grace at the moment of creation, even prior to the free response of humanity, determines the human nature in its deepest being and should rightly be described as a freely given "supernatural existential."²⁸⁸ For this reason, a human being's experience of transcendence is not purely natural experience of supernatural grace.²⁸⁹

Applying Karl Rahner's theological anthropology of the *supernatural existential*²⁹⁰ to the question of revelation, Dupuis asserts the universality of divine revelation as well as the presence of divine truth in religious traditions. He states: "Religions have their original source in a divine self-manifestation to human beings."²⁹¹ However, for him, it is important to acknowledge some fundamental distinctions among different religions. There is the distinction between the "monotheistic" or "prophetic" religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - and the "mystical" ones from the East. There may be a "common historical origin" or a "family resemblance" among the prophetic religions. Likewise, the mystical religions have common traits such as "wisdom" or "*gnosis*." However, between the two groups, there exists a deep difference to the extent that it leads to distinct worldviews.

²⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 393.

²⁸⁹ For a brief summary on Rahner's *Christocentric inclusivism* cf. Joseph H. Wong, "Anonymous Christians: Karl Rahner's Pneuma Christocentrism and an East West Dialogue", *Theological Studies*, 55 (1994), pp. 609 – 637. Cf. also, Joseph Pandiappallil, *Jesus Christ and Religious Pluralism: Rahnerian Christology and Belief Today*, (New York: Cross Road, 2001).

²⁹⁰ Karl Rahner starts from the human as an existential unity, who is simultaneously *historical* and *transcendental*. On the one hand, the historical dimension of human being refers to the fact that we are always connected to the world through categorical experiences. In this sense, categorical experience is *a posteriori* experience. He maintains that our transcendental knowledge or experience of God, which is conditioned by our transcendentality, is also *a posteriori*, since it is mediated by a categorical encounter with concrete reality in our world, both the world of things and the world of persons. On the other hand, there is an *a priori* or given element in all human beings that makes it possible for them to reach out to the infinite and to receive God's grace. This condition orients us not only in the direction of experiencing God but also in the direction of experiencing ourselves as transcendental subjects. Those two experiences, thus, "are not simply identical, still both of them exist within a unity of such a kind that apart from this unity it is quite impossible for there to be any such experiences at all." Cf. Karl Lehmann / Albert Raffelt, (ed.), *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner's Theological Writings*, (New York: Crossroad, 1993). p. 222.

²⁹¹ Dupuis, "Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism," in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 96.

These differences ought to be taken into account in the search for revelation in other religions.²⁹²

Dupuis affirms that those people, who live under the “cosmic covenant,” too can encounter the “true God,” since, in every divine-human encounter, it is God, who always takes the initiative. This religious experience is offered to people of all times. In other words, divine revelation is available to all. However, for Dupuis, religious experience does not necessarily entail a perfect concept of God. There is a “gap between religious experience and its formulation.” Accordingly, we can never have access to the religious experience of others in its real status. The language that expresses or communicates this experience cannot do this adequately. Thus, in order to explore the religious experience of others and “the hidden elements of truth and grace” in it, one must go beyond the concepts that express the experience. There can be genuine experience found in faulty concepts.²⁹³ Religious experience in the oriental religions “is not always expressed in terms of personal relationship with God.” Dupuis refers to the case of Hinduism, where *advaita* mysticism conceives of religious experience as “an awakening to one’s identity with the Brahman.” Likewise, Buddhism has a “non-theistic appearance” and implies an “impersonal Absolute.” It is different in the case of Christianity and other monotheistic religions, where “religious experience takes the form of an interpersonal dialogue” between God and human beings. For Dupuis, the mystical religions originating from the East are characterized by apophaticism, while the monotheistic or prophetic religions are characterized by cataphaticism. The reason, according to Dupuis, for the limitations of the concept of God in the mystical Asian religions is that “they lack the benefit of the ‘special’ revelation of God in the history of Israel and, a fortiori, the decisive self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”²⁹⁴ The limitations of those religions in enunciating religious experience do not mean that there is the absence of divine revelation in them, nor does it mean that divine revelation in them occurs apart from the revelation in Jesus Christ. Dupuis states: “Despite the limitations marking the enunciation of the experience of God in those traditions, still, wherever there is genuine religious experience, it is surely the God revealed in Jesus Christ who thus enters into the lives

²⁹² Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 240.

²⁹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

²⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 240 – 241.

of men and women, in a hidden, secret fashion. While the concept of God remains incomplete, the interpersonal encounter between God and the human being - for which God takes the initiative, awaiting the response of faith on the part of the human being – is authentic.”²⁹⁵

Dupuis emphasizes that the only source of religious experience and of divine revelation is the one God who has revealed himself in the whole of human history, and fully so in Jesus Christ. God who is one has revealed himself “in many and various ways” (Heb 1:1), culminating in Jesus Christ.²⁹⁶ What he says of the Trinitarian God working in salvation history is also found in his discussion on divine revelation.²⁹⁷ Every personal communication of God necessarily involves the Triune God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. “Whenever here is a personal communication of God, it is always necessary the God of Jesus Christ engages in self-revelation and self-bestowal: that is, the Triune God, Father, Son and Spirit. A Trinitarian structure is, from the stand point of Christian faith, the a priori condition of possibility of every personal divine communication.”²⁹⁸ He affirms that “before God’s self-manifestation culminated in the incarnation of his Word (Jn 1:14), God had already spoken to humankind in the Word-to-become-incarnate.”²⁹⁹ The universal significance of the incarnation of God’s Word notwithstanding, room must be left for his anticipated action in history as well as his enduring influence under other symbols. While affirming the word of God and divine revelation contained in the scriptures of other religious traditions, Dupuis does not overlook the significance of God’s self-communication in Jesus Christ.³⁰⁰ For him, Jesus Christ is the fullness of revelation. However, the revelation in Jesus is not absolute, but relative, since although Jesus is Son of God, he is also a human being; his human consciousness is limited.³⁰¹ The

²⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 241.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology, as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 96.

²⁹⁷ Cf. Dupuis, “God is Always Greater,” *The Tablet*, 27 (2001), 10, p. 1520.

²⁹⁸ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 242.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 243.

³⁰⁰ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free. The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” in *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 246 – 247.

³⁰¹ Cf. Dupuis, “God is Always Greater,” *The Tablet*, 27 (2001) 10, pp. 1520 – 1521; cf. also, idem. “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” in T. Merrigan and J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, pp. 93 – 95.

revelation in Jesus does not prevent the divine revelation from happening continuously in history before and after Christ. By different manners and forms, divine revelation has taken place throughout history. Here, Dupuis distinguishes three stages of revelation, which, however, do not necessarily follow a chronological order. In the first stage, God reveals himself to human beings through the seers and the sages. The scriptures of the world religions contain traces or bear witness to this revelation. In the second stage, “God speaks officially to Israel by the mouth of its prophets.” The Old Testament is the record of this revelation. The divine revelation in both of these stages, however, is ordered towards the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ – the third stage. The New Testament bears witness to this decisive word of God.³⁰²

Furthermore, Dupuis asks: What is the connection between this initial word, uttered by God to human beings, as contained in the holy scriptures of various religious traditions, and the decisive word spoken by God to human beings in Jesus Christ, of which the New Testament constitutes the official record? Letter to the Hebrew clearly states that the word uttered by God in Jesus Christ – in the Son – God’s decisive, and in this sense, definitive word (cf. Heb 1:1). The content of God’s revelation through Jesus Christ is definitive and decisive. But human knowledge regarding God’s revelation and its formulations in language is not so conclusive.³⁰³ Jesus Christ is the fullness of God’s revelation. The fullness of revelation is not, properly speaking, word of the New Testament. It is the very person of Jesus Christ, his deeds and words, his life, his death, and his resurrection – in a word, the Jesus Christ event itself – that constitute the fullness of revelation. In him God has uttered to the world his decisive word, to which nothing can be added by way of divine revelation. Dupuis notes, “This fullness is a matter not of quantity, but of quality. It is owing to his personal identity as Son of God that Jesus Christ is properly speaking, the pinnacle and culmination of the revealed word.”³⁰⁴ Furthermore he clarifies the qualitative fullness of God’s revelation in his Son Jesus Christ: “If divine revelation

³⁰² Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 249 – 250.

³⁰³ Hans Kessler, “Pluralistische Religionstheologie und Christologie“ im Schwager, R. (Hg.), *Christus allein? Der Streit um die pluralistische Religionstheologie*, QD. 160, (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 1996), p. 170.

³⁰⁴ Cf. *Dei Verbum*, 4. For a brief interpretation, cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 173.

attains its plenitude in Jesus, it is because no revelation of the mystery of God can match the depths of what occurred when very God, in the divine Son incarnate, lived in a human key, in a human consciousness, his own divine mystery. This is what took place in Jesus Christ, and it is this that is at the origin of the divine revelation that he delivers to us.”³⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Dupuis holds that the qualitative fullness of the revelation in Jesus Christ is no obstacle to a continuing divine self-revelation through the prophet and sages of other religious traditions. He clearly affirms, “That self-revelation has transpired, and continues to transpire, in history.” Yet, he affirms, “No revelation, however, either before or after Christ, can either surpass or equal the one vouchsafed in Jesus Christ, the divine Son incarnate.”³⁰⁶ But he also holds that “In the entire history of God’s relations with humankind there is more truth and grace than is available and discoverable in the Christian tradition alone.”³⁰⁷ He admits God’s self-revelation outside the Judeo-Christian tradition and accepts that the elements of Truth and grace contained in other religious traditions represent the “authentic words of God, and additional autonomous gifts of God.”³⁰⁸ Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh “has a specific, unique and singular, constitutive and universal character of truth and grace.”³⁰⁹

5. Theology of Logos and Religious Pluralism

Dupuis begins his theology of the Word of God with an insight into the event of Jesus Christ that marks the summit of the divine manifestation of God through his Word and in his Spirit. God’s self-revelation and self-gift to human beings in Jesus Christ is the centre of history and the key for interpreting the entire process of salvation. The Word of God, through the incarnation, has inserted himself personally, once and for all, in the human reality and in the history of the world. Dupuis considers the historical event of Jesus Christ is necessarily particular and circumscribed by the limits imposed upon it by time and space. The human story of Jesus belongs to a precise historical period. He affirms that Christ-event does not

³⁰⁵ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 174.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 174.

³⁰⁷ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 256.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 256.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 256.

exhaust the revealing and saving power of the Word of God. He begins by inquiring a possibility of reducing the salvific meaning of the historic event of Jesus Christ to the advantage of the universal work of God, which knows no such limits. Furthermore, in favour of such an inquiry he states, “that it is really the Word who saves, while the significance of the event of Jesus Christ consists in witnessing to the salvific action of the Word. Otherwise, if one maintains a salvific effectiveness of the risen human being of Jesus in view of Christians, who have recognised him as sacrament of the salvation of in their favour, it would seem necessary that this effectiveness be limited to those who have believed in him. Thus one arrives at the point of saying that, while Christians are saved through Jesus Christ, the members of other religious traditions reach salvation through the universal working of the Word of God.”³¹⁰ Hence, Dupuis speaks of a *distinct*, but not a *separate* action of the Word as such, both before the mystery of the incarnation and after the resurrection of Christ.³¹¹

We have seen that God’s divine plan of salvation for humankind is one and universal. While considering the universal operation of the Logos in the history of all humankind, we need to preserve the unity of the divine plan of salvation, which embraces the whole human history. Dupuis holds that “the becoming-human of the Word of God in Jesus Christ, his human life, death and resurrection, is the culminating point of the process of divine self-communication, the hinge upon which the process holds together, its key of interpretation. The reason is that the Word’s “humanisation” marks the unsurpassed – and unsurpassable – depth of God’s self-communication to human beings, the supreme mode of immanence of his-being with them.”³¹² However, he affirms, “the centrality of the incarnational dimension of God’s economy of salvation must not be allowed to obscure the abiding presence of the action of the divine Word. The enlightening and the saving power of the Logos is not circumscribed by the particularity of the historical event. It transcends all the boundaries of time and space. Through the transcendent power of the Logos, Trinitarian Christology is able to account for the mediatory function of religious traditions in the order of salvation, thus laying the foundation for the recognition of

³¹⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 138 – 139.

³¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 176 – 177.

³¹² Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 320 – 321; cf. also, *idem. Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, pp. 99 – 104; *idem. Introduction to Christology*, pp. 144 – 150.

pluralism in God's way of dealing with humankind."³¹³ Thus, as for him, while the event of Jesus Christ is "constitutive" of universal salvation, other religious ways nonetheless have a salvific significance for their followers in the one and the same divine plan of salvation.

Dupuis, in his theology of the Word of God, aims at showing the relevance and importance of the Word as such for a theology of religions capable of uncovering the salvific value of other religious traditions for their followers. Therefore, he states, "there is a salvific working of the Word as such, distinct from the Word operating through his human being in Jesus Christ, risen and glorified, though in "union" with it."³¹⁴ For him, this work of the Word of God as such remains related to the event of Jesus Christ in the single divine plan of salvation for humanity, which culminates in the mystery of the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ and in the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection. For him, both aspects of the universal action of the Word as such and of the universal salvific meaning of the event of Jesus Christ are combined in the single economy of salvation willed by God for humanity. This study seeks to analyse Dupuis's position regarding the universal working of the Word of God with regard to the salvation for the members of other religious traditions.

5.1. The Logo-centric Model in the Christian Theology of Religions

In the theology of religions, Dupuis considers that it is possible to speak of an enduring, enlightening and saving activity of the Word of God, without separating it from the salvific significance of the event of Jesus Christ, as well as without making compromise to the 'Christological dogma in the teachings of the Church'. In other words, "to speak of an action of the Word of God not only before the incarnation of the Word but also after the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ, distinct from the salvific action through his humanity, provided this continued action of the Word be not 'separated' from the event in which the insuperable 'concentration' of the self-revelation of God according to the one divine plan of salvation of humankind takes place."³¹⁵

³¹³ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 321.

³¹⁴ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 139.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 144.

In the theology of religions, among the models that are being proposed as possible substitutes for the Christocentric model, there is a Logo-centric model with a clear emphasis on the universal active presence of the Word of God in the world and in history. In this model, the *Logos* is shown as an autonomous and independent agent, transcending particular historicity of the Christ event, whose distinct action constitutes alternative economy of divine salvation. The protagonists of the Logo-centric model find some basis for the universal presence and operation of the *Logos* in the biblical and the post-biblical tradition of the early apologetics. The conclusion is being drawn that in every event and in all circumstances it is the Word of God who saves, not precisely the Word-of-God-made-flesh, that is Jesus Christ.³¹⁶ In the words of Aloysius Pieris, “He who reveals, who saves and transforms is the Word himself.”³¹⁷ However, “The Christ” is a title; a title does not save. As for Jesus, he is “he in whom Christians recognise the Word, as seen, heard and touched by human senses.”³¹⁸ He, therefore, holds that in every event, the Word as such is the one that saves and that Jesus Christ is he in whom the Word is recognised by Christians.³¹⁹

Dupuis, in order to counter the tendencies in the Logo-centric theologies that distance or erroneously detach the universal action of the Word from the salvific effectiveness of the event of Jesus Christ, affirms that, “while both aspects are distinct notwithstanding the personal identity of Jesus Christ with the Word-Son of God, they remain at the same time united in the single divine plan for humanity, so that they can never be separated as though they represented two parallel economies of salvation.”³²⁰ He further clarifies his position as, “The anticipated presence and action of the *Logos* do not, however, prevent the New Testament from seeing in the Word incarnate, of whom the Prologue of the Gospel according to John also speaks

³¹⁶ Cf. Aloysius Pieris, “An Asian Paradigm: Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions,” *Month*, 26 (1993) pp. 129 – 134; idem. “Universality of Christianity,” *VJTR*, 57 (1993), pp. 591 – 595; idem. “Inculturation in Asia: A Theological Reflection on an Experience,” in *Jahrbuch für kontextuelle Theologien*, (Frankfurt: Verlag für interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1994), pp. 59 – 71; idem. “The Problem of Universality and Inculturation with regard to Patterns of Theological Thinking,” *Concilium*, 6 (1994), pp. 70 –79.

³¹⁷ Pieris, “Inculturation in Asia: A Theological Reflection on an Experience,” in *Jahrbuch für kontextuelle Theologien*, p. 60.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 60.

³¹⁹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 195 – 196.

³²⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 139.

(1:14) as the universal saviour of humankind. Christianity has traditionally understood this to mean that the anticipated action of the Word of God is related to the event of Jesus Christ in which God's plan for humankind comes to a climax. The Word-to-be-incarnate and the Word-incarnate are one indivisible reality. Jesus Christ incarnate Word, remains at the centre of God's plan of salvation and of its unfolding in history. Logocentrism and Christocentrism are not opposed to each other; they call to each other in a unique dispensation."³²¹

Dupuis finds much truth in the Logo-centric perspective for a theology of religions. But for him it is not a substitute for Christocentrism. For him, they are inseparable, as he states, "Rather than being mutually opposed, they call to each other in a unique dispensation."³²² From this perspective, he tries to show the importance and relevance of a theology of the Word for an open theology of religions. He affirms that there exists a continuing action of the Word-to-be-incarnate, which is combined in the sole divine plan for humanity, with the universal salvific value of the historical event of Jesus Christ. He writes, "The fact remains, however, while clearly professing the universal presence of the Logos ... the New Testament assigns to the Son of God, or the Word of God made human in Jesus Christ, the universal salvation of humankind."³²³ The historical event of Jesus Christ retains its universal salvific value, working through the risen humanity of Jesus in all times and in all place; but it is part of the wider context of the divine manifestations in the Word as such through the entire history of humanity. Thus, he situates the possibility of the divine salvation for the people of other faith in the single divine plan of salvation, willed by God for whole human family, being constantly realised in the 'inclusiveness of the event of Jesus Christ' and in the universality of the active presence of the Word.

5.2. The Universal and Operative Presence of the Word of God

Jacques Dupuis considers that in the Christian traditions, there exists the awareness of the universal presence of God through his Word. Dupuis recognises the *trans-historic* operation of the Logos throughout the entirety of salvation history,

³²¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 196.

³²² Dupuis, "Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism," in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 86.

³²³ *Ibid.* p. 86.

from the point of creation onward.³²⁴ The universal enlightening and saving activity of the Word, without being separated from the Word-incarnated, continues to enlighten the believers in their diverse religious traditions and cultures.³²⁵ It is this universal and continuous involvement of God in human history that allows for a positive approach to the religions of the world. It must be kept in mind that the Bible was not directly concerned with the question which today's theology of religions is seeking to answer in the present context of religious pluralism. Yet, we find inspiration in the biblical literature for our positive approach to the believers of diverse religious and their religious traditions, principally in the biblical faith in God's universal involvement with humankind in a dialogue of salvation. Moreover, in this section, we analyse the implications of the universal presence and operation of the Word of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition as well as in other religious traditions for a theological evaluation of the other religious traditions. It reflects on the universal sphere of the non-incarnate Logos and the universal ministry of the Holy Spirit, extending even outside the visible boundaries of the Church.

In his theology of the Logos, Dupuis makes a distinction between the activity of the Word-to-be-incarnate and those of the Word-incarnate,³²⁶ but he does not separate them in the person of Jesus Christ, as Logos is inseparable from Jesus Christ, and the activities of the pre-existent Word are in view of its incarnation in Jesus Christ, and after the historical event of Jesus Christ all the activities of the Word are inseparable from those of the person of Jesus Christ. The theology of the Word of God can help us to see the positive role, which the other religions traditions can exercise in the divine plan of salvation for their members. In this context, Dupuis suggests that, if all religions have their original source in a self-manifestation of God to human beings through his Word, the principle of pluralism finds its primary foundation in the superabundant richness and variety of the self-manifestations of God to humanity. Dupuis adopts a clear affirmation of the permanent integrity of the divine nature and the action of the Word, and of their continuing "distinction". It is from this permanent integrity and continued 'distinction' of the divine action of the

³²⁴ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 254.

³²⁵ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 50 – 52.

³²⁶ Cf. Dupuis, *God is Always Greater*, *The Tablet*, 27 (2001) 10, p. 1521. Cf. also, idem. "The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited," *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 236 – 237.

Word that the possibility of a continuing action of the Word as such is derived, distinct from that which takes place through the humanity of Jesus Christ. He writes,

“The Word of God, as incarnate, remains Word of God; God remains God. ... That means that the Word continues to share, according to his personal character, in the mystery of the Trinity, the divine action in the world. The Word remains God: his divine eternity is not absorbed by his temporality as man; his creative function is not suppressed by his being a man (being himself a creature); his ‘illuminative’ power is not reduced to his revelation of God in human words. In short it means that the Word remains that which he is in the mystery of the Trinity, though, being united in the person of the Word through the historic mystery of the incarnation, the very humanity of Jesus has become part in a mysterious way, of the mystery of God himself. And this is why the continuing and invigorating action of the Word as such is ‘related’ to the ‘concentration’ of the divine salvation in the Word insofar as he is incarnate in Jesus Christ, and to the permanent actuality of the historic event through the risen condition of his humanity.”³²⁷

Dupuis sees no contradiction between the universal and operative presence of the Word of God and the unique salvific meaning of the historical event of Jesus Christ. He uses three terms to substantiate this position: “separation,” “distinction” and “identification.”³²⁸ He writes, “The universal action of the Word and the historical event of Jesus Christ are neither identified nor separated; they remain, however, distinct. Both the elements must be mutually harmonised in the divine plan for humanity. While it is true that that the work of the Word extends beyond the limits of space and time and therefore cannot be reduced, by way of wrong identification, to the historical happening of Jesus Christ, it is at the same time true that the personal insertion of the into the history of humanity through the mystery of incarnation has in the development of the history of salvation, a totally unheard-of meaning, as “constitutive” of salvation.”³²⁹

However, in his theology of the Logos, Dupuis makes a distinction between the Logos and Jesus Christ, even though he does not separate the Logos from the person

³²⁷ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 144 – 145.

³²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 156.

³²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 156.

of Jesus Christ.³³⁰ He writes, “A firm holding on to the personal identity between the Word of God and Jesus Christ is necessary as also between Jesus and the Christ. It is unique singularity, constitutive of the personal identity, which confers on Christ a universal significance.”³³¹ The personal identity between the Word of God and Jesus Christ is that Jesus Christ is none other than the Word of God made man in human history. Therefore no separation between them can be affirmed which would deny the personal identity of Jesus as the Son of God. This is the essential meaning of the mystery of the “hypostatic union,” that is union of the humanity of Jesus with the divine person of the Word. This union is realised independently of the kenotic or glorified state of Jesus’ human nature. The transition from the kenotic state to the glorified state involves a real and profound transformation of the whole human nature of Jesus. The humanity of the Word-of-God-incarnate began to exist in time with the mystery of incarnation, being submitted to the conditions of time and space; but it continues beyond death, in the glorified and risen state, having become henceforth ‘meta-historical’ or ‘trans-historical,’ that is, it is beyond the conditioning of time and space. Due to this real transformation the salvific meaning of the Christ event and of the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus remains present through all times and in all places.³³²

Notwithstanding this universality of the Christ-event, Dupuis sees that the historical event of Jesus Christ, of itself and of necessity, is particular and circumscribed by the limits imposed upon it by time and space. The human story of Jesus belongs to a precise historical period. The mystery of the resurrection itself is also located in human history, even though it introduces the human being of Jesus into a condition that extends beyond history. In and through the glorified state of the Risen One, the historical event of salvation becomes and remains present for all times and places; yet it is equally true that even that event does not exhaust – and cannot exhaust – the revealing and saving power of the Word of God. While Jesus’ human

³³⁰ Cf. Dupuis, “God is Always Greater,” *The Tablet*, 27 (2001) 10, p. 1521. cf. also, idem. “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 236 – 237.

³³¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 140.

³³² Cf. *Ibid.* p. 158.

nature can never be separated from the person of the Word of God, neither can the two ever be identified, as the two natures remain distinct in the personal union.³³³

Through the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word of God has inserted himself personally, once and for all, in the human reality and in the history of the world. The Word was undoubtedly manifested in Jesus Christ in the most complete way possible in history, indeed in the most profoundly human way that is possible to conceive, and therefore in the way best adapted to our human nature. But, paradoxically, this very human way of self-manifestation involves in itself and by its very nature its own limitations. The Word of God remains beyond whatever can be manifested and revealed in the human nature of Jesus, assumed personally by him. In his humanity, therefore, Jesus Christ is “universal sacrament” – the efficacious sign – of the mystery of salvation which God offers to the whole of humankind through his Word; but the God who saves through him remains beyond the human being of Jesus, notwithstanding his personal identity with the Word, even when he has reached his glorified state. Jesus Christ, risen and glorified does not substitute for the Father; neither does his glorified humanity exhaust the Word himself which is never totally contained any historical manifestation. When the Word of God became human in Jesus Christ, God’s self-communication to humanity reached its height. Here is the unsurpassed – and unsurpassable – key to the history of salvation.³³⁴ But the permanent action of God’s Word as such remains unrestricted by the particular historical event of Jesus Christ. The Christ-event, however inclusively present, does not exhaust the power of the Word of God, who became flesh in Jesus Christ. And, if the Word remains God, he continues to act as God, beyond his own human action. The action of the Word as such exceeds that of the Word-incarnate in his glorified humanity.

The universal salvific value of the historical event of Jesus Christ, according to Dupuis, leaves space for an illuminating and salvific action of the Word as such, both before the incarnation and after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The entire economy of salvation can be seen as made up of various divine manifestations through the Word. But the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ involved ‘something totally

³³³ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 159.

³³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 159.

new' owing to its personal coming into the flesh.³³⁵ Thus, the salvific action of God, which always works within the framework of a single divine plan, is unique and, at the same time multifaceted. It never abstracts from the Christ event, in which its highest historical density is found. Yet, the action of the Word is not exclusively linked to its becoming human historically in Jesus Christ. The mediation of the salvific grace of God to humanity takes on different dimensions, which have to be combined and integrated. Dupuis observes that, "The Christ-event, while it is inclusively present and actual in different times and places, does not exhaust the power of the Word of God, who became flesh in Jesus Christ. The working of the Word goes beyond the limits, which mark the working presence of the humanity of Jesus even in his glorified state, just as the person of the Word goes beyond the human nature of Jesus Christ, notwithstanding the 'hypostatic union,' that is, the union in the person."³³⁶ The Word of God was operative before its incarnation, and remains operative in the whole history of salvation, even after the event of Jesus Christ, beyond the boundaries of Christianity.

Thus, Dupuis clearly maintains the unity of the divine design for the salvation of humanity, which embraces all human history. The Word becoming man in Jesus Christ – the whole Christ-event – is the climax of the historical process of divine self-communication. And so he also maintains the centrality of the incarnation in the salvific economy of God. But he does not allow it to overshadow the permanent presence and action of the divine Word. For him, the illumination and the salvific power of the Word are not circumscribed by the particularity of the historical event. They transcend every barrier in space and time. The historical event of Jesus Christ and the universal operative presence of the Word of God, do not constitute two different parallel economies of salvation. They represent complementary and inseparable aspects of a single economy of salvation for all humankind. From this perspective, Dupuis understands then how "the elements of truth and grace"³³⁷ can be found in the other religious traditions of the world, and how these serve, for their followers, as "paths" or "ways" to salvation. Thus, Dupuis' theology of Logos helps us to catch a glimpse of how seeds of truth and grace can be present in other religious

³³⁵Cf. *Ibid.* p. 160.

³³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 160.

³³⁷ *Ad Gentes*, 9.

traditions of the world, which serve, for their followers, as ways of salvation. It is the Word of God who sowed his seeds in the religious traditions. And these are not to be understood as merely “stepping stones,” gifts of nature, awaiting divine self-manifestation to take place in some indeterminate future, but as true divine self-manifestation and self-giving in their own right, however initial and germinal.

5.3. Theological Foundations for the Universal Operative Presence of the Logos

Dupuis, in order to show the importance and the relevance of the theology of the Logos for an open theology of religious pluralism draws help from the data of revelation, the Logos theology of the early Patristic Tradition of the Church and the contemporary theology of the Logos. Relying on the biblical tradition, he insists on the universal presence and efficacy of the Word of God as well as its distinct reality.³³⁸ According to him, the Johannine vision of the divine Logos links with the divine economy of the Word of God and of divine Wisdom in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament theology, the Word of God (*Dabar*) and his Wisdom (*Hokmah*) stood for Yahweh’s self-manifestation in deeds and words in human history. John now sees the culmination of God’s universal manifestation through the Logos – with the difference, however, that through his incarnation the Logos is now revealed as a person distinct from God, yet one shared with God in the divine life “in the beginning” (Jn 1:1), later to enter into human history as a human being (cf. Jn 1:14). Dupuis writes, “The Word continues to be the one who “was in the beginning with God” and by means of whom “everything was made” (cf. Jn 1: 1-3), without the human nature of Jesus, which was not yet in existence, being able to serve as an instrument for the divine act of creation. Similarly, the Word remains still the true light, that which “enlightens every man coming into the world” (Jn 1:9) beyond the salvific action of the Word incarnate through his humanity.”³³⁹ Dupuis sees that Johannine theology of the Logos,³⁴⁰ in which the Logos embodies the universal self-

³³⁸ Cf. Dupuis, “God is Always Greater”, *The Tablet*, 27 (2001) 10, p. 1520. Cf. also idem. “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 84.

³³⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 144 – 145.

³⁴⁰ For John’s Theology of Logos cf. R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to John*, (New York: Crossroad, 1987), pp. 253 – 254.

manifestation of God throughout history, offers widest New Testament perspective on God's universal involvement with humankind. Dupuis asks whether the Logos of whom the three early Fathers of the Church speak, refer to the Word of God which was already present and active in human history previous to his incarnation in Jesus Christ. If this is the case, what is being affirmed here is a universal presence and action of the God's immanent Logos in human history. This interpretation also presupposes a due reference to the Logos-theology in the prologue of the Gospel according to John and the literary personification of the Word of God (*Dabar*) which in the Old Testament stood for God inasmuch as he manifests himself through deeds and words in history. The prologue of the Gospel according to John already integrated the features of the *logos* of the Stoic philosophy into its concept of the Word of God acting in history. Likewise, the early Fathers of the Church continued such integration.

Dupuis sees certain similarity or even a consistency in the theology of the Logos of the three early Fathers of the Church, namely, Saint Justin, a Philosopher and most important of the Greek apologists; Saint Irenaeus, the founder of the theology of history; Saint Clement of Alexandria, the first speculative theologian. Their theology of Logos makes reference to a manifestation of God in Logos before the incarnation of the Word, indeed throughout the human history and from creation itself;³⁴¹ for all three, "the manifestation of God in the Logos culminates in his becoming human in Jesus Christ – an event which, while being prepared by previous manifestations, is nonetheless entirely new and unexpected."³⁴² They take recourse to different concepts to characterise the action of the Logos. Moreover, we find the concept of Logos-sower in Justin, Logos-revealer in Irenaeus, covenantal Logos in Clement.³⁴³ These authors recognised the influence of the Word of God in the philosophy that is not devoid of religious elements, as preparation for the message of

³⁴¹ For Dupuis' detailed study on the theology of the Logos of the early Fathers of the Church cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 53 – 83. For a brief summary on the doctrine of the Logos in the early Fathers of the Church, cf. Dupuis, *The Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 147 – 156.

³⁴² Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 70.

³⁴³ Cf. Chrys Saldanha, *Divine Pedagogy: Patristic View of Non-Christian Religions*, (Rome: Liberia Ataneo Salesiano, 1984), pp. 185 – 187.

Jesus Christ. The wisdom of God present in the one and the other functioned as the meeting point between them.

However, the early Fathers of the Church often interpreted Logos as the principle of intelligibility of creation, world and history. According to St. Justin, some individuals, Greek philosophers in particular, have allowed themselves to be guided by the divine Logos, in whom every human being has received participation and who at a definite time became incarnate in Jesus. Similarly, Clement of Alexandria recognises that some philosophers have allowed themselves to be acted upon by the divine Logos universally present and active.³⁴⁴ The early Fathers were concerned about the “entire newness” which the coming in flesh of the Word of God brought about. This did not prevent them from asserting as well a universal active presence of the Word of God previous to the incarnation; these Logophanies announced and prepared the Word’s decisive manifestation in the flesh. They recognised his action in particular in Greek philosophy, which in their view contained not merely human reasoning; but such wisdom, piety and religiosity as needed to assigned to the action of the Word of God. They proclaimed their conviction about the underlying continuity which existed between the Word’s partial manifestation through human history and his decisive disclosure in the incarnation; at the same time they stressed the discontinuity by affirming the thorough newness of God’s advent in human flesh. The relation between the old and the new was, as they saw it, one of continuity-in-discontinuity.³⁴⁵

Thus, for Dupuis, the theology of Logos of the early Fathers of the Church provides a valid foundation for a positive view of other religious traditions in the divine economy of salvation. These “seeds” cannot be seen as “merely natural human endowments awaiting an eventual divine manifestation.” They “represent an actual manifestation of God”;³⁴⁶ although they may be incomplete. He writes, “the incomparable enlightening force of the divine Word – which was “the true light that enlightens every human being,” by coming into the world (Jn 1:9) – was universally operative before its manifestation in the flesh, and remains operative through the whole history of salvation, even after the event of Jesus Christ and beyond the

³⁴⁴ Cf. Hacker, *Theological Foundations of Evangelisation*, (St Augustin: Styler Verlag, 1980), pp. 39 – 46.

³⁴⁵ Cf. Chrys Saldanha, *Divine Pedagogy: Patristic View of Non-Christian Religions*, p. 161.

³⁴⁶ Cf. Dupuis, “God is Always Greater”, *The Tablet*, 27 (2001) 10, p. 1521.

boundaries of Christianity.”³⁴⁷ In the light of the theology of the Logos of the early Fathers of the Church, he concludes that not only people could, in fact, be “illuminated” by the Word of God, but also, human enterprises could become channels through which the divine light reaches persons. It follows from this that religious traditions, in which the experiences with the divine truth of followers and prophets of peoples all over the world are recorded contain seeds of “truth and grace”³⁴⁸ sown in them by the Word, by means of which his illuminating virtue and strength remain operative. Therefore, he affirms, “the divine Word continues even now to sow his seeds among peoples and religious traditions: revealed truth and salvific grace are present in them through his action”.³⁴⁹ Through universal enlightening action of the Word of God in other religious traditions, the believers of other religions are oriented towards God to become the children of God, as it is part of the universal saving will of God who “wants everyone to be saved and reach the full knowledge of truth” (1Tim 2:3-4). It is the Word of God who went sowing his seeds in the religious traditions. These seeds are not to be understood as representing merely natural human endowments awaiting an eventual divine manifestation. They represent an actual divine self-manifestation and self-gift of God through his Word.

Dupuis’ position has been affirmed by other theologians, who agree to see the salvific action of the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ as the sacrament of a broader action, action, that of the eternal Word of God the whole religious history of humanity. For instance, we can find Claude Geffré holding a similar position, that is, “Jesus is the icon of the living God in a unique manner, and we need not wait for another ‘mediator’. But this does not lead us to identify the historically contingent aspect of Jesus with his ‘Christic’ or divine aspect. The very law of God’s incarnation through the mediation of history leads to think that Jesus does not put an end to the history of God’s manifestations ... In conformity with the traditional view of the fathers of the Church, it is, therefore, possible to see the economy of the Son incarnate as the sacrament of a broader economy, that, namely, of the eternal Word of

³⁴⁷ Dupuis, *The Christianity and the Religions*, p. 160.

³⁴⁸ *Ad Gentes*, 9.

³⁴⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 160.

God which coincides with the religious history of humankind.”³⁵⁰ Therefore, he insists, “without producing a ruinous dissociation between the eternal Word and the Word incarnate, it is legitimate ... to consider the economy of the Word incarnate as the sacrament of a broader economy, that of the eternal Word of God which coincides with the religious history of all humanity.”³⁵¹ Similarly, Léon-Dufour affirms that we must speak not only of the universal action of the Word-to-be-incarnate before the incarnation, but also of the continuing action of the Word as such after the incarnation of the word and after the resurrection of Christ.³⁵² B. Senècal too affirms the same, with reference to the meaning of this working of the Word of God for the salvation of the members of other religious traditions.³⁵³ Furthermore, Dupuis finds support for his theology of the Logos in the statement of the Indian Theological Association regarding the “significance of Jesus Christ in the context of religious pluralism in India”:

“Celebrating the gracious and living mystery of God, we are not only aware of the Spirit of God “who blows where he wills”, but also the Word of God who speaks to the peoples through various manifestations in different ways (cf. Heb 1:1) and whom we profess as the one who became incarnate in Jesus. We gratefully acknowledge that it is our experience of the incarnate Jesus that leads us to the discovery of the cosmic dimension of the presence and action of the Word. We realise that we can neither ‘confuse’ nor ‘separate’ these different manifestations of the word in history, and in various cultures and religions. We joyfully proclaim our own experience of the Word in Jesus, on the one hand, and on the other,

³⁵⁰ Claude Geffré, « La singularité du christianisme à l’âge du pluralisme religieux » J. Doré and C. Theobald, (ed.), *Penser la foi: Recherches en théologie aujourd’hui: Mélanges offerts à Joseph Moingt*, (Paris: Cerf – Arras, 1993), pp. 365 – 366.

³⁵¹ Claude Geffré, « Théologie chrétienne et dialogue interreligieux » *Revue de l’Institut Catholique de Paris* 38 (1992), 1, p. 72.

³⁵² Cf. Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l’Evangile selon Saint Jean*, vol. 1, (Paris : Seuil, 1988), pp. 62 – 144.

³⁵³ For instance, B. Senècal, with an explicit reference to the exegesis of John 1: 9, proposed by Léon-Dufour, writes, “By not identifying straight away the Logos with Jesus-the-Christ, it is easy to conceive a broad revealing action of the Logos throughout the history of salvation, not only before but also after the incarnation.” Idem, *Jésus à la rencontre de Gautama le Bouddha* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), p. 213.

we also seek to relate in an open and positive way to the other manifestations of the Word as they are part of one divine mystery.”³⁵⁴

Dupuis holds that the divine operations of the Logos far exceed the limits imposed upon it by assuming the human nature. The distinction between the human and divine natures in Jesus Christ allows us to give proper emphasis to the saving power of the Logos that extends beyond the human person of Jesus of Nazareth, and see the possibility of its operation in other religious traditions.³⁵⁵ This position is true to the *Symbol of Chalcedon*, of the General Council of Chalcedon (451), which states, “one and the same Christ, the only-begotten, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division, and without separation. The distinction was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (*prosopon*) and one hypostasis. He is not split or divided into two persons, but he is the same only-begotten, God and Word, Lord, Jesus Christ.”³⁵⁶ In the same way, the third Council of Constantinople (681) teaches, “In the same our Lord Jesus Christ, our true God, we glory in proclaiming two natural actions, without division, without change, without separation, without confusion, namely a divine action and a human action.”³⁵⁷ Furthermore, the Council makes it clear that “The difference of natures in that same and unique hypostasis is recognised by the fact that each of the two natures wills and performs what is proper to it in communion with the other”³⁵⁸ This distinction gives insight into the universal salvific operation of the Logos, extending beyond the human person of Jesus of Nazareth, in other religious traditions.³⁵⁹ The Word exists in the eternity of the divine mystery. He also exist and is present and working throughout the history of the world and humanity, which in fact becomes the history

³⁵⁴ Cf. E. D’Lima / M. Gonsalves, (ed.), *What Does Jesus Christ Mean? Meaningfulness of Jesus Christ amid Religious Pluralism in India*, (Bangalore: Indian Theological Association, 1999), p. 182.

³⁵⁵ Cf. G. O’Collins, “Jacques Dupuis: His Person and Work,” Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins (eds.), *In Many and Diverse Ways*, pp. 23 – 24.

³⁵⁶ N. D. no. 615.

³⁵⁷ N. D. no. 636.

³⁵⁸ N. D. no. 637.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Dupuis, “God is Always Greater”, *The Tablet*, 27:10 (2001), p. 1521. Cf. also, idem. “‘The Truth Will Make You Free’ The Theology Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 236 – 237.

of salvation in as much as it comprehends the totality of the self-manifestations of God to humanity through his Word. The Word of God is therefore operative through the whole of history, both before and after the mystery of Incarnation.³⁶⁰ If so, that must mean that the Word of God keeps exercising, in union with the Father, the actions which belong to him by reason of his specific character in the divine mystery: mediation in creation (cf. Jn 1:3), a universal enlightening action with regard to human beings (cf. Jn 1:9), even the communication to them of the power to become children of God (cf. Jn 1:12).

Dupuis neither identifies nor separates the universal action of the Word and the historical event of Jesus Christ; they remain, however, distinct. Both elements find their unity in the one divine plan for the humanity. “While it is true that the work of the Word extends beyond the limits of space and time and therefore cannot be reduced, by way of wrong identification, to historical happening of Jesus Christ; it is at the same time true that the personal insertion of the Word of God into the history of humanity, through the mystery of incarnation has, in the development of the history of salvation, a totally unheard-of meaning, as ‘constitutive’ of salvation.”³⁶¹ For by identifying the salvific action of the Logos in the history of all humankind, one is able to indicate the same in other religious traditions for their followers. Jesus Christ remains inclusive for the salvation of humankind and the Christ-event remains the climax of salvation history.

5.4. Critique on Dupuis’ Theology of the Logos

The paradigm of Logocentrism tends to separate the salvific work of the Word of God-to-be-incarnate from the Word-incarnate in Jesus Christ in two different ways: either the distinct action of the Word is considered as representing an economy of salvation distinct from that in Jesus Christ and parallel to it; or, in the economy of salvation which is one, salvific action can no longer be attributed to the Word as incarnate, but to the Word himself, independently of his being human, whatever significance this being may have in the order of salvation.³⁶² The paradigm of Logocentrism, analysed from a Catholic perspective, has the tendencies to detach

³⁶⁰ Pope Leo the Great held that while becoming man, the “Word does not lose the glory which is his in equality with the Father.” Cf. N. D. no. 612.

³⁶¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and Other Religions*, p. 156 –157.

³⁶² *Ibid.* p. 139.

erroneously the universal action of the Word from the salvific effectiveness of the event of Jesus Christ. It is contrary to the Christian Faith and Revelation to hold for two parallel economies of salvation one that of Word, independently of his being human, and the other that of Jesus Christ-Word-incarnate. The Christian faith clearly upholds that “Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, and he alone, is the Son and the Word of the Father. The Word, which “was in the beginning with God” (Jn 1:2) is the same as he who “became flesh” (Jn 1:14). In Jesus, “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16), “the whole fullness of divinity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9). He is the “only begotten Son of the Father, who is in the bosom of the Father” (Jn 1:18), his “beloved Son, in whom we have redemption ... In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him, God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself, on earth and in the heavens, making peace by the blood of his Cross” (Col 1:13-14; 19-20).”³⁶³

The *notification* on Dupuis’ *Toward Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* points out that it is “contrary to the Catholic faith to not only posit a separation between the Word and Jesus, or between the Word’s salvific activity and that of Jesus, but also to maintain that there is a salvific activity of the Word as such in his divinity, independent of the humanity of the Incarnate Word.”³⁶⁴ The *Symbol of Chalcedon* affirms clearly that Jesus Christ is perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity; the one and the same person is true God and true man. The General Council of Chalcedon (451) states “the one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man composed of rational soul and body, the same one in being (*homoousios*) with the Father as to the divinity and one in being with us as to the humanity.”³⁶⁵ The Chalcedonian doctrine formulates the heart of Christian belief in Jesus Christ regarding the presence of two natures in one person. Jesus Christ as the “concrete universal,” is at once the Logos and an utterly unique historical figure. The Logos, while completely revealed in Jesus Christ, is simultaneously free to act in other, less complete manifestations throughout history. Because of the universality of the Logos, other religious traditions may in fact participate in the mediation of Jesus Christ.

³⁶³ *Dominus Iesus*, 10.

³⁶⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 335 – 336.

³⁶⁵ N. D. no. 614.

The conciliar and post-conciliar theology clearly affirms the personal identity between the Word of God and Jesus Christ and also Jesus and the Christ. It is the unique singularity, constitutive of personal identity, which confers on Christ a universal significance. The Catholic Church, down through the centuries, has affirmed the inseparability of the Word of God and Jesus Christ according to the Christian faith. Even though it may be legitimate for Dupuis to speak of the operation of the Word-to-be-incarnate, which is distinct form that of the Word-incarnate, but it is inseparably related to Jesus Christ the Word-incarnate. *Redemptoris Missio* clearly states “To introduce any sort of separation between the Word and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian Faith ... Jesus is the Incarnate Word – a single and indivisible person ... Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, he is the Word of God made man for the salvation of all ... In the Process of discovering and appreciating the manifold gifts – especially the spiritual treasures – that God has bestowed on every people, we cannot separate these gifts from Jesus Christ, who is at the centre of God’s plan of salvation.”³⁶⁶ Hence, “One cannot separate Jesus from the Christ.”³⁶⁷ Similarly, “it is contrary to the Catholic faith to introduce separation between the salvific action of the Word as such and that of the Word made man. With the incarnation, all the salvific actions of the Word of God are always done in unity with the human nature that he assumed for the salvation of all people. The one subject which operates in the two natures, human and divine, is the single person of the Word”³⁶⁸ The personal identity between the Word of God and Jesus Christ in virtue of the assumption of the humanity of Jesus into the divine person of the Word of God through the mystery of the ‘hypostatic union’ must therefore always be maintained. It follows from this that in the event of Jesus Christ the Word-to-be-incarnate cannot be separated form that of the Word-incarnate, in such a way as to attribute the salvific work to the pre-existent Word exclusively to the detriment of the humanity of Jesus.

Dominus Iesus cautions against dangers of certain theological positions that are in profound conflict with the Christian Faith, “In contemporary theological reflection there often emerges an approach to Jesus of Nazareth that considers him a particular, finite, historical figure, who reveals the divine not in an exclusive way, but

³⁶⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 6.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 6.

³⁶⁸ *Dominus Iesus*. 10. Cf. also, N. D. no. 612.

in a way complementary with other revelatory and salvific figures. The Infinite, the Absolute, the Ultimate Mystery of God would thus manifest itself to humanity in many ways and in many historical figures: Jesus of Nazareth would be one of these. More concretely, for some, Jesus would be one of the many faces which the Logos has assumed in the course of time to communicate with humanity in a salvific way.”³⁶⁹ Therefore, it categorically rejects any separation between the Word of God and Jesus Christ in order “to justify the universality of Christian salvation as well as the fact of religious pluralism”, along with the notion that “there is an economy of the eternal Word that is valid also outside the Church and is unrelated to her, in addition to an economy of the incarnate Word.”³⁷⁰ Similarly, *Gaudium et spes* affirms that “The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh, so that as perfect man he could save all humankind and sum up all things in himself. The Lord ... is he whom the Father raised from the dead, exalted and placed at his right hand, constituting him judge of the living and the dead.”³⁷¹ Likewise, *Dominus Iesus* reasserts the universal salvific mediation of Jesus Christ, and states, “It is, likewise, contrary to the Catholic faith to introduce a separation between the salvific action of the Word as such and that of the Word made man. With the incarnation, all the salvific actions of the Word of God are always done in unity with the human nature that he has assumed for the salvation of all people. The one subject which operates in the two natures, human and divine, is the single person of the Word.”³⁷²

Dupuis’ theology of Logos seems to go beyond the doctrinal limits set by the conciliar and post-conciliar teachings of the Church in the light Christian faith and tradition. His approach to the Christ-event as one which is circumscribed in human history and so limited in its salvific, but at the same time, his next approach to Christ event as universal and constitutive for the salvation of all humankind seem to conflict with one another. Dupuis affirms that Christ event is “unavoidably limited by the particularity of history.”³⁷³ Dupuis position on the universal operations of the Word of God as such, beyond the limits of time and space, and the boundaries of

³⁶⁹ *Dominus Iesus*, 9.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 9.

³⁷¹ *Gaudium et spes*, 45.

³⁷² *Dominus Iesus*, 10. Cf. also, N. D. no. 612.

³⁷³ Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 85.

Christianity, when compare to the historical particularity of the Christ-event, seem to pose certain amount limitations on the Christ-event. Dupuis holds that “in every event and in all circumstances it is Word of God who saves, not precisely the Word-of-God-made-flesh, that is, Jesus Christ.”³⁷⁴ For him, “while the Christ-event is the universal sacrament of God’s will to save humankind, it need not therefore be the only possible expression of that will. God’s saving power is not exclusively bound by the universal sign God has designed for his saving action.”³⁷⁵ Such a distinction between Word of God as such and the Word-of-God-made-flesh may suggest that God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is incomplete. For instance Dupuis writes, “The historical particularity of Jesus imposes upon the Christ event irremediable limitations. ... While the human existence of the man Jesus is truly that of the Son of God, it necessarily shares with all humanity the limitations of historical human existence. There follows that the human consciousness of Jesus as Son could not by nature, exhaust the mystery of God, and, therefore, left his revelation of God incomplete.”³⁷⁶ This position may smack subordinationism, as Dupuis goes further to say: “God remains beyond the man Jesus as the ultimate source of both revelation and salvation. ... The personal identity of Jesus as the Son of God in his human existence notwithstanding, a distance continues to exist between God (the Father), the ultimate source, and he who is God’s icon. Jesus is no substitute for God.”³⁷⁷

So to sum up, the relevance of Dupuis’ theology of the Logos is for an open theology of religions. It also helps us to see the positive role, which the other religious traditions can exercise in the mystery of divine salvation for their members. Going beyond the problematic of salvation of the religious others, he seeks to investigate the possibility of a positive role exercised by other religions in the mystery of salvation of their members. Going a step further, he asks whether or not the other religious traditions have by themselves a positive significance in the divine plan for humanity. In his theology of the Logos, he begins with a notion that there exists a continuing action of the Word as such, which is combined, in the divine plan for humanity, with the universal salvific value of the historical event of Jesus Christ.

³⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 84.

³⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 91.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 91.

³⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 91.

The historical event of Jesus Christ retains its universal salvific value, working through the risen humanity of Jesus in all times and in all places; but it is part of a wider context of divine manifestations in the Word as such through the entire history of humanity.

6. A Personal Assessment on the Christological Debate in the Theology of Religions

The declaration *Dominus Iesus* expresses concern that affirming the existence of religious pluralism not only in fact but also in principle may lead to relativism. The declaration's statements on Jesus as the unique and universal Saviour and on the relation between Christianity and other religions have direct implications for doing Christology in the context of religious pluralism. The declaration reaffirms certain Christological truths of Christian faith and doctrine which are at stake due to a pluralist approach to religious pluralism, namely, the fullness and definitiveness of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the unity between the saving work of the incarnate Word and that of the Holy Spirit, the unicity and universality of the salvific mystery of Jesus Christ. The declaration states, "In the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God ... the full revelation of divine truth is given."³⁷⁸ It rejects the "theory of the limited, incomplete, or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that found in other religions."³⁷⁹ It states "Jesus Christ has a significance and value for the human race and its history, which are unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute."³⁸⁰ Furthermore, *Dominus Iesus* rejects any theological theory, which supports religious pluralism as existing in principle. Such a position it considers as doctrinal relativism. It states, "The 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*".³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ *Dominus Iesus*, 5.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 6.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 15.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.* 4.

It is true that religious pluralism as existing in principle, which is founded on the rejection of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as universal Saviour, is detrimental to Christian faith and revelation, and therefore is not acceptable. But by implying that any theological theory supporting religious pluralism in principle is based on the denial of what is in fact the very core of the Christian faith does not seem tenable. The theology of religions must seek to combine and hold together, even if in a fruitful tension, its unimpaired faith in Jesus Christ as universal Saviour of humankind, on the one hand, and, on the other, a positive, salvific significance of the other religious traditions for their followers. This would be fully in accordance with God's salvific design for humanity, realised through the constitutive salvific mediation of Jesus Christ, and the universal presence and operation of the Spirit of God.

6.1. Jacques Dupuis' Contribution to Christology in the Context of Religious Pluralism

The challenge for future theology of religious pluralism, in general, and Christology in the context of religious pluralism, in particular, is to articulate a coherent and credible interreligious Christology that honours the Christian belief in Jesus as the Saviour of all humankind, in whom God has entered into a communion with all humankind. To put it in theological terminology, "inclusivist pluralism" seems to be a suitable model for doing Christology in the context of religious pluralism. It is a Christology of religions that relies on the praxis of interreligious dialogue and seeks to discover in this broad context the specificity of Christian faith and uniqueness of Jesus Christ. But the praxis of interreligious dialogue must always be the point of departure, depending on the concrete context. Furthermore, it has to do, not merely with religious traditions in an abstract, impersonal manner, but with concrete religious people. In other words, interreligious Christology needs to situate the mystery of Christ in the context of religious pluralism, in general and directly situate it in the context of each individual religious tradition, in particular.³⁸²

Dupuis holds that Christology of religions cannot, however, be limited to the Jewish-Christian dialogue. It must also meet the distinct religious traditions that the Christian faith encounters concretely in various contexts, in different continents of the world. Dupuis seeks to discover the salvific meaning of other religions in God's

³⁸² Cf. Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, pp. 30 – 31.

overall plan of salvation, manifested in the mystery of Jesus Christ. Thus, he goes beyond the conciliar and post-conciliar beckoning to discover the stepping-stones for the mystery of Jesus Christ not only the subjective religious life of individual persons in whom God's grace in Jesus Christ is already operative through the Holy Spirit,³⁸³ but also in the objective elements that together constitute the religious traditions of the world,³⁸⁴ in order to identify "the elements of truth and grace"³⁸⁵ present in those traditions. He seeks to identify in the other religious traditions not only the stepping-stones for the mystery of Jesus Christ or the "seeds of the Word of God," but also seeks to interpret those seeds not merely as expressions of their aspiration toward God but as traces of an initial approach of God to the religious others.

He sees the diversity of religions as God's own search for humankind, in accordance with his sole economy of salvation, in his Son, Jesus Christ, and in the sending of the Spirit. Dupuis writes "Such a Christology of God's search for people in their own religious traditions brings out once more the problem of continuity in discontinuity, but it takes the question in a new original fashion. This is the discontinuity of the absolute newness of the mystery of Jesus Christ in the continuity of the first steps and approaches made by God to people in anticipation of God's coming."³⁸⁶ Thus, a Christology in the context of religious plurality, will help us to understand not only how Christians are related to and saved in the mystery of Christ but also how religious others along with their religious traditions are related to the mystery of Christ. Moreover, the other religious traditions are not ways of salvation alongside or parallel to the way of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the other religions must be accepted as ways of salvation for their believers that participate or converge in the mystery of Jesus Christ.

So to sum up, Dupuis, on the one hand, keeps to the constitutive and normative role of Christ as universal mediator of salvation; on the other hand, he opens the possibility for a plurality of ways to salvation.³⁸⁷ His Christology is based

³⁸³ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

³⁸⁴ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2; *Lumen Gentium*, 16; *Ad Gentes*, 9, 11, 15.

³⁸⁵ *Ad Gentes*, 9.

³⁸⁶ Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, p. 31.

³⁸⁷ According to Terrence Merrigan, Dupuis' basic approach is certainly inclusivistic, but in some aspects such as assuming a plurality of ways to salvation, Dupuis seems to explore the frontiers between an inclusivistic and a pluralistic approach. Cf. Merrigan, "Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques

on the conviction that Christ as the Son of God is unique and universal in his salvific influence.³⁸⁸ He intends to show that “a well poised claim to oneness and universality for Jesus Christ leaves room for an open theology of religions and of religious pluralism. In particular, a Trinitarian Christological perspective allows for the recognition of the ongoing presence and activity of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Such a perspective ... makes it possible to affirm a plurality of ways or paths to human liberation/salvation, in accordance with God’s design for humankind in Jesus Christ; it also opens the way for recognizing other saving figures in human history”.³⁸⁹

6.2. A Critique on Dupuis’ Response to the Christological Problematic

Jacques Dupuis, while analysing the *Christological hermeneutic* for the theological interpretation of the reality of religious pluralism, proposes a need for discontinuing “all talk of the absolute claims of Christianity about Jesus Christ, nevertheless, he clearly upholds the constitutive uniqueness of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all humankind.³⁹⁰ In his Christological debate in the Christian theology of religious pluralism, Dupuis clearly indicates that we cannot possibly bypass the question of the centrality of Jesus Christ and the constitutive character of his salvific mediation with a universal significance in virtue of his identity as the Son of God made man. We need to affirm at every stage of our theological investigation, the Christological centrality in a Christian theology of religious pluralism, as we cannot distance away from the centrality of the event of Jesus Christ while assessing salvific role of other religious traditions in God’s overall plan of salvation. With such an insight into the centrality of the mystery of Christ and its constitutive implication for the salvation of all humankind, Dupuis does not seem to undermine the truth of Christian faith, namely, Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, crucified and risen, is the sole and universal mediator of salvation for all humanity. Dupuis clearly accepts the unity of the divine plan of salvation centred in Jesus Christ, as the salvific action of God is accomplished in and through Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of the

Dupuis and the Movement “Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism”, *Louvain Studies*, 23 (1998), pp. 338 – 359.

³⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 349.

³⁸⁹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 281 – 282.

³⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 292.

Father, the mediator of salvation for all humanity. Dupuis insists, however, that it is misleading to reduce the whole of salvation history to the appearance of Jesus.

Dupuis' theological synthesis of *inclusivist-pluralism* is based on the unity of God's salvific design for all humankind, the unicity and universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ, and the universal presence and operation of the Holy Spirit, without separating his activities from that of the risen Christ. Indeed, this model is rooted in Christocentric and Trinitarian theology, in which, the other forms of religious expressions find their rightful place in a common salvation history. In this regard, Dupuis asserts: "Whatever may be the primary or secondary intention guiding the Christological position involved in the pluralistic paradigm, it is clear that the Christological question occupies central stage in a Christian theology of religions. The salvific role of other religious traditions, as well as the significance to be assigned (in God's overall plan for humankind) to other "paths" and other "saving figures," is intrinsically and inextricably linked – from Christian standpoint – with the way in which the person and the event of Jesus Christ are understood and interpreted."³⁹¹ In this manner, by adopting the high ontological Christology, which unambiguously recognises the personal identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, he distances himself from the pluralists, who depend on the low Christology, which remaining deliberately at the functional level, questions and ultimately denies such ontological affirmations about Jesus Christ,³⁹² and consequently, reduces him to the same level of other saving figures. In other words, Dupuis, in the light of the Christian affirmation of centrality of the event of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humankind, clearly asserts the universal saving status of Jesus Christ for the whole of humanity. Dupuis states that "Jesus Christ indeed is the constitutive saviour of humankind, and the Christ event is the cause of salvation of all human beings; but this does not prevent the other traditions from serving as mediations of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ for their followers within God's design for humankind."³⁹³

Dupuis notes here that Christocentrism of Christian tradition is not opposed to theocentrism. It never puts Jesus Christ in the place of God, but affirms that God has

³⁹¹ Ibid. p. 280.

³⁹² Cf. Ibid. pp. 190 – 191.

³⁹³ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 253.

placed him at the centre of his saving plan for humankind.³⁹⁴ Nevertheless, while discussing the uniqueness of Christ, Dupuis considers that “The “constitutive” uniqueness of Jesus Christ will stand as an affirmation of Christian faith, but will not be absolutized by relying merely on the unilateral foundation of a few isolated texts, like for instance, Acts 4:12, 1 Tim 2:5, Jn 14:6.”³⁹⁵ Furthermore, “The universality of the Christ who, “being made perfect,” became “the source of eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9), does not cancel out the particularity of Jesus, “made like his brothers and sisters in every respect” (Heb 2:17).”³⁹⁶ Schillebeeckx expressed a similar idea when he wrote: “Although we cannot attain Jesus in his fullness unless at the same time we also take into account his unique relationship with God, which has a special nature of its own, this does not of itself mean that Jesus unique way of life is the only way to God.”³⁹⁷

However, while Jesus is an essential or constitutive element of this history, God’s saving work is above all a work of the Trinity in its entirety. Dupuis holds for the presence and operation of the Logos, as well as, the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the believers of other religions and in their religious traditions. While indicating the presence and action of the Logos, he does not pose a separation between the Word and Jesus, or between the Word’s salvific activity and that of Jesus; but he maintains the possibility for a salvific activity of the Word beyond its historical existence as the Word-incarnate.³⁹⁸ The eternal Word, who became incarnate in Jesus, and the Spirit, who was irrevocably linked to him in his resurrection, has always been active in history, in the hearts of individual men and women; and he is no less active in their religious traditions. The latter are both the expression of God’s search for humanity and of humanity’s response to the divine initiative.

Dupuis, speaking from a Christological perspective in reference to the reality of religious pluralism, prefers to call Jesus Christ the “universal” and “constitutive” saviour and redeemer, but not “absolute” one; similarly, while speaking about the

³⁹⁴ Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 191.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 294.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 297.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 299 – 300.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 435.

“Christ-event,” he calls it “decisive” rather than “definitive.” While Dupuis never wanted to reduce Christ to being one saviour among many, he is sensitive to the limits involved in the historical incarnation of the Son of God, the created character of the humanity that he assumed, and the specific quality of his redemptive human actions.³⁹⁹ The act of incarnation is a free act of God’s love and not unconditionally necessary. Dupuis starts from the general principle that truth or reality is distinct from the human understanding of it. That “all human apprehension of Divine Reality is fragmentary and time-conditioned is certain; human knowledge of God – even after God’s revelation in Jesus Christ – remains irremediably imperfect and provisional.” God is “absolute” and only he knows himself absolutely.⁴⁰⁰ Dupuis, then, applies this principle to the case of Jesus Christ. He consistently avoids the term “absoluteness” when speaking of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰¹ For him, “absoluteness is an attribute of the Ultimate Reality of Infinite Being which must not be predicated of any finite reality, even the human existence of the Son-of-God-made-man.”⁴⁰² The distinction that Dupuis maintains between Father and the Son and the distinction between Jesus Christ in his pre-existence and in his historical existence seems to reflect a milder form of subordinationism. He seems assign an inferior status to the Son with regard to the Father, who stands beyond the Son as an absolutely transcendent God. Since Jesus Christ is both God and Man, he is not limited in his divinity even if he freely chose to empty himself of his divine condition of existence. God’s son knows the Father in his absoluteness, even if his human knowledge is limited as Incarnate Son of God.

Dupuis attributes to Jesus a “singular” uniqueness and “singular” universality, which are different from “relative” uniqueness and “relative” universality. In this way, Dupuis sees Jesus as the “constitutive universal Saviour” of humankind. The uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ are neither “relative” nor “absolute,” but

³⁹⁹ In the opinion of Gerald O’Collins, Dupuis “maintains a firm, Thomistic approach: only God, who is totally necessary, utterly unconditional, uncaused, and unlimited, is truly absolute. Cf. “Jacques Dupuis: His Person and Work,” in Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, p. 24.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism”, in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 87; idem. *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 285.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 235.

⁴⁰² Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 282.

“constitutive,” such that Jesus’ Paschal Mystery is the “cause of salvation.” It is also “relational,” such that “the person and the event insert themselves in an overall design of God for humankind which is multifaceted and whose realization in history is made up of diverse times and moments.” Thus, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ makes him “universal” Saviour, but not the “absolute” Saviour, “who is God himself.”⁴⁰³ Dupuis calls the uniqueness of Jesus Christ “constitutive and relational,” which does not mean “relative,” or “absolute.”⁴⁰⁴ Christ or the Word does not have an ultimate origin, but from the Father. Similarly, Christ is called the sacrament of salvation, but not the Father,⁴⁰⁵ who is the “absolute” Saviour, since he is the original source of all saving acts.⁴⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Christ could perhaps be called the “absolute Mediator,” while there are participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees. Obviously, such participated forms of mediation cannot be seen as parallel with the mediation of Christ. “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ” (1Tim. 2:4).⁴⁰⁷ Dupuis’ above noted position seem to overlook the “consubstantiality” – “homoousios” nature of the Word made flesh as the Nicene Creed confesses.

The uniqueness and universality of Christ the Saviour are “constitutive” since his salvific work covers all humankind and all those who are saved are saved in Christ. This uniqueness of Christ is based theologically on his ontological Sonship of the Godhead (high Christology).⁴⁰⁸ Though “absoluteness” is not attributed to Jesus Christ, according to Dupuis, the Christian claim to him does not merely consist on his being “for me” “the path of salvation,” but “for all.” In other

⁴⁰³ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 282 – 283. Cf. also, idem. *Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism*, in T. Merrigan - J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 87.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Merrigan, “Exploring the Frontiers Jacques Dupuis and the Movement ‘Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism’”, *Louvain Studies*, 23 (1998), p. 355. Cf. also, Dupuis, *The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited*, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 243.

⁴⁰⁵ Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” *Louvain Studies* 24 (1999), pp. 243 – 244.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Ibid. pp. 243 – 244.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Ibid. p. 244.

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. Ibid. pp. 244 – 245. Cf. also, idem. “God is Always Greater”, *The Tablet*, 27 (2001) 10, p. 1521; idem. “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism”, in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 89.

words, everyone finds “salvation in and through him.” According to Dupuis, there is a “solid ground” or a “valid foundation” for the Christian claim to Jesus Christ’s “constitutive uniqueness.” In holding this idea, Dupuis strongly emphasizes that it is a “faith-conviction,” which, for him, by its nature, “lies beyond the purview of an empirical or scientific proof.”⁴⁰⁹ Dupuis implies a distinction between the witness of faith and the mere result of academic research. Thus, Dupuis sees the position by pluralistic Christologists that there is an “unbridgeable gap” between the “historical Jesus” and the “Christ of the Church” as a “trite contention.” Dupuis, then, tries to show “continuity-in-discontinuity” between Jesus and the Christ in confirming that the Christian faith in “Jesus-the-Christ” is definitely founded in the “historical person of Jesus of Nazareth.” According to Dupuis, it is possible and necessary to acknowledge the “continuity-in-discontinuity” between different stages of Christology: between the Jewish Messiah and the fulfilment in Jesus; between the “pre-Paschal Jesus” and the “Christ of the Apostolic Kerygma;” between the “Christology of early Kerygma” and “later biblical enunciations;” between the “New Testament Christology” and “that of Church tradition;” between the “state of kenosis” and the “glorified state.”⁴¹⁰ Here Dupuis seems to take a middle path between subordinationism and Nicene faith.

Dupuis’ idea of “discontinuity” involves the recognition of a real difference between each stage of Christology, between the “functional” Christology and the “ontological,” or even between “Jesus and the Christ.” Yet, the idea of “continuity” enables him to defend the one “personal identity” of the Son of God made flesh. Thus, “Jesus is the Christ” and “the historical Jesus is the Christ of faith.” There is a distinction, but also identity. “The transition from the one to the other is a homogenous development.”⁴¹¹ Dupuis’ Christology rests on Jesus’ personal identity as the Son of God.⁴¹² This is his theological foundation for the claim of the “constitutive uniqueness and universality” of Jesus Christ.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 295.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 295.

⁴¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 295 – 296.

⁴¹² Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism”, in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 89.

⁴¹³ Cf. Dupuis, “God is Always Greater”, *The Tablet*, 27 (2001), 10, p. 1521.

Dupuis affirms Jesus' universality without, however, overlooking his particularity. He states: "The universality of the Christ who, 'being made perfect,' became 'the source of eternal salvation' (Heb 5:9) does not cancel out the particularity of Jesus. A universal Christ, severed from the particular Jesus, would no longer be the Christ of Christian revelation."⁴¹⁴

Dupuis understands the Person of Jesus Christ as Jesus-the-Christ of the Christian *Kerygma* as witnessed to in the New Testament (cf. Acts 2:36), not a mythical Christ divested of the earthly Jesus, nor a pre-Easter Jesus seen apart from the Christhood of his risen state. He holds that "the Christ event is being taken in its integrity, without any reductionism in either of two directions, toward a mere Logology, on the one hand, or toward a mere Jesuology, on the other. In the event of Jesus Christ, God's self-communication to humankind and history is decisively disclosed and manifested. This basic factor of Christian self understanding is the foundation for the centrality of the Christ-event in the history of the divine human relations."⁴¹⁵ He notes further, "while Christ-event plays an irreplaceable function in God's design for humankind, it can never be taken in isolation but must always be viewed with the manifold modality of the divine self-disclosure and manifestation through the Word and the Spirit. The expansiveness of God's inner life overflowing outside the Godhead is, in the last analysis, the root-cause for the existence in human history of convergent paths, leading to unique common goal: the absolute mystery of the Godhead which all paths to itself, even as in the first place it launches them into existence."⁴¹⁶

6.3. Concluding Remarks Jesus the Christ and Religious Pluralism

Dupuis' theology of religious pluralism is closely related to his Christology. The mystery of Jesus Christ is necessarily at the centre of a Christian theology of religions. The new awareness of religious and cultural pluralism is not a danger to the proclamation of the Reign of God, broken in the Christ-event. On the contrary, a positive approach to the other religions helps to discover new depths in the mystery of Jesus Christ. The challenge consists in asking whether and how Christian faith in

⁴¹⁴ Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 297.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 208 – 209.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 209.

Jesus Christ, the universal Saviour, is compatible with the affirmation of a positive role of the other religions for the salvation of their members, in the one salvific plan designed by God for the whole of humankind. Dupuis gives a positive answer to the question of the meaning of religious pluralism in God's overall plan of salvation, as willed by God not only as a fact, but also in principle. He accepts that the diverse religious traditions of humankind represent the various divine interventions in the salvation history. The self-communication of God in Jesus Christ is the most perfect divine self-communication. Yet it is not the only or exclusive divine self-communication of God to humans.⁴¹⁷ So religious pluralism is not simply a fact of the religious history of humankind, but is God's bountiful gift and religious traditions are vehicles of his gift of salvation. In this sense, the other religions reflect certain aspects of the Divine. They contain in them the seeds of the Word and the elements of truth and goodness, which are rays of that divine truth which enlightens people.

First of all, we have to accept the universal salvific will of God. Salvation is offered to all. Secondly, since believers respond to God in their own respective religious traditions their religious life cannot be separated from their religious traditions. Hence, God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ takes place within a temporally and historically situated community of faith. For the believers in other religious traditions, this occurs within their own religions, rendering their religions as true vehicles of God's universal gift of salvation. Thirdly the Christ-event is always constitutive of the overall economy of salvation. In this way, the two fundamental truths of Christian faith and traditions: God our Saviour – "he wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth. For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself a human being, Christ Jesus, who offered himself as a ransom for all." (1 Tim 2: 4-6). In the Christian theology of religions, Dupuis option for the model of pluralistic-*inclusivism*, reflects his open Christocentric perspective toward God's overall plan of salvation, that is, *all salvation is in Christ* – Since God wills to save all and his plan of salvation includes all, he has placed Jesus Christ as the centre and summit of his one and universal plan of salvation for all humankind. Dupuis clearly upholds the Christian claim for Jesus Christ as traditionally understood, but with a renewed implication of mystery of Christ for salvation of all humankind. Therefore, for him, "faith in Jesus Christ does

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, pp. 99 – 110.

not merely consist in trusting that he is “for me” the path to salvation; it means to believe that the world and humankind find salvation in and through him”⁴¹⁸

The high Christology of the conciliar documents holds that God had established Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world; ⁴¹⁹ and that he is “the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every human heart and the answer to all its longings.”⁴²⁰ The council clearly recognises God’s intention “to re-establish all things in Christ, both those in the heavens and those on the earth” (Eph. 1:10). Furthermore, since all human beings have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, “all have need of Christ as model, master, liberator, saviour and giver of life.”⁴²¹ The conciliar and the post-conciliar documents have affirmed in unambiguous terms that salvation must be held possible for those outside the Church. In the mediation of salvation, Jesus Christ is invoked either as the fountainhead of saving grace or as the goal of humanity’s religious striving. Christ remains the *Norma normans non-normata*, that is, “the norm of norms which cannot be normed.” Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Word incarnate, who, in accordance with God’s universal plan of salvation, has been sent into the world for the salvation of all. When we place the Christ event on a universal axis, what we affirm in faith and doctrine regarding the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ for us is also true of all. Dupuis’ Christology accepts the conciliar teaching and uses it as a springboard to go further.

A Christocentric approach to the reality of religious pluralism is capable of assuring a proper place for diverse religious traditions in God’s overall plan of salvation. For Christians, it is the mystery of Christ that is at the centre of their faith-relationship with God. Since God has made his Son, Jesus Christ, the centre and summit of his overall plan of salvation, Christ is constitutive for all salvation. In this proper sense, we need to understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, whom the Christian faith and tradition has always held as the universal mediator between God and humankind (cf. 1Tim 2, 4-6). Jesus Christ as the constitutive Saviour and the constitutive character of the universal salvation in him has been properly emphasised.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. p. 292 – 293.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 17.

⁴²⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.

⁴²¹ *Ad Gentes*, 8.

The mediation of Christ in the order of salvation is universal. It is on the level of a further sacramental mediation that a distinction must be made between the Church's mediation for Christians and a certain mediation exercised for the others by their religious traditions. The mediation of salvation at work in other religions is also related to Christ, but not in the same way as the Church's mediation is related. The subsidiary mediations or the participated mediations cannot be placed on the same level of the mediation of Christ.⁴²² Nevertheless, the Church, being the mystical body of Christ, is the universal sacrament of salvation. Hence, a certain mediation exercised by other religions is ordained to the Church. Religious traditions have a positive value for their members in the order of salvation by virtue of the presence of Christ and his saving mystery operative in them and through them. Thus all channels of salvation are united in a single plan of revelation and salvation which climaxes in the incarnate and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴²² Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 166 – 167, 182 – 190.

Chapter - III

The Holy Spirit in the World of Religious Plurality

A Pneumatological Perspective toward Religious Pluralism

The Spirit is God's own self-communicating and self-interpreting activity for humanity in history. He is the universal point of contact between God and history. The Spirit, as experienced in history, is the point of entry into the Christological and Trinitarian mystery.⁴²³ He is the sole source and possibility of human relationship with God, which is rooted in the contact function of the Spirit. The Spirit is the reaching out of the Father and the Son into the human community. He is also their point of contact with our religious, moral, political, and social life. Likewise, the active presence of the Holy Spirit in our history of salvation is the point of contact with other religions. Hence, our key to pneumatology is the history of salvation, in which God wills to save everyone, through the salvific mediation of his Son, Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Michael Barnes writes: "A Spirit-centred theory of the interpretation of traditions can help us to solve the loyalty-openness dilemma. Instead of asking how other religions are related to Christ, and raising the inevitable conundrum of his 'latent,' 'unknown,' or 'hidden' presence, we look to the way the Spirit of Christ is active, in all religions, in revealing the mystery of Christ – the mystery of what Christ is doing in the world."⁴²⁴

A Pneumatology needs to bring forth the full import of the Spirit's active presence in the whole creation and his cosmic significance for the salvation of all human kind. Moreover, the cosmic presence of the Spirit will help us to explain the character and quality of created reality.⁴²⁵ The experiential dimensions of

⁴²³ Cf. Killian P. McDonnell, "The Determinative Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," *Theology Today*, 39 (1982), 2, pp. 142 – 161.

⁴²⁴ Michael Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p.143.

⁴²⁵ Killian P. McDonnell suggests that what needs to be retained is the cosmic dimension of the Creator Spirit, whose creative act embraces the whole of creation, which is destined for redemption. This universalist perspective, encompassing the whole of bodily and spiritual creation, precedes the individual and personal function. Cf., "The Determinative Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," *Theology Today*, 39 (1982) 2, p. 151.

Pneumatology positively may help us to theologise meaningfully about the Spirit in relation to resurrection and cosmic redemption.⁴²⁶ A Pneumatology, with right emphasis on role of the Holy Spirit in our world of religious plurality, may facilitate a positive attitude towards other religions. It is a fundamental point of departure for entire theology of religions to gain a real and radical understanding of Christology.⁴²⁷ A Spirit Christology might, therefore, be able to situate the diversity of religions in the super abundant richness of God's design for all humankind, concretised in central event of the Spirit-filled Jesus.⁴²⁸ A Pneumatological renaissance concerning the doctrine and spirituality of the Holy Spirit has in these days stirred much interest and even enthusiasm from all theological concerns, theology of religions included.⁴²⁹ A new experience of the reality and power of the Spirit will have a major impact on the Christian theology. However, a theology of religions, with its objective of investigating the salvific meaning and theological significance of religious pluralism, will have to retrace the universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation and his role in the world of diverse religions and cultures.

⁴²⁶ Cf. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1962), pp. 331 – 332.

⁴²⁷ Cf. Rahner, "Aspects of European Theology", *Theological Investigations*, vol. 21, (New York: Crossroad, 1988), pp. 78 – 98. Karl Rahner considers that "it is permissible to approach Christology from a universal pneumatology and not only to proceed in the opposite direction, so that Jesus Christ appears as the unsurpassable peak of a universal history of grace." Karl Rahner, "Foundations of Christian Faith," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 19, (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 10. Cf. also. Rahner, *Foundation of Christian Faith: Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (New York: The Crossroad, 2004), pp. 316 – 321.

⁴²⁸ For a detailed survey on the Spirit Christology: Mohan Doss, *Christ in the Spirit: Contemporary Spirit Christologies*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005). Cf. also, Ralph del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Philip J. Rosato, "Spirit Christology: Ambiguity and Promise," in *Theological Studies*, 38 (1977), pp. 423 – 449. Roger Haight, "The Case For Spirit Christology," *Theological Studies*, 53 (1992), pp. 257 – 287.

⁴²⁹ John R. Sachs writes regarding an incredible interest today in the Spirit and spirituality as "People pay attention to the spiritual dimension of their lives and often seem to be experiencing the Spirit in ways and places that often challenge traditional theologies and Church structures and sometimes have little connection with traditional religious practice. The Spirit is present and active beyond the official structures and ordained ministries of the Church." Idem. "'Do Not Stifle the Spirit': Karl Rahner, the Legacy of Vatican II, and its Urgency for Theology Today," *Catholic Theological Proceedings*, 51 (1996), p.15.

1. The Holy Spirit and the Diversity of Religions

The presence of the Spirit in religious others along with their religious and cultural realities and the new awareness of religious pluralism points to the diverse ways in which God bestows himself to his people in the outpouring of his Spirit upon all creation. The Spirit's being poured out upon all flesh is the point of departure to acknowledge his presence in the religious others and in their cultures and religions. Does the Spirit have an unrepeatable role in the life of religious others? Do the other religions serve as channels God's gift of salvation actualised through the mediation of Christ and in the universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit? In other words, are the other religions too works of the Spirit and God's Spirit-filled paths to salvation in their own right? These questions and others concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of religious others and in religions occupy a central place in the pneumatological perspective regarding religious pluralism. Hence, Dupuis writes, "It follows that a theology of religious pluralism elaborated on the foundation of the Trinitarian economy will have to combine and to hold in constructive tension the central character of the punctual historical event of Jesus Christ and the universal action and dynamic influence of the Spirit of God."⁴³⁰ Similarly, if Christian theology is to be adequately Trinitarian, it must attempt to identify the unique mission of the Spirit, for the Holy Spirit is personally present in creation.⁴³¹ A pneumatological approach to the diversity of religions provides hitherto untapped resources for the theological understanding of religious pluralism.

1.1 The Pneumatocentric Model in Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

The Spirit is actively present in human quest for the Divine and in the religious expressions of humankind, which have given rise to diverse religious traditions. Theologians are also challenged by the lively spirituality of the charismatic renewal to reflect on Jesus' relationship to the Holy Spirit. Christian theologians, engaged in a multifaceted dialogue with other religions, cultures and ideologies, are

⁴³⁰ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 207.

⁴³¹ Barbara Finan, "The Holy Spirit: An Issue in Theology" *Spirituality Today*, 38 (1986), pp. 9 – 18. Cf. also, Kilian McDonnell, "A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit?" *Theological Studies* 46 (1985), p. 91.

groping for an effectual Christological paradigm, which is both biblical as well as identical with Christian tradition, and relevant to today's society with its new awareness of religious and cultural plurality. The prevailing Logos model of dogmatic Christology, though valid in itself, is not adequate to the new awareness of the religious as well as cultural plurality in the world and to the pressing issues which face fundamental and pastoral theology. Hence, there seems to be a move among the theologians to return to the earliest Christology, which is based on the *Pneuma* model that was formulated to meet the needs of primitive Church in a social and religious milieu surprisingly not unlike the present one. They seem to propose a Spirit Christology that is capable of presenting the event of Jesus Christ relevant to the world of religious plurality and appropriate to the new knowledge of diverse cultures and religions.⁴³²

The proponents of Pneumatocentric model move beyond the traditional Christocentrism and elevate the Spirit as the Trinitarian member most specifically operative in the world. In the Pneumatocentric model, the universal economy of the Spirit is viewed as pre-scinding (*praescindere*) from the historical event of Jesus Christ. The protagonists of pneumatocentric model seem to suggest that while Christians obtain salvation through the economy God's Son incarnate in Jesus Christ, others receive it through the immediate autonomous action of the Spirit of God. The "hypostatic independence" or personal distinction between the Son and the Spirit is

⁴³² For a detailed study on the pneumatological perspective to the diversity of religions cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and His Spirit: Christological Approaches*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1977). Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic 2002); Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); idem., *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); idem., *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). G. D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, (N.Y.: Maryknoll 1990), pp.16 – 46. Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983). Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* (New York: Paulist, 1992). Knitter, "A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions," *Current Dialogue*, 19 (1991), pp. 32 – 41; idem. "A Catholic Theology of Religions Faithful to the Christology of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds," *Jeevadhara*, 36 (2006), 213, pp. 193 – 210. T. Merrigan, "Christ and the Spirit: Towards a Bifocal Christian Theology of Religions", in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, (Leuven: University Press, 2000), pp. 121 – 129. A. Yong, "The Turn to Pneumatology in Christian Theology of Religions: Conduit or Detour," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 35 (1998), pp. 437 – 454; idem. "The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth, and the Religions," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 57, (2004), 1, pp. 14 – 38.

seen as a basis for the two distinct channels through which God's saving presence reaches out to people in distinct economies of salvation.⁴³³ In short, Holy Spirit being God's necessary point of entry in the life of human beings, his immediate action – which bypasses the punctual event of Jesus Christ – opens way for a different model in the theology of religions, a model that is no longer Christocentric but pneumatocentric.⁴³⁴ Furthermore, a theology of religions that is built on a Pneumatocentric model helps to avoid undue dependence on a narrow Christocentric perspective.⁴³⁵ Nevertheless, by loosening the bond between the Son and the Spirit in the work of salvation, they fall short of the orthodoxy of the Catholic faith regarding the unity and universality of God's plan of salvation, the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Christ. The position regarding the salvific autonomy of the Holy Spirit fails to do justice to the doctrine regarding *filioque*, that is, the Spirit proceeds both from the Father and the Son.⁴³⁶

However, the question arises can a Pneumatocentric model help to solve the “Christological impasse”⁴³⁷ in the theology of religions? Paul F. Knitter affirms “a pneumatological route around the Christological impasse. But it must be a Pneumatology that soundly and consistently Trinitarian – one recognizes the

⁴³³ Cf. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, (N.Y.: Maryknoll, 1996), pp. 111 – 114. Knitter writes: “the Reign of God as it may be taking shape under the breath of the Spirit, can be seen as ‘an all-comprehensive phenomenon of grace’; that is an economy of grace genuinely different from the one made known through the Word incarnate in Jesus.” Ibid. p. 113.

⁴³⁴ For a brief summary of pneumatocentric model in the recent theology of religions, cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and Religions*, pp. 82 – 83.

⁴³⁵ Paul Knitter points out a need for a pneumatological Christology, one that follows the lead of the Spirit. Cf. Knitter, “A Catholic Theology of Religions Faithful to the Christology of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds,” *Jeevadhara*, 36 (2006), 213, pp. 193 – 210. In his opinion, a pneumatological theology of religions could dislodge the Christian debate from its confining categories of ‘inclusivism’ or ‘exclusivism’ or ‘pluralism’, in accordance with the opposite Christological positions. Cf. Knitter, “A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions,” *Current Dialogue*, 19 (1991), 1, p. 35.

⁴³⁶ For instance, the “*Symbol of Faith*” of the Eleventh Council of Toledo (675) states, “The Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity, is God, one and equal with God the Father and the Son, of one substance and of one nature, not, however, begotten nor created but proceeding from both, and that he is the Spirit of both.” N. D. 310. Cf. also, N. D. 321.

⁴³⁷ Gavin D’Costa points out that “It would be wrong to imagine that the Christological impasse (not Christomonism) is avoidable. ... if we remove it, we remove the basis of our faith.” D’Costa, “The Christological Assertions of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in Relation to a Catholic Theology of Religions”, *Jeevadhara*, 35 (2006), 213, p. 210.

difference between the Trinitarian persons, procession and missions.”⁴³⁸ He writes, “the Word cannot be what it is and realise its identity without a constitutive relationship with the Spirit.”⁴³⁹ A Spirit Christology shifts the focus from the question of uniqueness and universality of Christ to the universal active presence of the Spirit, therefore providing a fresh approach to the question of exclusive claims about the person of Jesus Christ, which appear so divisive in a pluralistic context. Furthermore, Spirit Christology seeks to interpret the Christ-event from the Spirit perspective. It is open to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, not only in the Spirit-filled Jesus and his mystical body, the Church, but also in other religions working for the salvation of religious others. A Pneumatological approach, with its emphasis on the role of the Spirit in the history of salvation, is able to give insight into the saving work of God on behalf of his creation as a whole.⁴⁴⁰ In the task of doing Christology in relation to religious pluralism, an effort to link it to Pneumatological theology of religions may help to understand and appreciate the unicity and universality of Christ. Likewise, “the polarity between Christic rootedness and pneumatic relatedness is the core issue in the emerging theology of religions. Neither narrow exclusivism nor naïve pluralism is creative. Creative Christian theology has to evolve in the dialectics between Christology and Pneumatology.”⁴⁴¹

Dupuis clearly rejects the Pneumatocentric model with a corresponding paradigm shift from Christocentrism to Pneumatocentrism. According to him, Christology and Pneumatology are inseparable in the Christian mystery in so far as the cosmic influence of the Holy Spirit is essentially bound to the universal action of the risen Christ. He tries to link Christology with Pneumatology in order to bring out

⁴³⁸ Knitter “A Catholic Theology of Religions Faithful to the Christology of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds,” *Jeevadhara*, 36 (2006) 213, p. 198. For a similar position cf. Michael Amaladoss, “Listen to the Spirit: ‘Father is Greater than I’”, *Vidyajyoti*, 63 (1999), pp. 687 – 689.

⁴³⁹ Knitter “A Catholic Theology of Religions Faithful to the Christology of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds,” *Jeevadhara*, 36 (2006), 213, p. 200.

⁴⁴⁰ Killian P. McDonnell suggests that for a balanced doctrine of the mystery of Christ, Pneumatology is the point of entry into Christology and ultimately into the Trinity. A truly Christocentric approach is without validity unless it is thought out in relation to the Spirit. Being the point of entry into Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity, and the point of contact between God and history, the Spirit is the horizon where the meaning of Christ and history are made manifest. Cf. *idem*. “The Determinative Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” *Theology Today*, 39 (1982), 2, p.153

⁴⁴¹ Sebastian Painadath, “Creedal Formula, End or Beginning? – The Nicaea-Constantinople Creed in the Age of Dialogue initiated by Vatican II,” *Jeevadhara*, 36 (2006), 213, p. 220.

the full significance of the action of the Word-incarnate and the Spirit in the world of religious diversity. He writes, “the action of the Spirit and that of Jesus Christ, though distinct, are nevertheless complementary and inseparable. Pneumatocentrism and Christocentrism cannot, therefore, be construed as two distinct economies of salvation, one parallel to the other. They constitute two inseparable aspects, or complementary elements, within a unique economy of salvation.”⁴⁴² He affirms, “the ‘personal distinction’ between the Word and the Spirit as well as the specific influence of each in all divine-human relationships, individual and collective, serve as hermeneutical key for the real differentiation and plurality obtaining in the concrete realization of the divine-human relationships in diverse situations and circumstances. ... Christology does not exist without pneumatology; it cannot be allowed to develop into a ‘Christomonism’.”⁴⁴³

For Dupuis, however, “the Holy Spirit is God’s ‘point of entry’”, wherever and whenever God reveals and communicates himself in history to people. Indeed, it is so, in virtue of the necessary correspondence, which exists between the persons in the mystery of the Trinity, as he is in himself and that of his manifestation in the world. The immanent presence of the Holy Spirit is always and in all circumstances the reality of God’s saving grace.”⁴⁴⁴ He emphasises the role of the Spirit in actualising God’s plan of salvation. He makes it clear that this Spirit, who is present and active in the salvation of religious others, is the Spirit of Christ, communicated by him in virtue of his resurrection from the dead. The cosmic influence of the Spirit cannot be severed from the universal action of the risen Christ. The Spirit of God, whose abiding presence that confers salvation, is at the same time the Spirit of Christ, communicated by the risen Lord. His saving function consists in “centring” people, through the medium of his immanent presence, on the Christ whom God has established as the mediator and the way leading to him. Christ, not the Spirit, is at the centre.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴² Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 83.

⁴⁴³ Ibid. pp. 92 – 93.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 83.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, pp. 152 –154; idem. *Jesus Christ and His Spirit*, pp. 21 – 31.

1.2. The Option for a Spirit Christology in the Theology of Religions

A theology of religions seeks to combine and hold together the twofold affirmations that God wills that all should be saved and Jesus Christ is the unique and universal mediator of this plan of salvation. While keeping in mind God's sole economy of salvation and the unicity and universality of Jesus Christ in mediating this economy of salvation, Pneumatology can help us to see the role of the Holy Spirit in the overall history of salvation. Hence, we ask: can Pneumatology contribute to a better understanding of how the believers in other religions are moved by the Spirit to be made partners of the paschal mystery of Christ? It will show us that God is present and active, through his Son and Spirit, not only among Christians and in Christianity, but also in the religious others and in their religions.⁴⁴⁶ According to Yves Congar the soundness any Pneumatology, however, is dependent on its reference to Christ. The Spirit is the object of a special 'mission.' The Spirit, however, does not do any other work than that of Christ. There is only one economy of salvation, which is both the paschal event of Christ and in the Spirit.⁴⁴⁷ He gives a valid criterion for the authenticity of a Pneumatology: "To accept a Christological criterion for the authenticity of a Pneumatology is fundamentally to look for the way in which the actions and the fruits that are attributed to the Holy Spirit are of a piece with or at least in accordance with the work of incarnate Word, Jesus Christ the Lord. ... Accepting a Christological criterion for the genuineness of a Pneumatology is to recognise the freedom of the Spirit to 'blow where he wills' (Jn 3:8; 2Cor 3:17), but it is also to affirm that that freedom is at the same time the freedom of truth (Jn 8:31; the 'Spirit of truth': 16:13) and that the 'mission' or the coming of the Spirit is related and in agreement with that of the Word."⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ Piet Schoonenberg affirms that the Spirit is active in the person of Jesus as an "extension of God." The Spirit is constitutive of Jesus ontologically: "The Spirit does not influence Jesus' human reality alongside the Logos, but as the overflowing fullness of the Logos' self-communication, overflowing *in* Jesus during his earthly life, overflowing *from* Jesus since his glorification." Cf. Schoonenberg, "Spirit Christology and Logos Christology," *Bijdragen*, 38 (1977), p. 374. Cf. also. "Trinity - The Consummated Covenant: Theses on the Doctrine of the Trinitarian God," *Studies in Religion*, 5 (1975), pp.111 – 116.

⁴⁴⁷ Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, p. 210.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 210 – 211.

Advocating a Spirit-oriented Christology, Walter Kasper affirms, “A pneumatologically defined Christology can in fact best convey the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his universal significance.”⁴⁴⁹ Jesus is the bearer of the Spirit; beyond that he is begotten, indeed created by the Spirit, and Jesus himself becomes life-giving Spirit. The identity of the risen and glorified Jesus and his cosmic significance is defined in relation to the Spirit.⁴⁵⁰ The Incarnation, according to him, is effected by the personal activity of the Holy Spirit, whose sanctifying presence is constitutive of the human person of Jesus. The risen Jesus, in turn, sends forth the Holy Spirit as his very own, and in this way continually inaugurates the eschatological era of salvation. In Christ, the Spirit has definitively reached his goal, namely, a new humanity and new creation totally open to God. Now the function of the Spirit is to integrate the whole reality into that of Christ.⁴⁵¹ It needs to see Jesus as the one in whom God’s Spirit was at work.⁴⁵² It also needs to consider the role of the Spirit after the resurrection of Jesus in the life and mission of the early Church. It is a biblical means of explaining Christ’s singularity and his cosmic significance.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 252. For further details regarding his Spirit Christology cf. idem. „Die Kirche als Sakrament des Geistes,“ Kasper and Gerhard Sauter, (eds.), *Kirche: Ort des Geistes*, (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), pp. 30 – 31. He writes, “The rediscovery of the pneumatic dimension is therefore the most important and far-reaching reorientation in Christology.” Cf. Idem. „Aufgaben der Christologie heute,“ Arno Schilson / Walter Kasper, (eds.), *Christologie im Präsens*, (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), p. 146.

⁴⁵⁰ Kasper sees the influence of the Spirit as the ground for the constitutive cosmic universal significance of Jesus, in that he is the first man capable of opening the way for all human persons to such a new form of being with God. Cf. Kasper, *Jesus der Christus*, p. 169; cf. also, *Ibid.* pp. 305 – 306.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, pp. 361 – 362.

⁴⁵² Cf. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, pp. 253 – 268. Kasper is of the opinion that a Spirit Christology that takes its lead from an analysis of the role of the Spirit at the resurrection can avoid adoptionist overtones and actually enhance the essential unity of Jesus with Yahweh from the beginning of his human existence and even before it. Cf. Kasper, *Jesus der Christus*, (Mainz: Grünwald, 1975), p.194. Whereas, Wolfhart Pannenberg has a contrary opinion. No Christology that begins with the presence of the Spirit in Jesus can avoid an inevitable lapse into adoptionism, and it is not a sufficient ground to establish his divinity. It is not the Spirit Christology as such, but historical study of the resurrection, which guarantees the identity of Jesus with the Father through the Spirit. Cf. Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), pp. 120 – 121, 135 – 137.

⁴⁵³ Kasper is convinced that the essential biblical framework in which Christ is presented is pneumatological and at the same time “Trinitarian.” Such a Christology will best safeguard both the uniqueness and universality of Jesus. Cf. *Jesus the Christ*, pp. 266 - 268.

Jesus' real identity can be accounted for in terms of his unprecedented relationship to the Spirit of God. Walter Kasper writes, "The Spirit can effect in the person of Jesus what the Spirit is in himself: God's own openness to history. The Spirit, as the divine self-mediating principle, is the transcendental – theological possibility of a free self-communication to humankind in history."⁴⁵⁴

A Spirit Christology is able to guarantee that the humanity of Jesus is not compromised in the clear affirmation of his divinity. It preserves strictly the dialectic between Jesus' being human and divine. It helps to make it clear that the Spirit of God is universally present and active in the life and mission of Jesus Christ. The Christ event both derives from the working of the Spirit in the world and gives rise to it.⁴⁵⁵ However, Jesus' convictions and self-understanding, his authority and his powerful actions all stemmed from an experience of God as Spirit present and work in his life. His empowerment by the Spirit was clearly manifested in his actions, which, for those who believed in him, the work of God. A Spirit Christology thematizes Christian experience of Jesus and explains the meaning of Jesus' being the bringer of God's salvation.⁴⁵⁶ A Spirit Christology shows that "Jesus is not only the giver but also the *receiver* of the Spirit."⁴⁵⁷

Dupuis indicates that "the universal presence and action of the Spirit in human history and in the world will not only need to be affirmed; they will also have to serve as guiding threads and principles."⁴⁵⁸ The universal presence of the Holy Spirit and his role in the salvation of religious others in their religions does not make any sense if it is severed from the risen Christ and his universal salvific mediation. The role of

⁴⁵⁴ Kasper, *Jesus der Christus*, p. 304.

⁴⁵⁵ Karl Rahner writes that there is "relationship of mutual conditioning" between the two aspects by virtue of which the Spirit in the course of entire history of salvation may properly be called the "Spirit of Christ." For a complete view, cf. idem. "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions" *Theological Investigations*, vol.17, pp. 39 – 50.

⁴⁵⁶ Roger Haight, "The Case For Spirit Christology" *Theological Studies*, 53 (1992), pp. 257 – 287. Cf. also James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, (London: SCM, 1975); idem. *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980). Olaf Hansen, "Spirit Christology: a Way Out of Our Dilemma?" in P. Opsahl, (ed.), *The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church*, (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1978), pp. 172 – 203. Dupuis, *Christianity and Religions*, pp. 178 – 194; idem. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 203 – 210, 321.

⁴⁵⁷ Alasdair I. C. Heron, *The Holy Spirit*, (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1983), p. 127.

⁴⁵⁸ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 206.

the Holy Spirit in the salvation of religious others consists in making them partners of the paschal event of Jesus Christ.⁴⁵⁹ However, from a Christian perspective, Spirit Christology facilitates the discussion of the relation of Jesus Christ to religious others and their religious founders. It can account for present-day Christian attitudes towards other religions and Jesus Christ in accordance with the Christian faith and tradition. While, Jesus' divinity accounts for his universal mediation of salvation and universal normativity, his humanity gives us a glimpse of how God, in and through in Jesus, united himself some way to every human person and in the same way with the whole creation.

1.3. The Active Presence of the Spirit in the Christ-event and in the Early Church

The Spirit precedes the Christ event, active throughout the Christ event and follows it. The role of the Spirit comes to focus in that Jesus was related to the Spirit. In Dupuis' opinion, a Trinitarian Spirit-Christology must show the influence of the Holy Spirit through out the earthly life of Jesus, from his conception through the power of the Holy Spirit to his resurrection at the hands of God by the power of the same Spirit. The Incarnation of the Son of God is the supreme work of the Holy Spirit. The conception and birth of Jesus Christ are accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt. 1:18-25; Lk 1:35ff). He was anointed with the Spirit at his baptism (cf. Mt 3:16-17; Mk 1:10-11; Lk 3:22; Jn 1:33). John the Baptist identifies Christ as the baptiser in the Spirit, who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mk 1:8; cf. also Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16). Jesus, the Messiah, is the one who is totally the bearer of the Spirit (cf. Is 11:2), the one who is anointed with the Spirit (cf. Lk 4:21). His overall ministry was born of the Spirit (cf. Lk 4:1, 14; 10:21). For instance, Jesus' casts out demons by the Spirit of God (cf. Mt 12:28). The specific configuration of compassionate, liberating and revelatory power in Jesus Christ reflects the indwelling presence and influence of the Spirit that provides a basis to distinguish between the divine and demonic forms of spiritual power (cf. Mk 3: 22-30; Mt 12: 24-29; Lk 11:15-22). Thus, Jesus is a unique Man of the Spirit.⁴⁶⁰ Jesus saw his ministry in

⁴⁵⁹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁴⁶⁰ James D. G. Dunn has elaborated the biblical basis for a Spirit Christology. As the effective power of God, the Spirit was experienced in a unique measure during Jesus' life. Cf. Dunn, "Rediscovering the Spirit," *The Expository Times*, 84 (1973), p. 10. According to him, the New Testament record

terms of eschatological blessing: good news, freedom and healing (cf. Lk 4:18-19); he is dispenser of the Spirit (cf. Mt 10:20; Mk 13:11). Furthermore, Jesus' resurrection completely transforms him into a "spiritual body" and a "life-giving spirit" (1Cor 15:44-45), entering fully in the dimension of God. Jesus is not only the prophetic bearer of the Spirit and the one who is anointed by the Spirit, but he is also divinely vindicated as the one who sends the Spirit to all humankind; because he has become head and lord of all creation in the power of God's Spirit.⁴⁶¹

The Spirit, who was active in Jesus life, death and resurrection, is experienced in a new way as being poured forth in abundance at the Pentecost. Christ sends the Spirit upon the Church and the world for the purpose of taking up and completing his mission.⁴⁶² It was, in fact, the Spirit-filled Church of the first century, which set the person, and significance of Christ into the framework of Yahweh's promise to pour out his Spirit on all flesh (cf. Joel 3:1-2). The early Church believed that this promise was uniquely fulfilled in the Christ-event. It was primarily in the light of their personal experience of the Spirit that they could understand how uniquely and how universally Yahweh was at work in the personal history of Jesus. The dawn of the Reign of God is defined in terms of the universally active presence of the power of the Spirit in the whole creation. Thus, Pentecost was a realization of this outpouring of the Spirit, which is characteristic of the messianic times (cf. Acts 2: 17-18). The Spirit poured out on Pentecost is the Spirit bestowed by Christ (cf. Acts 2: 33). The presence and activity of the Holy Spirit was the central reality in the early Christian community, as the Spirit guided it and led it to live their faith commitment to Christ. The Spirit's being "poured out on all flesh" (Acts 2:17), and the free and universal movements of the Spirit that "blows where it wills" (Jn 3:8) provide for a wider scope of the Spirit's transforming presence and work in the believers, as well as in the diverse religions of the world.

gives grounds for Spirit Christology as one of the earliest traditions, which was combined with Logos Christology in the development of the Trinity. Cf. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays*, Vol. 2, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), pp. 74 – 79.

⁴⁶¹ Cf. Rosato, "Spirit Christology: Ambiguity and Promise" *Theological Studies*, 38 (1977), pp. 438 – 444.

⁴⁶² For a detailed account of the presence and role of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of Christ and his Church, cf. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 1, pp. 15 – 174.

The Holy Spirit guides and leads all humankind to Christ. Jesus Christ, who is the way to the Father, in his turn directs all to the Father. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus because he is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6), but it is the Spirit, who guides everyone to the truth (cf. Jn 16: 12-13). The Spirit will guide along the way that Jesus is, the way that leads to the Father. The Spirit, who is guiding and leading all humankind to “the complete truth”, “will not be speaking of his own accord, but will say only what he has been told” (Jn 16:13a); will bear witness to Jesus Christ, since all that the Spirit will reveal to us will be taken from what belongs to Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 16:14-15), who in his turn reveals the Father. Hence, no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except through the action of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:3). The Spirit is the gift of Jesus: “When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness” (Jn 15: 26). The gift of the Spirit, therefore, is the gift of the risen and glorified Christ, whose resurrection itself is realised through the work of the Spirit (Cf. Rom 1:4, 8:11; Acts 2:32; Jn 14:15, 26; 15:26, 16:7, 20:22). The Holy Spirit is given to us as the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Son (Cf. Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; Acts 16:7). Dupuis holds that “God’s self-gift to us entails the active presence of the Spirit. In virtue of the glorification of the humanity of the incarnate Word, the Spirit of God has become “the Spirit of Christ,” as well, and accordingly is bestowed on human beings by the resurrected Lord.”⁴⁶³

The Holy Spirit is present to the whole humankind, including their religious traditions and cultures; yet, the Church constitutes a privileged sphere of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is indicated by the fact that, the risen Christ appeared to the disciples, “he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22). The Spirit, the breath of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word was communicated to the community of the Apostles who represent the Church. The Church was promised to have the special presence of the Spirit, the Paraclete, in contrast to the world (Jn 14:15-17). The Church is the inner circle of this Christian centre, while the world is the outer one. If Christ is the Head of the Church (Col 1:18; 2:19), He is also the Head of the Cosmos (Col 1:15-18; Eph 1: 22). If the Spirit of Christ is at work in the universe, it works in a special way in the Church (Rom 8:14-23). So the Church has the duty of witnessing to its Christ-Spirit experience in solidarity with other

⁴⁶³ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 167.

religious traditions. The Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ, which was entrusted to the apostles, was to be addressed to all; the different languages implied the universal mission of the apostles (cf. Acts 2:5-12).

Dupuis gives more emphasis to Jesus' relatedness to the Spirit than his Godward orientation, in order to stress the role of the Holy Spirit in his life and mission. In his opinion, Christology ought to be attentive to the need of building a Spirit Christology that "would show the influence of the Holy Spirit through out the earthly life of Jesus, from his conception through the power of the Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35) to his resurrection at the hands of God by the power of the same Spirit (cf. Rom 8:11)."⁴⁶⁴ Such a Christology would "extend beyond the resurrection to illustrate the relationship between the action of the risen Lord and the action of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁶⁵ Furthermore, he affirms, "while an 'integral Christology' requires this Spirit-component in all situations, the same requirement can be seen even more necessary for the sake of developing a Christian theology of religious pluralism. In such a theology, the universal presence and action of the Spirit in human history and in the world will not only need to be affirmed; they will also have to serve as guiding threads and principles."⁴⁶⁶ Thus, a Spirit Christology will be able to bring out the full import of the Pneumatological dimension of God's universal plan of salvation actualised through the Christ-event, in the power of the Spirit.

Thus, through the power of the Spirit, the Christ-event is being actuated at all times; it is present and active in every generation. In all cases the immediate influence of the Spirit gives expression to the operative presence of God's saving action, which has come to a climax in Jesus Christ. However, it is the Spirit who gives effect to that potentially salvific contact with the whole of humanity, called by God to a single goal, established by the Word precisely in becoming incarnate and entering into humanity.⁴⁶⁷ Likewise, "All men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit."⁴⁶⁸ The work of the Spirit, be it in religious others or in their religious traditions, cannot be severed

⁴⁶⁴ Dupuis, *An Introduction to Christology*, p. 169.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 169; cf. also, idem. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 206.

⁴⁶⁶ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 92

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 12.

⁴⁶⁸ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

from that of the incarnate Word. Therefore, “The action of the Spirit is not outside or parallel to the action of Christ.”⁴⁶⁹ “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.”⁴⁷⁰ Hence, “There is no sense in affirming a universality of the action of the Spirit, which is not encountered in relationship with the meaning of Jesus, the incarnate Son, dead and risen. All by virtue of the work of the Spirit can enter into relationship with Jesus, who lived, died and rose in a specific time.”⁴⁷¹

The emphasis on the role of the Spirit in the Christ event helps to show how the Holy Spirit actualises God’s plan of salvation in the one economy of salvation. A Spirit Christology needs to link the Spirit inseparably to the risen and glorified Jesus. In doing so, it not only opens the way back to the Father, but also looks to the full participation of humans in the life of the Trinity at the end time. A Spirit Christology needs to present the Spirit of God as the Spirit of the risen Lord, who is at work in all signs of religious faith; so that Jesus Christ remains the goal of every religious faith of humankind, which, through the guidance of the Spirit, meets the Divine. A Spirit Christology, with a starting point in the paschal mystery of Christ and his resurrection, might offer a possibility of seeing the universal cosmic influence of Christ. This will help us to present Jesus Christ, as the one who is the first one to be raised by the power of the Spirit, now, becomes the hope of salvation to all humankind. Thus, by situating Christ-event in an eschatological framework, the Spirit opens up the possibility for all people of all ages to find spiritual and corporeal fulfilment in the Kingdom of the Father.⁴⁷²

2. Universal Presence and Operation of the Spirit of God

The Spirit has been universally present and operative as God’s personal dealings with humankind through out the history of salvation. The universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit is found even outside the visible boundaries of the

⁴⁶⁹ *Dominus Jesus*, 12.

⁴⁷⁰ *Redemptoris Missio*, 28.

⁴⁷¹ International Theological Commission, “Christianity and Religious Pluralism,” *Origins*, 27 (1997), 10, p. 159.

⁴⁷² Cf. Rosato, “Spirit Christology: Ambiguity and Promise,” *Theological Studies*, 38 (1977), pp. 448 – 449.

Church.⁴⁷³ The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, people, cultures and religions.⁴⁷⁴ Along with these Conciliar and post-Conciliar insights into the universal presence and work of the Spirit, however, Dupuis affirms the presence and activity of the Spirit through out human history, both before and after the historical event of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷⁵ He speaks of the universal work of the Spirit that is neither limited nor exhausted by the effusion of the Spirit through the risen and glorified.⁴⁷⁶ The Holy Spirit, working after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is always the Spirit of Christ sent by the Father, who works in a salvific way in Christians as well as religious others.⁴⁷⁷ The active presence of the Holy Spirit in individual persons or in religions, before or after the Christ-event, is always part of the sole economy of salvation.

Dupuis, analysing the role of the Holy Spirit in God's one economy of salvation, indicates,

“Another avenue, however, is possible, founded more directly on the experience of God of the members of other religions. It consists of discovering, in their religious life, the active presence and life-giving influence of the Holy Spirit. This approach is based on the fact, attested by Christian faith, that the present world is a saved world: It is saved because the historical mystery of Jesus Christ, which culminates in Pentecost, has brought into being a new creation. The eschatological outpouring of the Spirit that results from the glorification of Christ is not limited to the boundaries of the Church: It extends to the whole universe. The Holy Spirit gives life to the cosmos, transforming all within it.”⁴⁷⁸

Dupuis asks: “What meaning does this universal life-giving activity of the Spirit have for the members of other religious traditions? Can we say that it comes to them by the mediation of their own faith, by the Holy Scriptures and religious practices of their tradition?”⁴⁷⁹ Hence, his objective is a matter of finding the cosmic

⁴⁷³ Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 6, 12.

⁴⁷⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, 28.

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. Dupuis, “God is Always Greater,” *The Tablet*, 27 (2001), p. 1520. Cf. also Merrigan, “Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement “Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,” *Louvain Studies*, 23 (1998), p. 353.

⁴⁷⁶ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 138.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 436.

⁴⁷⁸ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 152.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 152.

influence of the Spirit operative in those traditions. However, the cosmic influence of the Spirit is essentially bound up with the universal activity of the risen Lord. In virtue of the necessary correspondence between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, the Spirit is the obligatory point of entry of God's self-communication to the human being, but this Spirit in whom God makes his self-bestowal is at the same time the Spirit of Christ, conferred by the risen Lord. The proper function of the Spirit is to centre, by its immanent presence, the human being – and the Church – on Christ, whom God has personally established as mediator and as the way leading to God.⁴⁸⁰

2.1. Theological Foundation for the Universal Operation of the Spirit

The universal presence and influence of the Spirit is evident both in the promise and in the fulfilment. It is made clear in the fulfilment of the promise of the Spirit's being poured out upon all flesh (cf. Acts 2:17). The Pentecost account clearly highlights the universal gift of the Holy Spirit, which transcends the narrow bounds of the people of the covenant (cf. Acts 2:1-4, 17-18). This was later further confirmed through the outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles, namely, the Spirit came down on all the listeners and the Jewish believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God (cf. Acts 10:44–11:18; cf. also, 10:1-33). The gift of faith was given to the holy pagans (Heb 11:4-7). The Holy Spirit may truly be present in their hearts. In the Holy Spirit every individual and all people have become, through the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, children of God, partakers in the divine nature and heirs to eternal life. However, the text of the first letter of Peter states: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (3:18).

However, the truth of the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh is a sure indication to the presence and the action of the Spirit beyond the visible boundaries of the Church. It signals a decisive new change in the relationship between human

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 153.

beings.⁴⁸¹ This new mode of relationship due to the presence of the Spirit extends beyond the Christian fellowship to the interreligious fellowship among the people of diverse religions. Thus, the pagans also received the same Spirit that was conferred upon the apostles (cf. Acts 15:8).⁴⁸² Because, “God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” (Acts 10:34-35). Furthermore, Dupuis affirms that the spiritual freedom, the gift of faith and the love of God, which have been given to us by the Holy Spirit, are not the monopoly of Christians. Instead, the gift of faith made by God is also given to the holy pagans of the cosmic covenant (cf. Rom 5:5; Heb 11:4-17). The presence of the Spirit in the “pagans,” is also evident in the Spirit’s fruits in their lives (cf. Gal 5:22-23).⁴⁸³

The religious others too live under the action of the Spirit, which in these last days has been given to all humankind (cf. Gal 3:1-5; Acts 2:17-21). The Spirit guides whole human family. God’s closeness to humankind, which is accomplished by the power of the Spirit, cannot be limited to the Christian community alone. The Spirit is free, and blows where it wills (Jn 3:8); wherever the Lord’s Spirit is, there is freedom. Thus, a sincere and full recognition of the Spirit’s action in the world and among other religions is fully consistent with biblical foundations. The Spirit, in fact, has been operating outside the visible confines of any one particular religion or culture. Paul’s attitude regarding the piety of the Athenians (cf. Acts 17:22-31) reflects a deep esteem for what human has worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems. Consequently, it entails a genuine respect for everything that has been brought about in them by the Spirit. Thus, the decree *Ad Gentes* states, “The universal design of God for the salvation of the human race is carried out not only, as it were, secretly in the soul of a man, or by the attempts [even religious ones] by which in diverse ways it seeks after God, if perchance it may contact him or find him, though he be not far from anyone of us [cf. Acts 17:27].”⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ Cf. Jean-Jacques Suurmond, *Word and Spirit as Play: Towards a Charismatic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 201.

⁴⁸² Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 154.

⁴⁸³ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 155.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ad Gentes*, 3.

2.2. The Presence and Activity of the Spirit in the History of Salvation

Dupuis' notion on the active presence and activity of the Spirit in a world of religious and cultural plurality is also based on the fundamental principle – “The Holy Spirit is at work through out the history of salvation.”⁴⁸⁵ Dupuis finds support in the encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* for his theological conclusions on the active presence of the Spirit in religious others and in their religions, both before and after the Christ-event.⁴⁸⁶ The encyclical notes: “the activity of the Holy Spirit before Christ from the beginning throughout the world, and in a special way in the economy of the Old Covenant. This activity, in every place and at all times, indeed in every human being, was wrought in virtue of the eternal design of salvation.”⁴⁸⁷ Similarly, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* states: “Under the Spirit’s guidance, the history of salvation unfolds on the stage of the world, indeed of the cosmos, according to the Father’s eternal plan. That plan, initiated by the Spirit at the very beginning of creation, is revealed in the Old Testament, is brought to fulfilment through the grace of Jesus Christ, and is carried on in the new creation by the same Spirit until the Lord comes again in glory at the end of time.”⁴⁸⁸ All humankind is conformed to the image of risen Christ through the action of the Spirit, because in Christ do they acquire the dignity to which they have been called from the beginning (cf. 2Cor 3:18). Created in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:27), human beings become the dwelling-place of the Spirit in a new way when they are raised to the dignity of divine adoption (cf. Gal 4:5). The Holy Spirit is present from the first moment of creation, the first manifestation of the love of the Triune God, and is always present in the world as its life-giving force.⁴⁸⁹ Paul speaks of creation’s eager expectation for the mystery of divine sonship to be fully revealed: “not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” (Rom 8:22). When the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14), God’s self-communication to humanity reached its height. Here is the unsurpassed, and unsurpassable key to the history of salvation.

⁴⁸⁵ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 167.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. pp. 164 – 165.

⁴⁸⁷ *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 16

⁴⁸⁹ Cf. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 54.

There is only one salvation history, though with different stages, which are ordered by divine providence toward its culmination in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. The Spirit, according to Dupuis, plays a special role in all the stages of that salvation history. The Spirit is the agent in each covenant that God made with humanity. That same Spirit is revealed and manifested throughout the course of the history of salvation.⁴⁹⁰ Everyone has a measure of light and God's grace that extends to the whole of human existence, which may have implications for the relationship between Christianity and other religions. Even though there are many religions in the world, there is one Spirit seeking to bear fruit in them all. Dupuis, going back a step further in the development of the salvation history, asks: what is implied by the reality of the divine grace under the dispensation that historically precedes the covenant with Israel? His answer is the same: "there, as well, grace signifies the gift God makes to human beings in the divine Spirit and the active presence of the same Spirit in their hearts."⁴⁹¹ The "holy pagans" of whom the Old Testament speaks lived under the pre-Jewish economy of salvation. They lived by God's Spirit and responded in faith to the call of the Spirit. Such a response is possible through the grace of God produced by the assumption of the creature into the process of Trinitarian love, a process of which the Holy Spirit must be the agent.⁴⁹² Dupuis implicates the presence of the Spirit wherever the salvific grace is at work in the history of salvation. According to him, God's self-bestowal reaches us through Christ glorified in the Spirit. Jesus' humanity, transformed in glory by the Resurrection, becomes the source of all grace.⁴⁹³ Thus, God's self-gift to the human being and human being's authentic experience of God always involves the active presence of the Holy Spirit.

The whole economy of salvation is dynamically ordered by the providence of God towards its plenary manifestation in Jesus Christ. At each stage of this

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Dupuis, "The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited", *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 242 – 243.

⁴⁹¹ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 167.

⁴⁹² For instance, Hans Urs von Balthasar writes regarding pre-Christian grace as: "Cognition by the grace of the *mysterium* of God can never be produced but by the assumption of the creature into the process of Trinitarian love." Cf. Balthasar, „Der Zugang zur Wirklichkeit Gottes,“ in J. Feiner / M. Löhrer, (ed.), *Mysterium Salutis*, vol.2, (Einsiedeln, 1967), p. 39. Cf. also, idem. „Christologie und kirchlicher Gehorsam, in: Pneuma und Institution“, *Skizzen zur Theologie*, vol. 4, (Einsiedeln: Johannesverlag 1974), pp. 133 – 161.

⁴⁹³ Cf., Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 167.

development, in various ways, God is personally committed to humanity. All salvation history is summed up in the history of God's love for the human family. God offers to all an opportunity to a personal encounter in a dialogue of love. Thus the entire economy of salvation is the deed of Trinitarian love overflowing upon humanity in the course of the stages of its religious history, from our creation in the image and likeness of God to our re-creation in the image of the incarnate Son in view of the fullness of Christ.⁴⁹⁴ In this continuous overflow of Trinitarian love upon humanity, Dupuis sees that the Spirit of God plays a special role: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). This role corresponds to the proper character of the Spirit, the bond of love between the Father and the Son, in the intra-Trinitarian relations.

That same Spirit is revealed and manifested throughout the course of the history of salvation. There is only one history of salvation, even though it unfolds different stages, which is part of the one economy of salvation that is ordered toward its culmination in Jesus Christ. The Spirit, according to Dupuis, plays a special role in all the stages of that salvation history.⁴⁹⁵ In each of the progressive covenant struck with the human family, the Spirit is the immediate agent of the divine advance, and of the immersion of God in divine history. The Holy Spirit presides over the divine destiny of humanity, in the sense that each divine covenant reaches humanity in this person. Accordingly in various stages of the public history of salvation, just as in a personal story of human beings' salvation, the same Spirit is revealed and manifested. Jesus Christ's entry into glory, and then the outpouring of the Spirit wrought in the world by that entry indicate a progressive unfolding of the same salvation history, a gradual movement testifying to a well-ordered divine plan. Through this plan, Christians discover the manifestation and revelation in human history of a Trinitarian love that, ever more intensively, flashes forth in self-communication to all humankind in the Spirit. The mystery of salvation, which is at work in every man and woman, is the mystery of that individual's obedience through faith to the breathings of the Spirit, and of the openness of his or her personal freedom to the gift of God in the same Spirit.

⁴⁹⁴ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 168.

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. Dupuis, "The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology Religious Pluralism Revisited", *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 242 – 243.

Dupuis insists, however, that it is misleading to reduce the whole of salvation history to the appearance of Jesus. While Jesus is an essential or constitutive element of this history, God's saving work is above all a work of the Trinity in its entirety. The eternal Word who became incarnate in Jesus and the Spirit who was irrevocably linked to him in his resurrection have always been active in history, in the hearts of individual men and women and no less in their religious traditions. The latter are both the expression of God's search for humanity and of humanity's response to the divine initiative. While maintaining that there is one economy of the Triune God, however, Dupuis indicates that the other "saving figures" in other religious traditions, may nonetheless be "enlightened" by the Word and "inspired" by the Spirit, become pointers to salvation for their followers.

2.3. The Universal Presence of the Spirit in the Sole Economy of Salvation

The Spirit is present and active in a special way in the Church. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time.⁴⁹⁶ God's work of salvation, through the incarnate Word and the Spirit, is eternally directed towards and culminates in the paschal event of Jesus Christ, but is unlimited in its extent. But the permanent presence and action of Holy Spirit remain unrestricted by the particular historical event of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Likewise, *Ad Gentes* states: "Doubtless, the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified."⁴⁹⁷ Hence Dupuis asks: If before the Christ-event the Spirit was acting in the world and in history without being communicated through the risen humanity of Jesus, which did not yet exist, why after the Christ-event should the action of the Spirit be so bound to the risen humanity of Christ as to be limited by it? Certainly both before and after the historical Incarnation, the outpouring of the Spirit is "in view of" the Christ-event; and it is always related to it, since it is the culmination of the unfolding through history of the divine plan of salvation. But this does not justify, according to him, the statement that no action of the Spirit as such is conceivable after the event of the Incarnation. He tries to investigate, however, "whether after the Christ-event the communication of the Spirit and his active presence in the world take place solely through the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ, or, on the contrary, can

⁴⁹⁶ *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ad Gentes*, 4.

also go beyond that limit.”⁴⁹⁸ Therefore he asks: “Has the “Spirit of God” become to such an extent the “Spirit of Christ” as to be able no longer to be present and operative beyond the communication of him that takes place through the risen Christ, in such a manner that his activity henceforth circumscribed to that of the risen Christ, and in this sense limited?”⁴⁹⁹

Dupuis, with the help of the biblical data, tries to expound whether there can take place a saving activity of the Holy Spirit after the Christ-event beyond that which takes place through the risen humanity of Jesus, just as before the historic event of the incarnation, a saving action of the Spirit was exercised without the humanity of Jesus.⁵⁰⁰ In the Pauline epistles, the Spirit is called both “Spirit of God” and “Spirit of Christ” (cf. Rom 8:9). The expression “Spirit of Christ” seems to refer to the communication of the Spirit by the risen Christ, which corresponds to Jesus’ promise to the disciples in the Gospel of John that he would send them the Spirit after his death as the Comforter (cf. Jn 15:26; 16:5-15) and its realisation at the Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-4). Moreover, the work of the Spirit consists in establishing between human persons and Jesus Christ a personal bond by which they are incorporated into him: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (Rom 8:9). Dupuis notes that “The Spirit is God’s “point of insertion” through Christ in peoples lives and that its work consists of making them the children of the Father in the Son through the risen humanity.”⁵⁰¹ Nevertheless, the Spirit is more often called the “Spirit of God”. For instance, Paul writes, “you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Rom 8:9; cf. also, 8:11). Likewise, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rom 8:14; cf. also 1Cor 2:11-14; 3:16; 6:11; 12:3; 2Cor 3:3). The Spirit, which is communicated to us, is fundamentally the “Spirit of God”.

Dupuis, in the light of Pauline theology, asserts that the ‘re-creation’ of human beings, which is achieved by Jesus Christ in the Spirit, extends to all people. He states “For Paul, God “was reconciling the world to himself” in Christ (2 Cor 5:19). The Jesus Christ event is a cosmic event in that, in the person and mystery of

⁴⁹⁸ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 178 – 179.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 179.

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. Ibid. p. 179 – 181.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. p. 179.

Christ, God has wrought a new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). The “sole new human being” created of two ancient ones – Jews and Gentiles – is the prototype of this new humanity (Eph. 2:15-16). Their reconciliation with God and with one another due to their union with the resurrected body of the Lord is the tangible sign of what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ for all humanity (Col. 3:10-11). By Christ, who has opened a new way to all, “both [Jews and Gentiles], in one Spirit, [have] access to the Father” (Eph. 2:18).⁵⁰² Here, Dupuis’ emphasis is on the universality of Jesus Christ’s salvific mediation in the actualising work of the Holy Spirit, though it occurs in different levels in the Church and in the world. While the Church is the “inner circle, the immediate sphere of the activity of Christ through his Spirit,” the world is its “outer circle” (cf. Col 1:15-18, 2:19; Eph 1:22-23). Likewise, the Spirit, is the soul of both the Church and the world, but it is so “in a special way” for the former. The activity of the Holy Spirit is universal; his fruits have already been manifest.⁵⁰³ However, creation still waits for the “plenitude of its salvation” that would be accomplished when the “ultimate restoration” takes place in the *Eschaton*, with the glorious coming of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8:23-25; Acts 3:21).⁵⁰⁴

According to Dupuis “the Trinitarian perspective prompts observation about a universal presence of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁰⁵ He writes, “If, then, from God’s manifestation in history one reaches out to the Triune communication within the very mystery of God, the Spirit is presented to us as the person who “proceeds” premordially from the Father, the “principle without a principle,” through the Word or the Son.”⁵⁰⁶ He clarifies “the distinct activity of the Spirit by virtue of his distinct personal identity.”⁵⁰⁷ Thus he considers that “the Spirit of God is universally present and active, before and after the Christ-event. The Christ event both derives from the working of the Spirit and gives rise to it.”⁵⁰⁸ Dupuis, however, points out that the Word and the Spirit, “the two hands of God,” “produce a single work, namely, the

⁵⁰² Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 156.

⁵⁰³ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 237.

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, pp. 156 – 157.

⁵⁰⁵ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 178.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 179.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 179.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 178.

one economy of salvation.”⁵⁰⁹ Hence, he concludes, “While they are united and inseparable, they are also distinct and complementary in their distinction. The activity of each is different from that of the other; indeed it is the concurrence or “synergy” of the two distinct activities that produces God’s saving effect. Neither one nor the other could be reduced to representing a mere “function” of the other; rather both converge in achieving a single economy of salvation.”⁵¹⁰ Although the action of the Holy Spirit before the incarnation is “in view” of the Christ-event, the universal presence and operation of the Spirit cannot be reduced to the action of the Word. There is only one economy of salvation, but the Word and the Holy Spirit can be seen as the “two hands” of God, which “have and keep their own share” in that economy “in accordance with their character.”⁵¹¹

Dupuis holds that “The communication of the Spirit through the risen Christ does not necessarily exhaust the activity of the Spirit after the Christ event.”⁵¹² The danger, according to him, in concluding that after the incarnation the saving and vivifying action of the Spirit can take place only through the sending of the Spirit by the risen Lord, is to undermine the salvific role of the Spirit in the overall plan of salvation. This position can lead to the subordination of the Spirit to the risen Christ,⁵¹³ giving way to a kind of theological ‘Christomonism’ in which the Holy Spirit is reduced to being a “function” of Christ.⁵¹⁴ He writes, “While certainly, no autonomous economy of the Spirit can be construed detached from that of the Word, neither can the Spirit be reduced to a “function of the risen Christ, to the point of

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 179.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. p. 179.

⁵¹¹ Cf. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 195 – 198; cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 243.

⁵¹² Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 180.

⁵¹³ Knitter observes that the problem with many of the recent efforts to fashion a pneumatological or Trinitarian theology of religions is that they end up tinged with the heresy of subordinationism. Cf. Knitter, “A Catholic Theology of Religions Faithful to the Christology of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds,” *Jeevadhara*, 36 (2006) 213, pp. 197.

⁵¹⁴ For instance, the Eastern Orthodox tradition has often criticised the western tradition of neglecting the role of the Holy Spirit. Yves Congar regards this observation, though exaggerated, is not entirely without a basis; indeed it offers the Western theology the chance to reflect on the inadequacy of its pneumatology. Cf. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 3, pp. 72 – 76.

being, as it were, his “vicar.” The fullness of the personal activity of the Spirit would thereby be lost.”⁵¹⁵ He affirms, “Certainly no “subordination” of the Spirit to the Son in the inner mystery of God may be assumed, the “order” of the intra-Trinitarian “processions” not withstanding.”⁵¹⁶ For him, Christ is always implicated and constitutive for the salvation, wherever it may occur. He makes it explicit that “Christ, not the Spirit is at the centre as the way to God.”⁵¹⁷ Therefore, he clearly upholds the centrality the Christ-event in the single divine plan. The Christ-event represents, according to him, the high point of God’s commitment to humankind, and as such, it is interpretative key of the entire extension of personal dealings between God and human beings.⁵¹⁸

So to sum up, in the sole economy of salvation of the Triune God is realised through the incarnation of the Word, death and resurrection of the Son of God, actualized with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, and extended in its salvific value to all humanity.⁵¹⁹ The Spirit anticipates the Christ-event, and after that event, extends its salvific significance beyond the confines of the Church. The Spirit, who is at work in other religious traditions, however, does not work for another economy of salvation than that of Jesus Christ. Instead, all his work is to make it possible for human beings to partake in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, the constitutive Saviour. More precisely, both the Spirit and Jesus Christ work for the one divine economy of salvation.⁵²⁰ Hence states: “While, Jesus Christ is constitutive of salvation for all, he neither excludes nor includes other saving figures or traditions. If he brings salvation history to a climax, it is by way not of substitution or suppression but of confirmation and accomplishment.”⁵²¹ The Christ-event, which is particular in time and universal in salvific meaning, has cosmic repercussions due to the trans-historical character of the risen humanity of Jesus. It is ‘singularly unique,’ yet related to all other divine manifestations to humankind in the sole history of salvation.

⁵¹⁵ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 180.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid. p. 180 – 181.

⁵¹⁷ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 197.

⁵¹⁸ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 181 – 182.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 12.

⁵²⁰ Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism”, in T. Merrigan / J. Haers (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, (Leuven University Press, 2000), pp. 87 – 91, 95.

⁵²¹ Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 388.

3. Pneumatological Perspective Regarding Religious Pluralism

A pneumatological approach to the diversity of religions provides hitherto untapped resources for the understanding of the meaning of religious pluralism in God's overall plan of salvation.⁵²² The truth of the universal presence and unbound work of Holy Spirit enables us to be open to the diversity of cultures and the plurality of world religions. A Pneumatological theology of religions is a Christian way of construing this plurality in order to find its meaning and significance in God's overall plan of salvation for the humankind.⁵²³ The Holy Spirit is present and active in the world, in religious others and in their religious traditions.⁵²⁴ A Christian theology of religious pluralism, in the opinion of Dupuis, needs a well-balanced theological account of the relationship between Christology and Pneumatology. It needs to affirm, on the one hand, the central place of the event of Jesus Christ in the one divine plan, on the other hand, the universal salvific role of the Spirit in the same economy of salvation. However, they are not two distinct economies of salvation, namely, salvation through Jesus Christ for Christians, and salvation in the work of the Spirit as such for the others. Dupuis distinguishes them, without separating them, as complementary aspects in God's plan of salvation for all humankind.

However, God's economy of salvation is one and the same for all; the Christ event is both its apex and universal sacrament; but the God who saves is Triune God; each of the three is personally distinct and remains active distinctly.⁵²⁵ In this regard Dupuis considers two fundamental principles that will enable us to recognise in humanity's religious traditions a divine intervention, inscribed in salvation history and attributable to the influence of the divine Spirit. The Word incarnate and the

⁵²² For a pneumatological perspective regarding religious pluralism, cf. Amos Yong, "The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth, and the Religions", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 57 (2004), 1, pp. 14 – 38. Cf. also, idem. "The Turn to Pneumatology in Christian Theology of Religions: Conduit or Detour," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 35 (1998), pp. 437 – 454.

⁵²³ Karl Rahner, in the light of the universal salvific will of God, predicted that pneumatology, in the sense of a teaching of the inmost divinising gift of grace for all human beings, will become the fundamental point of departure in the Christian theology. Cf. idem, "Aspects of European Theology," *Theological Investigation*, vol. 21, (New York: Crossroad, 1988), pp. 97 – 98.

⁵²⁴ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 163.

⁵²⁵ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 178.

Spirit, through their combined universal action, endow the religious life of religious others with truth and grace and “saving values”. Thus, elements of truth and grace are present in human cultures and religions, through their combined universal action. Dupuis finds support for his pneumatological interpretation of religious pluralism in the conciliar and post-conciliar teachings of the Church concerning the universal presence and operation of the Holy Spirit.

3.1. The Conciliar Insights to the Spirit’s Role in the Salvation of Religious Others

The Conciliar documents speak of the multiple and diversified action of the Holy Spirit in the world, which extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church.⁵²⁶ The document *Gaudium et Spes* makes an explicit reference to the universal presence and operation of the Holy Spirit everywhere in the world.⁵²⁷ The Spirit is at work not only in the religious initiatives of humanity, but also in the cultures, the universal aspirations, even secular, that characterize the present world. He is also present and active in the human values, which they unanimously pursue.⁵²⁸ Thus his influence extends to various spheres of humanity, in different religious traditions and among all human beings, ‘mysteriously and secretly,’ in each concrete situation. The Holy Spirit continually sows “the seeds of the Word”⁵²⁹ among all peoples, in their religious life, in their cultures and in their common endeavours for justice and peace in the world.

The universal working of the Holy Spirit is understood from the very existence of the elements of truth and goodness in them. They contain treasures of ascetical and contemplative life whose seeds have been planted in human beings, through the work of God’s Spirit before the preaching of the Gospel.⁵³⁰ Thus “whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations is a sort of secret

⁵²⁶ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2; *Ad Gentes*, 3 – 5, 11, 15, 18; *Lumen Gentium*, 3 – 4, 17.

⁵²⁷ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 10 – 11, 22, 26, 38, 41, 92 – 93.

⁵²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* 38 – 39.

⁵²⁹ *Ad Gentes*, 11, 15. Dupuis notes that while, the Word has sown its seeds in the religious traditions of humankind, it belongs to the Holy Spirit to see that these seeds fructify by addressing a call to human beings for faith in Jesus Christ. Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, pp. 157 – 158.

⁵³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* 15, 18.

presence of God, because it is doubtless that the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified.”⁵³¹ Likewise, “the grace and love of the Holy Spirit” is fully present to all peoples.⁵³² The other religions reflect “a ray of that truth, which enlightens all persons.”⁵³³ This has been understood as due to the universal presence and operation of the Spirit, since “the Lord’s Spirit, who fills the earth.”⁵³⁴ Similarly, “God’s Spirit, who with a marvellous providence directs the unfolding of time and renews the face of the earth”⁵³⁵ is not absent in the religious life of the ‘others’. The Holy Spirit “summons all to Christ by the seeds of Word and the preaching of the Gospel.”⁵³⁶

The Spirit is at work in the hearts of religious others through the seeds of the Word to be found in their religious traditions and in their efforts to conform to the truth and goodness of God. Christ, who died and was raised up for all (cf. 2 Cor 5:15), can through his Spirit offer humans the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny.⁵³⁷ God’s gift of salvation brought in Christ through the Spirit extends beyond the Christian dispensation.⁵³⁸ The Holy Spirit offers to everyone the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.⁵³⁹ With this pneumatological perspective to the sole economy of salvation, the other religions can be accepted as channels of God’s salvific design for all humankind. The diversity of religious traditions converge in the Triune God, participating in the one salvation history of humankind, where God calls all humankind to its final destiny, through the unique and universal mediation of his Son Jesus Christ and in the universal presence and operation of the Holy Spirit. Thus, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christians will share with others the mystery of the heavenly Father’s love.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³¹ Ibid. 9, 4.

⁵³² Ibid. 5.

⁵³³ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁵³⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 11.

⁵³⁵ Ibid. 26.

⁵³⁶ *Ad Gentes*, 15.

⁵³⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 10.

⁵³⁸ Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 6; *Lumen G entium*, 16; *Gaudium et Spes*, 22; *Ad Gentes*, 15.

⁵³⁹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. Ibid. 93.

In conclusion, the Second Vatican Council, however, has recognised the influence exerted by the Holy Spirit on various domains of human activity in the world as a whole. The active presence of the Holy Spirit in religious others and in their religious traditions constitutes a Pneumatological foundation for a positive approach towards religious others along with their religious traditions. Dupuis observes a shift from a simple consideration of the universal possibility of salvation to the recognition of the actual presence of the Holy Spirit among religious others.⁵⁴¹ For him, interreligious encounter and enrichment is “based on the acknowledgement of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in others. It consists in the common discernment of the suggestions of the Spirit experienced by all.”⁵⁴² Though the Council does not speak about the presence or activity of the Holy Spirit in other religious traditions, nevertheless, the text clearly indicates the activity of the Spirit in the ‘others’ outside the Christian dispensation.

3.2. Post-Conciliar Outlook Towards the Presence of the Spirit in Other Religions

The post-conciliar documents, however, going a step forward, speak of the presence and activity of the Spirit not only in religious others but also in their religions.⁵⁴³ The document *Redemptoris Hominis*, highlighting the activity of the Holy Spirit in other religions, sees it as “one more effect of the Spirit of truth working beyond the visible boundaries of the mystical Body.”⁵⁴⁴ Therefore it calls due respect

⁵⁴¹ Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, pp. 158 – 159.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.* p. 162.

⁵⁴³ Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 11 – 12; *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53 – 54; *Redemptoris Missio*, 28 – 29. Pope John Paul II’s various allocutions reflect a broader outlook towards the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in religious others and in their religious traditions. Cf. Pope John Paul’s Message to all the people of Asia, Manila, February 21, 1981 Cf. *Documentation Catholique*, 78 (1981), pp. 281 – 282.) Cf. also, Speech to the Representatives of Other Religions, Tokyo, February 24, 1981 Cf. *Documentation Catholique*, 78 (1981), p. 321. According to Dupuis, one of the main contributions of his pontificate to the theology of religions is his clear insight into the presence and work of the Spirit in the people of other faith and in their religious traditions. Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 173. For a brief commentary on the document and its pneumatological insights, cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 162 – 165.

⁵⁴⁴ *Redemptoris Hominis*, 6; cf. also, 11.

for “all that the Spirit, who ‘blows where it wills,’ [Jn 3:8] has wrought”⁵⁴⁵ in religious others. The encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* explicitly mentions the universal activity of the Holy Spirit before the time of the Christian dispensation and today outside the visible body of the Church.⁵⁴⁶ Before the time of Christian dispensation, the activity of the Spirit, in virtue of the divine plan of salvation, was ordered to Christ. Outside the Church today it results from the saving event accomplished in him. The salvific grace works in an unseen way in the hearts of all people of good will, and bears within itself both a Christological as well as a pneumatological aspect. Thereofre, in oder to see how the Spirit “has drawn from the treasures of the Redemption achieved by Christ and given new life to human beings, bringing about in them adoption in the only-begotten Son, sanctifying them,” we have to reach the pneumatological dimension through the Christological content.⁵⁴⁷

The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* affirms the universal salvific function of the Spirit in the whole universe and in the entire history of humanity: “The Spirit is at the very source of man’s existential and religious questioning, a questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very structure of his being. The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only the individuals, but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.”⁵⁴⁸ Furthermore, “It is the Spirit who sows the ‘seeds of the Word’ present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ.”⁵⁴⁹ Since the other religions embody “the active presence of God through his Word” and “the universal presence of the Spirit,” it is “in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions ... that the members of other religions correspond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation.”⁵⁵⁰ Therefore “certainly, the various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God, and which are part of what the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions.”⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* 12.

⁵⁴⁶ Cf. *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53.

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.* 53.

⁵⁴⁸ *Redemptoris Missio*, 28.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 28.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 29.

⁵⁵¹ *Dominus Iesus*, 21.

In conclusion, the post-conciliar documents acknowledge the presence of the Spirit not only in the followers of other religions but also in their religious life, which, in fact, includes their religious traditions, culture and other social realities that surround them. The truth and grace found in other religions is understood as concrete signs of the hidden presence of Christ and Holy Spirit in them. The action of the Spirit is not limited to the intimate and personal aspects of humankind but embraces also the social dimensions.⁵⁵² Consequently, *International Theological Commission* states, “Given this explicit recognition of the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the religions, one cannot exclude the possibility that they exercise as such a certain salvific function, that is, despite their ambiguity, they help people achieve their ultimate end. In the religions is explicitly thematised the relationship of man with the absolute, his transcendental dimension. It would be difficult to think what the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of people 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.”⁵⁵³ It is therefore legitimate to maintain that the Holy Spirit accomplishes salvation in religious others also through those elements of truth and goodness present in their religions.⁵⁵⁴ Hence, the question of the salvific value of other religions as such must be situated in the context of the universal active presence of the Spirit of Christ.⁵⁵⁵ The conciliar affirmation of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in religious others and the post-conciliar recognition of the universal presence of the Spirit in their religious traditions can be regarded as a starting point for Dupuis’ pneumatological approach to religious pluralism. He indicates that the affirmation of Spirit’s presence and operation in other religions points to their ‘lasting role’ and ‘specific meaning’ both with regard to the followers of those religions and Christians.

3.3. The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Diverse Religious Traditions.

The Spirit of God has been universally present throughout human history and remains active today in the hearts of all people in the world of diverse religious

⁵⁵² Cf. International Theological Commission, “Christianity and Religious Pluralism,” *Origins*, 27 (1997), 10, p. 159.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 161.

⁵⁵⁴ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 436 – 437.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. International Theological Commission, “Christianity and Religious Pluralism,” *Origins*, 27 (1997), 10, p. 157.

traditions and cultures. For Dupuis, the religious experience, more precisely, the experience of God by the religious others is the proof of the active presence and life-giving influence of the Holy Spirit in their religions.⁵⁵⁶ Dupuis asks: What specific role might the other religions play in the salvation of their followers with respect to the universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit? Does the activity of the Spirit reach the members of other religious traditions precisely interventions of their traditions? Dupuis writes: “the Spirit of God has been universally present throughout human history and remains active today outside the boundaries of the Christian fold. He it is who ‘inspires’ in people belonging to other religious traditions the obedience of saving faith, and in the traditions themselves a word spoken by God to their adherents.”⁵⁵⁷

Dupuis sees that the other “saving figures” along with the religious traditions that they have envisioned may be enlightened by Word of God and inspired by Holy Spirit to become pointers to salvation to their followers, in accordance with God’s overall design for humankind.⁵⁵⁸ In order to arrive at this conclusion, Dupuis moves along with the conciliar and post-conciliar teaching of the Church that the Spirit is present and active in the life of religious others and in their religious traditions, leading them to Christ’s mediation of the grace of salvation.⁵⁵⁹ He affirms:

“The Trinitarian Christology model, the universal enlightenment of the Word of God, and the enlivening by his Spirit, make it possible to discover in other saving figures and traditions, truth and grace not brought out with the same vigor and clarity in God’s revelation and manifestation in Christ. Truth and grace found elsewhere must not be reduced to

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 152.

⁵⁵⁷ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 196. Cf. also, idem, *Jesus Christ and His Spirit*, pp. 211 – 227, idem, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 165 – 177. For instance, some contemporary theologians, based on the universal experience of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, suggest that the sacred writings of other religious traditions are inspired by the Holy Spirit and contain genuine truths, which lead people to salvation. Cf. M. Dhavamony, (ed.), *Revelation in Christianity and in Other Religions*, (Rome: Gregorian University, 1971); D. S. Amalorpavadas, (ed.), *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1975); M. Amaladoss, “Other Scriptures and the Christian”, *Indian Theological Studies*, 22 (1985) 1, pp. 62 – 78.

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. Ibid. p. 298.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. The conciliar documents: *Nostra Aetate*, 2; *Ad Gentes*, 3 – 5, 11, 15, 18; *Lumen Gentium*, 3 – 4, 17. Cf. also, the post-conciliar documents: *Redemptoris Hominis*, 11 – 12; *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53 – 54; *Redemptoris Missio*, 28 – 29.

“seeds” or “stepping-stones” simply to be nurtured or used and then superseded in Christian revelation. They represent additional and autonomous benefits. More divine truth and grace are found operative in the entire history of God’s dealings with humankind than are available simply in the Christian tradition.”⁵⁶⁰

In other words, the other religions are not merely stepping-stones; however, they actually serve as mediators of God’s saving purposes, albeit incomplete and less perfect than revelation in Christ.⁵⁶¹ Dupuis, “The influence of the Spirit is universal. It extends to the words uttered by God to humanity in all of the stages of self-revelation lavished by that God upon that humanity.”⁵⁶²

Dupuis is of the view that the mystery of God is not exhausted in the revelation in Jesus Christ but is also revealed in other religions. In order to defend this stand, he opts for Spirit Christology as long as it is understood as complementary to traditional Christology and not an alternative to it.⁵⁶³ He affirms that a certain divine revelation can be found in other religious traditions. Similarly, the authentic religious experiences and the sacred books of other religions can serve as channels by means of which God speaks to the nations through his Spirit.⁵⁶⁴ If the Spirit is active in history, what the Spirit is doing could be different from God’s word in Jesus, yet not contradictory to it, but different from it. That is, God may have more to say through other religions. In other words, Dupuis believes that there is more truth in the history of God’s dealings with humanity than is available simply in Christian traditions. At the same time, he holds that the fullness of revelation is available only in Jesus Christ. But it is in terms of quality and not in terms of quantity; it does not exhaust the divine mystery. Though the fullness of God’s revelation is available in Jesus Christ, Christians have to relate it to what the Spirit is doing in other religions. Dupuis considers that while the Spirit reaches beyond Jesus in extent, he does not go beyond Jesus in content. There is no independent revelation through the Spirit, but only applications of the revelation of Jesus.

⁵⁶⁰ Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 388.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 211.

⁵⁶² Dupuis, *Jesus Christ The Encounter of World Religions*, p. 176 – 177.

⁵⁶³ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p.196 – 198.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 234.

The world and history are filled with ‘seeds of the Word’.⁵⁶⁵ The ‘inchoate reality of the Kingdom of God’ is outside the Church among peoples everywhere, amongst those who are open to the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills. The expression, “seeds of the Word,” according to Dupuis, “is directly applied to the sacred books of various religious traditions of humanity, especially to the writings that they regard as holy scriptures.”⁵⁶⁶ For him, “the seeds of the Word contained in their scriptures are seminal words of God, from which the influence of the Holy Spirit is not absent.”⁵⁶⁷ If the Second Vatican Council has acknowledged the presence of the elements of truth and holiness in other religions,⁵⁶⁸ these elements are found, above all, in their sacred writings. Dupuis refers to an active presence of the Spirit of God who, in inspiring the sacred authors, imprints his personal seal on what is written.⁵⁶⁹ Moreover, the question is whether theology may acknowledge, in the sacred scriptures of other religions, a word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit and addressed by God to other religious communities. What specific role the Spirit might play in their scriptures on behalf of the religious others in the sole economy of salvation? Dupuis seeks to establish whether the scriptures of other religious traditions, in general, can be seen as the “word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit and addressed by God” to human beings. He, therefore, points out how these scriptures are connected with God’s decisive word addressed to humankind in Jesus Christ.⁵⁷⁰

Dupuis, however, makes it clear: “Important as it is to preserve intact the unique signification of the word of God reported by the Jewish and Christian

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 28; cf. also, *Ad Gentes*, 11; *Lumen Gentium*, 17. For the “seeds of the Word” in the patristic tradition, cf. also St. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*, 8, 1 – 2; 10, 1 – 3; 13, 3 – 6.

⁵⁶⁶ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ The Encounter of World Religions*, p. 169.

⁵⁶⁷ Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 211.

⁵⁶⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 17; *Ad Gentes*, 15.

⁵⁶⁹ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ The Encounter of World Religions*, p. 171. In his opinion, “The theology of the holy scriptures should once more and more earnestly than in the past, make an effort to show the personal influence of the Spirit in the inspiration of these scriptures. Only then shall we be in the possession of the theology of holy scripture that will permit a more open attitude toward the holy scriptures of other religious traditions.” Ibid. 171.

⁵⁷⁰ Kasper affirms that the universal mediating function of the Spirit in scriptures in general becomes more transparent in the concrete person, work, message and the destiny of Jesus of Nazareth. The Spirit inaugurates in Jesus’ resurrection totally a new form of human participation in the Trinitarian life of God. Kasper, *Jesus der Christus*, p. 296.

revelation, it is no less important to recognize the full value and meaning of the words of God contained in the cosmic revelation.”⁵⁷¹ God has spoken to the peoples through his prophets and he continues to speak to them through their founder figures and scriptures. He accepts that the scriptures of other religious traditions, though not without error, are inspired by the Holy Spirit and contain the words of God. For instance, “the religious experience of the sages and *rishis* [seers] of the nations is guided and directed by the Spirit. Their experience is an experience of God’s Spirit.”⁵⁷² According to him “They contain words of God to human beings in the words of the *rishis*, inasmuch as they report secret words uttered by the Spirit in hearts that are human, but words destined by divine providence to lead other human beings to the experience of the same Spirit. To say anything less, surely, would be to cheapen the realism of God’s self-manifestation to the nations.”⁵⁷³ Hence, he writes: “In the divine providence, God, to whom alone belongs any divino-human encounter, has willed to speak to the nations themselves, through the religious experience of their prophets. In addressing the prophets personally in the secret recesses of their hearts, God has willed to be manifested and revealed to the nations in the divine Spirit. Thus God has secretly entered the history of peoples, guiding them toward the accomplishment of the divine design.”⁵⁷⁴

On the basis of the universal presence of the Spirit, Dupuis holds that “the religious experience of the sages and *rishis* (seers) of the nations is guided and directed by the Spirit. Their experience of God is an experience in the Spirit”⁵⁷⁵ This takes place not for the good fortune of the seers alone, but also for the sake of the peoples. In the divine providence, God has willed to speak to the nations themselves, through the religious experience of their prophets. The “social character of the sacred scriptures” is willed by God. These scriptures contain “a word of God to human beings in the words of the *rishis*.” This, however, does not mean that the whole

⁵⁷¹ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 176.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.* p. 172.

⁵⁷³ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 172.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 172.

⁵⁷⁵ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 247. Cf. also Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” in T. Merrigan / J. Haers, (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, pp. 94 – 95.

content of these scriptures is the word of God.⁵⁷⁶ Neither are they God's decisive word to humankind. In fact, they contain many elements which are just "human words concerning God."⁵⁷⁷ Dupuis states: "The personal experience of the Spirit by the *rishis*, inasmuch as, by divine providence, is a personal overture on the part of God to the nations, and inasmuch as it has been authentically recorded in their sacred scriptures, is a personal word addressed by God to them through intermediaries of divine choosing. In a true sense, this word may be called "a word inspired by God," provided we do not impose too strict a version of the concept and that we take sufficient account of the cosmic influence of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁷⁸

The influence of the Holy Spirit in the scriptures of other religious traditions is the key for Dupuis' claim to the validity of these scriptures as well as their traditions. According to him, "before uttering the ultimate divine word in Jesus Christ, even before speaking through the prophets of the Old Testament, God had already uttered an initial word to human beings through the prophets of the nations – a word whose traces can be found in the holy scriptures of the world's religious traditions."⁵⁷⁹ He argues that "the last word does not preclude a first; on the contrary, it supposes it."⁵⁸⁰ God grants to the hearts of seers the hearing of a secret word, the traces of which are recorded in the holy scriptures of the other religions. Their holy scriptures can contain only initial, hidden words of God.⁵⁸¹ Yet, in his opinion, they are divine words inasmuch as God utters them by the divine Spirit. Therefore, the value of the words of God in the holy scriptures of other religions is not only applicable to their own members, but also for Christians. In his opinion, "Certain

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. Dupuis, "The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited," in *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 233 – 234.

⁵⁷⁷ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 247.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 247 – 248.

⁵⁷⁹ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 175.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p. 175.

⁵⁸¹ For Dupuis, though the scriptures of the nations deserve to be called *holy scriptures*, they are neither equal to nor have the same official character as the Old Testament, nor do they have the definitive value of the New Testament, which report the unique signification of the word of God. He affirms the definitive value of the New Testament, as it bears, by virtue of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a seal of authenticity that enables the Church community to recognize in it the official expression of its faith, in the true sense of what God has done for human beings in Jesus Christ. Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 175 – 176.

aspects of the divine mystery may actually be given more emphasis in other sacred scriptures than in the New Testament. We need only think of the deep sense of the divine majesty and holiness of the divine decrees and the interiority in which religious experience is steeped in the sacred books of Hinduism. Paradoxical as it may appear, a prolonged contact with non-biblical scriptures – practiced within their own faith – can help Christians to a more in-depth discovery of certain aspects of the divine mystery that they behold fully revealed in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁸² God’s revelation through the Spirit in the religions, though intimately related to what God has revealed in the Word-incarnate, cannot be reduced to it.⁵⁸³ Thus, the holy scriptures of the other religions represent the various manners and forms in which God addresses human beings throughout the continuous process of the divine self-revelation to them.

In conclusion, God’s Spirit has been work in the hearts of all people and in the symbols of religions all through history. Their scriptures try to articulate the message of this intense experience and the religious symbols express the salvific meaning of this encounter.⁵⁸⁴ As the presence of the Holy Spirit in religious others and in their religions is accepted, a like acknowledgement of God’s progressive differentiated revelation in their scriptures, although in part formally different from the Word revealed in Jesus Christ, may lead to a deeper appreciation of their holy scriptures as authentic word of God to the nations. Dupuis writes: “When, in virtue of their contacts and dialogue, it is given to them to discover this mystery at work in the lives of persons belonging to other religious faiths, it seems to Christians to testify to the presence – hidden, mysterious, and yet evident and undeniable – of the Spirit in others. Then they are in a position to weigh the secret manner in which the active

⁵⁸² Ibid. p. 177.

⁵⁸³ Knitter suggests that “the Spirit may be saying something new, something beyond the Good News of Jesus, but it will connect with the Good News so that between the two very different revelations, as between the two very different persons of the Trinity, there will be an exciting, life-giving *perichoresis*.” Knitter, “A Catholic Theology of Religions Faithful to the Christology of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds,” *Jeevadhara*, 36 (2006) 213, p. 198. Cf. Amaladoss, “Listen to the Spirit: ‘Father is Greater than I’”, *VJTR*, 63 (1999), pp. 687 – 689.

⁵⁸⁴ Cf. Sebastian Painadath, “Creedal Formula, End or Beginning? – The Nicaea-Constantinople Creed in the Age of Dialogue initiated by Vatican II,” *Jeevadhara*, 36 (2006) 213, pp. 214 – 215. In this regard, he writes: If our history is God’s history with us, the religions of humanity are *spiritually* interrelated in the *one* universal process of God’s self communication. It is the one god who speaks to humanity in diverse ways, the one Logos that vibrates in different languages, the one Spirit that works in the hearts of all.” Ibid. p. 215.

presence of the Spirit attains human beings whose faith differs from theirs. More specifically, they are in a position to discover how the holy scriptures of their religious traditions become for them mediation of the divine activity.”⁵⁸⁵ The ever-present Spirit can surely foster transforming relationship with God by means of the diverse religions of humankind.⁵⁸⁶ Surely the Spirit meets people not only in religious spheres but everywhere – in the natural world, in the give and take of relationships, in the systems that structure human life. Thus the Spirit’s presence and activity may even make use of other religions for drawing people to meet God in the realities of their historical and social existence.⁵⁸⁷ Thus, in the scriptures of other religions we listen to the word of God, in their symbols we discern the presence of God, through their sages we open ourselves to what the Spirit’s presence in their religions. With this openness to the Spirit we find ourselves on a spiritual pilgrimage with religious others, moving towards the one goal: life in the Divine.⁵⁸⁸

4. Theological Implications of the Universal Presence of the Holy Spirit

The saving love of God has been revealed and communicated to humankind through Christ; and it is actualised in the world for everyone by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the overflow of God’s love into time; and thus it is the Spirit who prepares the cosmos for the entrance of the Son into the human family. Furthermore, the Spirit opens the way for all humankind to share in the love-intention of the Triune God through the paschal death and the glorification of the Son. The Spirit is the meeting place of a double movement. In one direction, the *kenosis* of the Father through the Son in the Spirit, which initiates “the Trinitarian history of God’s dealings with the world,”⁵⁸⁹ puts in motion the other direction, that the world being

⁵⁸⁵ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 168.

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 3.

⁵⁸⁷ Amos Yong sees pneumatological ground in the way the religious others are caught up in the truth of Jesus. Jesus’ reference to his other sheep speaks of the Spirit bearing witness, not only to those in religious others, but perhaps also through them. Yong, “The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth, and the Religions”, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 57 (2004), 1, pp. 14 – 38.

⁵⁸⁸ Cf. Sebastian Painadath, “Creedal Formula, End or Beginning? – The Nicaea-Constantinople Creed in the Age of Dialogue initiated by Vatican II,” *Jeevadhara*, 36 (2006), 213, pp. 215 – 216. He notes that “an interreligious hermeneutic evolves in theological pursuit: one religion interprets the other in the universal process of Divine-human dialogue.” *Ibid.* p. 216.

⁵⁸⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, (London: SCM Press, 1977), p. 64.

gathered in the Spirit through the Son be led back to the Father. If the whole of the Christian life is caught up in the movement “from the Father, to the Father,”⁵⁹⁰ then the Spirit is the point of departure in the Trinity of the movement of God toward humanity. The Spirit alone makes clear how Christ is entirely turned toward the Father, how Christ is the face of the Father turned entirely toward the world and how Christ exists entirely for all humanity, who opens the doors to all peoples.⁵⁹¹

The universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, prior to the Christ-event is traditionally understood as “*intuitu meritorum Christi*” (in view of the merits of Christ). The truth of the universal imparting of the Spirit is in view of Christ is often explicated in terms of *final causality*.⁵⁹² The mystery of incarnation means that the fullness of God’s self-communication through the Word met with a perfect human acceptance through the action of the Spirit. Jesus lived out his filial relationship to God with a genuine human consciousness and freedom under the inspiration of the Spirit.⁵⁹³ The Christ-event can be viewed as the goal of the working of the Spirit in the world, and for this reason the Spirit can be rightly called the Spirit of Christ even from the beginning of salvation history. Thus, Karl Rahner writes, “Since universal efficacy of the Spirit is directed from the very beginning to the zenith of its historical mediation, which is the Christ event [the final cause of the mediation of the Spirit to the world], it can be truly said this Spirit is everywhere and from the very beginning the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the incarnate divine Logos.”⁵⁹⁴ There exists between the Spirit and the Christ-event “mutually conditioning relationship”, like that of the relationship between an efficient and a final cause. In as much as the Spirit, who is efficient cause of the Incarnation and the paschal mystery, bears his goal within himself as an intrinsic entelechy (*entelechia*), he is from the outset the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Insofar as this Spirit always and everywhere brings justifying faith, this faith

⁵⁹⁰ Hans-Jochen Jaschke, „Der Heilige Geist im Bekenntnis der Kirche“, *Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie*, 40 (1976), p. 331.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator: Skizzen zur Theologie*, vol.3, (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1967), p. 102.

⁵⁹² Cf. Rahner, “Jesus Christ in Non-Christian Religions,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 17, pp. 44 – 46.

⁵⁹³ Cf. Rahner, *The Trinity*, pp. 61 – 63, 91 – 103.

⁵⁹⁴ Rahner, “Jesus Christ in Non-Christian Religions,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 17, p. 46. Cf. also, idem. *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 318.

is always and everywhere and from the outset a faith which comes to be in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.⁵⁹⁵

It is the Spirit who enables human reception of divine grace and the self's experience of existential transcendence.⁵⁹⁶ However, a transcendental experience of Spirit is oriented toward an explicit awareness of it. The value of the religions is in the mediation of these experiences of the Spirit, even when it is less than perfect.⁵⁹⁷ In that sense, all religious traditions potentially express truth about God's self-communication in the Spirit and therefore are part of the history salvation. But through Christ's death and resurrection, God's gracious self-communication has become manifest in history. To put it in the words of Karl Rahner: "The world is drawn to its spiritual fulfilment by the Spirit of God, who directs the whole history of the world in all its length and breadth towards its proper goal."⁵⁹⁸ For him the experience of the Holy Spirit is the presence of the self-communicating God in the form of sanctifying grace in the depth of human existence. This transcendental experience of God in the Holy Spirit is present in ordinary life non-thematically, anonymously. It becomes thematic through concrete mediating figures and practices.⁵⁹⁹ The universal salvific significance of the Christ-event and the universal presence of the Holy Spirit presuppose the divinising gift of grace for all human beings.

4.1. The Salvific Unity in the Presence and Operation of Christ and his Spirit

The Spirit has been active in the salvific economy, actualising God's universal plan of salvation. The Second Vatican Council, while presenting the Father's salvific plan for all humankind, has closely linked the paschal mystery of Christ from its very beginnings with the presence and work of the Spirit.⁶⁰⁰ "For the grace of God has

⁵⁹⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 318.

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. Gary Badcock, "Karl Rahner, the Trinity, and Pluralism," in Kevin E. Vanhoozer, (ed.), *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 149.

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 42 – 44, 72 – 76; cf. also, Sachs, "Do Not Stifle the Spirit," pp. 22 – 23.

⁵⁹⁸ Rahner, "The One Christ and Universality of Salvation," *Theological Investigations* vol.16, p. 203.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. Rahner, "Experience of the Holy Spirit," *Theological Investigation*, vol.18, pp. 189 – 210.

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 3 – 5, 11, 15, 18; *Gaudium et Spes* 10 – 11, 22, 26, 38, 41, 92 – 93; *Lumen Gentium*, 3 – 4, 17.

appeared for the salvation of all men” (Tit 2:11). The role of the Spirit in Incarnation of the Word (Cf. Mt 1:20; Lk 1:35), however, presupposes the Spirit’s subsequent and parallel role in taking all human nature into the unity with the Son of God. The Holy Spirit offers to everyone the possibility of sharing in the paschal mystery of Christ in accordance with *God’s will to save all humankind* (1Tim 2:4). The specific function of the Spirit consists in guiding the humankind to obtain God’s grace of salvation through *the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ* (cf. 1Tim 2:5). The Spirit leads all the people of good will along the way that God has opened for the salvation of all. In the light of Christ-event we understand the entire history of humankind as the history of revelation and salvation. Salvation is therefore participation through the Holy Spirit in the life of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the author of divine life in the faithful. Likewise, “the life bestowed by the *Paraklitos* has its roots in Christ, the Saviour. But without the Spirit, such divine life could not have been transmitted to the believers. By actually communicating this salvific life, the divine *Pneuma* transforms the faithful as their sanctifier, thus effecting in them the process of redemption commenced by the Father and actualised by the Son.”⁶⁰¹ Consequently, the mystery of salvation includes both Christological and pneumatological dimensions.⁶⁰² The presence of the Spirit in creation and history points to Jesus Christ in whom creation and history are redeemed and fulfilled. The presence and action of the Spirit both before the Incarnation and in the climactic moment of Pentecost point always to Jesus and to the salvation he brings.

Dupuis highlights the Spirit’s concrete role in the one-whole economy of salvation. The Spirit’s presence and operation in the religious history of humankind before the Christ-event is in view of it and related to it; since the Christ-event is the centre and summit God’s overall plan of salvation; and “Christ is at work now in the human hearts through the power of his Spirit.”⁶⁰³ Similarly, *Dominus Iesus* states, “There is only one salvific economy of the one and triune God, realized in the

⁶⁰¹ Nicodemus T. Makhalemele, “Pneumatological Themes in the Writings of Karol Wojtyła,” *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 67 (2002), pp. 242 – 243.

⁶⁰² For instance, Karl Rahner states that in the intra-Trinitarian life, the Spirit is not inferior to the Son, and therefore the external mission of the Spirit cannot be inferior to that of the Son. The economic Trinity is a reflection of the immanent Trinity. Cf. Rahner, *The Trinity*, (New York: Seabury, 1974), pp. 21 – 24.

⁶⁰³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 38.

mystery of the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of God, actualised with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit and extended in its salvific value to all humanity and to the entire universe. ‘No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit.’⁶⁰⁴ For the sake of theological clarity, Dupuis distinguishes the role of the Spirit from that of Jesus Christ in the Trinitarian economy of salvation. But he does not maintain any dichotomy between the two operations. Though the Word-incarnate and the Holy Spirit work for the one and the same economy of salvation, the operation of each is different from that of the other. In defense of his position, he affirms, “But it is one thing to affirm different economies of salvation parallel to that of the Christ event, and another matter to distinguish without separation different complementary aspects of a single economy of salvation willed by God for humankind.”⁶⁰⁵ Pneumatocentrism and Christocentrism, however, in his opinion, cannot be construed as two distinct economies of salvation one parallel to the other. They constitute two inseparable aspects or complementary elements within a unique economy of salvation. The Spirit is, at the same time, God’s communication to human beings and the Spirit of Christ, communicated by him after his resurrection. Therefore the cosmic influence of the Spirit cannot be severed from the universal action of the risen Christ.⁶⁰⁶ However there is no salvation brought about by the Spirit apart from the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Hence, there are not two channels that of the Son and of the Spirit through which God’s saving presence reaches out to people in distinct economies of salvation.⁶⁰⁷ Even for religious others, salvation comes as a grace from Jesus Christ through the communication of the Holy Spirit.

Hence, in his theology of religious pluralism, Dupuis does not opt for a paradigm shift from Christocentrism to Pneumatocentrism. Rather, he seeks to combine the two in his Trinitarian perspective to the history of salvation and to the diversity of religions. The work of salvation belongs to the whole Trinity. The universal operation of the Spirit cannot be set in opposition to the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, any more than that of the Son to the Father; Son and Spirit

⁶⁰⁴ *Dominus Iesus*, 12; cf. also, *Redemptoris Missio*, 5.

⁶⁰⁵ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 182.

⁶⁰⁶ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 197, 206 – 268.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 196.

presuppose each other. Furthermore, the universal activity of the Spirit is not to be separated from his particular activity within the Body of Christ, which is the Church.⁶⁰⁸ So, the Spirit can neither be severed from Christ nor from the Church. The Spirit, who is at work in other religious traditions, however, does not work for another economy of salvation than that of Jesus Christ. Instead, the work of the Holy Spirit is to make it possible for human beings to be related to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal Saviour. More precisely, both the Spirit and Jesus Christ work for the one divine economy of salvation.⁶⁰⁹ The following citation, adopted from Albert Greiner, summarises Dupuis' theology of Spirit: "In the New Testament the Holy Spirit everywhere appears as the bearer of the creative and motive deed of God: the Spirit is very God, setting in motion and fulfilling the great cosmic renewal toward which the divine plan of salvation tends. The Spirit extends to human beings, and seeks to extend to the world, the living bond of love that it constitutes from all eternity between the Father and the Son. The Spirit is divine fullness, aspiring to penetrate and fill creation altogether, as it has penetrated and filled Jesus, the Son of God eternally blessed."⁶¹⁰

However, in way of posing a corrective to the neglect in the western theology of the role of the Spirit in the history of salvation,⁶¹¹ he intends to bring out the full implications of the salvific role of the Holy Spirit in the world of religious pluralism. Consequently he emphasises the role of the Spirit in universalising the salvific-effects of the Christ-event. Dupuis writes, "Unlike the economy of the Christ event, which is unavoidably limited by the particularity of history, the economy of the Spirit knows no bounds of space and time. Free of all constraints, "the Spirit blows where it wills" (Jn 3:8). The Spirit of God has been universally present through out human history and therefore continues to remain active today outside the boundaries of Christian fold. He it is who "inspires" in people belonging to other religious traditions the obedience of saving faith, and in the traditions themselves a word spoken by God to

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 29.

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. Dupuis, "Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism", in T. Merrigan / J. Haers (eds), *The Myriad Christ*, pp. 87 – 91, 95.

⁶¹⁰ Albert Greiner, « L'Esprit Saint dans le Nouveau Testament », in Henri Cazelles, et al. (eds.), *Le Mystère de l'Esprit-Saint*, (Paris: Mame, 1968), p. 68; cf. also, Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 157.

⁶¹¹ Cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and His Spirit*, pp. 21 – 32.

their adherents.”⁶¹² Though this is a clear affirmation of the freedom of the Spirit and of the unlimited sphere of mission, such an affirmation might suggest that Jesus Christ represents particularity, while the Spirit represents universality. Nevertheless, he seeks to avoid a kind of error in the theology of religions to construe a kind of Pneumatological paradigm that tends to play off a broader economy of salvation by the Spirit against the more punctual economy of salvation by the incarnate Word.⁶¹³ But, his above statement seems to play off a sort of subordinationism of the Son to the Spirit in the Trinitarian economy.

4.2. Tracing the Presence and Fruits of the Spirit in the World Religions

The Spirit of God has been universally present through out the human history and remains active today out side the boundaries of the Christian fold. He continues to inspire in people belonging to other religious traditions the obedience of saving faith, as he has been at work in the traditions themselves in accordance with a word spoken by God to their adherents. Dupuis affirms “any personal experience of God is the vehicle of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.”⁶¹⁴ The order of God’s self-manifestation corresponds to the origin of the divine persons in the Trinitarian life itself. God’s self-bestowal is the communication of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. He writes, “The Spirit, who, in the cycle of Trinitarian processions, draws its origin from the Father through the Son, is, so to speak, the culminating locus, the crowning instance of God’s self-manifestation to human being, where God opens the divine substance to human beings to grant them a participation in the divine life itself.”⁶¹⁵ Thus, the Spirit is the human being’s only possible point of entry into the divine life, in virtue of the same necessity that, from the side of God, makes the Spirit the bond of God’s personal relationship with human beings. This means any personal encounter of God with human being and vice versa occurs in the Holy Spirit. God becomes God-for-the-human-being in the Spirit, and it is in the Spirit that human beings can respond to the divine advances. Hence, Dupuis writes, “All “being together” of God and the human being is made fast in the Spirit, or – and this is the

⁶¹² Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 196.

⁶¹³ *Dominus Iesus*, 12; cf. also *Redemptoris Missio*, 5; *Ecclesia in Asia*, 15 – 16.

⁶¹⁴ Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, p. 166.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 166.

heart of the matter – all religious experience becomes truly personal in the Spirit. In the order of divine-human relationships the Spirit, in the last analysis, is the God rendered personally present to the human being – God felt by the human being in the depths of the human heart.”⁶¹⁶

Consequently, from the above analysis it follows that “all authentic experience of God is an experience in the Spirit. Thus in all authentic experience of God, the Spirit is present and active, whatever be the manner in which human beings are situated in the salvation history or the particular stage of this history to which they belong.”⁶¹⁷ Human person’s spiritual drive towards the Absolute Being is an innate, grace-given readiness to encounter the God, who is Spirit. It is the Spirit who can then lead humankind to the Father through the Son. It is the Spirit who enables human reception of divine grace and the self-experience of existential transcendence.⁶¹⁸ Every quest of the human spirit for truth and goodness, and in the last analysis for God, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit can be discerned through many pointers in everyday life.⁶¹⁹ However, with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, the believers of other religions too experience God’s liberating grace, which is realised in the paschal mystery of Christ.⁶²⁰ The experiences of the Spirit is not limited to Christians. They are present in all religious experience, and they are thematised in diverse, yet recognisable, ways by the great religious traditions.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁶ Ibid. p. 166.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. p. 166.

⁶¹⁸ Cf. G. Badcock, “Karl Rahner, the Trinity, and Pluralism,” in Vanhoozer, K. J., (ed.), *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 143 – 154.

⁶¹⁹ Rahner points out that the mysticism of everyday life points out that God is found in all things. Christians’ experience of God’s liberating grace, which they describe as the Holy Spirit. Cf. Rahner, “Experience of the Spirit,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 18, pp. 199 – 203.

⁶²⁰ Albert the Great accepted a much wider concept of ‘grace’ and, in reply to the question as to “whether all truth that is the object of knowledge inspired by the Holy Spirit,” he said that “so long as every gift that is gratuitously given by God is called grace.” Cf. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, p. 219.

⁶²¹ For just to indicate one of the pointers to the notion of pneumatic experience in Hinduism: “through a process that is inexplicable, the universal ultimate reality became subdivided into myriad individual *atmans* [spirits]. ... All beings then are spiritual beings, sharing with one another and the forces that move the universe a common spiritual essence.” Cf. John L. Esposito, et al. *World Religions Today*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 282; cf. also Francis X, Cloony,

The Holy Spirit is the author of divine life in the hearts of the believers in the sole economy of salvation because he is from eternity the interpersonal and dynamic gift of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father. He is the author and agent of the actuality of divine life and salvation, because he proceeds and acts in the name of Creator, who called all beings to existence, and then of the redeemer who won salvation in and through the paschal mystery.⁶²² In the case of the believers of other religious traditions, they too experience the Creator, who bestows on them the gift of the Spirit that associates them to the merits of Jesus Christ. Indeed every good that has been brought about in other religious traditions is the effect of the universal active presence of the Spirit. The Spirit is associated with contemplation, devotion and acts of liberation rather than exclusively with one kind of religious expression over against another, and points towards the combination of the three – in *jnana*, *bhakti* and *karma* – as the true evidence of the Spirit’s work.⁶²³ This will open us to the truth that every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person (cf. Rom 8:26-27). These are, indeed, gifts of the Holy Spirit in people as well as in their religions. They are also visible signs of unique and universal presence of the risen Christ, in and through the sending of his Spirit on all humankind.

The salvation mediated by Jesus Christ is closely bound up with the actualising work of the Spirit in a human person and it bears fruit depending on the way one lives his life in the Spirit. “This universal design of God for the salvation of the human race is carried out not only, as it were, secretly in the soul of a man, or by the attempts (even religious ones by which in diverse ways it seeks after God) if perchance it may contact him or find him, though he be not far from anyone of us (cf. Acts 17:27).”⁶²⁴ The various religions arose from this primordial human openness to

Hindu Wisdom for All God’s Children, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998). For a pneumatic experience in Buddhism cf. John B. Cobb, (Jr.), *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); Aloysius Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, (NY: Orbis, 1988).

⁶²² Cf. Nicodemus T. Makhalemele, “Pneumatological Themes in the Writings of Karol Wojtyla,” *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 67 (2002), p. 244.

⁶²³ Sebastian Painadath, “Towards an Indian Christian Spirituality in the Context of Religious Pluralism” in Dominic Veliath (ed.), *Towards an Indian Christian Spirituality in a Pluralistic Context*, (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1993), pp. 3 – 14.

⁶²⁴ *Ad Gentes*, 3.

God. In spite of several ambiguities in them “they may sometimes serve as leading strings toward God.”⁶²⁵ At their origins we often find founders who, with the help of God’s Spirit, achieved a deeper religious experience. Handed on to others, this experience took form in the doctrines, rites and precepts of the various religions. Transcendental experience of the Spirit is oriented toward explicit awareness of something beyond. This orientation is expressed in the religious traditions of the world and reaches its apex in the final self-revelation of God in Christ. The value of religions is in the mediation by the individual moments of the experiences of the Spirit, even when these experiences are partial and mixed with error.⁶²⁶ The presence and action of the Spirit cannot be reduced merely to persons, cultures and religious traditions.⁶²⁷ We can find the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of religious others: “a sense of the sacred, a commitment to the pursuit of fullness, a thirst for self-realization, a taste for prayer and commitment, a desire for renunciation, a struggle for justice, an urge to basic human goodness, an involvement in service, a total surrender to God, and an attachment to the transcendent in their symbols, rituals and life itself, though human weakness and sin are not absent.”⁶²⁸

The Spirit’s mission precedes that of the Church and extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church. Any discernment of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the diverse religions stands in relation to Christ and his Church.⁶²⁹ The universal operation of the Holy Spirit, in God’s overall economy of salvation for all humankind, is always related to the universal salvific mediation of the Jesus Christ and ordained to the Church. Similarly, the experience of the Spirit by the religious others is in some way related to the ecclesial community.⁶³⁰ While God’s plan of

⁶²⁵ Ibid. 3.

⁶²⁶ Cf. Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, pp. 36 – 37.

⁶²⁷ Cf. Sebastian Painadath,, *Creedal Formula, End or Beginning? – The Nicaea-Constantinople Creed in the Age of Dialogue initiated by Vatican II,* *Jeevadhara*, 36 (2006), 213, pp. 211 – 220.

⁶²⁸ John Gnanapiragasam / Felix Wilfred, (eds.), *Being Church in Asia*, vol. 1, (Manila: Claretian Publication, 1994), p. 13.

⁶²⁹ Gavin D’Costa notes that the riches of the mystery of God disclosed by the Spirit are measured and discerned by their conformity to and illumination of Christ, who is the normative criterion. Cf. D’Costa, (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: A Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, p. 23; idem, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, p. 114.

⁶³⁰ Cf. Nicodemus T Makhalemele, “Pneumatological Themes in the Writings of Karol Wojtyła,” *Irish theological Quarterly*, 67 (2002), pp. 241 – 250.

salvation is fully efficacious in the Church, the mystical body of Christ and the universal sacrament of salvation, it also includes all the diverse religions of humankind, due to the universal presence of Holy Spirit in them. Thus, the other religions partake in the one salvific economy of the Triune God; and converge in the one mediation of Christ in the universal operation of the Spirit. Hence, Christian mission includes a humble recognition of the free and unlimited movements of the Spirit that “blows where it wills,” (Jn 3:8) and cooperating with the work of the Spirit in all the realities of human life, including their religious and cultural realities. If so, then discerning the presence and activity of Spirit in religious others and in their religious traditions becomes a matter of crucial significance because it determines the nature of Christian mission.⁶³¹ The mission is not to verify whether a particular tradition or spirituality or movement represents the work of the Spirit, but to discern the free movement of the Spirit in all of them. By opening ourselves to the Spirit’s work among people, we are enabled to approach them with a theological clarity of seeing them as God’s endowments for the salvation of his people. This helps us to understand how God’s universal plan of salvation has been manifested and is progressively accomplished, through the life death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ and how it is actualised by the power of the Spirit in the lives of all humankind.

4.3. Concluding Remarks on the Holy Spirit and the diversity of Religions

A pneumatic perspective regarding religious pluralism opens new avenues for the Christian theology of religious pluralism. Dupuis’ nuances concerning the unbound action of the Spirit in the whole economy of salvation can help to grasp the meaning of religious pluralism and purpose of the saving values found in the other religions. The specific role played by the Holy Spirit in salvation both inside and outside the Church, and the immediacy of his action make it possible to recognise his personal imprint wherever salvation is at work. Though the universal presence of the Holy Spirit is God’s necessary point of entry in human history, Christ-event continues to be the manifestation of God’s universal economy of salvation. Hence, a Christian perspective to the universal presence and activity of the God’s Spirit must not by pass the universal salvific significance of the Christ event, not withstanding the historical temporality of the punctual event of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God is, at one and the

⁶³¹ Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit*, p. 72.

same time, the Spirit of Christ, communicated by him in virtue of his resurrection from the dead.

A Spirit Christology that takes into account the full significance of the centrality Jesus' resurrection will show us that the Spirit, who raised Jesus to lordship over all of creation, must have been active in Jesus throughout his whole human existence, and must have planned to include Jesus' concrete destiny into the eternal love-intention of the Triune God from the very beginning of time.⁶³² The Spirit, who was active in the resurrection and glorification, in retrospect, was also active during his incarnation and in his historical existence, opens for all humankind the centre of Christ's paschal mystery. All creation now has the possibility of being encountered by the same Spirit who gave life to Jesus, dwells in him unendingly and establishes him as the head and goal of all things.⁶³³ The active presence of the Holy Spirit in the world of religious and cultural plurality, gives us the hope regarding the possibility of salvation for all humanity, even for those who still do not know Christ. However, all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation through Jesus Christ in the actualising power of his Spirit. Being in the Spirit and being in Christ can now be identified, since Christ is fully in the dimension of God, and because of his unique position, Christ himself is in fact the reality and the possibility of salvation for all peoples at all times. After the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit, being one with him, will continue to lead all to the Son, and the Son will hand over the Kingdom to the Father.

In conclusion, the Holy Spirit is universally at work among human beings along with their religious traditions. In fact, it is not the religious traditions that save people, but Triune God: Father, who wills to save all humankind through his Son and in his Spirit. The diverse paths sketched by diverse religious traditions are conducive to salvation because they have been traced by God himself in his search for his people and peoples. Even though not all these diverse paths have the same meaning or represent the same depth of divine involvement with people, yet all of them converge in the one universal plan designed by God eternally. The hidden manifestation of the Word of God through the seers of other religions and through the traditions which

⁶³² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 33 – 75.

⁶³³ W. Pannenberg, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the Task of a Theology of Nature," *Theology*, 75 (1972), p. 9.

have found their origin in them, the inspiring breath of the Spirit in their prophets and in their message, as well as the historical coming of the Word incarnated in Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit through him at Pentecost, to which the Christian community testifies – all combine together in the overall ensemble of a unique divine plan. If faith in the Spirit of Jesus Christ means openness to truth wherever it manifests itself, we should have no fear of entering into the dialogical process with religious others, being open to what the Spirit is accomplishing in the religious traditions, offering our own deep insights and experience of the Spirit and enriching ourselves from their life in the Spirit.

Chapter IV

Trinity and the World Religions

Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Religious Pluralism

A growing awareness of religious pluralism is becoming all the more a permanent feature of the present and future human predicament. Religious pluralism has indeed made an unprecedented impact on Christianity. Jacques Dupuis is convinced that “the affirmation of Christian identity is compatible with a genuine recognition of the identity of other faith communities representing in their own right distinct facets of the self-disclosure of the Absolute Mystery in a single but complex and articulated divine economy.”⁶³⁴ Dupuis revisits Christian doctrine to construct a Trinitarian theology of religious pluralism, so as to encompass the experience of other religious faiths or at least to make better sense of our own faith in the midst of other faiths and their doctrines. However, if Christian theology is to encompass the new awareness and experience of the reality of religious pluralism, the pluralism needs to be grounded in the very reality of God. God has something to do with the diversity of religious traditions that have continually put people in contact with him. The plurality of religions is rooted within the divine life itself, of which the Christian doctrine of Trinity provides an account. The mystery of Trinity is for Christians the ultimate foundation for pluralism.⁶³⁵

Dupuis foresees that the relationship between Christianity and other religions can no longer be viewed in terms of contradiction, or of realisation here and stepping-stones there, and much less between absoluteness on the one side and potentialities on the other. It must henceforth be thought of in terms of the relational interdependence, within the organic whole of universal reality, between diverse modalities of encounter of the human existence with the Divine Mystery. Consequently, he seeks to develop a Christian theology of religious pluralism, with the aim of expanding the concept of theology of religions which goes beyond the question of salvation to the theological meaning of religious plurality itself. Consequently, his theology searches more deeply

⁶³⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 210.

⁶³⁵ Panikkar, “The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-consciousness,” in Hick / Knitter, (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, pp. 89 – 116.

in the light of Christian faith, for the meaning of God's design for humankind of the plurality of living faiths and religious traditions with which we are surrounded.⁶³⁶ In the light of Christian faith and the doctrinal tradition of the Church what can be said regarding the salvific meaning and theological significance of other religions?⁶³⁷ Are they Spirit-filled paths, ways or channels through which the religious others have communion with the God of Jesus Christ? The question arises regarding the other religions, while participating in the universal salvific mediation of Christ, due to the presence and work of the Spirit in them; they become ways of salvation for their followers. These and other questions will be considered by having recourse to Trinitarian Spirit Christology model.

1. The Unity of Religious Traditions in God's Universal Plan of Salvation

The theological perspectives, at the time of the Second Vatican Council were no longer restricted to asking what kind of saving faith is necessary for the salvation of people to whom the Gospel has not been promulgated. Instead, they went further and asked how the religious traditions to which those people belonged stood in relation to the Gospel message and Christianity and what could a Christian theological discourse affirm concerning those religions. They asked, whether these religions even today should be considered a "preparation to the Gospel" (*preparatio Evangelica*), to use Eusebius' expression, and in what sense other religious traditions are preparation for the Gospel. The Council spoke of God as being the common origin and goal of all peoples. It adopted a positive approach towards the religious traditions, as it situates them in God's plan of salvation that includes all humankind. It took a positive stance in relation to the spiritual values endowed in other religions and traditions. The Council dealt with three fundamental themes concerning the 'religious others' and their religious traditions, namely, first and foremost, the salvation of people of other religions, secondly, the authentic values found in them and their religious traditions, and finally, the Church's appreciation of these values

⁶³⁶ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 10.

⁶³⁷ Hans Küng observes that since Christians are now living in a radically altered context of the plurality of religions, there can no longer be a credible Christian theology that does not take seriously the challenge of the world religions. Cf. Hans Küng, et al. *Christianity and World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), p. xiii.

and the consequent attitude which it takes toward the religious traditions and their members.

The basic perspective of the Council has been the unity of the people of God. The entire humanity is the people of God and the Church is the sacrament of this theological reality. It stresses the common origin of all people in God and the search, common to all religious traditions, to answer the ultimate questions that beset the human spirit and common destiny of all people to God.⁶³⁸ It asserts the basic unity of all humankind in their origin and in their final goal.⁶³⁹ God's universal plan of salvation includes everyone, even though its actual attainment will depend on God's providence and human response in faith commitment to him. Apart from the basic unity of the all humankind the Council acknowledges also a common vision of diverse religious tradition. In other words, the Council recognises that the religious traditions have their place in God's universal design of salvation, consequently, the "universal design of God to save the human race is not achieved only in secret, as it were, in the hearts of people; nor merely through the undertakings, including religious ones, by which they seek God in many ways, in the hope that they may feel after him and find him, though indeed he is not far from each one of us [Acts 17:27]."⁶⁴⁰ Here, the explicit reference to „the religious undertakings“ seems to refer to the objective elements belonging to the other religious traditions. Dupuis observes, "what in previous Church documents affirmed – firmly but cautiously – as a *possibility* based on God's infinite mercy and in any event to be left to his counsel is being taught by the council with unprecedented assurance: in ways known to him, God can lead those who no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel to that faith without which impossible to please him (cf. Heb 11: 6)."⁶⁴¹ The unity of subjective dispositions of the believers of other religions and objective values found in their religions can be traced in God's universal design to save all humankind.

The post-conciliar teaching of the Church continues to recognise the basic unity of the humankind in God. The unity of the plan of salvation is found in the mystery "that all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the

⁶³⁸ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 1

⁶³⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ad Gentes*, 3.

⁶⁴¹ Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 161. Cf. also, *Ad Gentes*, 7.

same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit.”⁶⁴² Hence the entire history of humanity has to be seen theologically from the perspective of one universal plan of salvation. “Though roots taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit, as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words, for the full meaning of human life.”⁶⁴³ However, God, who desires to call all peoples to himself in Christ and to communicate to them the fullness of revelation and love, does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches.

The universality of God’s plan of salvation and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ cannot be understood without the universal action of the Holy Spirit. The pneumatological perspective towards humanity’s search for God in their diversity of religious traditions – that the one divine Spirit is transforming the lives of all humankind and guiding them to the divine Truth– opens a wide horizon for recognising God’s universal plan of salvation, unfolded in the event of Jesus Christ. The fundamental orientation towards God, of all humankind and their religious traditions, can be understood from the perspective of God’s presence in the whole of creation in the power his Spirit. In this basic orientation of all humankind to God, the post-conciliar theology acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit is at the very source of man’s existential and religious questioning”⁶⁴⁴ The “interior and mysterious working of God’s Spirit is to be recognised in the great religious and sapiential traditions of East and West.”⁶⁴⁵ The spiritual value and existence of truth in those religions are the result of the Spirit who is universally active in the world, and the truths of those religions, too, are “reflections of one Truth, ‘the seeds of the Word’”.⁶⁴⁶ Thus, the Conciliar theology had laid as the foundation for a Christian understanding of the Church’s relationship with the world religions a double commonality existing between all persons and peoples, namely, their common origin from God and their common destiny to God in accordance with

⁶⁴² *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

⁶⁴³ *Redemptor Hominis*, 11.

⁶⁴⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, 28.

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. *Veritatis Splendor*, 94.

⁶⁴⁶ Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 11.

his design of salvation for all humankind. Such a design, as the Council implied, was accomplished by God through his only Son, Jesus Christ and in the indwelling of his Spirit in the believers and their diverse religious traditions.

1.1. Tracing the Meaning of the Plurality of Religions in the One History of Salvation

There is one salvation history, starting from creation and it is not peculiar to one nation or one religion, but for the whole of humankind.⁶⁴⁷ The whole of humankind forms one family, due to the common origin of all men and women, created by God in his own image. Similarly, all are called to a common destiny, the fullness of life in God. Moreover, there is but one plan of salvation for humankind, with its centre in Jesus Christ, who in his incarnation has united himself in a certain manner to every person.⁶⁴⁸ For Dupuis, the understanding of salvation history is the key point for Christianity to situate itself in relation to world history and in relation to the history of other religious traditions and their salvific role. Dupuis tries to establish that the history of other religious traditions, the “non-biblical religions,” is not excluded from salvation history. He does this by showing the supporting elements from Scripture, Patristic Tradition of the Church, conciliar and post conciliar Catholic theology in general. Dupuis presents history as “linear” having a goal, a destination, toward which it is being moving.⁶⁴⁹ Every event has meaning and value in itself and in relation to others, and especially in relation to the final goal of the whole of history.⁶⁵⁰ Quoting Samuel Rayan, Dupuis writes: “Historical events began to be regarded as Yahweh’s active presence. History appeared as a series of theophanies. Each theophany, each event, had its intrinsic value because it was Yahweh’s intervention with a view to the people’s final salvation.”⁶⁵¹ Salvation history did not begin with the vocation of Abraham, and may not be reduced to the Hebrew-Christian

⁶⁴⁷ Cf. *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 19.

⁶⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* 28.

⁶⁴⁹ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 212 – 215. Cf. also, Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of Eternal Return*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), pp. 88 – 89, 106; Samuel Rayan, “Models of History,” in *Jeevadhara*, 13 (1983), pp. 5 – 26.

⁶⁵⁰ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” in *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 230.

⁶⁵¹ Samuel Rayan, “Models of History,” in *Jeevadhara*, 13 (1983), p. 10. Cf. also, Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 213.

tradition. Rather, according to Dupuis, “salvation history coincides and is coextensive with the history of the world. It consists of human and world history itself, seen with the eyes of faith as a “dialogue of salvation” freely initiated by God with humankind from creation itself and pursued through the centuries until the fulfilment of God’s Reign in the eschaton.”⁶⁵² Indeed, salvation history consists of the history of humankind and of the world. It was initiated by God from creation and will culminate in the fulfilment of God’s Kingdom in the final time.⁶⁵³

Dupuis, in order to penetrate more deeply into God’s plan of salvation for humankind, “asks about the significance of the plurality of religious traditions in that plan – and consequently in the unfolding of the history of God’s dealings with humankind which we call the history of salvation.”⁶⁵⁴ He holds that “the history of salvation and revelation is one,”⁶⁵⁵ in view of God’s will to communicate with the entire human race, irrespective of historical situations and circumstances in which men and women find themselves; and it is manifold and variegated in the concrete forms which the divine unitary takes on in historical unfolding. Consequently, he asks, whether the theological framework regarding the history of salvation “allows us to assign to them a lasting role and a specific meaning in the overall mystery of the divine-human relationships.”⁶⁵⁶ He asks further, “Can Salvation history not only accommodate the idea of propaedeutic value for world religions – granting them merely, and hypothetically, some saving significance under clearly set condition – but also make allowance for an abiding meaning of the plurality of the world religious traditions in accordance with God’s universal saving design for humankind?”⁶⁵⁷ Thus Dupuis is of the view that the history of salvation operates as an important hermeneutical key for Christianity’s self understanding as well as the way in which it situates itself in relation to world history in general and to the history of religion in particular.

⁶⁵² Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 217.

⁶⁵³ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 217; cf. also, Dupuis, “God is Always Greater,” *The Tablet*, (27/ 10/ 2001), p. 1520.

⁶⁵⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 13.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 251. Cf. also, *ibid.*, pp. 220, 236.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 211.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 211 – 212.

Dupuis regards human history as the story of “God-with-humankind.” Accordingly, it is “both divine revelation and salvation.”⁶⁵⁸ This position is supported by the idea of the universal will of God for human salvation for which he refers to 1 Tim 2:4. He goes on to say that the divine will of salvation for humankind is not subject to any condition except human freedom.⁶⁵⁹ In other words, God’s grace is at work or available at all times, in every space, in biblical as well as non-biblical religions. Oscar Cullmann distinguishes “special salvation history” and “general history.” The former refers to the “sacred history” of Israel that was a preparation for the Christ-event and Christianity itself while the latter refers to the history of other peoples and other pre-Christian religions.⁶⁶⁰ Dupuis goes beyond this idea by questioning whether other people’s history cannot have a role for its members, which is comparable to the one that the history of Israel had for its people in the order of salvation. Nevertheless, Dupuis insists, “the distinction between the general and the special history of salvation must not be taken too rigidly: extra-biblical religious traditions ... cannot be excluded *a priori* from belonging to special revelation history.”⁶⁶¹ Dupuis, then, implicitly gives a positive answer to the question: whether the special history of salvation does not extend beyond the boundaries of Hebrew-Christian tradition. Moreover, Dupuis observes that there is a “universal process of divine revelation which occurs through concrete, limited manifestations.”⁶⁶² He sees the “universal active presence of the Word of God and his Spirit, as a source of enlightenment and inspiration of religious founders and the traditions which have sprung from their experience.”⁶⁶³ So also, he affirms that “God’s saving action, which always operates within the framework of a unified plan, is one and at the same time multifaceted,”⁶⁶⁴ and that the history of salvation is both “one and manifold.”⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 217.

⁶⁵⁹ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free, The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” in *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 230.

⁶⁶⁰ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 219; Cf. also, Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Christian Concept of Time and History*, (London: SCM Press, 1952).

⁶⁶¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 233.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.* p. 229.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 385.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.316.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 325. Cf. also, *ibid.* p. 211.

Dupuis affirms that the “Christian view of God’s dealings with humankind is a historical perspective capable of accounting at once for a variety of divine self-manifestations and the unity of a divinely preordained plan. God’s design for humankind is neither monolithic nor piecemeal, but singular and complex at the same time. It is one and universal, in view of God’s will to communicate with the entire human race, irrespective of historical situations and circumstances in which men and women find themselves; and it is manifold and variegated in the concrete forms which the divine unitary design takes on in historical unfolding.”⁶⁶⁶ Dupuis holds that the unfolding of the God’s plan of salvation in the religious history of humankind is Trinitarian. The entire process of God’s self-manifestation in salvation-revelation within history is marked by a Trinitarian rhythm. In the Christian understanding of the unfolding of the single but holistic design of God for the salvation of humankind in history, the Christ event is the midpoint and the focal point. He notes, “The Christ-event is the midpoint and the focal point. It is the pivot upon which the entire history of the dialogue between God and humanity turns, the principle of intelligibility of the divine plan concretised in the history of the world. It influences the entire process of history by way of a final cause, that is, as the end or the goal drawing to itself the entire evolutionary process: both “pre-Christian” and “post-Christian” history are being drawn by the Christ-Omega to himself.”⁶⁶⁷ But at the same time, Dupuis holds that “the Christocentrism of salvation history must not be understood as a “Christomonism.” The centrality of the Christ event does not obscure, but rather supposes, calls forth, and enhances the universal operative presence of the “Word of God” and the “Spirit of God” through salvation history and, specifically, in the religious traditions of humankind.”⁶⁶⁸ Salvation history in its entirety is the history of the origin of all things from God through his Word in the Spirit and of their return to God through the Word in the Spirit. This affirmation is in keeping with the New Testament conviction: “For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6). Also, our journey from and to the Father

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 211.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 221 – 222. Cf. also, idem, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 109 – 113. Karl Rahner, “Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, pp. 157 – 192.

⁶⁶⁸ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 110.

through Jesus Christ is accomplished in the Spirit: “Through him [Christ], then, we both [Jews and Gentiles] in the one Spirit have free access to the Father” (Eph 2:18). Thus, from a Christian standpoint, the Trinitarian interpretation of the history of salvation has the merit of throwing light on the fact that, individually as well as collectively, extra-biblical religious humanity is assumed by God into fellowship with himself in grace and hope.

1.2. Trinitarian Perspective Regarding God’s Covenant Relationship with Humankind

The universal involvement of God with his creation throughout history is marked by different covenants with humanity, of which St Irenaeus in the 2nd century in a celebrated text distinguished four covenants, as follows: One, prior to the flood, under Adam; the second, after the flood, under Noah; the third, the giving of the law under Moses; finally, the fourth one, which renews humanity, and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing human beings upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom. There is only one God and one plan of salvation, which is the same for all humanity. All humans without exception have been created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26f; 9:6). Even though the term “covenant” is not found in the creation narrative (Gen 1-2); however, outside of the book of Genesis there hints that creation is viewed as a cosmic covenant (see Jer 33: 20-26). God’s “everlasting covenant” with Noah embraces all the living beings of the earth (cf. Gen 9:9, 12, 17f). Similarly, covenant terminology recurs in the story of Abraham (cf. Gen 17, 1-14). In Abraham, “all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (Gen 12:3; cf. also 18:18). All nations find salvation in the context of the salvation of the people of Israel and the offering of all the nations will be accepted by God just like the offerings of the people of Israel (cf. Is. 42:1-4; 49:6-8; 66:18-21; cf. also, Ps. 86; 47:10).

The covenant that God started with Abraham and later with Moses and that made Israel the chosen people of God is obviously described in the Bible through the story of Abraham (cf. Gen. 15: 17-21; 17: 1-14), Moses and the exodus stories (cf. Ex. 24: 1-11). This covenant not only makes Israel the chosen people of God, it also gives it an identity, a foundation for religious experience and the starting point for a

dialogue with God in salvation history and for reflection on Him.⁶⁶⁹ According to Dupuis, though the story of Adam (Gen 1-5) does not explicitly speak of a covenant relationship between God and the first man, it does describe God's intimate personal dealings with humankind through this first human being.⁶⁷⁰ Dupuis states: "The covenant with Noah is not to be understood as simply guaranteeing a knowledge of God through the elements of nature. It deals with a personal, universal intervention on the part of God in the history of the nations, previous to the subsequent covenant with the chosen people. The religious traditions of humanity are the chosen testimonials of this covenant with the nations."⁶⁷¹ The significance of the covenant with Adam is the manifestation of a personal relationship between God and humankind, between Creator and creatures. Likewise, the covenant with Noah symbolizes God's personal commitment toward all peoples, i.e., a universal intervention of God in human history. This is not just a kind of "natural religion" or "natural revelation." It indicates that other religious traditions along with the Hebrew-Christian tradition are also "in the state of covenant relationship with God." Their members are also "covenant people" and may be seen as "people of God."⁶⁷² For Dupuis, the different covenants stand as the different forms of God's dealings with humankind "through the Logos."⁶⁷³ Thus, they do not destroy or substitute for each other. He says: "They are Logophanies through which the divine Logos 'rehearses,' as it were, his breaking into human history through the incarnation in Jesus Christ. As such, they relate to each other, not as the old that has become obsolete in the advent of the new that substitutes for it, but as the germ that already contains in promise the fullness of that plant which will issue from it."⁶⁷⁴

Dupuis sees a Trinitarian rhythm of the divine covenants. He elaborates his Trinitarian perspective towards God's covenant relationship with humankind by

⁶⁶⁹ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 31.

⁶⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid*, p. 32 – 33. Cf. also, Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1992), pp. 32 – 39, 173.

⁶⁷¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 33.

⁶⁷² Cf. *Ibid*, p. 226. Cf. also Dupuis, "The Truth Will make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited", *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 232 – 233.

⁶⁷³ Cf. Dupuis, "The Truth Will make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited", *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 239.

⁶⁷⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 225 – 226.

having recourse to Gregory of Nazianzus' insight into the economy of the progressive revelation to humanity of the mystery of God's inner life: "The Old Testament proclaimed the Father quite clearly, and the Son only dimly. The New Testament revealed the Son and allowed us to glimpse the divinity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells among us and shows himself more clearly. ... It was necessary to go forward by way of successive clarification, by increasingly enlightening improvements and advances, in order to see the light of the Trinity."⁶⁷⁵ Dupuis argues theologically that "this economy was in the order of things, insofar as between the order of origins in the divine communion of Father-Son-Spirit and that of their self communication to humankind in history, there is a necessary correspondence and correlation: the "economic" prolongs the "immanent" Trinity, allowing to overflow beyond itself. Or, conversely, the immanent Trinity is the a priori presupposition of a Trinitarian rhythm of divine self communication: from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit."⁶⁷⁶

The Trinitarian rhythm of God's self-revelation described by Gregory of Nazianzus speaks of the stages of the unfolding of God's self-communication in salvation history. The same threefold feature is, moreover, present and operative at every stage of its development. Thus, every divine covenant with humankind necessarily involves the active presence of God, of his Word, and of his Spirit. This threefold rhythm is implied in the biblical idea of creation: God created through his Word (Gen 1:3; Jdt 16: 13-14; see also Ps 33:9; 148:5; Jn 1:1-3) in the Spirit (Gen 1:2). The same threefold rhythm marks the history of Israel, based on God's covenant with Abraham and Moses. Thus, God's interventions in favour of his people are accomplished through his Word; as for the Spirit of God, it takes possession of individual persons to make them the instruments of God's and of the prophets to empower them to speak God's word.⁶⁷⁷

From the standpoint of Christian theology, God's covenant relationship with humankind – in the Judeo-Christian traditions as well as in the extra-biblical religious traditions cannot but bear an imprint of the economic Trinity. Christian tradition has persistently sought and found the "vestiges" of the Trinity in creation and in the spiritual activity of the human being. Dupuis seeks to investigate the traces of the

⁶⁷⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Fifth Theological Discourse* 26; *P. G.*, 36:161 – 64.

⁶⁷⁶ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 227. Cf. also, *ibid.* pp. 41 – 45.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 227.

Trinity outside the biblical tradition, in the religious life of individual persons and the religious traditions to which they belong. They too, in some way echo in history the Father's eternal uttering of the Word and breathing forth of the Spirit. Dupuis considers that "If it is true that God conceives and wills all things that are in the act by which the Father utters the Word and breathes forth the Spirit, the same applies a fortiori and of necessity to God's covenantal relationship with peoples in history. That in the existing world order God has freely chosen to communicate personally with human beings means that all – in whichever historical situation, including extra-biblical traditions – are included and, as it were, caught up into a Trinitarian rhythm of God's self-communication."⁶⁷⁸ Thus, from the vantage point of Christian theology, God's cosmic covenant with humankind in Noah cannot but be marked, as is the entire history of salvation, with a Trinitarian rhythm.

The God who wishes to save all is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The plan of salvation precedes the creation of the world (cf. Eph 1:3-10) and is realised with the sending of Jesus into the world for the salvation of all humankind, which is the proof of God's love for the humankind (Jn 3:16-17). God's love for the human family goes as far as "handing over" his Son, Jesus Christ to death for the salvation of humankind and the reconciliation of the world (cf. Rom 5:8-11; 8:3, 32; 2Cor 5:18-19). God is God of Jews and Gentiles (Rom 3:9). God's salvation in Jesus Christ is offered to all the nations (Lk 2:30; 3:6; Acts 28: 28). He takes the initiative to save humankind in his Son Jesus Christ: "The Father has sent his Son as the saviour of the world" (1 Jn 4:14). God, "the Father, from whom are all things" (1Cor 8:6) is the author of the universal plan of salvation and he is the Saviour, who desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth (cf. 2:3-4). The salvific will of God knows no restrictions. Similarly, it is always united to the desire of the Divine that all come to the Truth of God, recognise the Truth of God and believe in him (cf. 1Tim 4:10). The universal salvific will of the Father is bound up with Christ's unique mediation (cf. 1Tim 2:5-6). Hence, the ultimate end of God's creative and saving action will be realised when all things have been made subject to the Son; "then the Son himself also be subjected to him who put all under him, that God may be everything to everyone" (1Cor 15:28).

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 227 – 228.

Only in the light of one, universal divine plan of salvation for humankind, which knows no frontiers of peoples or races, does it make sense to approach the reality of the diversity of religions. In order to point out the Divine axis of the diversity of religious traditions and the salvific role of other religious traditions, Dupuis argues for the abiding value of covenants, which were established by God not only in Moses and Jesus Christ with in the Hebrew-Christian tradition, but also in Adam and Noah with the Gentiles. Other peoples and other religions, thus, too are also included in God's covenantal bond with humankind. From this perspective, Dupuis tries to explore theological meaning of religious pluralism in the Trinitarian economy and in God's covenant relationship with humankind. He tries to assess the salvific role of other religious traditions for their own members, as he accepts their legitimate place in God's plan of salvation for humankind. The plurality of religions challenges us to discover the unity of humankind in God's overall plan of salvation, being appropriated in the diversity of religious traditions serving towards religious ends meeting together in the triune God. In this meeting diverse religion Triune Godhead, the person of Jesus Christ as "the only begotten Son of God" constitutes "the way" leading everyone to "the Truth" of God, in whom all have the gift life everlasting.

In the Christian theology of religions, however, it is quite surprising that even though the doctrine of the Trinity is a hermeneutic key for the theological interpretation of religious pluralism, it is quite surprising that the Trinity with its unique solutions to the problem of one and the many is not regularly invoked. Since the Trinitarian doctrine was developed in the context that raised many issues similar to those that the theology of religious pluralism is facing, Dupuis draws on the classical doctrines of the Trinity, Christology and soteriology and applies them to the reality of religious pluralism to construct a distinctive Christian theology of religions. He suggests a Trinitarian and Pneumatic Christology as the most suitable model for an open theology of religions. It would seem that this model, while clearly holding on to the full meaning of Jesus Christ with regard to the salvation of humankind, also opens the door to the recognition of the salvific value of ways or paths to salvation put forward by other religious traditions for their followers. The apparent contradiction between these two affirmations could be solved by placing a proper emphasis on the three complementary converging aspects by which God's gift of salvation reaches humans according to their actual circumstances. These elements are

as follows: “The universal reality and the effectiveness of the event of Jesus Christ, notwithstanding the historical particularity of this event; the universal operative presence of the divine Word, whose action is not constrained by the human nature assumed by him in the mystery of the incarnation; *and* the equally universal work of the Spirit of God, which is neither limited nor exhausted by the effusion of the Spirit through the glorified and risen Christ.”⁶⁷⁹

2. Trinitarian Hermeneutic for a Christian Interpretation of Religious Pluralism

The Trinitarian mystery of love and communion is the eminent model for human relations and the foundation of dialogue. The works of the “economic Trinity” (Trinity *ad extra*) are undivided; the universal presence of Christ and the universal operation of the Spirit among other religions also mean the presence of the triune God. Triune God is the meeting point of diverse religious ways, who gathers all together in the bosom of the Father, in his Son, Jesus Christ, in the unbound work of the Spirit, who blows where it wills. Dupuis adopts *Trinitarian Christology* or a Trinitarian theology of religious pluralism as the most suitable hermeneutical key to bring out in full relief the interpersonal relationships between the different persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and the Spirit. By this Dupuis means that the Trinitarian dimension of the mystery of Jesus Christ must be clearly emphasised. Likewise, the universal operative presence of the Spirit in the Christ-event needs a proper emphasis.

Dupuis takes recourse to Catholic Trinitarian traditions in order to articulate a Trinitarian theology of religious pluralism. Consequently, in and through his inclusivist perspective regarding religious plurality, he tries to discover the Trinitarian meaning of religious plurality. He tries to explore new frontiers in the Christian theology of religions. For such an investigation in the theology of religions, he formulates a new synthesis of *inclusivist-pluralism*, which represents a type of inclusivism which, while seeing Christ’s mediation as necessary for all salvation, affirms the salvific role of other religions when interpreted from the perspective of Christian religion and revelation.⁶⁸⁰ He begins his study in the framework of a Christology that negotiates between the roles of the Father and Son in relation to

⁶⁷⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 138.

⁶⁸⁰ Dupuis notes in this regard that the “openness does not gain from syncretism any more than commitment to faith does from isolation.” Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 203.

other religions. He then proposes the model of *Theocentric-Christocentrism*, which “while holding fast to faith in Jesus Christ as traditionally understood by Christianity and church tradition, would at the same time integrate, in their difference, the religious experiences of the living religious traditions and to assign to those traditions a positive role and significance in the over all plan of God for humankind, as it unfolds through salvation history.”⁶⁸¹ The following study deals with Dupuis’ Trinitarian interpretation of religious pluralism, which he expounds with help of his new synthesis of *pluralist-inclusivism*, namely, Trinitarian Pneumatic-Christology. It investigates whether *pluralist-inclusivism* is a suitable model for doing Christian theology of religious pluralism.

2.1. A Methodology for a Trinitarian Theology of Religions: *Inclusivist-Pluralism*

Dupuis, while exploring new frontiers in Christian theology, proposes a *Trinitarian-Pneumato-Christological model*, as a methodology for an open Christian theology of religious pluralism. The inner life the Divine Trinity – One God: Father, the Son and the Spirit that proceeds from both the Father and the Son – through their communion and diversity, their unity and diversity give us insight into Dupuis’ recognition of ‘convergent paths.’ He prefers to hold on to the high Christology of tradition and to the principle of God’s self-manifestation in a way that would not devalue the self-revelation of God in other religions.⁶⁸² Consequently Dupuis recommends that his Trinitarian-pneumato-Christological model can help us choose a middle path between pluralistic theocentrism, according to which the various religious traditions revolve around the one Divine Absolute, the Ultimate Reality; and exclusivism that recognizes the possibility of salvation only in explicit Christian faith in Jesus Christ. In Dupuis’ opinion, both of these extremes are theologically inadequate and fail to fulfil the promise of a Trinitarian theology.⁶⁸³ Whereas, a

⁶⁸¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 1.

⁶⁸² Cf. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, p. 57 – 59.

⁶⁸³ In the bid to transcend the dilemma between christocentrism and theocentrism conceived as contradictory paradigms, Michael Barnes too views that a Trinity centred theology as the way open, beyond a particularist exclusivism, toward a pluralistic inclusivism capable of accounting within the Christian faith perspective for a plurality of religions not only in fact but also in principle. Cf. Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 135 – 159.

Trinitarian Christology, on the contrary, “evokes at once the fundamental character of the Christ-event as the guarantee of God’s manifold way of self-manifestation, self-revelation, and self-gift to humankind in a multifaceted yet organically structured economy of salvation through which the diverse paths tend toward a mutual convergence in the absolute Divine Mystery which constitutes the common final end of them all.”⁶⁸⁴ Moreover, the Trinitarian image of God, unveiled in Jesus, is the mystery of God’s outpouring love toward all humankind in free and liberating self-gift.

The Trinitarian Christological key of interpretation helps to lay stress on the universal active presence of the Word of God and his Spirit, as source of enlightenment and inspiration of religious founders and the religious traditions, which have sprung from their experience. It has been put to use in at various stages of the enquiry, which includes our treatment of the God’s overall plan of salvation, God’s self-gift in the history of salvation with a culmination of his revelation in his Son: Jesus Christ, his gift of the Spirit, the diverse faces of the Divine manifested diverse and various ways in other religions and the saving figures and paths to salvation proposes in various religious traditions. Dupuis writes,

“The Trinitarian Christology model, the universal enlightenment of the Word of God, and the enlivening by his Spirit make it possible to discover, in other saving figures and traditions, truth and grace not brought out with the same vigour and clarity in God’s revelation and manifestation in Jesus Christ. Truth and grace found elsewhere must not be reduced to ‘seeds’ or ‘stepping-stones’ simply to be nurtured or used and then superseded in Christian revelation. They represent additional and autonomous benefits. More divine truth and grace are found operative in the entire history of God’s dealing with humankind than are than are available in the Christian tradition. As the ‘human face’ or ‘icon’ of God, Jesus Christ gives to Christianity its specific and singular character. But, while he is constitutive of salvation of all, he neither excludes nor includes other saving figures or traditions. If he brings salvation history to a climax, it is by way not of substitution or suppression but of confirmation and accomplishment.”⁶⁸⁵

In this manner, without downplaying the uninterrupted mainline Christian tradition regarding the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, he affirms that the

⁶⁸⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 209.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 388.

Christ-event is constitutive of salvation for all humankind, that is, all salvation is through Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. In particular, the Christ-event opens access for all humankind to meet God, independently of their historical situation. Jesus Christ is the pre-mordial sacrament (*Ursakrament*) of God's universal will to save all humankind. The Incarnation marks the deepest and most decisive engagement of God with humankind; it establishes with it a bond of union that can never be severed. Hence, while God's will to save all humankind is absolute, the event of Jesus Christ is constitutive for all salvation. But this event is, of necessity and irremediably, marked by the particularity of every historical happening. The 'trans-historical' character of the risen humanity of Jesus Christ notwithstanding, the event is limited by its insertion into history, without which its singular significance and density would vanish. It is, then, at once particular in time and universal in meaning, and such 'singularly unique,' yet related to all other divine manifestations to humankind in the history of salvation.

The model of '*inclusivist pluralism*,' being rooted in Christocentric and Trinitarian theology, is the core of Dupuis' Christian theology of religious pluralism. It is centred on the universal presence and action of the Logos and of the Holy Spirit in "religious others" and in their religious traditions. His Trinitarian Christological model differs greatly from the 'low' Christological models proposed by the 'pluralists', where Christ is reduced to the same level as other saving figureheads.⁶⁸⁶ Dupuis continues to affirm the universal saving status of Jesus Christ for the whole of humanity.⁶⁸⁷ Dupuis' Christological-Trinitarian model of salvation accommodates God's saving commitment to humanity. Dupuis, in fact, is very consistent in his Trinitarian theology.⁶⁸⁸ For him, God's self-manifestation is marked with Trinitarian communion, that is whenever God personally deals with human beings, it is done by God as Father, Son, and Spirit. Likewise, the divine self-bestowal is the communication of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. However, Dupuis chose to adopt the paradigm of *inclusivistic pluralism*, since a Trinitarian Pneumatic model of Christology can help us to see how two apparently contradictory

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid. 281ff; Gerald Hall, "Jacques Dupuis' Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," *Pacifica*, 15 (2002), p. 40.

⁶⁸⁷ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 253; Hall, "Jacques Dupuis' Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism," *Pacifica*, 15 (2002), pp. 39ff.

⁶⁸⁸ Cf. Dupuis, "God is Always Greater," *The Tablet*, 27 /10 / 2001, p. 1520.

affirmations can be combined. Thus, on the one hand, the Christ-event constitutes salvation for the whole of humanity; and, on the other hand, the *paths* proposed by the other religious traditions have authentic saving value for their followers. If these two affirmations can be held together, it is also possible to discover the meaning willed by God, within the framework of his unique plan of salvation for humankind, of the religious pluralism. Far from competing with each other, the different paths proposed by the different religious traditions converge with Christianity, as part of the one and multifaceted entire divine plan of salvation for humankind.

2.2. Trinitarian Christology: The Meeting of World Religions in the Triune God

Dupuis, in his Trinitarian perspective to the reality of religious pluralism, aims at a well-pondered assertion of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ which unambiguously maintains his personal identity as the ‘only begotten’ Son of God leaves space for a ‘open’ theology of the religions and of religious pluralism. A Trinitarian Christological perspective, in particular allows us to recognise the ongoing presence and activity of the Word of God and of the Spirit of God. Such a perspective makes it possible to affirm a multiplicity of “ways” and “routes” toward human liberation or salvation, in keeping with God’s plan for humankind in Jesus Christ; it likewise opens the way for recognizing other “saving figures” in human history.⁶⁸⁹ However, “Where the dimensions of salvation history are concerned,” Dupuis holds, “the Trinitarian model will make it possible to lay stress on the universal presence and action of the Word of God and of the Spirit of God throughout human history as mediums of God’s personal dealings with human beings independently of their concrete situation in history. The relatedness of the action of the Word and of the Spirit to the punctual historical event of Jesus Christ will not thereby be overlooked or forgotten.”⁶⁹⁰ Such a Christology will place in full relief the interpersonal relationship between Jesus and the God whom he calls Father, and the Spirit whom he will send. This interpersonal relationship between the Father (*Abbà*), Son and the Spirit are intrinsic to the mystery of Jesus Christ. The relationship between the three persons of the Trinity is intrinsic to the mystery of the person and work of Jesus. A

⁶⁸⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 164.

⁶⁹⁰ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 212.

Christology, in the context of religious pluralism, needs to pay proper attention to these intra-Trinitarian relationships.

However, it follows that in Christian theology, as Dupuis clearly adopts, “Christocentrism and theocentrism cannot be mutually opposed as different perspectives between which a choice must be made. Christian theology is *theocentric qua christocentric, and vice versa*. Far from being passé, the Christocentric and theocentric perspectives seems surely to be only way open. What is at issue is not in the last analysis, a choice between two interchangeable theologies, but the free, responsible adoption of the perspective that reveals to our gaze the very heart of faith, the mystery of Jesus Christ in its integrity and universality.”⁶⁹¹ This dilemma was often caused by a failure to pay adequate attention to the interpersonal dimension of Christology. Dupuis makes a valid observation regarding the Christocentric trend that may have dominated Christian theology, namely, “Christology has often sinned by imperialism.”⁶⁹² However, he indicates a remedy to such a shortcoming, namely, “the personal and Trinitarian dimension of the mystery must be everywhere. A Christology of the God-man is an abstraction; the only Christology that is real is that of the Son-of-God-made-man-in-history. The personal intra-Trinitarian relations must, therefore, be shown to inform every aspect of the Christological mystery.”⁶⁹³ Dupuis writes, “The personal intra-Trinitarian relations must, therefore, be shown to inform every aspect of the Christological mystery.”⁶⁹⁴ He states, “His divine identity consists in the personal relationship of the son to the Father, experienced by Jesus the man, embodies the concrete reality of the mystery of the hypostatic union. It has its ultimate foundation in the Son’s origin from the Father in the life of the Godhead.”⁶⁹⁵ Dupuis affirms, “Part of the Trinitarian dimension of the Christological mystery is its pneumatological aspect. Christology must include a “pneumatic Christology,” which will lay emphasis on the universal, operative presence of the Spirit of God in the Christ-event.”⁶⁹⁶ A proper emphasis to the pneumatic dimension of the mystery of the

⁶⁹¹ Ibid. p. 162.

⁶⁹² Ibid. p. 36

⁶⁹³ Ibid. p. 36

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 36.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid. pp. 106 – 107.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 36. Cf. also, Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 205; idem. *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 92.

event of Jesus Christ, however, would not limit itself to substantiating the influence of the Spirit on Jesus' manhood during his earthly life, but would extend beyond the resurrection to illustrate the relationship between the action of the risen Lord and the economy of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in *Trinitarian Pneumato-Christological* model, Christology cannot be severed from the mystery of the Trinity, as Jesus Christ cannot be severed from his relationship with the Father and the Spirit. He finds that such a model is "capable of leading the Christian faith commitment beyond the suspicion of claiming for itself, if not exclusivity, at least the obligatory reference binding on all people vis-à-vis the divine-human relationships."⁶⁹⁷

The personal involvement of God with his people history is marked with a Trinitarian rhythm. Hence, Dupuis asserts clearly that in the Trinitarian theology of religious pluralism it will have to be clearly shown that Jesus Christ must never be thought to substitute for the Father:

"As Jesus himself was entirely "God-centred" so must the faith-interpretation of Jesus-the-Christ proposed by the Christian kerygma remain at all times. The Gospel according to John calls Jesus "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6) – never the goal or the end; the same gospel makes it clear that the goal of human existence – and of history – is the unfathomable mystery of God, whom no human being has ever seen, but who has been "made known" by his incarnate Son (Jn 1:18). The unique closeness that exists between God and Jesus by virtue of the mystery of incarnation may never be forgotten, but neither can we overlook the unbridgeable distance that remains between the Father and Jesus in his human existence."⁶⁹⁸

Hence, in line with the theocentric paradigm, conceived one-sidedly and advocated by the pluralists, Dupuis points to the essential aspect of the mystery of God:

God, and God alone, is the "absolute" mystery and as such is at the source, at the heart, and at the centre of all reality; the human reality of Jesus by contrast is created and as such is finite and contingent. While it is true that Jesus the man is uniquely the Son of God, it is equally true that God [the Father] stands beyond Jesus. When he is said to be at the centre of the Christian mystery, this is not to be understood in an "absolute" sense but in the order of God's freely [chosen] dealings with humankind in history."⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁷ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 208.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 205 – 206.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 206. Cf. also, Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 92.

A Trinitarian Christology will have to express clearly Jesus' relatedness to the Father and to the Spirit. It is necessary to maintain the intra-Trinitarian relationship. The historical centrality of the Christ-event cannot be allowed to obscure the Trinitarian rhythm of the divine economy, with its distinct and correlated functions. The mystery of Jesus Christ unveils to us the mystery of God in a unique, unprecedented manner. Hence, Dupuis observes, "Christology thus ends up by opening up the mystery of the triune God. In Jesus Christ, the Word of God has entered human history personally; the Son has stooped [down] to us to share with us his Sonship of the Father. ... The secret of God's intimate life stands revealed to us: the Father who is the source, the Son who eternally comes from the Father and through whom the Father eternally breathes the Spirit. By unveiling for us these interpersonal relationships that constitute inner life and communion of the Godhead, the Christ-event teaches us "God is love" 1 Jn 4:8) and that love overflows to humankind."⁷⁰⁰

Dupuis clearly indicates "a theology of religious pluralism elaborated on the foundation of the Trinitarian economy will have to combine and hold in constructive tension the central character of the event of Jesus Christ and the universal action and dynamic influence of the Spirit of God. It will thus be able to account for God's self-manifestation and self-gift in human cultures and religious traditions outside the orbit of the influence of the Christian message without for that matter construing Christology and pneumatology into two distinct economies of divine-human relationships for Christians and for the members of other traditions, respectively."⁷⁰¹ Nevertheless, "the 'hypostatic distinction' between the Word and the Spirit as well as the specific influence of each in the Trinitarian rhythm of all divine-human relationships, individual and collective, serve as the hermeneutical key for the real differentiation and plurality obtaining in the concrete realisation of the divine-human relationships in diverse situations and circumstances."⁷⁰² In his effort to go beyond the dilemma of Christocentrism and theocentrism being conceived as contradictory paradigms, a Trinity-centred theology, and in particular, a Spirit Christology, as a theological progress, beyond the narrow perspective of exclusivism. However, this

⁷⁰⁰ Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, p. 169.

⁷⁰¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 94.

⁷⁰² Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 206.

can be seen as a qualitative leap in Christian theology of religions – a new frontier, moving toward a model of ‘*pluralist- inclusivism*’ –that is capable of accounting within the perspective of Christian faith for a plurality of religious traditions not only in fact but also in principle.

3. Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Religious Pluralism

Trinitarian theology is *apophatic*, in so far as it cancels the simple idea of the human person acquired from human experience; while it does acknowledge the God who speaks, the God-Logos, it simultaneously preserves the greater silence that comes from the Logos and bids us enter it. Similarly, in the Incarnation, God becomes concrete, tangible in history. He approaches humankind in bodily form. But this very God, becomes graspable, is utterly mysterious. The self-humbling that he himself has chosen, his *kenosis*, is in a new way so to speak, the cloud of mystery in which he both conceals and reveals himself.⁷⁰³ Thus, “the Word, which the Incarnate and Crucified one is, always far surpasses all human words; thus God’s *kenosis* is the place where the religions can meet without claiming for sovereignty.”⁷⁰⁴ The Christian faith has always held that God has one, universal plan of salvation for all humankind, which is accomplished in the salvific mediation of Christ and the universal presence and action of the Holy Spirit. Dupuis upholds that the Holy Trinity is universally at work among human beings and religious traditions. God, who is the Absolute Reality, has communicated himself to humankind in many and diverse ways, in and through the diverse religious traditions, drawing people to himself through his Son Jesus Christ, in the universal presence and action of the Spirit in the believers and their diverse religious traditions, including Christianity.

St. Thomas Aquinas designates diversity as a sign of perfection of the universe. “The distinction of things comes from their proper forms.”⁷⁰⁵ The universe is a whole made of diversely created parts related to each other, to the whole and to God. The Part, in its specificity, is not simply and directly related to the whole, rather each part specifies and completes the whole in its unique fashion in relation to all other parts.

⁷⁰³ Cf. B. Stubenrauch, „Dialogisches Dogma: Der christliche Auftrag zur interreligiösen Begegnung“, *Questiones Disputatae* 158, (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1995), pp. 84 – 96.

⁷⁰⁴ Ratzinger, *Many Religions – One Covenant*, p. 108.

⁷⁰⁵ *ST*, I, q. 47, a.1.

The whole made of parts is the perfection of the Father's design but not each of the divine parts. Hence "the distinction and multitude of things come from the intention of the first agent, who is God. ... and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another."⁷⁰⁶ Thus diversity of things, which is a sign of richness and perfection in the universe, comes from God. Hence, the principle of the diversity of religious traditions is to be found in God's design for all humankind. From the standpoint of Christian faith God is one in nature, yet in three persons: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The plurality of persons "found in God would seem to imply multiple relationship with God. ... Hence, the human experience of the Supreme Reality and the different ways of relating to It can give rise to several religions, according to the emphasis laid on one or another aspect of the relationship."⁷⁰⁷

3.1. Trinitarian Perspective to the Plurality Religious Experience

The mystery of the Trinity implies at once absolute communion of love between distinct persons, yet one divine nature and distinct relationships. It discloses the immanent life of God consisting of total mutual exchange and sharing. The distinction of persons and unity of nature in the Trinity may give some insight to grasp the complexities of plurality of religions, yet the one common origin and the one common destiny. God's design for humankind is neither monolithic nor piecemeal, but singular and complex at the same time. It is one and universal, in view of God's will to communicate with the entire human race, irrespective of historical situations and circumstances in which men and women find themselves; and it is manifold and variegated in the concrete forms which the divine unitary design takes on in historical unfolding. According to Christian faith God's relationship with human beings, even though in various and in diverse ways, is always marked by a Trinitarian rhythm, since God who reveals himself to all humankind is the Triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

⁷⁰⁶ *ST*, I, q. 47, a.1; cf. also *ST*, I, q. 44. a. 2.

⁷⁰⁷ Arulsamy, "Mission of the Church and Dialogue with Religions," *VJTR*, 66 (2002), p. 676.

Dupuis' Trinitarian Christology searches "for the signs of God's action, for the "seeds of the Word," for the imprint of his Spirit in the foundational experiences and events upon which religious traditions have been built, and for traces of the same in the sacred books and the oral traditions that constitute the official record and the living memory of those traditions."⁷⁰⁸ A Trinitarian Christology can help us see how two apparently contradictory affirmations can be combined: on the one hand, the event of Jesus Christ constitutes salvation for the whole of humanity; on the other, the "paths" proposed by the other religious traditions have authentic saving value for their followers. Within the one divine plan for humankind, salvation reaches to people in the concrete circumstances of their life through three complementary and convergent aspects. First and foremost, there is the event of Jesus Christ, which has lasting actuality and universal efficacy, notwithstanding its historical particularity; secondly, there is the universal operative presence of the Word of God, whose action is not restricted by the human existence assumed by him in the mystery of the Incarnation; and finally, there is an equally universal action of the Spirit of God, which is neither limited nor exhausted by its communication through the risen and glorified Christ.

God, the centre and ground of reality and human life, is in different forms and manners active among all peoples of the world and gives ultimate meaning to human existence and aspirations.⁷⁰⁹ Dupuis writes, "The 'ultimate mystery,' universally present yet never adequately comprehended, is, for Christian believer, the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2Cor 1:3)."⁷¹⁰ However, it is through Jesus Christ and in the continuing work of the Spirit that we have access to the mystery of God. Furthermore, it is through Christ and in the Spirit that a Christian believer experiences God as a Trinitarian communion of persons, namely, Father, Son and the Spirit: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? ... You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and Father is in me" (Jn 14:10-11); "I shall ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth" (Jn 14: 16-17; cf also Jn 14:20, 28; 15: 8-10; 16:5-11, 27-28; 17:21). While accepting other religions too as the legitimate salvific ways for

⁷⁰⁸ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 237.

⁷⁰⁹ Cf. Joseph Pathrapankal, (ed.), *Service and Salvation*, (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 1973), p. 4.

⁷¹⁰ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 237.

their followers, Dupuis points out that the universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit beyond the boundaries of Christianity both before and after historical event of Jesus Christ allows for such an affirmation.⁷¹¹ The Spirit, who is at work in other religious traditions, however, does not work for another economy of salvation than that of Jesus Christ. Instead, all his work is to make it possible for human beings to associate themselves with the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Thus, the event of Jesus Christ remains constitutive for the salvation of the believers of other religions. Hence, in accordance with the God's overall plan, all salvation through Christ reaches to religious others in their respective religious traditions due to the universal presence and operation of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ in them.⁷¹²

The Trinitarian perspective represents the Christian context for interpreting religious plurality and its salvific significance as paths to salvation. Some of the impact of this is obviously seen in the contemporary Christian theological reflection, particularly on the doctrine of Trinity, in the hope of promoting Christian openness to the world religions and providing a suitable interreligious theological environment for interreligious dialogue. Consequently, there are number of authors, who analyse the theological meaning and significance of religious pluralism with a Trinitarian perspective.⁷¹³ Gavin D'Costa contributes to the Trinitarian interpretation of religious pluralism. He holds that a Trinitarian Christology guards against exclusivism and pluralism by dialectically relating the universal to the particular. The universal

⁷¹¹ Cf. Dupuis, "God is Always Greater", *The Tablet*, 27 / 10 / 2001, p. 1520. Cf. also, Merrigan, "Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism", *Louvain Studies*, 23 (1998), p. 353.

⁷¹² Cf. Dupuis, "Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism," in T. Merrigan / J. Haers (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, pp. 87 – 91, 95.

⁷¹³ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 203 – 278; idem. *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 87 – 132; idem. "Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism", in T. Merrigan / J. Haers (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, pp. 83 – 97. For a further reference cf. also, G. D'Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions and The Trinity*; idem. (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: A Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. C. Cornille / V. Neckebrouck, (eds.), *A Universal Faith? Peoples, Cultures, Religions, and the Christ*, (Leuven: Peeters Press; 1991), pp. 139 – 154. Panikkar, *The Trinity and Religious Experience of Man*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973). Mark S. Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions*, (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2004). G. Greschake, *Der dreieine Gott: eine trinitarische Theologie*, (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1997), pp. 499 – 537.

presence and operation of the Holy Spirit allows the particularity of Christ to be related to the universal activity of God in the history of humankind. If the Holy Spirit is active in the world religions and the Church stands under the power of the Spirit, then attention to the religions is vital for Christian faithfulness. His Trinitarian approach to the plurality of religions sets the normative character of the mystery of Jesus Christ within the context of the wider economy of God. Similarly, he also points out how such an approach entails respect for religious others. He states that the Christocentric Trinitarianism discloses loving relationship as the proper mode of being and so love of the religious neighbour is imperative for Christians. Similarly, he indicates that the normativity of Christ implies the normativity of crucified self-giving love, and this prescribes the mode of relationship with those of other traditions.⁷¹⁴ Thus, as Gavin D’Costa says, “The Trinity safeguards against an exclusivist particularism (Christomonism) and a pluralist universalism (theocentrism) in that it stipulates against an *exclusive identification of God and Jesus*, as well as against *non-identification of God and Jesus*.”⁷¹⁵ In this way he attempts to establish a foundation for the validity of other religious traditions and their place in God’s providential plan for humankind.

Similarly, S. Mark Heim holds that our understanding of God as Trinity, the understanding whose catalyst is the incarnation of Christ, allows us to grasp the key features of God’s character and God’s relation with us. Our faith in the triune God is integral for our communion with God, that is, salvation. Salvation is shaped by a particular vision of the God with whom we are in relation. Here we glimpse the way in which Christ is constitutive to salvation, both embodying the relation with God that constitutes salvation and distinctively representing to us the nature of God with whom we have communion in salvation. Furthermore, he notes: “Distinctions of some sort are a necessary feature of salvation, as a condition for the fullness of relation. Communion involves awareness of the others with whom we participate and of their identities. If the ultimate religious identity is relationship with God, then God has a determinate character in that relation.”⁷¹⁶ He affirms that in claiming communion with the triune God, we make the Trinity central to our understanding of religious

⁷¹⁴ Cf. G. D’Costa, (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, pp. 18 – 26.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 18.

⁷¹⁶ Mark S. Heim, *Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, p. 125.

diversity. He holds that “The Trinity provides a particular ground for affirming the truth and reality of what is different. Trinitarian conviction rules out the view that among all the possible claimed manifestations of God, one narrow stand-alone is authentic. Trinitarian conviction will rule out as well the view that all or most of these manifestations could be reduced to a single pure type underlying them.”⁷¹⁷ Hence, he indicates that a simple exclusivism and a simple pluralism are both untenable. However, “We find validity in other religions because of our conviction that the Trinity represents a universal truth about the way the world and God actually are.”⁷¹⁸ Hence, as he puts it, “for God to be distinctively connected with historical particularity, while also remaining the sole transcendent creator, obviously required diversity in the means, the economy, by which God is related to the world. And if this economic activity of God was to be at the same time the true revelation of God’s very self, then the variety of manifestation had to be rooted in a complexity of relation intrinsic to God’s self.”⁷¹⁹

3.2. The Different Faces of the Trinity in Other Religions

In the world of diverse religious traditions, while all religions find their place in the overall plan of God for the salvation of humankind, not all have the same place or an identical significance within this plan’s organic unfolding in history. Likewise, there exist always some fundamental distinctions between the monotheistic or prophetic religions and those, which usually referred to as mystical or oriental.⁷²⁰ The distinction has the merit of pointing to a common historical origin and consequently to a family resemblance between the prophetic religions. Similarly, the mystical religions of the East share, despite of substantial differences and distinct worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*), common traits, in particular a characteristic of “wisdom” or “gnosis.”⁷²¹ Differences are also found in searching for divine revelation in the

⁷¹⁷ Ibid. p. 127.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid. p. 127.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid. p. 131.

⁷²⁰ Cf. Robert C. Zaehner, *At Sundry Times: An Essay in the Comparison of Religions*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1958).

⁷²¹ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 9, 239 – 240. Cf. also, Aloysius Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), pp. 110 – 119.

religious traditions outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. Yet, we need to acknowledge that the religious others, living under the dispensation of cosmic covenant have encountered the true God in an authentic religious experience. We can indeed maintain that every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person.⁷²² It is always a sign that God, in whatever secret, hidden way, relates to human beings in self-revelation and as a response to it human beings relate to him in faith. Those who entrust themselves to God in faith and charity are saved, however imperfect their conception of the God who revealed to them. Indeed, salvation depends on the response made in faith by sinful human beings to a personal communication initiated by God.

In the Christian theology of religions, Dupuis observes that despite the limitations marking the enunciation of the experience of God in diverse religious traditions. There is a gap between religious experience and its formulation. We never have access to the religious experience of another in its pure state. Though language gives access to this experience and communicates it to us, yet it does so quite inadequately. Hence, in order to reach to the religious experience of others and discover the hidden elements of truth and grace there, one should go beyond the concepts that enunciate that experience. For instance, in the Eastern religious traditions, the religious experience is not always expressed in terms of a personal relationship with God. Hindu *advaita* mysticism conceives it as an awakening to one's identity with the *Brahman*. Dupuis, analysing from the standpoint of Christian Trinitarian theological tradition, holds not only that the Ultimate Reality is differently manifested to humankind is a personal God, but also further, that the Christian Trinitarian God represents the Ultimate Reality in itself. This is of course not to say that Christian tradition claims a comprehensive knowledge of God. The Christian, for his part, who in continuity with the Jewish revelation and the Christian tradition, adheres to a Trinitarian monotheism, cannot but think in terms of the universal presence and self-manifestation of the triune God. For him, the Divine Mystery with

⁷²² Pope John Paul II held that every authentic prayer, whether of Christians or otherwise, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit who is present and active in all the believers and in their religious traditions. "Every authentic prayer is under the influence of the Spirit "who intercedes for us ..., he prays in us "with unutterable groanings" and "the one who searches the hearts knows what are the desires of the Spirit" [cf. Rom 8: 26-27]. Pope John Paul II, "Message to the People of Asia" (Manila, 21 / 01 / 1981), no. 4. Cf. also, "Secretariat for non-Christians," *Bulletin*, 22 (1987), p. 224.

many faces is, unequivocally, the God and Father who disclosed his face for us in Jesus Christ. In this regard Dupuis holds that the Ultimate Reality is personal; it is interpersonal. It consists in total interpersonal communion and sharing between three who are one-without a second: Father, Son and Spirit.⁷²³ Furthermore, he shows “that the God of the three monotheistic religions [Judaism, Christianity and Islam] is the same and only God, notwithstanding the vastly different [understanding of God] there of in the various traditions; and that the Ultimate Reality of the mystical Eastern traditions can, without violence being made to it, be interpreted, in a Trinitarian key, as potential tending toward the unfolding of the Trinitarian God in Jesus Christ.”⁷²⁴ Even though these monotheistic religions have radically different doctrinal formulations, Dupuis makes a valid reference to the faith of the mystics in whose experience a convergence can be seen. Mystics in all these three traditions search for union with God, who is one and the same God.⁷²⁵

Nevertheless, from a Christian faith perspective, we need to acknowledge that wherever there is genuine religious experience, it is surely the God revealed in Jesus Christ who enters into the lives of men and women, in a hidden, secret fashion. While the concept of God remains incomplete, the interpersonal encounter between God and the human being – for which God takes the initiative, awaiting the response of faith on the part of human beings – is authentic.⁷²⁶ He argues “theologically we must hold that wherever and whenever human beings turn toward an Absolute that addresses and bestows itself upon them, an attitude of supernatural faith is thereby on the scene, in response to personal divine revelation. This attitude is directed toward, as well as originally aroused by, the God of Jesus Christ who communicates himself to them.”⁷²⁷ Thus, notwithstanding all the differences in the religious experience among the believers of diverse religious traditions, a Christian theology cannot but interpret the religious experience as in all circumstances involving the self-disclosure and self-gift of the one God who fully manifested himself in Jesus Christ and in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Dupuis writes, “God is one, and there is no other! The same God it

⁷²³ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 259.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 259.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 254 – 262.

⁷²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 241.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 241.

is who performs saving deeds in human history and speaks to human beings in the secret of their hearts. The same is at once the “utterly other” and the “ground of being” for all that is; the transcendent “without” and the immanent “within”; the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Self at the centre of the self. And while, in Jesus Christ, God has truly become our Father, that God remains the One “Who is” while we are those who “are not.” In ecstasy the same God is contemplated, awareness of whom may gush forth in “instasy”; the same is affirmed through theological cataphaticism and inferred in mystical apophaticism.”⁷²⁸

The doctrine of the Triune God does not merely stand at the centre of the Christian message; it also imprints a Trinitarian rhythm on the origin of all things from God and their return toward God: “For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6); and “through him [Jesus Christ] we both [Jews and gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18). Thus according to Paul, Christian and human existence consists of a twofold Trinitarian movement of issuing forth and returning back: from the Father through Jesus Christ in the Spirit, and conversely, in the Spirit through Jesus Christ to the Father. The Christian faith further holds that the Ultimate Reality that has revealed itself to human beings throughout history and continues to do so even today is the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁷²⁹ This has been clearly articulated in *Dei Verbum*: “In his goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (cf. Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (cf. Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (cf. Col. 1; 15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends (cf. Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. Bar. 3:38), so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself.”⁷³⁰

Dupuis clearly asserts that the Triune God of Christian faith “is not penultimate sign of the Real *an sich*; it is the Ultimate Reality itself. This is not to say that the Divine Reality is in itself within the purview of a direct human apprehension

⁷²⁸ Ibid. p. 241 – 242.

⁷²⁹ Ibid. pp. 262 – 263.

⁷³⁰ *Dei Verbum*, 2.

by mode of a positive representation; for the intrinsic mystery of God remains irremediably beyond our full grasp: *de Deo quid sit nescimus!* But it does not mean that the divine Trinity, as revealed in Jesus Christ, objectively, though imperfectly and only analogically, corresponds to the Absolute.”⁷³¹ While speaking of the content of Christian faith in the God, he indicates that we should distinguish between primordial affirmations and derived assertions. The foundation of the Christian doctrine of God is the experience of the man Jesus during his earthly life of living in intimate relationship with God whom he called his Father (*Abba*) and to the Spirit whom he promised to communicate to his Church (cf. Jn 14:16-17, 26; 16:7). Furthermore, he states, “Jesus’ human awareness of the Divine Mystery of communion between Father-Son-Spirit is the source from which springs the axiom according to which the “economic Trinity” is the “immanent Trinity” in *self-communication*, and the locus where it is self-authenticating.”⁷³² Apart from the insights we have through the man Jesus Christ, the Easter and post-Easter experience of the Apostolic Church and later Christian tradition, especially the doctrinal heritage flowing from the Fathers of the Church, have progressively contributed to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. In this development, Dupuis finds at once a continuity and development from Jesus’ human consciousness of the divine communion to the Apostolic Church’s teaching, and then, toward the later Christian doctrine of the one-God-who-is-three. But while the primordial affirmation made by the Apostolic Church belongs to the foundational Christian revelation and as such to the *norma normans* of Christian faith, the later elaborations do not have either the same authority or universality. Consequently, he holds that the way Christian tradition has formulated its faith in the Triune God is open to further elaborations and clarifications or even to other modes of expression.⁷³³

In the process of reflecting on the relationship of the Christian doctrine of the Triune God with the other notions of God found in other monotheistic religions, without going into conflicting claims particular to each religion, Dupuis holds that “when Jesus spoke of God, his one point of reference was Yahweh, the God who declared his name to Moses, whom Jesus called “Father”; this is certain. But it is

⁷³¹ Ibid. p. 263.

⁷³² Ibid. p. 263.

⁷³³ Cf. Ibid. pp. 263 – 264.

equally certain that Jesus conceived and affirmed his “oneness” with the Father as Son, in such a way as would provide a valid foundation for the Church’s – apostolic and post-apostolic – doctrine of the Trinity: the economic Trinity experienced by Jesus himself in his human awareness unmistakably led to the enunciation of the immanent Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit.”⁷³⁴ Nevertheless, the Christian doctrine of three persons in God remains a stumbling block for both Jews and Muslims. For the Hebrew scripture, the God of Abraham, who revealed his name to Moses as Yahweh, is the one without a second. The Old Testament speaks explicitly of the dynamic attributes through which God intervenes in the history of Israel and of other peoples. These do not represent *persons* distinct from Yahweh, but Yahweh as he manifests himself in deeds and words. They are, nevertheless, frequently given literary personifications, like for instance, Word (*Dabar*), Wisdom (*Hokmah*) and Spirit (*Ruah*). While it is true, then, that the mystery of the divine Trinity is only revealed in Jesus Christ, it must be said that God’s revelation in the Old Testament contained in anticipation the main categories which God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ and its elaboration in the Christian tradition would put to use later. No matter how great the distance may be that separates literary personifications from the affirmation of distinct personhoods, the biblical revelation of God’s mystery must be seen as a process that culminates in Jesus Christ.⁷³⁵

However, where Islam is concerned, it has been noted that the ninety-nine beautiful names which the Qur’an attributes to Allah can, without violence being done to them, be grouped under three broad headings, namely, God as omnipotent Creator and ruler of the universe; God as gracious and forgiving; and God as intimately present to us.⁷³⁶ Transposed into Christian Trinitarian doctrine, these categories are seen to correspond to the *appropriations* ascribed of various divine activities of the distinct persons: creation to the Father, salvation to the Son and

⁷³⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 264 – 265. Cf. also, Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, pp. 39 – 76. Dupuis adopts here Rahnerian terminology of “immanent” and “economic” Trinity. Without going into the intricacies of the pros and cons of the change in terminology, one may continue to opt for the terminology of the Christian tradition, namely, “Trinity in its intra-Trinitarian life” (*Trinitas ad extra*) and “Trinity in relation to the economy of salvation” (*Trinitas ad intra*).

⁷³⁵ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 266.

⁷³⁶ Cf. John Hick, “Rethinking Christian Doctrine in the Light of Religious Pluralism,” in *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism*, ed. P. Phan, (New York: Paragon House, 1990), pp. 89 – 102.

indwelling to the Spirit. Similarly, looking beyond the monotheistic religions, the doctrine of the divine Trinity is for Christian theology the hermeneutical key for other experiences of the Divine Reality.⁷³⁷ The Christian dogmatic tradition of the Triune God is, at times, believed to represent a stumbling block in dialogue with other monotheistic religions. Nevertheless, Dupuis is quite convinced that Holy Trinity, if understood correctly, offers much more room for accommodation of other religious beliefs than strict monotheism.

Dupuis freely acknowledges the existence of such Trinitarian traces not only in the monotheistic religious traditions but also in the mystical religions of East. For instance, he sees the signs of the Trinity in the *advaita* Mysticism of Hinduism. It poses searching questions in the areas of the relationship between the Ultimate reality and the finite historical, between the non-dual Absolute and the world.⁷³⁸ Hinduism, however multi-faceted and cannot be reduced to a monolithic entity. Various currents occur in it, which view the Ultimate Reality, either as non-personal or as personal and which conceive the relationship between the Ultimate Reality and the world in terms of either monism, of non-duality (*advaita*), or of dualism (*dvaita*). For instance, the *bhakti* theism, that is, *advaita* experience rooted in the *Upanishads* and elaborated by the *Vedanta* theologians, is the challenging view for Christian mysticism. Dupuis, however, draws comparisons between the Holy Trinity and the Hindu concept of *saccitananda* (being-conscious-bliss). The *Nirguna Brahman* (the Absolute in itself)

⁷³⁷ Raimon Panikkar, in his work: *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, establishes a parallel between Father-Son, on the one hand, and *Brahman-Ishvara*, on the other. Cf. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981). Furthermore, he pursues a parallel between the Spirit and the Atman. Cf. Panikkar, *The Trinity and Religious Experience of Man*. Panikkar sees that the fundamental intuition of the non-duality (*advaita*) of God and the human being, conveyed by the Trinitarian experience, is found in most religious traditions, though expressed differently in each tradition. He also sees in the mystery of the Trinity the ultimate foundation for the plurality of world religious traditions. Cf. Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments Christic Self-consciousness," in Hick and Knitter, (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, pp. 89 – 116. Cf. also, Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

⁷³⁸ For a brief study on Trinitarian parallelism in Hindu *advaita* mysticism, cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 268 – 278. For a comparative study in the field of significance and interpretation of the historical person of Jesus Christ, cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, pp. 15 – 45. Cf. also, Michael von Brück, *The Unity of Reality: God, God-Experience and Meditation in the Hindu Christian Dialogue*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1991); Harold Coward, (ed.), *Hindu – Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990).

is conceived in the concept of *saccidananda*. Being (*sat*), Consciousness (*cit*) and Bliss (*ananda*) stand for three intrinsic perfections of the Absolute Brahman.⁷³⁹ The three terms are not found together in any single text of the Upanishads. In the sacred texts they are only found separately: Brahman is “supreme being” (*satyasya satyam*) (cf. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 2, 1, 20); “consciousness and bliss” (*vijnanam anandam*) (cf. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 3, 9, 28); “being, consciousness and infinity” (*satyam, jnanam anantam*) (cf. *Taitriya Upanishad* 2, 1), and so on and so forth. It is the Vedanta theological tradition, which on the foundation of the scriptural assertions coined the compound expression *saccidananda*.⁷⁴⁰ Moreover, the term designed to express the intrinsic nature of the Absolute is the “One-without-a-second,” (*ekam eva advitiam*) (Chandogaya Upanishad 6, 2, 2). These and other similar divine attributes correspond to the “transcendental perfections” which Christian philosophy has traditionally affirmed of God. Yet, these divine attributes do not represent in Hindu tradition a mere philosophical understanding. These are derived from the Upanishads. Hence, Sri Aurobindo affirms that the term *saccidananda*, a concept of Hindu mysticism represents an authentic spiritual experience. He writes, “An absolute, eternal and infinite Self-existence, Self-awareness, Self-delight of being that secretly supports and pervades the universe even while it is also beyond it, is, then, the first truth of spiritual experience.”⁷⁴¹

Dupuis, on the basis of above analysis, inquires how the *saccidananda* concept of Brahman relates to the Christian concept of the Trinity. The “fulfilment theory”, proposed by certain inclusivists, recognises only the presence of the “stepping-stones” toward the Christian mystery of the Trinity in some Hindu doctrines. The concept *saccidananda* witnesses to the universal human search for the divine, which the Christian message brings to fulfilment. It merely conveys the transcendental perfection of the Divine, attainable to human reason independently from any personal

⁷³⁹ For instance, Henri Le Saux (*Abhishiktananda*) speaks about the experience of *Saccidananda* that carries the soul beyond the intellectual knowledge to the source of its being. He writes, “Only there the [soul] is able to hear the Word which reveals within the undivided unity and *advaita of saccidananda* the mystery of the three persons: in *sat*, the Father, absolute Beginning and Source of being, in *cit*, the Son, the divine Word, the Father’s Self-knowledge, in *ananda*, the Spirit of Love, Fullness and Bliss without end.” Idem. *Saccidananda: Christian Approach to Advaita Experience*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1984), p. 178.

⁷⁴⁰ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 274.

⁷⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Pondicheri: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1970, vol.1, p. 325.

manifestation on the part of God. By contrast, the “theory of the presence of the mystery of Christ” recognises in the concept of *saccidananda* more than a human waiting for the Divine. It recognises the traces, in the “spiritual experience” of Hindu mysticism, of a divine self-manifestation and, therefore, of a hidden, operative presence of the mystery of God and of Christ. There is more to be found in the Hindu tradition than a simple “natural” foundation for a divine self-communication. There are in it elements of “truth and grace”⁷⁴² which witness to a self-manifestation of God in his Spirit. The term *saccidananda* represents an authentic pre-sentiment of the Divine mystery as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Dupuis, analysing in the light of “Trinitarian Christological model” makes an effort to uncover a Trinitarian structure in all human experiences of the Divine. He affirms that “the divine Trinity is experience, though hidden and “anonymously,” wherever human beings allow the Divine Reality that impinges upon them to enter into their life. In every authentic religious experience the Triune God of the Christian revelation is present and operative.”⁷⁴³ He takes into account the values of interiority cultivated by the Hindu tradition that can come to the Christian’s aid. He writes, “God is the Utterly other, but the divine otherness is not to be located outside ourselves, as on a horizontal plane. The relationship between the human being and God must be interiorised as it grows. This interiorisation is the deed of the Spirit of God in the spirit of the human being”.⁷⁴⁴ Similarly, the Hindu tradition of the *Atman* can help the Christian to interiorise the Christian experience of the God of history. By way of pointing out a true complementarity between other religions and Christianity, and their convergence with it, Dupuis states, “the religious traditions of the world convey different insights into the mystery of Ultimate Reality. Incomplete as these may be, they nevertheless witness to a manifold self-manifestation of God to human beings in diverse faith communities. They are incomplete “faces” of the Divine Mystery experienced in various ways, to be fulfilled in him who is the human face of God.”⁷⁴⁵ Whatever the precise form of these signs of Trinity either in monotheistic traditions or Eastern mystical traditions, for Christian faith the Ultimate Reality is

⁷⁴² *Ad Gentes*, 9.

⁷⁴³ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 276 – 277.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 277.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 279.

decisively and completely revealed and manifested in Jesus Christ. Even though Dupuis tries to go beyond the fulfilment theory of the inclusivist model, while speaking about the complementarity between Hindu mysticism and Christianity he speaks of it in terms of fulfilment theory as “one expression, among others, of the human aspiration toward the Divine reality.”⁷⁴⁶ Likewise, while speaking about complementarity between other religions and Christianity, he again includes the traits of fulfilment theory, as they seem to represent incomplete “insights into the mystery of Ultimate Reality,” as they are “incomplete faces of the Divine Mystery” to be fulfilled in Christ.⁷⁴⁷

3.3 The Significance of Other Religions in the Trinitarian Economy of Salvation

The Second Vatican Council has clearly acknowledged that the diverse religious traditions contain and offer religious elements that come from God.⁷⁴⁸ While speaking about the way in which the salvific grace of God reaches to religious others, it limited itself to the statement that God bestows it “in ways known to himself”.⁷⁴⁹ God may work salvifically in other religions, but it is always in conformity with the norm of Christ’s revelation. Humans are historical, embodied, social beings and are necessarily conditioned and influenced by their environments. Religions play a key role in this environment. If Christians need sacraments to help them meet God and receive his saving grace, so do the believers of other religions too. They have their own sacraments too. *Redemptoris Missio* indicates that the Holy Spirit is present “not only in individuals but also in society and history, peoples, cultures, and religions.”⁷⁵⁰ The religious elements are part of what “the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures, and religions.”⁷⁵¹ The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* states that because of “the active presence of God through his Word” and “the universal presence of the Spirit” not only in persons outside the Church but

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 278.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 279.

⁷⁴⁸ Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 11; *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ad Gentes*, 7.

⁷⁵⁰ *Redemptoris Missio*, 28.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid. 29.

also in their religions, it is “in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions ... that the members of other religions correspond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation.”⁷⁵² Furthermore, *Redemptoris Missio*, after affirming the unique and universal mediation of Christ, states about “participated mediations” of God’s saving grace. This is a clear recognition that, while God’s grace is certainly one, it is visibly mediated in different ways, not only in degree but also in nature. On the one hand, there is recognition that people’s religious practice gives expression in their own cultural and religious context to their experience of God and of the mystery of Christ. Their practice both sustains and helps them to meet God. On the other hand, the religious practices and rites of other religions are not understood to be on the same level as the Christian sacraments deriving from Christ, though a certain mediation of grace, essentially connected to the unique meditation of Jesus Christ and deriving power from it, is to be attributed to their religious practice.⁷⁵³ What is clearly affirmed is that, while there is only one mystery of salvation in Christ, this mystery is present to human beings outside the bounds of Christianity. The grace of salvation is “always given by means of Christ in the Spirit and has a mysterious relationship to the Church”.⁷⁵⁴

The International Theological Commission indicated that the religions could then, within the term specified, be a means, which helps for the salvation of their adherents.⁷⁵⁵ If so, in which precise sense do the religious traditions help people to receive God’s gift of salvation for their followers? In other words, how does the mediation of God’s saving grace take place in other religious traditions? Do the religious traditions lend a certain visibility and social character to the saving power of Christ as it reaches their members? Are they signs, however incomplete they may be, of God’s universal saving activity? Dupuis’ *Trinitarian Spirit Christology model* opens the way for recognising the saving economy of the triune God in other religious traditions. The diverse religious traditions are many and various ways of God’s multifaceted relationship with his people, in their historical situations and

⁷⁵² *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

⁷⁵³ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 5.

⁷⁵⁴ *Dominus Iesus*, 21.

⁷⁵⁵ Cf. *The International Theological Commission*, “Christianity and World Religions”, *Origins*, 27 (1997), pp. 149 – 166.

religious environment. However, this universal presence of God to his creation is the universality of God's reconciling and saving love. It is never independent of God's self-disclosure in the particularity of Christ-event as the Trinitarian God – Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Similarly, God's saving action, which always operates within the framework of a unified plan, is one and at the same time multifaceted. It never prescind from the Christ event, in which it finds its realisation. Yet the action of the Word of God is not constrained by becoming human in Jesus Christ; nor is the Spirit's work in history limited to its outpouring upon the world by the risen and exalted Christ. The mediation of God's saving grace to humankind needs to be situated in the universality of God, his universal will to save all humankind and his unified as well as multifaceted plan of salvation.⁷⁵⁶

Dupuis stresses the worldly and social character of the human being. He considers that the existence of human beings is essentially historical. Likewise, what is true of human life is also true of religious life. It is not purely spiritual state of soul. In order to exist, religious life must express itself in religious symbols, rites and practices. He writes, "In view of the human being's essentially composite nature, such symbols, rites, and practices are necessary for the very existence of religious life, as they serve both as expression and support of the aspirations of the human Spirit. There is no religious life without religious practice. In this sense neither is there faith without religion."⁷⁵⁷ The necessity of religion for religious life of human beings is also confirmed by the anthropological principle, according to which human beings are inevitably related to others. A human being can become and grow as a person only through interpersonal relationship. One becomes what one is. Applying this same principle in the case of religious life of human beings, he writes, "Religious human beings subsist not as separated individuals but as members of determinate religious communities with particular traditions. They grow and become by sharing the religious life of their respective communities, by entering personally into the respective historical tradition in which they are placed, and by taking up its social manifestations, ideas and teaching, moral code and ritual practices."⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁶ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 316.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 317.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 317.

It follows that if the members of other religious tradition have any experience of God in their respective religions, then they must contain, in their institutions and social practices, traces of the encounter of human beings with grace. According to Dupuis, there can be no dichotomy between the human being's subjective religious life and the religion they profess, between their personal religious experience and the historico-social religious phenomenon to which they adhere. Hence, one cannot, on the one hand, accept that the religious others can obtain salvation thanks to the sincerity of their subjective religious life, and on the other hand, fail to accept that their religious traditions have salvific value for them.⁷⁵⁹ Consequently, he adopts from the above analysis that "the religious traditions of humanity derive from the religious experience of the persons or groups that have founded them. Their sacred books contain memory of concrete religious experiences with Truth. Their practices, in turn, result from the codification of these experiences. Thus it seems both impracticable and theologically unrealistic to maintain that, while the members of various religious traditions can obtain salvation, their religions play no role in the process. As there is no purely natural concrete religious life, so neither is there any such thing as purely natural historical religion."⁷⁶⁰

Consequently, Dupuis asserts the mediation of religious traditions in admitting that they somehow contain and signify God's presence to humankind in Jesus Christ.⁷⁶¹ The diverse religious traditions, then, can be said to serve as the "channels" of the mystery of salvation, participating in the unique and universal mediation of the mystery of Christ and due to the presence and action of the Spirit in them. In Christ, God enters into a personal relationship with human beings, which means, God is present to them. Dupuis holds that "every authentic experience of God, among Christians as among others, is an encounter of God in Jesus Christ with the human being. God's presence to the human being, *qua* a "being with" of the intentional order like any personal presence, sets God in relationship with the human being in an interpersonal exchange of a "Thou" and an "I." The order of faith or salvation consists precisely of this personal communication of God to the human being, a communication whose concrete realisation is in Jesus Christ and whose

⁷⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 318.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 318.

⁷⁶¹ Cf. Dupuis, "God is Always Greater," *The Tablet*, 27 / 10 / 2001, p. 1521.

efficacious sign is the humanity of Jesus.”⁷⁶² Furthermore, he affirms that “God, however, is infinite Person, beyond all finitude, and the transcendence of God profoundly stamps the nature of the personal divine presence to human beings. Inasmuch as infinite distance separates the Infinite from the finite, the personal presence of God to the human being – and a fortiori to the sinful human being – can only be gratuitous. The initiative of God’s relationship to the human beings is at the centre of the mystery of Christ.”⁷⁶³ This does not mean to accept that religions in themselves save human beings. It must be clearly held that all are saved by God through the universal salvific mediation of Christ and in the universal presence and operation of the Spirit. Nevertheless, God, while communicating his saving grace to the religious others, can use their religious traditions as locus or vehicles of his grace.

However, in Christianity, God’s personal presence to human beings in Christ reaches its highest and complete sacramental visibility. Hence, in Christianity, the grace of salvation in Christ is fully available to the Christians in and through word and sacramental life in the Church. Dupuis holds that “Indeed, their own religious practice is the reality that gives expression to their experience of God and of the mystery of Christ. It is the visible element, the sign, and the sacrament of that experience. This practice expresses, supports, bears, and contains, as it were, their encounter with God in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁶⁴ Dupuis, however, distinguishes the salvific mediation of Christ found in other religious traditions from that of his mediation in Christianity.⁷⁶⁵ He distinguishes various modalities of the sacramental presence of the mystery. The mystery of Christ knows different modalities of the mediation of its presence.⁷⁶⁶ While the grace of God is one, it is visibly mediated in different modes, differing not only in degree but also in kind. The religious practices and sacramental rites in other religions are not on the same footing as the Christian sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ. From a Christian perspective, keeping in mind the above

⁷⁶² Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 318.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 318.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 319.

⁷⁶⁵ Cf. Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” in T. Merrigan / J. Haers eds., *The Myriad Christ*, p. 95. Cf. also Merrigan, “Exploring the Frontiers: Jacques Dupuis and the Movement Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,” *Louvain Studies*, 23 (1998), pp. 350 – 351.

⁷⁶⁶ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 319.

analysis, it follows that the other religious traditions help their followers to come into contact with the saving grace of God, actualised through the Christ-event and by the power of the Spirit. From this perspective we can see other religious traditions indeed as ways and means of salvation for their followers. This is also in keeping with the essential unity that we saw between the subjective religious life of the believers of other religious traditions and their religious traditions. Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine in what precise sense the historical religions serve as mediation for their members of the Christic mystery. However, Dupuis claims that there is only one mystery of salvation, which is present to all people both inside and outside the boundaries of Christianity.⁷⁶⁷ He makes a further distinction between the visibility of the mediation in the Church, the eschatological community, from that of the mediation in other religious traditions. While, in the former it is present to the believers overtly, explicitly, in the full visibility of its complete mediation, in the latter it is present in an implicit, concealed manner, in virtue of an incomplete mode of mediation constituted by these traditions.

A concrete criterion to discern salvific values such as divine revelation and grace is “love,” which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:16-24), the central revelation in Jesus Christ, the sign of God’s presence. Furthermore, the New Testament also insists that the empowering love of *agapè* is a gift of the Spirit, who has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5). *Agapè* is the overflow in us of the love by which God loved us first. Hence, Dupuis holds that “the practice of love is the sure criterion by which to recognise that a person has listened to the word of God and opened his or heart to it. The practice of *agapè* is the reality of salvation, present and operative in human beings in response to God’s self-disclosure and revelation.”⁷⁶⁸ According to the New Testament, Christian precept of love is love of God and love of neighbour go hand in hand (cf. Mt. 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28). Love of God and love of neighbour have become one: in love for the least of the brethren love for God is lived (cf. Mt. 25:31-46). There exists the necessary interplay and an unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour (cf. 1 Jn 4:20). The same is true of religious others, in their case too *agapè* involves “a non-thematic recognition of the

⁷⁶⁷ Cf. Ibid. p. 319. Cf. also Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited,” *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 249.

⁷⁶⁸ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 323.

personal worth of the “other” and an implicit acknowledgement of a transcendent Absolute upon which this personal worth is based – whatever name may be given to this transcendent Absolute.”⁷⁶⁹

Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascertain how far the habitual practice of *agapè* and the ensuing mystery of personal salvation are inspired by the religious tradition to which a person belongs. Nor is it easy to evaluate if, to what extent, and with what clarity saving charity is enjoined as precept by the sacred books considered in other religious traditions as divine revelation. Though it may be described in different ways by various religious traditions, love is universally proposed by religious traditions and lived by their members. Appealing to Peggy Starkey, Dupuis speaks briefly of the universalism of love in some of the great religions.⁷⁷⁰ Peggy Starkey states that “A Christian can conclude from the examination of the scriptures and traditions of Judaism, that Jews are called to live a life characterised by deeds of compassion, charity, loving kindness, respect, justice towards all.”⁷⁷¹ Likewise, in the Qur’an, the practice of charity extends at least to all Muslims, and, according to some traditional interpretation, even to all people. This *agapè* is based on the attitude of God as compassionate and merciful toward humankind. For Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, *agapè* is even more universal. Regarding Hinduism, she writes, “The Hindu Scriptures call for the action of *agapè* described as acts of compassion, justice, respect, generosity, uprightness and selflessness towards all.”⁷⁷² According to the *Upanishadic* tradition, the altruistic love is based on the identity of *Brahman-Atman*. On the contrary, in the *Bhakti* tradition, the altruistic love has its foundation in the personal dignity of human beings in relation to a personal God.⁷⁷³ Buddhist *metta* (love) is to treat kindly not only friends and neighbours, but also enemies. Buddhist altruistic love includes compassion for all living creatures. Moreover, *jen* (human

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 323.

⁷⁷⁰ Peggy Starkey reviews the evidence available in the various religious traditions in favour of a divine revelation inspiring and sustaining in the followers to commit themselves to the practice of *agapè*. Cf. idem, “Agape: A Christian Criterion for Truth in the Other World Religions,” in *International Review of Mission*, 74 (1985), pp. 425 – 463.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid. p. 441.

⁷⁷² Ibid. p. 451.

⁷⁷³ Cf. Ibid, p. 451.

heartedness) in Confucianism stands in “close resemblance to the Christian concept of *agapè*.”⁷⁷⁴ It is the love that is universally active in all human relationships.

From the Christian standpoint, acts of love or *agapè* in action are the sign that God has entered into the life of a person in self-disclosure and manifestation, no matter how imperfect the awareness of God who has thus intervened may remain in the subject. They are also sign that the person has responded positively to God’s intervention in his or her life, no matter how non-thematic may remain the knowledge of the self-revealing God. Dupuis considers that God’s initiative of manifesting himself to a person and the positive response of the person gives to God’s initiative are not totally unrelated to the religious tradition to which he or she belongs and to what the tradition has taught him or her about the Absolute. He writes, “Subjective faith-commitment expressed in *agapè* and the objective doctrine and practice of the faith community to which one belongs cannot be severed without violence to both.”⁷⁷⁵ The presence of *agapè* in the religious others is indeed the sign of the operative presence of the mystery of God’s grace of salvation that is at work in them.

By way of summary, we note Dupuis’ concluding remarks on above analysis: God has manifested and revealed himself throughout human history “in many and in various ways” (Heb 1:1). Hence, the diverse religious traditions are the many and diverse ways in which God has disclosed himself to the nations throughout human history. They are the many ways, in which God has, in anticipation of the coming of his Son, has disclosed the divine self to the nations and in which he continues to do so. They all form part of the history of salvation, which is one and manifold. They all contain divine grace and moments of revelation, even though they remain incomplete and open to a fuller self-gift and disclosure on the part of God. The gracious moments enshrined in the religious traditions of humankind open their followers, through faith and love, to God’s grace and salvation. In other words, they are paths of salvation since they cannot be separated from the operative presence of the mystery of God’s grace of salvation that is at work in the followers of these traditions. They do so insofar as in God’s providence they anticipate God’s fuller disclosure and decisive self-gift in Jesus Christ. In Christ, who is God’s Son made Man, God has united with

⁷⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 451.

⁷⁷⁵ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 325.

humankind in a bond of love. This is why saving *agapè* finds in Christ its decisive theological foundation.⁷⁷⁶

4. The Problems in the Praxis of Trinitarian Theology of Religious Pluralism

Dupuis' Trinitarian Christological model is capable of holding in creative tension the depth of God's commitment to humankind in Jesus and the authenticity of other paths in accord with his divine providence. Jesus is unique and universal, yet in practice the visible paths to salvation have remained many. He does consider other religions to be valid channels of salvation, not understood as parallel to Jesus Christ who is the way, but understood as participating in Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and life (cf. Jn. 14:6). The active presence of the Word of God and of the Divine Spirit in other religions enables the convergence of all religions in the unity of salvation, which is also rooted in the unity of God's design of salvation for all humankind. Dupuis, in the process of showing a convergence that exist between "faces of the divine mystery" proposed by the other religious traditions and the mystery of the divine Trinity revealed in Jesus Christ, holds that there is an asymmetrical complementarity between the various religious traditions, Christianity included. This conclusion is justified by the discovery of "truth and grace," "the seeds of the Word," the spiritual values in other "paths to salvation" complementary to those proposed by the Christian 'way.' It is a mutual complementarity, in which dynamic interactions between two traditions result in mutual enrichment. It makes the reciprocal convergence possible. This convergence between the religious traditions is both historical and eschatological. It is task of the interreligious dialogue to turn the potential convergence inherent in the religious traditions into a concrete historical reality. Founded on the mystery of communion in the Spirit existing between the partners of dialogue, which flows from their common sharing in the universal reality of the reign of God. This anticipated communion, according to Dupuis, guarantees that actual convergence through interreligious dialogue is possible, while, respecting the difference between the various faith-commitment of the participants. Interfaith dialogue thus contributes to the building up of the reign of God in history, which

⁷⁷⁶ Cf. Ibid. p. 325.

itself remains directed towards the eschatological fullness at the end of time. So also the convergence between the religious traditions will also attain its goal in the fullness of the Reign of God.

4.1. The Problematic of 'One' and 'Many' Paths to Salvation

Dupuis, in accordance with the Christian faith, upholds that the event of Jesus Christ is *constitutive* for the salvation of all humankind, in the sense that “the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ has according to God’s saving design for humankind, a universal significance: it seals between the Godhead and the human race a bond of union that can never be broken; it constitutes the privileged channel through which God has chosen to share the divine life with human beings.”⁷⁷⁷ Similarly, he also affirms that the mystery of Christ is *relational*, with an aim of “inserting the universal significance of the Christ-event into the overall plan of God for humankind and the manner in which it unfolds in the salvation history.”⁷⁷⁸ However, Dupuis tries to build a bridge between the path of salvation that is unfolded in Jesus Christ and the various paths proposed by the religious traditions to their members. He sees various religious traditions as “paths to salvation,” which are laid by God, and not by human beings for themselves. This brings us to the core of the problem in the theology of religions regarding the *one* and the *many* paths to salvation. But how, in God’s providence, is the “one way” related to the “many paths”? In other words, “the question is whether the Christian character of the economy of salvation leads to the conclusion that the members of other religious traditions are saved through him beside, or even in spite of, the religious traditions to which they adhere and which they practice with sincerity. Or are they, on the contrary, saved within this tradition and through it? And, if the second alternative is true, how does a Christian theology of religions account for the saving power of these other paths?”⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 305.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 305.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 305. For a detailed consideration of this problematic and his response to these and other related questions regarding plurality of religious traditions as paths to salvation, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 305 – 329. Cf. also, Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp.182 – 194.

The ‘elements of truth’ originating in divine revelation must be found in the various religious traditions of the world.⁷⁸⁰ Reflecting it from a Trinitarian structure of his theology, Dupuis notes that whenever there is a personal communication of God, it is always necessarily the God of Jesus Christ, who engages in self-revelation and self-bestowal, that is the triune God: the Father, the Son and the Spirit. He also maintains that the religious experience of the sages and *rishis* (seers) of the nations is guided and directed by the Spirit of God. In addressing the prophets personally in the secret recesses of their hearts, God has willed to be manifested and revealed to the nations in the divine Spirit. Thus God has secretly entered the history of peoples, guiding them toward the accomplishment of the divine design.⁷⁸¹ Yet this does not nullify the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ. This qualitative fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ – in Dupuis’ terminology and understanding– is no obstacle to a continuing divine self-revelation through others.⁷⁸² Consequently, Dupuis considers it is legitimate to point to a convergence between the religious traditions and the mystery of Jesus Christ, representing various, though not equal, paths along which, through history, God has sought and continues to seek human beings in his Word and Spirit. However, Jesus Christ is the “integral figure of God’s salvation”; the other religious traditions represent “particular realisations of a universal process, which has become pre-eminently concrete in Jesus Christ. Salvation is at work everywhere; but in the concrete figure of the crucified Christ the work of salvation is seen to be accomplished.”⁷⁸³

Dupuis affirms “God – and God alone – saves.”⁷⁸⁴ God, who alone is the Absolute, is the final agent of human salvation. He is the source and root cause of salvation, and the mystery of Jesus Christ, in a derivative manner, is the path to salvation, since God saves through Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 3:16-17). Thus the principal cause of salvation remains the Father: “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself” (2Cor 5:19). Jesus Christ is the *mediator* between God and humankind, insofar as in him the Godhead and humankind have been joined together in a lasting

⁷⁸⁰ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 239 – 242.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid. p. 247.

⁷⁸² Cf. Ibid. p. 249 – 250.

⁷⁸³ Cf. Ibid. p. 328.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 306.

bond: “By his incarnation the son of God has united himself in some way to every person.”⁷⁸⁵ The mediation between God and human beings realised in Jesus Christ as *unique*. After affirming Christ’s one and universal mediation, *Redemptoris Missio* states, “Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds 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.”⁷⁸⁶ Hence, if there are participated forms of mediation in the diverse religious traditions, those mediations must be seen as essentially related to, and deriving its power from the unique mediation of Jesus Christ. Moreover, Dupuis observes, the religious traditions do not save people, any more than does Christianity. Nevertheless, God can make use of diverse religious traditions as channels of his salvation; they can thus become ways or means conveying the power of the saving God. Likewise, all religions present to their followers paths to salvation, even though, the concept of salvation or liberation might vary from one religious tradition to the other.

Dupuis firmly holds the idea of the common ultimate goal for diverse religious traditions.⁷⁸⁷ He holds for the common end of all religions as the one God “who revealed himself in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁸⁸ Human beings are profoundly united by their origin in God and by their orientation towards him. For the Christian tradition, “the Triune God is the ultimate goal of human life, the Ultimate Reality,” which “though remaining beyond our human grasp, has nevertheless revealed himself in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁸⁹ The Christian tradition has always held that God wills the salvation of all human beings (1 Tim 2:4). By salvation it meant sharing in God’s life here on earth and union with him in the other life. Nevertheless, God’s grace is subject to acceptance by each individual person in accordance with one’s freedom of will. God respects the freedom of human beings who alone can be made responsible for not

⁷⁸⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁷⁸⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 5.

⁷⁸⁷ Dupuis rejects the idea of “orientational pluralism,” held by Mark Heim. He looks at the possibility of the providential provision of a diversity of religious ends for human beings, that is, of providential role for the religions in the divine plan other than or in addition to serving as channels for salvation. According to him, the diversity of religious ends throws light on the meaning of religious plurality in God’s providence. Cf. Mark Heim, *Salvation: Truth and Difference in Religion*, (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1995), pp. 131, 160-163.

⁷⁸⁸ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 307 – 313.

⁷⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid*, pp. 308, 312.

being saved. In all circumstances, God's will to save all endures even where it is frustrated by individual free choice. Religious others too are destined to share in God's life here on earth and union with him in the other life as their "ultimate" end, whether this end is actually realised or not and no matter when and how it is realised. In the words of Dupuis, "salvation as revealed by God in Jesus Christ is the universal destiny devised by God for human beings, whichever situation they may find themselves in and whichever religious tradition they may belong to."⁷⁹⁰ This conclusion is in keeping with the witness of the conciliar teaching in *Gaudium et Spes*, which states: "since Christ died for all, and since all human beings are called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy spirit offers to all the possibility of being associated, in a way known to God, to the paschal mystery."⁷⁹¹

We have seen that God is the common meeting point of all religious traditions. Since God offers his grace of salvation to all humankind, all the believers, though they belong to diverse religious traditions, have as their in common religious end union with God. This personal union with God, the gift of salvation is offered to all humankind in and through Jesus Christ. Yet the various religious traditions represent various paths leading, though differently to the common goal. Dupuis holds that the Christian affirmation regarding the universal presence and activity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit somehow allows for a mediating role of religious traditions. The encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, sees the presence of the Holy Spirit not only in people of good will but also in society and history, in peoples, in cultures and in religions. This universal action of the Holy Spirit in other religious traditions without being separated from that of Jesus Christ or confused with the specific, peculiar action that develops in the body of Christ, which is the Church, nevertheless, allows us to analyse how these religious traditions become ways of salvation for their followers. These ways are not parallel to Christ-the-way, whom the Christian faith and tradition has always held as the only Saviour. It is the risen Christ who works in the hearts of the peoples through the Holy Spirit, and it is same Spirit who distributes the seeds of word present in the religious rites and traditions.⁷⁹² Trinitarian

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 312.

⁷⁹¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁷⁹² Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 28, 29.

Christology, which is the foundation in Dupuis's affirmation of divine revelation occurring in religious traditions, is also the principle that allows for the salvific role of the world religions. Dupuis clearly sees the possibility of diverse religious traditions offering different paths to a common goal, that is God.⁷⁹³ Theological concepts may differ from one religion to another. This, however, does not necessarily prevent the "convergence" of the religions in their final goal.

Dupuis argues that in God's over all salvific design for all humankind, religious pluralism exists not merely as a *fact* but also in *principle*. Religious pluralism in principle is based on God's initiative in searching for people throughout history in order to share with them his own life, even before human beings could ever search for God. It follows that the other religious traditions play a positive role in God's overall plan of salvation for humankind. This motivates him to see all the diverse religious traditions, as paths converging in the constitutive mediation of Jesus Christ, meeting together in the universal Reign of God. Therefore, it is possible to speak of a religious pluralism that does not just arise as reality *de facto* in our present world, but that can be viewed theologically as existing *de jure*, that is intended and willed by God in his eternal design for humankind. Hence, he concludes that if religion has its original source in a divine self-manifestation to human beings, the principle of plurality will be made to rest primarily on the superabundant richness of the diversity of God's self-manifestations to humankind. This is in keeping with his approach to God's plan of salvation, which, in his opinion, is one but multifaceted. It belongs to the nature of the overflowing communication of the Triune God to humankind. The decisiveness of the Christ-event does not cancel the universal presence and action of the Spirit of God in religious others and in their religious traditions. Religious pluralism in principle rests on the immensity of God who is love, who bestows himself to all peoples through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Spirit. Thus, Dupuis holds that the foundation of religious

⁷⁹³ This is in line with what Keith Ward states: "it is possible to hold that, in an important sense, many faiths may offer different paths to a common goal, conceived in a number of rather different ways." He holds that just as there is theological diversity in the Christian theology, other religious traditions introduce a further diversification in the way of conceiving the ultimate goal of humankind. Since the goal remains common, it is possible to speak of a true convergence in a common religious end. Cf. Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation, A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 338. For further details cf. *ibid*, p. 310ff.

pluralism in principle is “the mystery of the plural communication of God to humankind in history – the economic Trinity, which governs the one, plural, economy of salvation.”⁷⁹⁴ The reason is that God has in every event and from the beginning searching for men and women throughout the history, even before they could even think of searching for him. The religions cannot but contain at least traces of that divine search for humankind. Hence, the existence and continuation of religious pluralism in principle is an expression of a positive divine will of the saving God.

4.2. A Certain Complementarity Between Diverse Religious Traditions

In a world of religious plurality, diverse religious traditions reflect a common pilgrimage of all humankind to the Divine. From the Christian theological standpoint, we have pointed out that these diverse religious traditions meet together in Triune God. But can we speak of a complementarity between diverse religious traditions. Dupuis finds a complementarity between Christianity and other religions. He states, “It is legitimate to speak of complementarity and convergence between Christianity and the religious traditions. ‘Complementarity’ is not intended here unilaterally, as though values found outside were destined to be one-sidedly ‘fulfilled’ by Christian values and to be merely ‘integrated’ into Christianity. It is a question of a mutual complementarity, in which a dynamic interaction between those traditions and Christianity results in mutual enrichment.”⁷⁹⁵ As regards Dupuis’ usage of the term ‘complementarity’ between Christianity and other religions, Gerald O’Collins observes, “Dupuis never intended to deny that the revelation which reached its fullness in Christ is somehow incomplete or imperfect, and so needs to be filled out by other religious traditions. Rather he 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, Christianity may “hear” something which enriches them spiritually.”⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹⁴ Dupuis, “The Truth Will make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999) p. 259.

⁷⁹⁵ Dupuis, “Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism,” in T. Merrigan / J. Haers (eds.), *The Myriad Christ*, p. 97.

⁷⁹⁶ Cf. Gerald O’Collins, “Jacques Dupuis: His Person and Work,” in Daniel Kendall / Gerald O’Collins, (ed.), *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honour of Jacques Dupuis*, p. 24

The kind of complementarity and convergence between Christianity and the other religions of the world that is in keeping with Christian standpoint is not a mere simple complementarity, understood as “one way traffic.” Such a one-way complementarity would mean that, while it is true that the other religions must find their “complement” in Christianity, the reverse is in no way true, as these have nothing to contribute to Christianity. To hold for such unilateral complementarity would amount to going back to the “fulfilment theory” in the theology of religions, according to which all other religions represent but different expressions, in the various cultures of the world, of the universal aspiration of human beings for union with the Divine Mystery. All other religious traditions would then be merely “natural” religions, destined to find the fulfilment of their aspirations in the only “supernatural” religion, which is Christianity. So Dupuis does not hold that the “one-way traffic” model of complementarity can be a foundation for dialogue.

The complementarity, with which Dupuis is concerned, is by necessity a “*reciprocal complementarity*,” or a “*mutual complementarity*,” such as would allow for a “two-way traffic” in a process of dialogue, and, through it, for a mutual enrichment of both partners involved and of their respective religious traditions themselves. This, however, does not necessarily imply that both religions concerned are, theologically speaking, to be placed on one and the same level. There will remain differences in value and significance of the respective religious traditions, in accordance with the faith-persuasion of the religious practitioners involved. What would, however, be presupposed for a “mutual complementarity” is that, differences in theological evaluation notwithstanding, various the traditions involved would be considered as embodying some divine self-manifestation to people in words and deeds, and, to that extent, should be approached, on either side, with the respect due to God’s word and his saving deeds in history. So, for example, Dupuis declares that since the one, triune God is at work in other religious traditions, it is possible that their sacred books might stress aspects of the divine mystery that have not been highlighted with equal force in Christianity. But here too, he insists that what is at stake is not a simple equality between Christianity and other religions. If complementarity exists, it is necessarily “*asymmetrical*”. While holding on to the claim that Jesus alone is the “image of God”, Dupuis proposes that other “saving figures” may nonetheless be “enlightened”

by the Word or “inspired” by the Spirit, to become pointers to salvation for their followers.

Consequently, Dupuis holds that the complementarity between Christianity and other religions is an ‘*asymmetrical complementarity*’.⁷⁹⁷ His usage of an adjective ‘*asymmetrical*’ reflects the Christian belief that the divine revelation in Jesus Christ enjoys a unique fullness and completeness, and therefore, there is no void in it to be filled by other revelations and traditions. The Christian faith holds that the Jesus Christ event represents the acme of God’s personal dealings with humankind in history. The Word, which God speaks to humankind through Jesus Christ, is, by virtue of his personal identity as the Son of God made man, the “fullness” of divine revelation. Similarly, the historical event of his human life, and in particular the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection, is the culminating point of salvation history in which God’s will to save is fully realized. While then it may be true that between Christianity and the other religions there exists a mutual complementarity, it cannot be said that this mutual complementarity is symmetrical, that is, identical in both directions. Whereas Christianity can truly be enriched through the process of dialogue with other religious traditions in which the divine self-manifestations in history is verified, it nevertheless represents God’s decisive engagement with humankind and in that sense the “fullness” of divine revelation and salvation. This enrichment should not be conceived in terms of a gap or a vacuum that would be left open in Christian revelation itself that could only be filled through the contribution made to Christian revelation by other divine revelations. If such were the case, Christian revelation by itself would fall short of its own fullness, and the fullness of divine revelation in Jesus Christ would tend to be denied. Christian theology must maintain that the complementarity of revelation and salvation between the Christ event and other divine manifestations to humankind in other religious traditions has to be qualified as at once reciprocal and asymmetrical.

Dupuis adds one more qualification to the complementarity found between Christianity and the religions. The mutually asymmetrical complementarity that obtains between them is of the *relational* order. The Christ-event must be viewed as essentially *relational* to all other divine manifestations in history. God in his eternity

⁷⁹⁷ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999) pp. 255 – 258.

has conceived only one design for humankind; it is that unique plan of revelation-salvation which has been progressively unfolding throughout history and continues to unfold even today. In this unique design and in its historical unfolding Jesus Christ is the “centre” of gravity, the “key of understanding”; but, as such, his unique event is essentially correlated to the entire process and vice versa. The Christ-event in which revelation and salvation are achieved did not take place in a vacuum, with no previous divine interventions, but as the climax of what God had through the centuries been achieving among the peoples of the world. The stories of God’s saving dealings with the nations and the story of his saving work through Jesus Christ are essentially mutually related. The former are inconceivable without the latter, and vice versa. This is where an effort needs to be made, in so far as is possible, into the mind of God, to discover from within the intrinsic consistency of God’s unique design for humankind. Hence it is possible to assert “God wills that the other religions perform functions in his plan for humankind that are now only dimly perceived and that will be fully disclosed in the consummation of history for which Christians long.”⁷⁹⁸

Mutual complementarity, even partial and initial, makes a reciprocal convergence possible. The mystery of communion in the Spirit existing between the partners of dialogue flows from their common sharing in the universal reality of the Reign of God. It is the task of interreligious dialogue to turn the potential convergence inherent in the religious traditions into a concrete reality. Interfaith dialogue thus contributes to building up the Reign of God in history. But the Reign of God in history is directed towards its eschatological fullness at the end of time. The convergence between the religious traditions also will attain its goal in the fullness of the Reign of God. An eschatological “recapitulation” (Eph 1:10) in Christ of the religious traditions of the world will take place in the *eschaton*. Such a recapitulation would preserve the irreducible character, which the distinct self-manifestations of God in history have impressed upon the various traditions. The eschatological fullness of the Reign of God thus appears as the common final goal of Christianity and the other religions. Thus the reign of God being accomplished, the end will come, “when [Christ] delivers the Kingdom to God the Father,” and, the Son himself being “subject to him who put all things under him,” God will be “everything to everyone”

⁷⁹⁸ DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective*, p. 381.

(1 Cor 15:24–28).”⁷⁹⁹ In this manner Dupuis hopes for a “marvellous convergence”⁸⁰⁰ to take place in the eschaton, of all things and all religious traditions in the reign of God and in Christ-omega. Such an eschatological convergence does not in any way overshadow the historical event of Jesus Christ, since he is both the *Alpha* and the *Omega*. Finally, Christ is the central axis for a general convergence of all religious traditions in the Reign of God. The eschatological fullness of the reign of God is the common final achievement of Christianity and the other religions.

However, objections are raised to the complementarity suggested above between Christianity and religions. In its *Notification on the Book Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does not permit the idea of complementarity between Christianity and other religions. The text of the notification states, “It is contrary to the Catholic faith to maintain that revelation in Jesus Christ (or the revelation of Jesus Christ) is limited, incomplete or imperfect.”⁸⁰¹ The idea of complementarity may seem to contradict the fact that the Church has the fullness of the means of salvation. It would, moreover seem to establish parallel ways of salvation. Fear is expressed that this may fail to do full justice to the Christian faith as well as to the otherness of the other religious traditions in their difference and specificity, and thus obscure their intrinsic coherence as wholesome visions of reality. There may be a real danger of seeking too easily to assimilate the truth and the grace contained in them as “stepping stones” or a “preparation for the Gospel”, thus falling again into the trap of the “fulfilment theory”, instead of accounting for the mutually irreducible character of distinct, apparently irreconcilable, systems of thought and visions of life. For the “fulfilment theory” complementarity is in one direction only, in so far as Jesus Christ and Christianity fulfil the natural religiosity expressed in other religious traditions. On the contrary, Dupuis suggests “a ‘reciprocal complementarity’ which, without suppressing the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the consequent irreducible singularity of Christianity, holds, nevertheless, that some true aspects of the divine mystery can so stand out be expressed in other traditions that even Christians can profit from

⁷⁹⁹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 389.

⁸⁰⁰ Dupuis takes from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin the idea of *eschatological convergence* of the religious traditions in the Reign of God. Cf. Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 126 – 130.

⁸⁰¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 436.

contact with them.”⁸⁰² He writes, “the other religions may contain divine truth from which Christians can learn, even if the same religions also contain elements incompatible with Christianity; similarly, they may contain elements which serve as ‘means’ of salvation for their followers, even if the Church alone has received from Christ the fullness of the means [of salvation].”⁸⁰³

Dupuis distinguishes between the imperfect and partial complementarity that may exist in history between Christianity and other religious traditions from the complete convergence in Christ of all things at the *eschaton*.⁸⁰⁴ But another difficulty may arise regarding the mutual complementarity between Christianity and the religions that is taking place in history. To claim that a complementarity can already be realized in time, amounts to unduly projecting into the present time what can only be realized in the *eschaton*. We may well conceive that in the fullness of time all things will be “recapitulated” in Christ (cf. Eph 1:10), according to the Christian promise. We may even think that such an eschatological “recapitulation” will respect and preserve the irreducible character which God’s self-manifestation that through his Word and his Spirit he has impressed upon the different traditions. But to speak of a “recapitulation” in history is to unduly anticipate what remains in store for the end-time. Such complementarity and convergence would seem to betray a theological optimism, which is belied by concrete reality. To prevent collapsing the eschatological times into present history, it will be important to distinguish clearly between the initial, incomplete mutual convergence between Christianity and the other religions, which can be realized in time from the full “recapitulation” in Christ of all things, religions included, which remains in store in the eschatological future. An incomplete mutual complementarity and convergence are possible, the complete realization of which, however, will only be unveiled in the *eschaton*.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰² Dupuis, “The Truth Will make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 257.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.* pp. 257 – 258.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 258.

⁸⁰⁵ For instance, the possibility of a real, though incomplete, convergence, beyond the apparent contradictions and the irreducible differences, would be: the possible symbiosis between the non-duality (*advaita*) of Hindu mystical experience and the mystery of interpersonal communion in the tri-personal God of the Christian tradition.

4.3. A Critical Assessment of Dupuis' Trinitarian Pneumatic-Christology

Dupuis' theology is of a distinctly Trinitarian character. It may be said that the divine Trinity is experienced, though in a hidden manner and 'anonymously', wherever human beings allow the Divine Reality that impinges upon them to enter into their life. The Triune God of Christian revelation is present and operative in every authentic religious experience. His Trinitarian theology of religions, with his new approach of *inclusivist-pluralism: theocentric-christocentrism*, seems to be able to overcome the dilemma of choosing a theology that is either theocentric or Christocentric. He has clearly shown that his synthesis of inclusivist pluralism is capable of holding together and harmonizing the two axioms of Christian faith that are obligatory for any Christian theology of religions, namely, that God's salvific will is truly universal, and that the gift salvation comes from God, through Christ, in the power of the Spirit. In other words, Jesus Christ is clearly asserted to be God's decisive revelation and the constitutive Saviour. Jesus Christ being the centre of God's universal plan of salvation, all salvation is through Christ. Triune God is the goal and end toward which the religious life of human beings and the religious tradition of humanity tend. Jesus Christ is at the centre of the mystery as obligatory mediator, constituted by God, as the way leading to God. Jesus Christ is at the centre of God's salvific plan for all humankind because God has placed him there. He clearly proposes inclusive uniqueness for Jesus Christ. God's revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ includes all religions. The other religious traditions are related to the primordial mystery of Christ, and so while these religious traditions being functioning as the ways of salvation to their followers, they converge in the universal mystery of Jesus Christ.

Dupuis' Trinitarian Christology model seems to be capable of giving the theology of religions an open Christocentrism that holds for the universal salvific mediation of the Christ-event for the salvation of all humankind. It is also open to discover God's grace in other religions and recognise their salvific value as interventions of God in the history of human cultures, constituting "ways" or "channels" of salvation for their members. In this way Dupuis leaves the door open to acknowledge the divine manifestations in the history of humankind, in their cultures and religious traditions of peoples and to discover the elements of truth and grace in other religious traditions, elements that are vehicle of God's salvation to their

members. The other religions participate in the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the power of the Spirit of God, who works to make the diverse religious traditions meet in the Trinity. The diverse “paths” are conducive to salvation because God has traced them in his search for people. And even though not all of them have the same meaning or represent the same depth of divine involvement, yet all converge in the one plan designed by God eternally.

Thus, whatever may be the new models and methods formulated in the light of the Scripture, Tradition and the generally accepted patterns in the Christian theology of religions, the fact remains, that it is not religious traditions that save people, but God himself through his Word and his Spirit. The hidden manifestation of the Word of God through the seers of other religions and through the traditions which have found their origin in them, the inspiring breath of the Spirit in their prophets and their message, as well as the historical coming of the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit through him at Pentecost to which the Christian community testifies, all combine in the overall ensemble of the unique eternal divine plan. If God has taken the initiative in coming to meet people and peoples throughout the history of salvation, one must say that the religious traditions of the world are “paths” or “ways” of salvation for their followers. Hence, religious plurality need to be welcomed as a positive factor which witnesses at once to the superabundant generosity with which God has manifested himself to humankind in manifold ways and to the pluriform response which in diverse cultures human beings have given to the divine self-disclosure. So to sum up, the various religions that represent the many personal self-manifestations of God to peoples in history are generous gifts of God to the nations. As such, they are all asymmetrically complementary to, and essentially relational with, the Christ-event in which culminates the one and only plan devised by God for humankind.

Chapter V

The Church, the Reign of God and the Religions

The Church is the living sign of God's saving love revealed in his Son, Jesus Christ, in such a way as to render it as the norm of life for all. The Church, being the body of Christ, in it God's universal plan of salvation is realized and manifested through Jesus Christ. The Church, in the context of the diversity of religions, is the symbol of unity of all humankind, itself being united with the person of Christ. The Church, being the mystical body of Christ, wherever Christ is present, there also the Church is present. In this sense the Church becomes a constitutive community, where the believers are drawn together share the gift of salvation. The Spirit both anticipates and accompanies the Church in becoming the universal symbol and sacrament of God's saving love. The role of the Church is therefore to discern the signs of the Spirit's presence, to follow the leads given by the Spirit, and to serve humbly and discreetly towards building up God's Kingdom.⁸⁰⁶ Consequently, Church's openness to the religious others and a due respect for their religious traditions may contribute to a fruitful interreligious dialogue, mutual enrichment and a collaboration for justice and peace.

Religious pluralism is not a new situation in the life and mission of the Church. The early Church from apostolic times onward had to situate its evangelising mission first in relation to Judaism, from which it emerged, and then in relation to the other religions that it encountered along its way. What is actually new is the acute awareness attained by our world of the pluralism of cultures and of religious traditions, and of the right that each has to its own difference. A question arises regarding what this new awareness of the surrounding religious pluralism has to tell us about Christian attitude towards religious others and Christian praxis. How do we understand our own religion and ourselves in the light of our encounter with religious others? The International Theological Commission clearly indicates "It is not possible to develop a theology of the religions without taking into account the universal

⁸⁰⁶ Gavin D'Costa writes, "If we have good reasons to believe that the Spirit and Word are present and active in the religions of the world (in ways that cannot, a priori, be specified), then it is intrinsic to the vocation of the Church to be attentive to the world religions." Cf. "Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality," D'Costa, (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: A Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 23.

salvific mission of the Church, attested to by the Holy Scripture and by the tradition of faith of the Church.”⁸⁰⁷

1. The Church and the Religions

The Church has a positive outlook towards other religions and appeals to the Christians for an attitude of respect towards the religions of the world. The Church, “coming forth from the eternal Father’s love, founded in time by Christ the Redeemer and made one in the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 13: 1-5), the Church has a saving and an eschatological purpose which can be fully attained only in the future world.”⁸⁰⁸ The universal presence and activity of Christ and the Spirit is primarily the work of God, which is both Trinitarian and ecclesiological.⁸⁰⁹ The Church asserts its special role in dispensing grace and truth, particularly to those who are incorporated into the Body of Christ and also to all humankind. This is precisely in so far as it has been established by the risen Christ as the “universal sacrament of salvation”.⁸¹⁰ The Church is, “thanks to her relationship with Christ, a sacramental sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of the whole human race.”⁸¹¹ Furthermore, “The Church, now pilgrim on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation. Christ, present to us in his Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and the unique way of salvation. In explicit terms he himself affirmed the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. Rom. 11, 28-29), and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church.”⁸¹²

Dupuis employs the concept of the Church affirmed and explained by the Vatican II, according to which the Church is constituted by two inseparable elements,

⁸⁰⁷ International Theological Commission, “Christianity and Religious Pluralism”, *Origins*, 27(1997), p. 159.

⁸⁰⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, 40.

⁸⁰⁹ For instance, Gavin D’Costa writes, “It is Trinitarian in referring to the activity of the Spirit to the paschal mystery of Christ and ecclesial in referring the paschal event to the constitutive community-creating force it has under the guidance of the Spirit.” Cf. *idem.*, *The Meeting of the Religions and the Trinity*, p. 110.

⁸¹⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 48; cf. 1; 9. Cf. also, *Gaudium et Spes*, 42; 45; *Ad Gentes*, 1; 5.

⁸¹¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

⁸¹² *Ibid.* 14.

namely, invisible and visible. The Church is both a spiritual communion and a human institution. *Lumen Gentium* makes it clear that these two elements: “the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element.”⁸¹³ Hence, “the visible social structure of the Church serves the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body.”⁸¹⁴ Thus while both aspects of the mystery of the Church may be distinct, they may not be separated as though they constituted different realities. Dupuis writes, “There are not two Churches: one institutional and visible to which “Christians” belong, and another one spiritual and invisible to which the “others” would also belong.”⁸¹⁵ Some questions arise concerning the universality and the necessity of the Church in the order of salvation: How does the Church function as universal mediation while everyone necessarily participates in the mediation of Jesus Christ?⁸¹⁶ In the context of the affirmation of the necessity of the Church for salvation, and if there is salvation for people of other faiths, without becoming the visible members of the Church, what is the role of the Church as the mediator of salvation? How, those who attain salvation outside the visible boundaries of the Church are related to it? How do these people, who find themselves being outside the Church, can be seen as being saved in Christ through the mediation of the Church? Dupuis inquires these and many other related questions in his *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*.

1.1. The Problematic of the Salvation of Religious Others

In the past, in Christianity’s encounter with other religions, there was a clear emphasis on the necessity of the Church in the mediation of salvation, which is contained in the axiom: “*outside the Church there is no salvation.*” The Magisterial statements of the fourth Lateran council (1215) declared, for the first time that “there

⁸¹³ Ibid. 8.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid. 8.

⁸¹⁵ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 196 – 197.

⁸¹⁶ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 347.

is indeed one universal Church of the faithful outside which no one at all is saved”.⁸¹⁷ The axiom was a warning to Christian schismatics and heretics, in order to assure the unity of the Church, and not to condemn those who belonged to other religions.⁸¹⁸ Later the scope of the axiom was widened, in order to apply it, not only to the Christian heretics, but also, to those who belonged to other religions.⁸¹⁹ The Decree for the Copts of the General Council of Florence (1442) states, “no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life; ...”⁸²⁰ Thus, the axiom began to be applied to anyone who was outside the Church, the representatives of other religions. Consequently, the Church’s relationship with other religions was influenced by an exclusivist ecclesio-centric attitude along with the axiom, even though it was directed against Christian heretics and schismatics in order to maintain the unity of the Church. In short, there was no longer any hope of salvation for anybody who did not accept Christ by becoming a member of the Church after hearing about him.⁸²¹

We find a gradual openness in the teachings of the Church as it began to encounter wider horizon in the wake of the discoveries of the new lands, peoples and their religious traditions and cultural heritage.⁸²² The Church became aware of the existence of a vast majority of people who never had a chance to hear and respond to the message of Jesus Christ. Consequently, attempts began to be made to rethink the Church’s attitude to other religions in the light of this new this new awareness. Hence, during this period, the problematic of the salvation of those who were outside the Church continued to remain at the heart of Christian theology with regard to Church’s relationship with other religions. No longer was it possible to hold, without qualification that faith in Jesus Christ and belonging to the Church were absolutely required for salvation. It called on theologians to consider the entire case of the

⁸¹⁷ N. D., no. 21.

⁸¹⁸ Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), p. 18 – 19.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 27.

⁸²⁰ N. D., no. 810.

⁸²¹ Francis A. Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 113.

⁸²² For instance, with the discovery of America in 1492 and the voyage of Vasco da Gama around the Cape of Good Hope to India in 1497, it had become evident that there existed vast masses of people outside the Church.

requisites of salvation. The Church had to rethink substantially conditions for salvation on the part of people without the knowledge of the Gospel.⁸²³ A first step toward a broader approach to the diversity of religions was adopted along with the theological renewal during the Second Vatican Council.

Dupuis stresses, “In all cases and circumstances, whether heretics, schismatics, Jews, or pagans were concerned, the axiom supposed grievous guilt on the part of those not belonging to the Church. This presupposition, however, is totally unacceptable today.”⁸²⁴ And so, a rigid form of the axiom is untenable today.⁸²⁵ According to him, there can be no return to the restrictive, narrow and negative understanding of the axiom.⁸²⁶ Dupuis observes that Vatican II clearly adopts a positive approach to the axiom, when it affirms, “the Church is necessary for human salvation.”⁸²⁷ Furthermore, *Dominum et Vivificantem* teaches, “Salvation outside the Church through the Spirit implies, nevertheless, an orientation, a reference to the Church which, if it comes to full effect, emerges as belonging to the Church through membership.”⁸²⁸ The International Theological Commission maintains that “A theological evaluation of the religions was impeded over a long time because of the axiom *extra ecclesia nulla salus*, understood in an exclusivist sense. With the doctrine about the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation or sacrament of the kingdom of God, theology seeks to respond to the new way of posing the

⁸²³ Francis A. Sullivan observes that this new situation poses a problem, namely, how to reconcile our belief in the universality of God’s salvific will with the fact that he apparently has left all those people without any possibility of becoming members of the Church, out side of which they could not be saved? Cf., *Salvation Outside the Church*, p. 69

⁸²⁴ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 99.

⁸²⁵ Gavin D’Costa notes that “The axiom’s basic theological *raison d’être* was to maintain the Christian conviction that God is the source of all salvific grace, and Christ through his mystical body, the Church, is the prime mediator of that grace.” G. D’Costa, “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus Revisited.” in I. Hamnet, (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief*, (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 141.

⁸²⁶ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 204.

⁸²⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 14. Yves Congar in this regard makes following observation, “the Church is the only institution created and commanded by God to obtain for people the salvation which is in Jesus Christ; the Church has received from her founder and Lord all that is necessary to obtain the salvation of the whole of humankind.” Cf. *This Church that I love*, (Danville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1969), p. 354.

⁸²⁸ *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 28.

problem.”⁸²⁹ Moreover, the question arises about the necessity of the Church for salvation of all humankind and the compatibility of this principle with the twofold affirmations of Christian faith and tradition, namely, the universal salvific will of God and the universal salvific mediation of the mystery of Jesus Christ.

1.2. The Church as the Universal Sacrament of Salvation

The Second Vatican Council maintains that the Church is a general help for salvation and it is also an ordinary means of salvation, since the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation as well as the mystery of Christ. In it is realised the eternal plan of the Father, manifested in Jesus Christ, to bring humanity to its eternal glory. It laid a special stress on the relatedness of the Church to the mystery of Jesus Christ when it defined the Church as “the universal sacrament of salvation”⁸³⁰ and a “sign and instrument of communion with God and the unity among all men.”⁸³¹ The Church, is “in Christ, in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”⁸³² The Council teaches that this pilgrim Church is necessary for salvation,⁸³³ being constituted by Christ to be “the instrument for the salvation of all,” and “that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity.”⁸³⁴ Thus the Council clearly maintains that since Jesus Christ is present to us in his body, the Church and

⁸²⁹ *International Theological Commission*, “Christianity and Religious Pluralism”, *Origins*, 27 (1997), p. 159.

⁸³⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 48. Dupuis makes it clear that Jesus Christ – who in his person is the mystery of salvation – is the “primordial sacrament” (*Ursakrament*) of humankind’s encounter with God, while the Church is derivatively the sacrament of the encounter with the risen Lord. Cf. Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, p. 3. Similarly, International Theological Commission notes: “since Christ himself be called “the sacrament of God,” the Church, in an analogous way, may be called the “the sacrament of Christ,” ... it is self-evident that the church can only be a sacrament by way of total dependence on Christ who is intrinsically the primordial sacrament.” Michael Sharkey, (ed.), *International Theological Commission, Texts and documents 1969 – 1985*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 296.

⁸³¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

⁸³² *Ibid.* 1.

⁸³³ Cf. *Ibid.* 14.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.* 9.

established it as the universal sacrament of salvation, the Church is necessary for salvation.

The Church, in this manner being united with the person of Christ, has in God's plan an indispensable relationship with the salvation of every human being. It is in Christ, through the universal sacramental mediation of the Church, that the fullness of the means of salvation available for all humankind. The gifts, which God offers to all for directing themselves to salvation, are rooted in his universal will.⁸³⁵ The religious others are justified by means of the grace of God, partaking in the merits of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. The mystery of Church in Christ is a dynamic reality in the Holy Spirit. Although visible expression of belonging to the Church is lacking to this spiritual union, justified religious others are included in the Church, "the mystical body of Christ" and a "spiritual community".⁸³⁶ The religious others, who are justified outside the visible boundaries of the Church, are in various ways related to the people of God.⁸³⁷ They are oriented to the Mystical Body of Christ by a yearning and a desire, of which they may not be aware. In the case of invincible ignorance, the implicit desire of belonging to the Church suffices; this desire will always be present when a man aspires to conform his will to that of God.⁸³⁸ The Council's affirmation of the fact that even religious others are ordered to the people of God is rooted in the fact that the universal call to salvation includes the vocation to all people to the catholic unity of the people of God.⁸³⁹ The Council holds that the close relationship between both vocations is based on the unique mediation of Christ, who in his body, the Church, makes himself present in our midst.⁸⁴⁰

1.3. The Necessity of the Church for the Salvation of Religious Others

Dupuis, while dealing the question regarding the salvific necessity of the Church in the context of other religions, avoids two extreme positions, namely, either the placing of the Church's necessity and universality on the same level with that of Jesus

⁸³⁵ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 2, 3, 26; *Ad Gentes*, 7.

⁸³⁶ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

⁸³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.* 16.

⁸³⁸ Cf. N. D., no. 854 – 857.

⁸³⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

⁸⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* 14.

Christ or the reducing of the Church's necessity and universality by limiting its function and operation only to its members.⁸⁴¹ While, the extreme of placing the Church on a par with Christ will lead to exclusivism, taking us back to the excessive interpretation of the axiom – outside the Church no salvation; the other extreme of reducing the salvific necessity of the Church will minimise the necessity and universality of the Church by simply reducing its function and operation only to its own members. Dupuis writes, “This would be equivalent to asserting that there are two parallel ways of salvation without any mutual relationship both derived from the unique mediation of Jesus Christ, yet one operative for the members of the Church while the other comes into play for people who are saved in Jesus Christ outside of it.”⁸⁴²

According to Dupuis, the Council does not explain the exact nature of this universal necessity of the Church. The question remains, however, in what sense the universal need and instrumentality of the Church in the order of salvation must be understood. The necessity of Church, as the mystery of Christ and the universal sacrament of salvation, has to be seen in the broad perspective of God's plan of salvation, which includes all human beings and creation as a whole (cf. 1Tim 2:4; Rom 8:22). The paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus offers Christians a new perspective for understanding not only their religious situation, but also that of all humankind, including the religious others. It represents God's gift of salvation in Christ for all humankind. While the death of Jesus is an event contained within the limits of history, his resurrection, although it took place at a precise time in history, transcends history and is certainly a transcendent event. Having been constituted by God “the Christ” has become “trans-historic.” As such, for the Church he is now the key to understand the mystery of salvation for all human beings. That is the basis for the apostolic faith according to which he is the Mediator between God and human beings in the order of salvation (cf. 1Tim 2:5). In the risen Christ, God has established a new order in his relationships with humankind, the consequences of which reach all human beings in the different situations. The Church takes its shape on the basis of the paschal faith and lives this salvific relationship with God in Jesus

⁸⁴¹ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 250 – 251.

⁸⁴² Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 347.

Christ consciously and explicitly; but it is also convinced of the saving significance of the paschal event for all humankind.⁸⁴³

Dupuis holds that “what belongs to the content of the faith is the necessity of the Church, as taught by Vatican II, while “explicit,” public, and visible belonging to it, as members, is not necessary.”⁸⁴⁴ He distinguishes between “belonging” to the Church and orientation toward the Church. According to Dupuis, pre-conciliar ecclesiology identified the Kingdom of God with the Church. It understood that the people saved by Christ outside the Church belong to it in some way. Dupuis writes: “Distinctions were made: between actual members (*reapse*) and members in desire (*voto*); between belonging visibly and invisibly, explicitly and implicitly.”⁸⁴⁵ The Council makes some precise distinctions concerning the relation to the Church of the persons finding themselves in different situations. The term “members” is not attributed in every case; “*votum*” is addressed to catechumens only.⁸⁴⁶ Moreover, “All are called to this Catholic unity.... And in different ways belong to it (*pertinent*) or are ordained to it (*ordinantur*): the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all humankind, called by God’s grace to salvation.”⁸⁴⁷ Catholics are seen as being fully incorporated (*plene incorporantur*) into the Church.⁸⁴⁸ The catechumens are united (*coniunguntur*) to the Church by virtue of their desire (*voto*) to join it. Thus Church is joined (*coniuncta*) to other Christians, who are in turn incorporated (*incorporantur*) into Christ.⁸⁴⁹ Finally, religious others “are ordained (*ordinantur*) in various ways to the People of God.”⁸⁵⁰ For Dupuis, “it is certain that for persons outside the Church Vatican II intentionally used the term “orientation” (*ordinantur*) to the Church, while leaving out a membership in desire or wish.”⁸⁵¹ They, however,

⁸⁴³ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22. Cf. also. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 31.

⁸⁴⁴ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 204.

⁸⁴⁵ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 348.

⁸⁴⁶ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

⁸⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.* 13.

⁸⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* 14.

⁸⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.* 15.

⁸⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* 16.

⁸⁵¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 208.

are not ordained towards it by a desire, either explicit or implicit.⁸⁵² According to the Council, religious others can be saved through Jesus Christ without belonging to the Church in any manner; they are, however, “oriented” towards the Church, inasmuch as the risen Lord has entrusted to it “the fullness of the means of salvation,” that are not available outside the Church.⁸⁵³ Furthermore, *Redemptoris Missio* makes it clear that “For such people, salvation in Christ is accessible in virtue of grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation.”⁸⁵⁴

However, Dupuis holds along with the post conciliar teaching that the Church plays the “specific and necessary role” for the salvation of religious others in Jesus Christ, that is, a sort of “implicit mediation” which establishes for persons saved in Jesus Christ outside of it a “mysterious relationship with the Church.” It must certainly be held that the Church is “indissolubly united” to Christ as his Body, in a “singular and unique relationship” from which follows its “specific and necessary role”.⁸⁵⁵ This does not prevent a certain “participated mediation” of their own religious traditions which derives its “meaning and value from Christ’s own mediation”⁸⁵⁶ The Church is universally united to Christ in the work of salvation of all people, regardless whether they find themselves in relation to the Church. But this conclusion does not clarify fully the “specific and necessary” role of the Church on behalf of the religious others and the meaning of the “the mysterious relationship” with the Church with religious others. Hence, Dupuis seeks to investigate further the positive influence of other religious traditions in the religious life their members, helping them to give a positive response to the divine offer of grace.

⁸⁵² Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 348.

⁸⁵³ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 18.

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 10.

⁸⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* 18.

⁸⁵⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* 5. Similarly, The International Theological Commission acknowledges that one cannot exclude the possibility that the religious traditions “exercise as such a certain salvific function,” and so function as “means helping the salvation of their followers.” Yet it makes clear that “they cannot be compared to the function that the Church realizes for the salvation of Christians and of those who are not.” “Christianity and the World Religions,” *Origins*, 27 (1997), 10, pp. 152 – 153.

Dupuis seeks to understand the function that the Church exercises for the salvation of those who are not its members. Even though salvation through Christ is available even outside the visible boundaries of the Church, nevertheless, he affirms that all salvific grace is related to it. He finds hard to conceive the full meaning of the “implicit mediation” of the Church. But he accepts it but seeks to investigate whether one can speak of an “explicit mediation” of other religions on behalf of religious others. He also accepts the universal mediation of the Church, but seeks to clarify it in comparison with the universal mediation and the necessity of the mystery of Christ. He distinguishes between the necessity of the Church and the necessity of the mystery of Christ in the order of salvation. Furthermore, he distinguishes between the mediation of the Church and that of Jesus Christ. The universal mediation of Christ in the order of salvation concretely refers to the fact that his risen humanity is the obligatory channel, the instrumental cause, of grace for all. According to him, the Church’s necessity and universality are not on the same level with those of the mystery of Jesus Christ. For him, they are not, and can never be, placed on the same level. For the New Testament, Jesus Christ alone is the “mediator” between God and human beings (cf. 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6, 9:15, 12:24). Whatever role may have to be attributed to the Church in the order of salvation, it can never be placed on a par with that of Jesus of Christ; nor the same necessity ever be attributed to it. The Church undoubtedly intercedes for the salvation of all. The Church, as a derived mystery and utterly relative to the mystery of Christ, cannot be the yardstick by which the salvation of others is measured.

According to him, “the Church exercises its salvific mediation principally by announcing the word and through the sacramental economy, at the centre of which is the Eucharistic celebration.”⁸⁵⁷ One can speak of the meditation of the Church by pointing to the intercession and prayers of the Church and to the witness, the life, and the merits of its members, for the salvation of all. The Church’s intercession is for the salvation of all people, especially in the Eucharistic celebration: “Lord may this

⁸⁵⁷ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 349. This is based on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which states: “Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebration. By his power he is present in the sacraments so that when anyone baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is present when the Church prays and sings” *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

sacrifice, which has made our peace with you, advance the salvation of all the world” (Eucharistic Prayer III). Such intercession, insofar as the Church is united to Christ as his body, is certainly ecclesial missionary action. Dupuis asks whether or not it is necessary to say that such mediation by the Church covers all people who are saved in and by Jesus Christ, including religious others. Dupuis gives a positive answer to this question, considering that the Church’s intercession is for the salvation of all. Nevertheless, a further question arises: whether or not this intercession could be properly understood as mediation in the proper theological sense, since it is the risen humanity of Jesus that is the “obligatory channel” of his universal mediation for human salvation.⁸⁵⁸ The universal mediation of Christ in the order of salvation concretely refers to the fact that his risen humanity is the channel, the instrumental efficient cause, of grace for all people. Based on the fact that the Church prays and intercedes for all people that salvation’s grace in Jesus may be granted to them, Dupuis uses the terminology of scholastic theology to identify the “mediation” of the Church. For him, in the case of the Church’s salvific mediation, the causality seems to be of the moral rather than of the efficient order. The Church prays and intercedes with God for all people that the grace of salvation in Jesus Christ may be granted to them. The Church exercises its derived participated mediation in the strict sense through the proclamation of the word and in the celebration of the sacraments in and by Church communities. Hence, Dupuis locates the causality of the Church’s salvific mediation in the moral order, rather than, in the efficient order. The causality involved is not of the order of efficiency but of finality.⁸⁵⁹

Members of other religious traditions do not necessarily depend on the Church’s mediation for their salvation. Yet, in different ways, they are “oriented” towards the Church, and the mediation in their religious traditions is also ordained to it. For Dupuis, the necessity of the Church for the salvation of religious others, does not imply “a universal mediation in the strict sense, applicable to every person who is saved in Jesus Christ. On the contrary, it opens up the possibility of substitutive mediations, among which are found the other religious traditions to which the

⁸⁵⁸ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 350.

⁸⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 350 – 351.

“others” belong”.⁸⁶⁰ Therefore, the necessity of the Church should be seen as the “sacramental sign of the presence of God’s grace among people.” This divine grace is also operative outside the boundaries of the Church, while the Church is its sacramental sign.⁸⁶¹ Nevertheless, the Church remains “the ordinary way” for salvation inasmuch as it possesses the “ordinary means” of salvation⁸⁶² or the “fullness of the means of salvation,”⁸⁶³ even though religious others can be saved in Jesus Christ “in a way known to God”.⁸⁶⁴ The saving grace obtained through Christ is ecclesial insofar as it is tending toward the mystery of the Church, in virtue of the orientation toward it,⁸⁶⁵ of the people saved in Christ outside of it. Dupuis understands the “instrumentality of the Church”⁸⁶⁶ in the order of salvation for the religious others in terms of expectation and hope, based on their orientation to it. He affirms that “Divine grace is operative where the Church is not present, but the Church is the universal sacramental sign of the presence of divine grace in the world.”⁸⁶⁷

Dupuis holds that the Spirit is not so bound to the Church, to its ministry and institutions, that its presence and work of salvation are impaired outside of it.⁸⁶⁸ He writes,

“The Church cannot be said to be the “only place” where the Holy Spirit is operating. Grace has no “station,” because it works everywhere. Salvation outside the Church through the Spirit implies, nevertheless, an orientation, a reference, to the Church, which, if it comes to full effect, emerges as belonging to the Church through membership.

⁸⁶⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 212; cf. also, idem. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 133 – 147.

⁸⁶¹ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 352.

⁸⁶² Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80.

⁸⁶³ *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

⁸⁶⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22; *Ad Gentes*, 7.

⁸⁶⁵ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

⁸⁶⁶ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9; *Redemptoris Missio*, 9.

⁸⁶⁷ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 213.

⁸⁶⁸ Karl Rahner, for instance, held that the people saved in Jesus Christ outside the Church are objectively oriented towards it, but without being members of the Church. It is true that the Church is in a privileged way “the locus of the sending of the Holy Spirit,” in which the grace of salvation consists. Cf. idem, „die Kirche als Ort der Geistsendung,“ *Geist und Leben*, 29 (1956), pp. 94 – 98.

As privileged locus of the Spirit, the Church must, therefore, be understood as the point toward which the grace obtained outside it is tending; that grace is destined to find its visible expression in the Church. Such orientation towards the Church exists wherever the Spirit is present and working. However, orientation does not imply a universal mediation of the Church already operative by way of efficient causality.”⁸⁶⁹

So to sum up, for Dupuis, the Church’s necessity and universality are not on the same level with those of Jesus Christ. He prefers to speak about the Church’s mediation or significance, rather than its salvific necessity. According to him, the mediation of the Church is never equal to and can never be a substitute for that of the mediation of Jesus Christ. The universal mediation of the Church, in the order of salvation is subordinate to the unique mediation of Christ. The Church exercises its salvific mediation in the announcement of the word and the sacramental economy, at the centre of which is the Eucharistic celebration.⁸⁷⁰ The mediation by the Church covers all people, including other religious traditions’ members, considering that the Church’s intercession is for the salvation of all. However, Dupuis locates the Church’s mediation or intercession more in the moral order, rather than in the efficient order.⁸⁷¹ Members of other religious traditions do not necessarily depend on the Church’s mediation for their salvation. Yet, in different ways, they are “oriented” towards the Church.

1.4. The Church as the Sacrament of the Reign of God

What exactly is the relationship between the Kingdom that Jesus preached and the Church that he intended? Some authors sharply distinguish between Church and Kingdom. Others make them identical, seeing the Church as the present form of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is identical now with the visible Church. Vatican II maintained the identification between the Reign of God and the Church. The Reign of God, present in history, is simply the Church. It is “on earth, the seed and beginning of that Kingdom.”⁸⁷² Likewise, the Church is the Reign of Christ “already present in

⁸⁶⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 213.

⁸⁷⁰ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 349.

⁸⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 350 – 351.

⁸⁷² *Lumen Gentium*, 5.

mystery.”⁸⁷³ The visible Church is sign, symbol, and representative of God’s invisible reign over all things. The Church is primarily conceived as a sacrament and regarded as the present imperfect form of the future Kingdom.⁸⁷⁴ The problem in this perspective is that the identification of the Kingdom of God with the Church leads to triumphalism and lack of self-criticism.⁸⁷⁵ However, the Kingdom of God and the Church are two key New Testament concepts both are crucial for the understanding of God’s plan of salvation for all humankind. They are central to the understanding of his redemptive purpose.⁸⁷⁶ While the Church cannot be identified with the Kingdom of God, for the latter is wider and a broader reality, the two are nevertheless in such a correlation that they cannot be separated.

Dupuis shows how the role of the Church should be understood in its unique and special relation to the Reign of God. The Reign of God is “the manifestation and the realization of God’s plan of salvation in all its fullness.”⁸⁷⁷ The Church is effectively at the service of the Reign of God.⁸⁷⁸ Moreover, he does not want to identify the Church with the Reign of God.⁸⁷⁹ The Church, according to Dupuis, is

⁸⁷³ Ibid. 3.

⁸⁷⁴ Cf. Howard A. Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), pp. 75 – 76.

⁸⁷⁵ For instance, John Fuellenbach, furthermore, notes the dangers of identifying the Kingdom of God with the Church, “The Church becomes blind towards its own faults and intolerant of its critics. Not only the Church as a whole, but also the structures in particular, become sacralised so that proposals for fundamental renewal may be seen as rebellion against God’s Reign.” Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), pp. 248.

⁸⁷⁶ Peter Kuzmic’, “The Church and the Kingdom of God: A Theological Reflection,” in Bruce J. Nicholls, (ed.), *The Church*, (Australia: Paternoster Press, 1986), pp. 49 – 81.

⁸⁷⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, 15.

⁸⁷⁸ For instance, a document of the *Theological Advisory Commission of FABC*, “Thesis on Interreligious Dialogue” states, “The focus of Church’s mission of evangelising is building up the Kingdom of God and building up the Church to be at the service of the Kingdom of God. Kingdom is therefore wider than the Church. The Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom, visibilizing it, ordained to it, promoting it, but not equating itself with it.” *FABC Papers*, no. 48, (Hong Kong: FABC, 1987), p. 16.

⁸⁷⁹ For instance, a document of the Federation of the Asian Bishops’ Conference (FABC) states, “The Reign of God is the very reason for the being of the Church. The Church exists in and for the Kingdom. The Kingdom, God’s gift and initiative, is already begun and constantly realised, and made present through the Spirit. Where God is accepted, where the gospel values are lived, where the human being is respected ... there is the Kingdom. It is far wider than the Church’s boundaries. This already present reality is oriented towards the final manifestation and full perfection of the

not identical with the Reign of God in history and the reign of god in its final stage that will be definitively present at the *eschaton* with the coming of Christ.⁸⁸⁰ He goes beyond the conciliar position its constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, which does indeed seem to identify the two. In fact, when it speaks of the mission that the Church has received to proclaim the Kingdom of God and of establishing it among all peoples, the council affirms that the Church “is on earth, the seed and the beginning of the Kingdom.”⁸⁸¹ The progress of the Reign of God towards its final completion is identified with the passage of the Church on earth to the Church in heaven.⁸⁸² Dupuis states: “it is not possible to separate the Church from the Kingdom as if the first belonged exclusively to the imperfect realm of history, while the second would be the perfect eschatological fulfilment of the divine plan of salvation.”⁸⁸³ However, Dupuis applies the distinction between the sign and the reality signified to the relationship, in history, between the Church and Kingdom of God. God is not bound by the sacraments.⁸⁸⁴ Consequently, one can be part of God’s Kingdom – the Reality, without formally belonging to the Church – the sacrament. The religious others are members of the Reign of God, without the instrumental mediation of the Church. He holds that the Church, willed by God, is the efficacious sign of the reality of the

Reign of God.” See G. Rosales and C. G. Arevalo, *For all the People of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishop’s Conference from 1970 – 1991*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 252.

⁸⁸⁰ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 250 – 254.

⁸⁸¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 5.

⁸⁸² Ibid. 5, 9. Where as *Gaudium et Spes* seems to go beyond the position of *Lumen Gentium*, when it speaks of the growth of the Reign of God in history and of its eschatological fulfillment without reference to the Church, but including the whole humanity (Cf. 39). For instance, it affirms: “the Church has but one sole purpose – that the Kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race may be accomplished” *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.

⁸⁸³ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 34.

⁸⁸⁴ Dupuis finds support in what Edward Schillebeeckx affirms: “The Church is not the Kingdom of God, but it bears symbolic witness to the Kingdom through its word and sacrament, and in its praxis effectively anticipates the Kingdom.” Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, (London, SCM Press, 1990), p. 157. Similarly, Dupuis takes recourse to Karl Rahner, who notes “That the Church is the sacrament of the world’s salvation means this: that the Church is the concrete historical *appearance* in the dimension of history become eschatological, in dimension of society, for the unique salvation which occurs, through God’s grace, across the length and breadth of humankind.” Rahner, *The Church after the Council*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), pp. 53 – 54.

Reign of God in the world and in history. Being the sacramental presence of the Reign of God, the Church receives from Christ “the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation.”⁸⁸⁵

The encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, while maintaining the unity between the Reign of God and the Church, clearly adopts a distinction between the two: “One may not separate the kingdom from the Church. It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered toward the kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both. Christ endowed the Church, his body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation.”⁸⁸⁶ The Reign of God present in the world is a reality which is broader than the Church; it extends beyond its boundaries and includes – even if the modalities may differ – not only the members of the Church but also the religious others. The encyclical states: “It is true that the inchoate reality of the kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live “gospel values” and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8).”⁸⁸⁷ It speaks of the “necessary and specific role” of the Church in relation to the Reign of God: “a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church’s visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role.”⁸⁸⁸ The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* also distinguishes between the two by affirming that the Reign of God is a wider reality than the Church, indeed, a universal reality. The document speaks of the Church, as the sacrament in which the Kingdom of God is present “in mystery”. It makes a distinction, on the one hand, between the Reign of God in history and its eschatological dimension and, on the other hand, between the Reign of God and the Church. The document states: “The Church’s mission is to foster “the Kingdom of our Lord and his Christ” (Rev 11:15), at whose service she is placed. Part of her role consists in recognizing that the inchoate reality of this Kingdom can be found also

⁸⁸⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, 16. Cf. also, Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 354 – 355.

⁸⁸⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 18.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 20.

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 18.

beyond the confines of the Church, for example in the hearts of the followers of other religious traditions, insofar as they live evangelical values and are open to the action of the Spirit. It must be remembered nevertheless that this is indeed an inchoate reality, which needs to find completion through being related to the Kingdom of Christ already present in the Church yet realized fully only in the world to come.”⁸⁸⁹

Dupuis’ theology seeks to rediscover the Reign of God as an eschatological reality. Consequently, he distinguishes the Reign of God in its eschatological fullness and the reign of God, as it is present in history, that is, between the “already” and “not yet”.⁸⁹⁰ God has instituted Kingdom in the world and in history through Jesus Christ. He writes, “He instituted it in two stages. For, in fact, the Reign of God is already instituted through the earthly life of Jesus, through his words and deeds; it has, however, been fully instituted through the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection. But the Reign of God instituted in history in Jesus Christ must develop to eschatological fullness at the end of time.”⁸⁹¹ The establishment of the Reign of God in history by God in Jesus Christ specifies that this Reign is progressing towards its fulfilment at the end of time. The kingdom of God, in fact, has an eschatological dimension: it is a reality present in time, but its full realization will arrive only with the completion or fulfilment of history.⁸⁹² Furthermore, *Lumen Gentium* states: “The kingdom of God, which has been begun by God himself on earth, and which is to be further extended until it is brought to perfection by him at the end of time.”⁸⁹³ Dupuis seeks maintain this distinction between the ‘already’ of the Reign of God in history and the ‘not-yet’ of its fulfilment at the end of time. However, he also maintains a distinction between the Reign of God in history and the pilgrim Church. He does not either identify the Reign of God in its final eschatological stage with the Church in its eschatological fulfilment.

⁸⁸⁹ Cf. *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 35.

⁸⁹⁰ For a detailed treatments of a twofold rhythm of the “already” of the Reign of God in history and “not yet” of its fulfilment at the end of time, see Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Christian Concept of Time and History*, (London: SCM Press, 1952).

⁸⁹¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 335.

⁸⁹² Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 3.

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.* 9.

2. The Kingdom of God and the Plurality of Religions

The Kingdom of God is the symbol of God's eternal plan to save all humankind in his Son, Jesus Christ. The reign of God was inaugurated through the earthly life of Jesus, his words and works; yet it was only fully inaugurated through the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. The Kingdom of God is essentially connected with the person of Jesus of Nazareth himself. The Reign of God stands at the centre of the preaching and mission of Jesus, his words and deeds. The "sermon on the mount" and the beatitudes are the constitution of the Reign of God. Jesus' parables refer to it and the miracles show that it is already present and at work.⁸⁹⁴ It is also certain that the Reign of God had begun to set up in the world through the earthly life of Jesus and became truly present through the mystery of his death and resurrection.

The Reign of God places God himself at the origin and heart of the economy of salvation. The Reign of God means God himself, as God begins to act decisively in the world, manifesting himself and ordering his creation through the event of Jesus Christ. Jesus not only announces the coming of the Reign of God but also in him it has dawned. Jesus' mission is centred on the Reign of God, that is, on God himself as the one who is establishing his dominion on earth through his messenger. The Reign of God is the dominion of God among human beings.⁸⁹⁵ It is the revealing and the saving presence of God, active and encouraging, as it is affirmed or welcomed among men and women. It is a saving presence offered by God and freely accepted by men and women which takes concrete form in just and peaceful relationships among individuals and peoples, in the disappearance of sickness, injustice and oppression, in the restoration to life of all that was dead and dying. It requires completely reorienting human relations and organising human society in accordance with God's intention. The Kingdom of God is a changed new relationship (*metanoia*) of men and women with God, the tangible and visible side of which is a new type of liberating relationship among men and women with a reconciling society, in a peaceful natural

⁸⁹⁴ Dupuis, *Introduction to Christology*, pp. 42 – 46. Cf. also, J. Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: the Central Message of Jesus' Teaching in the Light of Modern World*, (Manila: Logos Publication, 1993); idem. *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995). C.S. Song, *Jesus and the Reign of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁸⁹⁵ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 21 – 22.

environment.⁸⁹⁶ This Reign of God, present in history, must now grow through history to reach its eschatological fullness at the end of time.

2.1. The Reign of God Paradigm in the Theology of Religions

The Regnocentric paradigm facilitates centring of the theology of religions on the Reign of God which builds itself up through history and is destined to reach its fulfilment in the eschatological time and no longer on the Christ-event.⁸⁹⁷ The focus in the new perspective would no longer be on the past but on the future. Hence God and his Reign are the goal of history towards which all religions, including Christianity, tend together as to their common destiny. God and the reign of God constitute the end of history towards which all religions journey, Christianity included.⁸⁹⁸ In specifically Christian parlance this means that all religions are destined to be visible signs of the presence in the world of the Reign of God; all can and ought to contribute on different counts to the growth of God's Reign among persons and people. It has the merit of showing that the followers of other religious traditions are already members of the reign of God in history and that together with Christians they are destined to meet God at the end of time. With the regnocentric model, an eschatological perspective is being substituted for the traditional Christocentrism. The theology religions is no longer centred on the Christ-event, but on the Reign of God, which builds itself up through history and is destined reach its fulfilment in the eschatological time. The focus is no longer on the past but on the future; God and his Reign are the goals of history toward which all religions,

⁸⁹⁶ Schillebeeckx, *Church the Human Story of God*, pp. 111 – 139.

⁸⁹⁷ Paul F. Knitter observes that from a Christian point of view all the religions are destined to be the visible signs of the presence in the world of the Reign of God; all can contribute to the growth of God's Reign among his people. Cf. Knitter, "Catholic Theology at the Cross Roads", *Concilium*, 183 (1986), 1, pp. 99 – 107; cf. also idem. *Jesus and the Other Names*, pp. 108ff; idem, "Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions" in J. Hick / P. F. Knitter, (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, pp. 178 – 200; idem. "Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?" in L. Swidler, *et al.*, *Death or Dialogue? From the age of Dialogue to the Age of Monologue*, (London: SCM Press, 1990), pp.19 – 44.

⁸⁹⁸ For further details on the perspective of *regnocentrism*, Cf. M. Amaladoss, "Evangelisation in India a New Focus?," *VJTR*, 51 (1987), pp.7 – 28; idem. "Dialogue and Mission," *VJTR*, 50 (1986), pp. 62 – 86; idem. "Faith meets Faith," *VJTR*, 49 (1985), pp. 6 – 15.

Christianity included, tend together as to their common destiny.⁸⁹⁹ Consequently, Church-centeredness, Christ-centeredness and God-centeredness – all of these seem to give way to Kingdom-centeredness,⁹⁰⁰ as the common task and the meeting point of all religions.⁹⁰¹

Dupuis' objection to the Reign of God Model is that "apart from the fact that it continues to refer to a concept of God proper to the monotheistic religions, it does not, nor can it for traditional Christian faith represent a paradigm shift from the Christological."⁹⁰² The Reign of God model is a new version of the theocentric paradigm. They do not constitute distinct paradigms. Dupuis insists that to accept such a paradigm shift is to forget that the Reign of God has broken through to history in Jesus Christ.⁹⁰³ The regnocentric perspective does not seem to take seriously the religious identity and the differences between each individual religion. According to this model, there is no longer any reason to approach the other religions in their core, to bring them into relationship with each other in their moral and religious messages. As a result, the religions thereby become distorted in their deepest being, in that they are expected to serve as a means to a future structuring which is really foreign to them and empties them of their particular content.

A Christian theology of religions, according to Dupuis, must show how, through opening themselves up to the action of the Spirit, the religious others share the reality of the Reign of God in the world and in history. The Reign of God model has the merit of affirming that the religious others are already members of the Reign of God in history and that together with Christians they are co-pilgrims of the Divine, destined to meet God at the end of time. He makes it clear that in the final analysis "a theology of religions following Kingdom-centred model cannot bypass or avoid the

⁸⁹⁹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 193 – 194; cf. also, idem. *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 79 – 80.

⁹⁰⁰ The declaration of the congregation for the doctrine of the faith reiterates that "it is necessary to avoid one-sided accentuations, as is the case with those conceptions which deliberately emphasize the kingdom and which describe themselves as 'kingdom centred.'"

⁹⁰¹ Dupuis, "The Kingdom of God and World Religions", *VJTR*, 51 (1987), pp. 530 – 544.

⁹⁰² Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 195.

⁹⁰³ For a critique on the model of *regnocentrism*, cf. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, pp. 204 – 206.

Christocentric perspective.”⁹⁰⁴ Just as theocentrism and Christocentrism go hand in hand, so too, according to him regnocentrism and Christocentrism seem to go hand in hand, as two aspects of the same reality.⁹⁰⁵ It is through the combined action of the risen Christ and his Spirit that the religious others share in the Reign of God historically present. The eschatological Reign to which the members of all the religious traditions are summoned together is that Reign which the Lord Jesus will hand over to his Father at the end time (cf. 1Cor 15:28). In fact one cannot separate the Reign of God in history from Jesus of history, in whom God instituted it, nor from Christ, whose present kingship is its expression. Because Jesus is centred on God’s Reign, Jesus is centred on God. Dupuis writes, “In him there is no distance between the one and the other: “regnocentrism” and “theocentrism“ coincide. The God whom Jesus calls “Father” is the centre of his message, his life and his person: Jesus did not speak primarily about himself, but he came to proclaim God and the advent of his Reign and to place himself at its service.”⁹⁰⁶ Thus, far from being mutually exclusive, the regnocentric and Christocentric perspectives are necessarily interconnected. Through sharing in the universal plan of salvation, all partake in the one and the same paschal mystery of Christ. Hence, along with Christians, the religious others too share in the Reign of God already present as a historic reality.

2.2. Participation of Other Religions in the Reign of God

A Christian theology of religions ought to show that the members of the other religious traditions, together with Christians, share in the Reign of God, which he has established in history through Jesus Christ. He writes,

“Jesus of history, however, enjoyed a special and unique relationship of sonship toward the God of the Reign whom he called his Father (*Abbà*). He was likewise aware of his messianic vocation, which consisted in the renewal and fulfilment of the religion of the covenant established by God with his people. Indeed, that renewal and fulfilment constituted the establishment of God’s Reign in the world through his life. That was the horizon – that was the perspective – on the basis of which Jesus brought about and understood the situation, not only of the members of the people of the covenant, but of the “pagans” as well, of the “peoples” of the

⁹⁰⁴ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 202.

⁹⁰⁵ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 194 – 195.

⁹⁰⁶ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 22.

“foreigners,” vis-à-vis the God of the salvation and the kingdom. As mysterious as the situation of the “others” with regard to the God of salvation, for Jesus, in any case, that God was the God of all human beings, who according to the scriptures does not make differences between persons: “God ... who is not partial” (Deut 10:17).”⁹⁰⁷

Hence, Dupuis indicates that God’s salvation in Jesus Christ is intended for all human beings alike. The universal scope of salvation goes hand in hand with the universal God of the Reign. For him, the entry of religious others into God’s Kingdom is not purely eschatological: it takes place first of all in history. The eschatological gathering of the nations has already begun in the ministry of Jesus (cf. Mt 8:5-13). Jesus’ admiration for faith of the centurion offers Mathew an occasion to mention the saying that many, coming from the east and the west, will be admitted into the Kingdom of heaven. Furthermore, the “banquet parable” (cf. Mt 22:1-14; Lk 14:15-24) symbolise participation all in God’s salvation.⁹⁰⁸ The universality of the Reign of God is already operative during the earthly mission of Jesus. The miracle worked by Jesus for “foreigners” (cf. Mt 8:5-13; 11:4-6; 15:21-28; Lk 4:16-22; Mt 12:25-28) have the same meaning as all his other miracles. They mean that the Reign of God is already present and at work. Dupuis writes, “The healing miracles and exorcisms performed for the “others” are thus indications that God’s Reign is present and is at work in them as well; it extends to all who approach God through faith and conversion.”⁹⁰⁹ For him, “faith and conversion that lead to salvation do not entail moving to any different religion, but means conversion to God of life, love, and freedom, that is, to the God of the Reign of God, of all human beings.”⁹¹⁰ Thus, the Reign of God, established by God in Jesus and proclaimed by Jesus is present and at work through his own life, his words and deeds, and ultimately realized in his death and resurrection, represents the universal reality of salvation present in the world. All human beings, in all the circumstances of life, may enter it through faith and conversion (cf. Mk 1:15).

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 22.

⁹⁰⁸ For instance, C.S. Song writes, “This great banquet embodies Jesus’ vision of God’s reign.” Song, *Jesus and the Reign of God*, p. 26.

⁹⁰⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 24.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 23.

He seeks to present the universality of the Reign of God, “extending beyond the people of the covenant, and beyond the movement created by Jesus and his “disciple”, to the whole world, including foreigners, “pagans”, and Gentiles”⁹¹¹ Dupuis sees in the episode on the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt 5:1-7:29; Lk 6:17-49) the charter of the Reign of God, along with its universality and openness to whoever is willing to enter it. For him the Sermon is addressed to “all human beings who want to listen to it, all of them being destined by the God of the Reign for the praxis of the “values of the Reign” in their respective life circumstances.”⁹¹² Hence he summarises, “Through Jesus’ ministry, the Reign announced by him and initiated in him by God in the world reaches all humankind. Here is the “good news” for all human beings on earth, whatever their ethnic group or religious tradition. Such sharing of the Reign of God among all human beings from all parts of the world, and from all religions, is at the centre of Jesus’ message; it is what he has disclosed most clearly about foreign religious traditions. The God of Jesus is the God of all human beings; his Reign is intended for all.”⁹¹³

The universality of the Reign of God, which God was establishing in the world through his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, extends to whole world and to all human beings. The religious others are also capable of saving faith, indeed, a faith that is worthy of admiration (cf. Mt 8:10; Lk 7:9). For Dupuis, “it is therefore clear that, for Jesus, saving faith is available to “pagans” and “foreigners” not only from afar; it is really at work in their midst. Analogously, even foreigners can belong ultimately to the Reign of God, the call to which extends beyond the confines of the

⁹¹¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 26. Dupuis in the light of some episodes in the New Testament, namely, Jn 4:1-42; Lk 10:29-37, 17: 11-19; Mk 9:14-29; Mt 8:5-13, indicates to the universality of the Reign of God in Jesus thinking. According to C.S. Song, these episodes indicate that Jesus aims at changing, transforming and revitalising life with images and symbols that disclose and reveal for all the true nature of the Reign of God. Cf. Song, *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit*, pp.103 – 106. According to Joachim Jeremias, these episodes also serve as occasions in which Jesus reveals his thinking on the God of salvation and the universality of salvation. Cf. J. Jeremias, *Jesus Promise to the Nations*, (London: SCM Press, 1958). For a brief summary on the biblical foundations for the Reign of God, cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 21 – 31. For further details on universality of the Reign of God, cf. C.S. Song, *Jesus and the Reign of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 3 – 38; idem. *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 196 – 226.

⁹¹² Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 29.

⁹¹³ Ibid. p. 31.

chosen people of Israel. Belonging ethnically to the chosen people is irrelevant.”⁹¹⁴ Thus, the few episodes in the gospels of Jesus’ attitude towards the ‘Samaritans’, ‘foreigners’ and ‘pagans’ indicate to the borderless universality of the Reign of God and of divine salvation operative in the world, as well as God’s welcome to all people, independently of their belonging to a chosen people. The work of salvation in the Reign of God is not limited to the boundaries of a privileged people of God.⁹¹⁵ Moreover, Dupuis concludes, “In the power of the Spirit, Jesus has launched the ministry of the Reign of God in such a way as to restructure the human community, and especially the religious community, not on the basis of traditional religious boundaries, but on the basis of the demands and challenges of the Reign of God.”⁹¹⁶

According to Dupuis, through the sharing of in the reality of salvation which the Reign of God is, the religious others are by this very fact subject to the saving action of God in Jesus Christ, in whom the Reign of God has been established.⁹¹⁷ The universality of the Reign of God consists in the fact that Christians and the religious others share the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ, even if the mystery reaches them in different ways.⁹¹⁸ Dupuis writes, “The Reign of God to which the believers of other religious traditions belong in history is then indeed the Kingdom inaugurated by God in Jesus. It is that Kingdom, which God, in raising Jesus from the dead, has put into his hands; under the kingship of Christ, God has destined to grow towards its final plenitude. While the believers of other religious faiths perceive

⁹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 27.

⁹¹⁵ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 28 – 29. Cf. also, Song, *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit*, pp. 200 – 226.

⁹¹⁶ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 28.

⁹¹⁷ Cf. Ibid., p. 201.

⁹¹⁸ He finds support for this view in the final conclusions of a theological consultation “Evangelisation in Asia” which states: “the Kingdom of God is therefore universally present and at work. Wherever men and women open themselves to the transcendent divine mystery, which impinges upon them, to go out of themselves in love and service of fellow humans, there the Reign of God is at work. ... Where God is accepted, where the gospel values are lived, where the human being is respected ... there is the Kingdom. In all such cases people respond to God’s offer of grace through Christ in the Spirit and enter into the Kingdom through an act of faith.” *FABC Papers*, no. 64, (Hong Kong: FABC, 1992) p. 31.

God's call through their own traditions, they become in all truth – even without being formally conscious of it – active members of the Kingdom.”⁹¹⁹

2.3. The Universal Orientation of Religious Others Towards the Reign of God

The Church, being a sacrament of God's Reign in history, according to Dupuis, does not necessarily make it a universal mediator for the salvation of religious others. While the Kingdom is present in a special way in the Church, it extends beyond the limits of the Church. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* states that “the inchoate reality of this Kingdom can be found also beyond the confines of the Church, for example in the hearts of the followers of other religious traditions, insofar as they live evangelical values and are open to the action of the Spirit. It must be remembered nevertheless that this is indeed an inchoate reality, which needs to find completion through being related to the Kingdom of Christ already present in the Church yet realized fully only in the world to come.”⁹²⁰ This text contains an explicit recognition that the Reign of God in its historical reality extends beyond the Church to the whole humankind. The Reign of God is present where gospel values are at work and are lived, and where people are open to the presence of Christ and the action of the Spirit. The text also affirms that the Kingdom in its historical dimension remains oriented to towards its eschatological fullness and that the Church is in the world at the service of the Reign throughout history.

Dupuis observes: “That the Church is a sacrament of the Reign of God, universally present in history, does not necessarily imply on its part a universal mediatory activity of grace in favour of the members of other religious traditions who have entered the Reign of God by responding to God's invitation through their faith and love.... We could uphold a ‘mediation’ of their own religious tradition in their favour.”⁹²¹ Nevertheless, the religious others are oriented to the Church inasmuch as “they respond to God's calling as perceived by their conscience, are saved in Jesus Christ and thus already share in some way in the reality which is signified by the Kingdom.”⁹²² The religious others can belong to it, provided they live its values and

⁹¹⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 202.

⁹²⁰ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 35.

⁹²¹ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 355.

⁹²² *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 35. Cf. also, *Redemptoris Missio*, 20.

help to spread it in the world. But they seem to enter the Kingdom of God without recourse to the mediation of the Church. Dupuis finds that Christians and the religious others share together the universality of the Kingdom of God that was inaugurated by God in Jesus Christ. They all are called to build this Kingdom in the world and journey together towards the fullness of that Kingdom, remaining faithful to their own religious tradition by means of which they express their religious life.

Dupuis affirms, not only the religious others share truly in the Reign of God present in history, but also, that their religious traditions can contribute to the building up of the Reign of God among their followers and in the world. Moreover, “While, the Church is universal sacrament of the Reign of God in the world, the other religious traditions too exercise a certain sacramental mediation of the Reign, different, no doubt, but no less real.”⁹²³ Hence the question arises: does it thereby follow that the religious traditions themselves contribute to the construction of the Reign of God in history? In this analysis, one should keep in mind that the personal religious life of the religious others cannot in fact be separated from the religious traditions to which they belong and through which they give it a concrete expression. Dupuis affirms that if their response to the divine invitation takes form in, and is upheld by, objective elements, which are part of these religious traditions, such as their sacred scriptures and their “sacramental” practices, then it also must be admitted that these traditions themselves contain “supernatural, grace-filled elements” for the benefits of the followers of these religious traditions. It is in responding to these elements of grace that they find salvation and become the members of the Reign of God in history.⁹²⁴ However, although the Church remains the efficacious sign, willed by God, of the presence of the reality of the Kingdom of God in the world, it does not exercise a “universal mediation” in the order of salvation in a strictly theological sense. While discussing the relation between the Church and the Reign of God, he seems to stress the difference between the historical reality of the Church and the eschatological reality of the Reign of God. Although one cannot separate the Church from the Reign of God, because both are inseparable from the person and work of

⁹²³ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 217.

⁹²⁴ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 202. Cf. also, Karl Rahner, “Christianity and Non-Christian Religions”, in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, (London: Longmann and Todd, 1966), pp. 121, 130.

Jesus himself,⁹²⁵ it is possible to speak about other religions as paths to the eschatological goal of the Reign of God.⁹²⁶ This is a theologically legitimate possibility because the Church is, by its very nature, provisional.⁹²⁷

The Reign of God has dawned in Jesus the Christ and is constantly being realized through the universal presence and the work of the Spirit. The Church, for its part, being at the service of the Kingdom, is destined to proclaim not itself but the Reign of God. The Reign of God is present in the world wherever the “values of the Reign” – love and justice – are lived and promoted. Under the Lordship of Christ, God has destined this Kingdom to grow towards its final plenitude. While the believers of other religions perceive God’s call through their own traditions and respond to it in the sincere practice of these traditions, they become – even without being formally conscious of it – active members of the Kingdom. Further, their religions contribute, in a mysterious way, to the building up of the Reign of God among their followers and in the world. They exercise, with regard to their members, a certain mediation of the Kingdom – different from that which is operative in the Church – even if it is difficult to give a precise theological definition of this mediation.⁹²⁸

The Reign of God is the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, in which Christians and religious others share together. It is the fundamental “mystery of unity” which unites us more deeply than differences in religious allegiance are able to keep us apart.⁹²⁹ One, then, may ask whether or not the evangelical mission of the Church is still necessary. Referring to the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Dupuis describes one of the essential reasons for the continuous mission of the Church, which must bear witness to the Kingdom and serve it. According to Dupuis the Church was “intended to serve the Reign of God, to help it to grow, to give witness to

⁹²⁵ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

⁹²⁶ Dupuis, in this regard, makes a direct reference to the report of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference. Cf. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 338 – 342. For a similar analysis cf. P. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, pp. 125 –135.

⁹²⁷ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 357.

⁹²⁸ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 343 – 352.

⁹²⁹ Cf. *FABC Papers*, no. 64, (Hong Kong: FABC, 1992), p. 31.

its presence in the world, to announce it as “good news” for all people.”⁹³⁰ The encyclical notes the twofold mission of the Church: “on the one hand, promoting such “values of the kingdom” as peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood, etc, on the other hand, fostering dialogue between peoples, cultures and religions, so that through a mutual enrichment they might help the world to be renewed and to journey ever closer toward the Kingdom.”⁹³¹ Furthermore, the encyclical states, “The Church serves the Kingdom by spreading through the world the ‘Gospel values’ which are an expression of the Kingdom and which help people to accept God’s plan.”⁹³² *Dialogue and Proclamation* states, “The Church’s mission is to foster “the Kingdom of our Lord and his Christ” (Rev 11:15), at whose service she is placed.”⁹³³ The Church stands in relation to God’s Kingdom, which it is called to serve and announce.⁹³⁴

Finally, Christians and the religious others are called to build together the Kingdom of God in the world down through the ages. They build together the Reign of God, in which they share, through conversion to God and the promotion of gospel values, until it achieves, beyond history, its eschatological fullness.⁹³⁵ The encyclical letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, recalls the unity of all humankind in the Reign of God and states, “The kingdom’s nature, therefore, is one of communion among all human beings – with one another and with God. The kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society, and the world. Working for the kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God’s activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God’s plan of salvation in all its fullness.”⁹³⁶ Furthermore, it states “The kingdom aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love,

⁹³⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 25.

⁹³¹ *Redemptoris Missio*, 17.

⁹³² *Redemptoris Missio*, 20. Cf. also, Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 356.

⁹³³ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 35.

⁹³⁴ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 254.

⁹³⁵ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.

⁹³⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 15.

forgive and serve one another.”⁹³⁷ Thus, where God is accepted, where Gospel values are lived, where the human being is respected, there is the Reign of God in process. Nevertheless, the encyclical letter makes it clear that “this temporal dimension of the kingdom remains incomplete unless it is related to the kingdom of Christ present in the Church and straining towards eschatological fullness.”⁹³⁸ For it is in Christ, God has destined this Kingdom to grow towards its final plenitude. While the believers of other religions perceive God’s call through their own traditions and respond to it in the sincere practice of these traditions, they become – even without being formally conscious of it – active members of the Kingdom.

However, one, then, may also ask whether the other religions contribute to the building up of the Reign of God in history. Dupuis holds that “the religious traditions contribute, in a mysterious way, to the building up of the Reign of God among their followers and in the world. They exercise, for their own members, a certain mediation of the Kingdom – doubtless different from that which is operative in the Church – even if it is difficult to define this mediation with theological precision.”⁹³⁹ The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* states: “The building up of the Kingdom of God is the task of everyone: individuals, society and the world. It involves acknowledging and promoting God’s activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms.”⁹⁴⁰ Christians and others build together the Reign of God whenever they commit themselves by common accord to the cause of human rights, and whenever they work for the integral liberation of each and every human person, but especially of the poor and the oppressed. They also build up the Reign of God by promoting religious, human and spiritual values.

2.4. Meeting of the Church with Religious Others in the Reign of God

Dupuis spells out the relationship of the Church and the other religious traditions to the universal reality of the Reign of God. According to him, “a

⁹³⁷ Ibid. 15.

⁹³⁸ Ibid. 20.

⁹³⁹ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 202.

⁹⁴⁰ *Redemptoris Missio*, 15.

regnocentric perspective on ecclesiology and the mission of evangelisation seems more suited to the pluralistic religious world.”⁹⁴¹ He writes, “The Reign is “symbol” of the new lordship that God will establish in the world, thereby renewing all things and re-establishing all relationships.”⁹⁴² For him, the imminent coming the Reign of God in Jesus’ thought and action, through his life, death and resurrection are the necessary point of reference. For Dupuis, the Reign of God is a “wider reality than the Church, indeed a universal reality.”⁹⁴³ The Reign of God is a broader reality than the Church, which is present and operative beyond its boundaries among religious others.⁹⁴⁴ He affirms that “the Reign of God is universal, with no limits whatsoever of ethnic, religious, or other ties.”⁹⁴⁵ Christians and the religious others are co-members in the Reign of God. Hence he poses the question of the sacramentality of the Church in relation to the Reign of God differently: “It is no longer simply a matter of stating that the Church, God’s Reign in history, is the “sacrament” of its own fullness to be achieved in the eschatological future (*sacramentum futuri*). Rather it entails showing that the Church is the “sacrament” in the world of the universal reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, already present and work in history.”⁹⁴⁶

Thus for him “the Church, in its visible aspect, is the sacrament (*sacramentum tantum*); the reality signified (*res tantum*), which it both contains and confers, is belonging to the Reign of God – that is sharing in the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ; the intermediate reality, the *res et sacramentum*, is the relationship established between members of the ecclesial community and the Church, by virtue of which they participate in the reality of the Reign through their belonging to the Church as its members.”⁹⁴⁷ Taking recourse to the sacramental theory that “it is possible to attain to the *res tantum* without passing through the *res et sacramentum*,” Dupuis maintains, “the “others” can attain the reality of the Kingdom of God present without belonging

⁹⁴¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 195.

⁹⁴² Ibid. p. 196.

⁹⁴³ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 353.

⁹⁴⁴ Dupuis, “A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation,” in W. R. Burrows, (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading ‘Redemptoris Missio’ and ‘Dialogue and Proclamation’*, p. 150.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 196.

⁹⁴⁶ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 213.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 214.

to the body of the Church. They can be members of the Reign of God without becoming part of the Church as its members.”⁹⁴⁸ By this position, he does not mean that the Church ceases to be efficacious sign, willed by God, of the presence in the world and in history of the reality of the Reign of God. In fact, the Church is called to proclaim the Reign of God through words and deeds: by announcing it, bearing witness to it, serving its growth in history.

The Reign of God is a multifaceted reality. Reign of God, on the one hand, belongs to this world; on the other hand, it also belongs to the world to come. It was inaugurated through the earthly life of Jesus, his words, deeds and the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. This Reign, present in history, must now grow through history to reach its eschatological fullness at the end of time.⁹⁴⁹ Reign of God is not identical with the Church and the Church has no monopoly on the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, the Church is not an end unto itself, since it is ordered towards the Kingdom of God of which it is the seed, sign and instrument.⁹⁵⁰ The Church, being the “Sacrament of the Kingdom”, is effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom.⁹⁵¹ Thus, the Church is meant to be a servant of the Reign of God. Although the Kingdom may not be identified with the Church that does not mean that the Kingdom is not present in it. It is the Reign of God now that creates the Church and keeps it constantly in existence. Hence it is the Reign of God that makes itself present in the Church in a particular way: “The Church becomes on earth the initial budding forth of the Kingdom.”⁹⁵² The Reign of God that Jesus brought has cosmic dimensions that go beyond the confines of the Church. It is present and operative beyond her boundaries among the members of other religious traditions.

The Reign of God cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church. If the Kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the Reign of God, which he revealed. Likewise, one may not separate the Reign of God from the Church. While remaining distinct from Christ and Reign of God, the Church is indissolubly united to

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 214.

⁹⁴⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 5, 9.

⁹⁵⁰ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 18.

⁹⁵¹ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 20. Cf. also, *Lumen Gentium*, 9.

⁹⁵² *Lumen Gentium*, 5.

both.⁹⁵³ The Reign of God is a wider reality than the Church, indeed, a universal reality.⁹⁵⁴ The universality of the Reign of God consists in that Christians and the “religious others” share the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ, even if the mystery reaches them in different ways. The Reign of God is the very reason for the being of the Church. The Reign, God’s gift and initiative, is already begun and is constantly being realized through the Spirit. The Church, for its part, is destined to proclaim not itself but the Reign of God. The Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the Reign of God. The Church serves the Kingdom by spreading throughout the world the “gospel values” which are an expression of the Kingdom and which help people to accept God’s plan. The “religious others” have access to the Kingdom of God in history through obedience in faith and conversion to the God of the Kingdom.

The Church is a living sign of the Mystery of God present in the world.⁹⁵⁵ A sign points to something beyond itself – to the work of God in Jesus Christ, rendered credible by the lives of Christians themselves everywhere in the world. The Church, then, is the visible expression of grace present in the world. It is the sacrament of the Reign of God. The Church, being ordained to the Kingdom of God, makes it visible and promotes it, but does not equate itself with it. The Church is totally concerned with bearing witness to and serving the Kingdom. In the Church we find the visible manifestation of the salvific economy that God is carrying out throughout the world. “The Church is the sacrament of salvation for all humankind, and her activity is not limited only to those who accept her message. She is a dynamic force in mankind’s journey toward the eschatological Kingdom, and is the sign and promoter of gospel values.”⁹⁵⁶ It is the place where a maximum concentration of God’s activity can be found, and gives access to the Reign through Word and Sacrament.⁹⁵⁷ Dupuis’ idea of the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God makes clearer the place of the Church in relation to human salvation and in history. He claims a close connection between the Kingdom and the Church while maintaining the distinction

⁹⁵³ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 18.

⁹⁵⁴ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 35.

⁹⁵⁵ *Dialogue and Mission*, 13.

⁹⁵⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 20; Cf. also *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.

⁹⁵⁷ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 354 – 355.

between the two. The Kingdom of God in history is a reality that extends beyond the boundaries of the Church and is shared by both Christians and the members of other religions. However, as sacramental reality, the Church will disappear when the fullness of Kingdom has come, because the sign will lose its *raison d'être* when the reality is actualised. The essential nature of the earthly Church consists in pilgrimage towards the promised future. Thus, when the Church completes its earthly task, it will be absorbed in the eschatological Kingdom where both its members as well as the members of other religious traditions are welcomed.⁹⁵⁸ Thus, according to Dupuis, a recognition that the Reign of God in history is not restricted to the dimensions of the Church but extends beyond them to the world is not without bearing and importance for a Christian theology of religions.

Dupuis, by maintaining the unity between the Christocentric and regnocentric perspective, tries to overcome a too narrow ecclesiocentric perspective towards the diversity of religions. Dupuis conceives the task of the Church not in terms of some universal function of mediation, but rather as witness, service and proclamation. The Church needs to display to all the presence in the world of the Reign of God, which God has inaugurated in Jesus Christ; it must serve its growth and proclaim it. Dupuis advocates decentring of the Church from itself, to be entirely centred on Jesus Christ and the Reign of God. He writes, “The Church does not find in itself its own reason for being; it is not an end in itself. As Jesus was entirely oriented to the Father, who was establishing his Reign in him, so also Church must be entirely oriented to Jesus Christ and to the Reign established by the Father in him. It must then be entirely related to Christ and to God’s Reign.”⁹⁵⁹ The Church thus must give witness to Christ and the Reign of God, reproducing in itself the values of the Kingdom of God, thus making the Reign of God visible and tangible for all humankind by proclaiming its active presence in the world as “good news” for all people.

3. Personal Assessment on the Church, the Reign of God and the Religions

The eternal plan of the Father, namely, to bring humanity to its eternal glory, is realized and manifested through Jesus Christ in the Church. Therefore, the Church

⁹⁵⁸ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 357. Cf. also, Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 255 – 256.

⁹⁵⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 217.

as the mystery of Christ has to be seen in this broad perspective of God's plan of salvation, which includes all human beings and creation as a whole (cf. 1Tim 2:4; Rom 8:22ff). The gifts which God offers to all people for directing themselves to his offer of salvation are rooted in his universal salvific will to save all humankind through his Son. Jesus Christ constituted the Church as a universal salvific mystery. Therefore, the fullness of Christ's salvific mystery belongs also to the Church, which is inseparably united to the mystery of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus Christ continues his presence and his work of salvation in the Church and by means of the Church, which is his mystical body. The Church is essentially the sacrament of salvation for the nations. The Church, since joined to Jesus Christ in a mysterious way, yet subordinate to him, has in God's plan an indispensable relationship with the salvation of every human being.⁹⁶⁰

However, the salvific grace of God — which is always given by means of Christ in the Spirit and has a mysterious relationship to the Church — comes to religious others. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of his sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. This is based on the unique mediation of Christ, who in his body, the Church, makes himself present in our midst. This is also based on the vocation of all people to the catholic unity of the people of God. The universal call to salvation includes the call of all humankind to the unity of Church. The universal salvific mission of the Church and the sacramental efficacy in the order of salvation are the theological foundations for the truth of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Religious others, being justified through the paschal mystery of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, are joined to the unity of the Church, although the visible expression of belonging to the Church is lacking. Nevertheless, they are ordained to the people of God, and so included in the Church through a spiritual union with a spiritual community, which is seen as a mysterious relationship to the Church, the mystical body of Christ.

3.1. The Unity of the Church with the Mystery of Christ in the Economy of Salvation

Dupuis, in his theology of the Reign of God, seems to go beyond traditional conciliar teaching, which held that the Reign of God coincides in the Church. Dupuis

⁹⁶⁰ Cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 20.

seems to adopt the nuances of the post-conciliar magisterium, namely, that the Reign of God present in history extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church, even if it present in Church in a privileged manner;⁹⁶¹ and that the religious others belong to the Reign of God without Church membership.⁹⁶² The Reign of God, thus, represents the universal reality of salvation present and work in the world. According to him, the terms: “identification”, “separation” and “distinction” are not one and the same. While, he continues to maintain a distinction between the Reign of God and the Church, does not separate them from each other. He accepts an indissoluble bond between them. For him the Church is at once a communion of grace among her members and a human institution; it is distinct but not separated from the universal Reign of God.⁹⁶³

The declaration of the congregation for the doctrine of the faith, *Dominus Iesus*, indicates clearly that “Christ and the Church can neither be confused nor separated, and constitute a single ‘whole Christ’”.⁹⁶⁴ Furthermore, the declaration directs that while seeking to understand God’s salvific plan and the ways in which it is accomplished, “it is necessary to keep these two truths together, namely, the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all humankind and the necessity of the Church for this salvation”.⁹⁶⁵ It states, “the fullness of Christ’s salvific mystery belongs also to the Church, inseparably united to her Lord. Indeed, Jesus Christ continues his presence and his work of salvation in the Church and by means of the Church.”⁹⁶⁶ Furthermore, if the Kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the Kingdom of God, which he revealed. The result is a distortion of the meaning of the Kingdom, which runs the risk of being transformed into a purely human or ideological goal and a distortion of the identity of Christ.⁹⁶⁷

Dupuis, however, does not separate the Church from the mystery of Christ, but distinguishes the salvific necessity of the mystery of Christ from that of the salvific

⁹⁶¹ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 20.

⁹⁶² Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 252.

⁹⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 253.

⁹⁶⁴ *Dominus Iesus*, 16. Cf. also, *S. T.*, III, q. 48, a. 2 ad 1um.

⁹⁶⁵ *Dominus Iesus*, 20 – 21. Cf. also, *Redemptoris Missio*, 9.

⁹⁶⁶ *Dominus Iesus*, 16.

⁹⁶⁷ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 18. Cf. also, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 17.

necessity of the Church in the overall economy of salvation. For him, both cannot be placed at the same level with an equal importance. For him, the Church, being a derived mystery, is subordinate to Jesus Christ its head; it is, in fact, at the service of the Reign of God. The traditional ecclesiology seems to affirm that the Church is the proper place where grace operates. Outside the full ecclesial sacramentality of grace, which is realized in it, the life of grace is extremely precarious. That is why other religions, even while an initial ecclesiality is at work in them must find their accomplishment in the full ecclesiality of the Church. Dupuis affirms that the incomplete mediation of salvation found in other religions is by its nature ordained to the complete mediation present in the Church. But for him this does not necessarily imply that the Church is the proper place where grace is operative. He holds that “grace has no “proper place”. It is operative in all places and salvation can reach out to all people, in whatever historical situation and in circumstances of life they may find themselves.”⁹⁶⁸

3.2. An Indissoluble Bond Between the Church and the Reign of God

The declaration *Dominus Iesus* speaks of an “intimate connection between Christ, the kingdom, and the Church.”⁹⁶⁹ It affirms that the Church is “the sign and instrument of the kingdom; she is called to announce and to establish the kingdom.”⁹⁷⁰ Similarly, the Kingdom of God cannot be detached from the Church. While remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both. Dupuis, on the one hand, affirms a close connection between the Kingdom of God and the Church, on the other hand, he insists on the distinction between them. He accepts that the Church, while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom of God, indissolubly united to both. For him the specific necessary role of Church in the universal salvation does not necessarily imply “universal mediation” understood by way of instrumental causality in the order of grace on behalf of the religious others, outside its own visible boundaries. Even though the Church exercises its salvific function through its prayer and intercession, celebration of the sacraments, these for Dupuis do not imply instrumental causality of the Church in the salvation of religious others. For this he adopts a

⁹⁶⁸ Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 249.

⁹⁶⁹ *Dominus Iesus*, 17.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 17.

distinction between efficient causality that is at work in the *opus operatum* of the sacraments on behalf of the members of the Church, and the moral causality operative in the intercession or merit.⁹⁷¹ The Church is traditionally understood as the proper place for the grace of salvation and the instrument of conferring grace. For Dupuis, the efficiency of the word and the sacraments does not reach out to the religious others. He writes, “If, therefore, by mediation proper to the Church her efficient causality as instrument in conferring grace is understood, it seems legitimate to query whether such mediation can be said to extend beyond the circle of the Church members and be universal.”⁹⁷² However, *Dominus Iesus* clearly upholds that “it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as *one way* of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the Church toward the eschatological kingdom of God.”⁹⁷³ The Church is sign and instrument of salvation for all people. The followers of other religions are oriented to the Church and are all called to become part of her.

Dupuis regnocentric approach to the diversity of religions opens vast horizons in the field of interreligious dialogue and offers broader perspective toward a Christian theology of religious pluralism. He prefers to distinguish between the Church and the Reign of God in history. Dupuis theology of the Reign of God seeks to decentre the Church from itself in order to centre it on Jesus Christ and the Reign of God. Dupuis opts for a Reign of God perspective, which takes him beyond a too narrow ecclesiocentric perspective. In the Reign of God perspective, which developed in the post-conciliar period, the Church is seen as efficacious sign in the world and history of the active presence of the mystery of salvation wrought by God in Jesus Christ: “The Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered toward the kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both.”⁹⁷⁴

⁹⁷¹ Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), pp. 250 – 252.

⁹⁷² *Ibid.* pp. 252.

⁹⁷³ *Dominus Iesus*, 21.

⁹⁷⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, 18.

Dupuis opts for the universality of the Reign of God and the sacramentality of the Church in relation to the Reign of God, to which it is called to testify and which it is mandated serve and announce. He points out the universality of the Reign of God in a manner of reaching it out far beyond the visible boundaries of the Church. Even though Dupuis recognises an indivisible bond between the Reign of God and the Church, he insists on their difference. Such a position may obscure “the specific and necessary role of the Church”⁹⁷⁵ as the universal sacrament of salvation and its indissoluble bond with Christ and the Kingdom of God. For him the expression “the specific and necessary role of the Church” does not by itself automatically imply a “universal mediation” understood by way of the instrumental causality. For him the “necessary role of the Church” for the salvation of religious others is not necessarily universal instrumental causality of grace, outside its own visible boundaries. Dupuis does not seem to point out clearly the proper role of the Church in the salvation of religious others. He seems to be silent regarding the association of the Church with the exercise of the universal mediation of Christ. The Church, being the mystical body of Christ, is present wherever its head, Jesus Christ is present. Nevertheless, Dupuis’ option for “all salvation through Christ” implicitly presupposes the ecclesial component, “since united always in a mysterious way to the Saviour Jesus Christ, her Head, and subordinated to him, she has, in God’s plan, an indispensable relationship with the salvation of every human being.”⁹⁷⁶

Dupuis, though accepts the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation and its necessity for the salvation of all humankind, does not accept it in terms of efficient causality, rather in terms of finality. Dupuis argues that the instrumentality of the Church should be understood in case of religious others, an expectation and hope based on their orientation to the Church. This position has the danger of making the Church very special indeed, the best and fullest sign, but finally on a logical par with other mediated participations or other ways of salvation. Dupuis admits that there is no straightforward answer to the question how is the Church to be understood as an instrument of salvation for religious others. In the theology of religions, Dupuis marks a new and an important avenue regarding the need for paying attention to the problem of conceiving theologically of the instrumental efficient causality of the Church in conferring of the

⁹⁷⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, 18.

⁹⁷⁶ *Dominus Iesus*, 20.

grace of salvation on behalf of the people, who are saved outside the membership of the Church. Nevertheless, there existed and exists God's gifts of light and grace working for salvation outside the visible boundaries of the Church. The various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God,⁹⁷⁷ and which are part of what "the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures, and religions".⁹⁷⁸ They are, in fact, received in view of the Church and they orient the religious others toward the Church.

3.3. Concluding Observations on the Reign of God and the Plurality of Religions

Dupuis' specific contribution to the theology of the Reign of God consists in showing how the religious others are members of the Reign of God present in history. The distinction which he maintains between the Reign of God and Church – which he calls "the sacrament of the Reign of God" – allows him to see religious others, who, even though, do not explicitly belong to the Church, are already members of the Reign of God. The religious others are not merely oriented to the Reign of God; they are part of it. Together with Christians the religious others share actively in the Reign of God already present in history and contribute to its growth in history and to its eschatological fulfilment.⁹⁷⁹ He accepts that if there is orientation of the religious others to the Church it is not to the Reign of God but to the Church, since it is sacrament of the fullness of the means of salvation.

So to sum up, Dupuis regnocentric perspective does not sever the Reign of God either from Jesus Christ or from the mystery of the Church. For him, the reality of salvation is the Reign of God universally present and the Church is the universal sacrament of this reality. He makes it clear that in Christianity, God's personal presence to human beings in Jesus Christ reaches its highest and most complete sacramental visibility through the word revealed in him and the sacraments based on him. In other religions the mystery of salvation is present hidden and implicit through an incomplete modality, but no less real, mediation, constituted by such traditions.⁹⁸⁰

⁹⁷⁷ Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 11; *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁹⁷⁸ *Redemptoris Missio*, 29

⁹⁷⁹ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 201 – 206.

⁹⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 188 – 189.

Dupuis considers that it is possible to conceive that religious others (non-members of the Church) may receive grace of salvation without passing through a mediation of Church's instrumental causality of grace resulting in Church membership.⁹⁸¹ He points out that in the case of religious others, "substitutive mediation," comes to play, consisting of the elements of "truth and grace," comprised in their own religious traditions, not without relation to the unique mediation of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, he makes it clear that he does not want to place the Church on a logical par with other mediated participations, as parallel ways of salvation.⁹⁸² For the mediation of grace which is at work in the Church on behalf of their members is of another transcendent order than the one that is at work for the religious others through grace-filled elements in the traditions to which they belong.⁹⁸³

The Reign of God that Jesus proclaimed and pioneered in his own life, death and resurrection is at work, beyond the confines of the visible Church, in all the religions of humanity. Therefore, the possibility of salvation is not confined to the Church. The mediation of the Church for its members in the order of salvation consists essentially, though not exclusively, in announcing to them the word of God and the sacramental economy, at the centre of which stands the Eucharistic celebration. These benefits do not by definition reach to the religious others. Nevertheless, Church intercedes on their behalf, praying to God in his bounty to confer upon them the gift of his grace. In virtue of these differences, the mediation of the Church for its members cannot be placed on a logical par with other mediatory participations. The religious others, who are saved outside of its visible boundaries, are oriented to the mystery of the Church; since in it is found the fullness of the means of salvation. The Church, being the universal sacrament of the Reign of God, is fully at the service of the Kingdom of God. Its specific task consists in being a living sign in history of what God has accomplished and continues to accomplish everywhere in the world for the salvation of humankind through Jesus Christ and in the action of the Holy Spirit. The Church accomplishes this task through its witness of life and by announcing the Gospel as good news of universal salvation for all human beings.

⁹⁸¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 214.

⁹⁸² Dupuis "Christianity and the Religions Revisited", *Louvain Studies*, 28 (2003), pp. 376 – 379.

⁹⁸³ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 189, 213 – 217.

4. A Praxis of Trinitarian Theology of Religious Pluralism in Interreligious Dialogue

In the climate of increased awareness of cultural and religious pluralism, which is expected to mark the society of the third millennium, it is obvious that interreligious dialogue will be important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion, which have so often caused human disasters in history.⁹⁸⁴ Dupuis accounts for the reciprocal interaction existing between interreligious dialogue and the theology of religions. He shows that dialogue, in its deep meaning, is based on an open theology of religions. In his opinion, “theology of religions must be ‘dialogical theology’ that is, built on the praxis of interreligious dialogue.”⁹⁸⁵ He holds that harmony between religious communities will not be promoted by a “universal theology” which would claim to bypass differences and contradictions; rather, it will be promoted by the development within the various traditions of theologies which, taking the mutual differences seriously, will assume them and resolve to interact in dialogue and cooperation.⁹⁸⁶

Dupuis is of the opinion that “a constitutive and inclusive Christology is genuinely open to a Kingdom-centred theology of mission and to a sincere dialogue that leaves room for announcing the gospel. The universal saving impact of Jesus Christ, as the ‘constitutive’ of the salvation of the world leaves space for other ‘saving figures’ and other religious traditions, where God is present and at work through God’s Word and Spirit.”⁹⁸⁷ A constitutive Christology leaves room for other mediations and divine revelations, and so it is capable of doing justice at once to the demands of a true pluralism and to the Christian identity. Dupuis holds that a sincere affirmation of the Christian identity need not entail exclusivist statements about Christ and Christianity, which would claim the exclusive possession of God’s self-disclosure or of the means of salvation, would distort Christian message and the Christian image. He writes, “Our one God is ‘three’ [persons of the Trinity], and the

⁹⁸⁴ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 55.

⁹⁸⁵ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 234.

⁹⁸⁶ Dupuis, “Renewal of Christianity through Interreligious Dialogue,” *International Journal in Philosophy and Theology*, 65 (2004), 2, pp. 131 – 143.

⁹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 227.

communion-in-difference which characterises God's inner life is reflected and operative in the one plan which Father, Son and Spirit have devised for their dealings with humankind in revelation and salvation. The plurality of religions, then, finds its ultimate source in a God who is Love and communication."⁹⁸⁸ The Reign of God, truly a broader reality than the Church, which is destined to be built by Christians and religious others. Dialogue is an authentic expression of the evangelising mission. Hence, the Church affirms "dialogue is the new way of being Church today."⁹⁸⁹ But dialogue does not exhaust the mission of the Church, which truly includes proclaiming Jesus Christ in whom God has established his Reign. Dupuis writes, "Insofar as the Church remains on her pilgrimage, together with the 'others' towards the fullness of the Kingdom, she engages with them in dialogue; in so far as she is the sacrament of the reality of the Kingdom already present and operative in history, she proclaims to them Jesus Christ in whom the Kingdom of God has been established by God."⁹⁹⁰ As a preliminary step, we point out certain theological foundations for dialogue;⁹⁹¹ and in the next step, we investigate the challenges of dialogue that influence theology and mutually enrich Christianity and other religions.

4.1. Theological Foundations for Interreligious Dialogue

God's presence in creation and human history, religious history included, in all its various manifestations is at the foundation of dialogue. The entire history of human's salvation is one long, varied dialogue, which marvelously begins with God and which he prolongs with humankind in so many different ways.⁹⁹² Moreover, "Dialogue is found in the very plan of God."⁹⁹³ God's providence, goodness, and

⁹⁸⁸ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 263.

⁹⁸⁹ *Ecclesiam Suam*, 63.

⁹⁹⁰ Dupuis, "A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation," in W. R. Burrows, (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading 'Redemptoris Missio' and 'Dialogue and Proclamation'* pp. 155.

⁹⁹¹ For a brief summary on the theological foundations for interreligious dialogue, cf. Painadath, "Theological perspectives of FABC on Interreligious Dialogue", *Jeevadhara*, 27 (1997), 160, pp. 272 – 288.

⁹⁹² Cf. *Ecclesiam Suam*, 70.

⁹⁹³ *Ibid.* 70.

saving design extend to whole humankind.⁹⁹⁴ Interreligious dialogue is established on a double foundation, namely, the community that has its origin in God through creation and its destiny in him through salvation in Jesus Christ. In this dialogue of salvation “God allows us to understand something of himself, the mystery of his life, unique in its essence, Trinitarian in its persons.”⁹⁹⁵ This dialogue is Trinitarian inasmuch as “God the Father initiated and established with us through Christ in the Holy Spirit.”⁹⁹⁶ God’s universal dialogue with humankind has reached its fullest manifestation in Jesus Christ. This dialogue of salvation was made accessible to all; it was destined for all without distinction (cf. Col. 3, 11).⁹⁹⁷ God has also spoken to the nations, as he has offered his gift of salvation to all its members. Thus, it is the same God who performs saving works in human history and who speaks to human beings in the depths of their hearts. The same God is present and acting in both dialogue partners.⁹⁹⁸

The universal presence of the Spirit of God throughout the entire history of salvation and its activity in the religious life of the ‘others’ and in their religious traditions⁹⁹⁹ is also at the foundation of interreligious dialogue. The Spirit guides everyone into the truth of God revealed through Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 16:13). Dupuis notes, “The principal agent of interreligious dialogue is the Spirit of God who animates people. The Spirit is at work in both traditions involved in the dialogue, the Christian and the other; thus the dialogue cannot be a monologue, that is, a unilateral process. It is also the same God who performs saving works in human history and who speaks to human beings in the depths of their hearts. The same God is both the “Wholly Other” and the “ground of being” of everything that is; the transcendent “Beyond” and the immanent “deep down”; the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Self at the centre of the self. The same God is present and acting in both dialogue

⁹⁹⁴ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

⁹⁹⁵ *Ecclesiam Suam*, 70.

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 70.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 76.

⁹⁹⁸ Dupuis, “Renewal of Christianity through Interreligious Dialogue,” *International Journal in Philosophy and Theology*, 65 (2004), 2, pp. 131 – 133.

⁹⁹⁹ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 28.

partners.”¹⁰⁰⁰ Thus, interreligious dialogue is based on the Trinitarian foundation that God is the Father of the entire human family, whose only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, by his incarnation, has in some way joined every human person; and the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, is present and operative in each and every individual person and in the diverse religious traditions.¹⁰⁰¹ Moreover, the fundamental ground for interreligious dialogue is not merely anthropological but primarily theological.¹⁰⁰²

The fourth element of the theological foundation of interreligious dialogue is universally present and shared Reign of God. Dupuis emphasizes the universality of the Reign of God, in which religious others are fully members and in which they participate together with Christians. That all are co-members in the Reign of God means that all come to share in the same mystery of salvation.¹⁰⁰³ The Reign of God universally present in the world represents the universal presence of the mystery of salvation through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit.¹⁰⁰⁴ All have access to the Reign of God in history through obedience to the God of the Reign in faith and conversion. Hence, theology of religions and dialogue must show how the ‘others’ are sharers in the reality of the Reign of God in the world and history by opening themselves to the action of the Spirit. Mutual complementarity, even partial and initial, makes a reciprocal convergence possible. It is the task of interreligious dialogue to turn the potential convergence inherent in the religious traditions into a concrete reality. The mystery of communion in the Spirit existing between the partners of dialogue flows from their common sharing in the universal reality of the Reign of God.

This anticipated communion guarantees that actual convergence through dialogue is possible – with full respect to the differences between faith-commitments. Dupuis writes, “By responding in the sincere practice of their religious tradition to God’s call addressed to them, believers of other religious faiths truly become – albeit

¹⁰⁰⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 233.

¹⁰⁰¹ Cf. “Pope John Paul II’s Address of the Pope at the Conclusion of the Plenary Assembly of the Secretariat,” *Bulletin* 56, 19 (1984), 2, pp. 122 – 123.

¹⁰⁰² Cf. *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 28, 38.

¹⁰⁰³ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 224.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Cf. *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

without being formally conscious of it – active members of the Reign. Through their participation in the mystery of salvation, they are members of the Reign of God in history, and their religious traditions themselves contribute in a mysterious manner to the construction of the Reign of God in the world.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Furthermore, “this dialogue takes place between persons who are already bound to each other in the Reign of God inaugurated in history through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit. The differences in their religious allegiances notwithstanding, such persons are already in communion with one another in the reality of the mystery of salvation, even if there remains a distinction between them on the level of the ‘sacrament,’ that is in the order of the mediation of the mystery.”¹⁰⁰⁶ Thus, partners in dialogue, though belong to diverse religious traditions despite their differences and distinct convictions, are walking together as joint members of the Reign of God in history toward the fullness of the Reign in the end of time.

The Church should enter into a dialogue of salvation with all human beings in the very same way in which God entered into an on-going dialogue of salvation with whole humankind. “In this dialogue of salvation, Christians and others are called to collaborate with the Spirit of the risen Lord who is universally present and active.”¹⁰⁰⁷ Interreligious dialogue is viewed as an image, a participation of the dialogue going on at the very core of the ultimate mystery of Being, God himself. This mystery is, in Christian terms, not just an undifferentiated or amorphous Oneness, but a deep dialogical interrelation in which unity is expressed in and through the distinction and otherness of persons: the mystery of the Trinity. This same mystery is seen to be the source and the model of all interreligious dialogue. The unity of origin and of the destiny of human race through creation and redemption is ‘the mystery of unity’ which unites all human beings, whatever the differences in the circumstances of their lives. This mystery of unity leaves a trace in the reality lived by human beings, though belonging to diverse religious traditions.¹⁰⁰⁸ Interreligious dialogue also expresses a deep communion in the Spirit that enables all to share in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, which is the reality of the Reign of God that is already shared in

¹⁰⁰⁵ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 224 – 225.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 225.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 40.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Cf. *Redemptoris Hominis*, 5 – 7.

mutual exchange. For a Christian, the practice of dialogue “flows from the heart of faith in God, a God of love and communion, which the mystery of the Trinity enables us to glimpse, a God who is Father for all human beings, Son who has come among us, and the Spirit who works in all hearts and religions.”¹⁰⁰⁹ The openness to God and his ways in the world manifested in the diverse religious traditions can lead toward cosmic *Abbà* experience. Interreligious dialogue is a meeting point for the Christians and religious others in their search for the will of God, constantly “seeking the face of God” (cf. Ps 27:8), so that “God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). Through interreligious dialogue, we open ourselves to one another, and there by we listen to God’s dialogue with humanity, and let God be present in our midst.

4.2. The Enrichment and Renewal of Christianity through Interreligious Dialogue

Religions are not static cultural entities but are actually dynamic spiritual organisms. The moment we enter into existential dialogue with them, we also enter into the possibility of their deep influence on our own views, enabling mutual encounter and enrichment for a personal conversion and commitment.¹⁰¹⁰ Christian theology is also given the opportunity to renew itself through its encounter with the other religions.¹⁰¹¹ For Bede Griffiths, “dialogue, when properly understood, is not a compromise with error but a process of enrichment by which each religion opens itself to the truth to be found in the other religion, and the two parties grow together

¹⁰⁰⁹ Cf. “The Letter of Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue,” *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue Bulletin*, 70 (2003), p. 25.

¹⁰¹⁰ For instance, the Asian religions have numerous insights to contribute in the area of mystical and ascetical theology, which are never abstract, but relate to the difficult work of inner transformation, one of the chief goals of the spiritual life in any tradition. The Asian religions possess vast resources on this issue of transformation. Cf. Wayne Teasdale, “Interreligious Dialogue Since Vatican II: The Monastic Contemplative Dimension,” *Spirituality Today*, 43 (1991), 2, pp. 119 – 133.

¹⁰¹¹ Dupuis points out the actual difficulties in deciding what elements and religious insights can be shared by Christian theology and other religions, as they come into contact with each other. There is a limitation to mutual assimilation and ‘cross-fertilisation’ between religious and theological traditions. For each religious tradition constitutes a whole from which the various elements cannot be isolated. Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 234 – 235. Cf. also, Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979).

in the common search for truth.”¹⁰¹² A predisposition for interreligious dialogue includes that one enters into it with the integrity of one’s personal faith. There can be no doubt that the Christian identity must be preserved in its integrity in the process of encountering and entering into dialogue with the other religious traditions. There is no dialogue in a void or in flux of personal religious persuasions. Furthermore, interreligious dialogue “also requires openness to the faith of the other, in its difference. Each partner in the dialogue must enter into the experience of the other, in an effort to grasp that experience from within. In order to do this, he or she must rise above the level of the concepts in which this experience is imperfectly expressed, to attain, insofar as possible, through and beyond the concepts, to the experience itself.”¹⁰¹³ It also requires that both partners in dialogue make a positive effort to enter into the religious experience and overall vision of each other insofar as it is possible. Dupuis visualizes that in the present world a renewal of Christianity is more likely to take place through interreligious dialogue than in opposition to the other religious traditions. Moreover, a genuine dialogue leads to an inner purification and conversion; and only such a spiritual renewal will save the world from further widespread sufferings.¹⁰¹⁴ It opens us to the religious experience of each other, and so it also leads to a deeper openness to God, as we let God be present in our midst, and as we also open ourselves to God.

The common points significant for dialogue are the common origin and destiny of all humankind in God and the truth and goodness found in all religions. The common goal of dialogue is action for peace and justice, that is, a common effort to solve the problems of humanity. Interreligious dialogue is a precious means by which the followers of the various religions discover shared points of contact in the spiritual life, while acknowledging the differences that exist between diverse religious traditions. It is “a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment.”¹⁰¹⁵ Its

¹⁰¹² Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West: A Sequel to The Golden String* (Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1982), p. 25.

¹⁰¹³ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 230. Cf. also, F. Whaling, *Christian Theology and World Religions*, (London: Marshal Pickering, 1986), pp. 130 – 131.

¹⁰¹⁴ Cf. Pope John Paul II, “To the Pontifical Council for Dialogue,” 13 / 11 / 1992.

¹⁰¹⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, 55. Although, it stated that the main objective of dialogue should be mutual enrichment, and that Christian values could be regarded as “a source of enrichment for others,” it

objective is “to deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God’s personal call and gracious self-gift which, as our faith tell us, always passes through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the work of his Spirit.”¹⁰¹⁶ Its aim is to walk together in truth making joint efforts in projects of common concern and for a deeper conversion of all toward God.¹⁰¹⁷ It will contribute to the peace between the nations, to the promotion of mutual respect, uniting everyone in the defense of spiritual, moral, social and cultural values, which constitute the solid foundation upon which human society rests.¹⁰¹⁸ It will help us to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values”¹⁰¹⁹ in the diverse religious traditions. Through the practice of interreligious dialogue Christians can enrich their faith. Dupuis affirms, “Through the experience and testimony of the others, they will be able to discover at greater depth certain aspects, certain dimensions, of the Divine Mystery that they had perceived less clearly and that have been communicated less clearly by Christian tradition.”¹⁰²⁰ At the same time, they will gain a purification of their memories through the new knowledge regarding the faith commitment of religious others, destroying deep-rooted prejudices or overthrow certain overly narrow conceptions and outlooks with regard to other religious traditions. Dialogue also has the benefits of encounter and exchange of the religious experience of the dialogue partners. Dupuis notes, “While from the outset they presuppose openness to the other and to God, they also effect a deeper openness to of each through the other.”¹⁰²¹

Dialogue is the openness and attention to the mystery of God’s action in the believers. It tends toward a deeper conversion of each to God. The Spirit calls all

did not state whether the values found in other religions might be a source of enrichment for Christians.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 40.

¹⁰¹⁷ *Dialogue and Mission*, 13.

¹⁰¹⁸ Cf. Pope Paul VI, “Message to the Council of Religions of Vietnam,” Rome, 15 / 09 / 1966.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Nostra Aetatae*, 2.

¹⁰²⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 233. Cf. also, Hans Kessler, “Pluralistische Religionstheologie und Christologie“ im Schwager, R. (Hg.), *Christus allein? Der Streit um die pluralistische Religionstheologie*, Q. D. 160, (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 1996), p. 170 – 171.

¹⁰²¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 234.

peoples to conversion, which is primarily a free turning of the heart to God and his Reign in obedience to his word.¹⁰²² The same God speaks in the hearts of the dialogue partners in dialogue; and it is the same Spirit is at work in them and in their religious traditions. It is the same God who calls and challenges the partners through one another, by means of their mutual witness. Thus they become, as it were, for each other and reciprocally, a sign leading to God. The proper end of the interreligious dialogue is ultimately the common conversion of Christians and the religious others to the same God – the God of Jesus Christ – who calls them together with one another, challenging them through each other. This reciprocal call, a sign of God's call, is mutual evangelisation. It builds up, between Christians and religious others, the universal communion, which marks the advent of the Reign of God.¹⁰²³ The aim of interreligious dialogue is to unify under one Spirit all human persons of whatever nation, race or culture; to receive the inspiration of the Spirit faithfully and to measure up to them energetically; in order to build up the world in genuine peace. The fruit of such a meeting of religions is union between the people and union with God, who is the source and revealer of all truth and whose Spirit guides them in freedom only when they meet one another in honesty and love. Dialogue is a matter of new relationships in the integration process of the divine Spirit. God's Spirit recreates this world anew. Through inter-religious collaboration, believers of all religions participate in the work of promoting justice and peace, solidarity and freedom, unity and integral development. Integral human liberation is the meeting point of religions; this is expressed specifically in love and charity.

¹⁰²² Cf. Edmund Chea, (ed.), *Dialogue: Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), pp. 189 – 197, 204 – 217.

¹⁰²³ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 234.

Conclusion to Trinity and the Plurality of Religions

Religious Pluralism is a reality in the post-modern world; and for most people, it is a daily experience of life in a globalised world. Christian theology attempts to take religious pluralism seriously as a cultural and religious fact, recognizing the spiritual and moral values found in other religions and develop a theology of religious pluralism. It seeks to discover the salvific meaning and place of the diverse religious traditions in God's plan of salvation for all humankind. As an inclusivist theologian, Jacques Dupuis seeks to progress on the theological insights of the Second Vatican Council regarding the problematic of the salvation of religious others and the positive appraisal of the diverse religious traditions and cultures, as well as, the subsequent post-conciliar reflection on the place and salvific value of other religions in God's plan of salvation. He takes into account the changing trends in the Christian theology surrounding the Council and the post-conciliar theology in the light of the new awareness of religious pluralism. He looks at the reality of religious pluralism not only as a fact but also as principle willed by God in his universal plan of salvation for all humankind.

1. A Theological Significance of Religious Pluralism

Dupuis, in his approach to the theological significance of religious pluralism, is no longer merely content with asking whether salvation is possible for individuals outside the Church; nor whether positive values, either natural or even supernatural, can be found in the religious traditions. Rather, he asks whether Christian theology can affirm that the religious traditions have a positive significance in the eternal plan of God for humankind; whether they are for their followers "ways," or "means" and "channels" of salvation willed and devised by God. Based on conciliar acceptance of the possibility of salvation through Christ for the religious others and the affirmation that their religions be said to contain elements of truth and grace, Dupuis asks whether God saves them within their own religions. If yes, can it be said that these religions have a positive meaning in God's single overall plan of salvation? Dupuis, with his inclusive pluralist perspective regarding religious pluralism, arrives at an affirmative answer regarding their salvific significance and their lasting role in the overall plan of salvation. He views religious pluralism not only as a reality with a

theological significance in the order of salvation of their followers, but also they have their autonomy, as willed by God in principle.

Dupuis holds that religious pluralism 'in principle' is willed by God in accordance with his universal design for all humankind. God has established saving covenants with all peoples. God's "diverse ways" of speaking with humankind (cf. Heb 1:1-2) may be taken to refer to his presence and communication in other religious traditions. Moreover, he speaks of other religions as "participated mediations" in the "one mediation" of Christ. If "other paths" have authentic religious value for salvation, then it is possible to speak of religious pluralism as willed by God in principle, for the ways by which people can find God, which have been traced by God himself. Nevertheless, he affirms an asymmetrical complementarity between Christianity and other religions. Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of the existence of "elements of truth and grace" in other religions does not cancel out the unsurpassed and unsurpassable transcendence of God's self-manifestation in Jesus Christ.

2. Christological Unity in the Diversity of Religions

Dupuis considers that an open inclusive Christocentrism, without being construed as one opposed to theocentrism, as the proper approach to indicate the universal saving presence of Christ in the world and hence in all religions. Such a perspective is capable of combining and explaining the two basic statements of faith regarding God's economy of salvation: God's universal salvific will includes all humankind and Jesus Christ as the one and universal mediator of salvation (cf. 1Tim 2:4-6). It hinges on the relationship between salvific design of the Father and the Christ-event, which is the "mystery of his will" (Eph. 1:9). This inclusive Christocentrism is to be unfolded from a Trinitarian perspective regarding the history of salvation. Dupuis finds an internal unity between the Christocentric and the theocentric models. The Christocentrism of Christian tradition is not opposed to theocentrism. Jesus is the "medium" of God's encounter with human beings. Christian theology is theocentric by being Christocentric.¹⁰²⁴ The point of unity between Christocentrism and theocentrism lies in the fact that while God is the goal and unity of all humankind's religious striving, he has placed his Son, Jesus Christ at

¹⁰²⁴ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 92, 167, 176.

the centre of his universal plan of salvation. He portrays Jesus Christ as the universal and primordial sacrament (*Ursakrament*) of saving grace, including that grace which is operative in other religions. He holds together the constitutive and universal character of the Christ event and the salvific significance of other religious traditions within the one, universal plan of God for all humankind. Hence, Christ is the norm against which all religious traditions are to be measured and the catalyst for the operation of the Spirit of God, who being present and operative in and diverse religious traditions, draws all to the Father. In way of pointing out a universal saving presence of the pre-existent Logos, he makes a distinction between the saving action of the incarnate Word (*Logos ensarkos*) and the saving action of the eternal Word (*Logos asarkos*). But he does not separate them from each other, nor denies their personal identity.¹⁰²⁵

Dupuis affirms Jesus as the definitive revelation of God and constitutive Saviour. However, his Christology, being rooted in the Christian tradition and the conciliar and post-conciliar theology, differs from that of the pluralists. For him, there is only one Christ who is Jesus of Nazareth, the God-man and mediator. It is the nature of Jesus Christ, as both divine and human (infinite and finite, respectively), that makes his mediation unique and universal for the salvation of all humankind. Jesus Christ is the constitutive universal Saviour of all people and the Christ event belongs to the essence of salvation. In other words, the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is truly the cause of salvation for all human beings. The Christ-event seals a bond of union between God and humankind, a bond that can never be broken, and that constitutes the channel through which God has chosen to share the divine life with human beings. So, faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour does not simply consist in believing that he is the way of salvation for me; but it also means believing that humankind has been saved in him and through him.¹⁰²⁶ This assertion of the constitutive uniqueness of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all does not diminish the salvific role of the other religions and their saving figures in God's plan of salvation.

3. Pneumatological Dimension of the Plurality of Religions

Dupuis gives a proper emphasis to the pneumatological dimension of the economy of salvation. The Holy Spirit serves as the dynamic link between the saving

¹⁰²⁵ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp.195 – 196.

¹⁰²⁶ Cf. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, pp. 167, 171.

plan of God and its realisation in Christ. He considers the universal presence of the Spirit in the life of the religious others and in their religions working towards the one and the same economy of salvation. The Christ-event constitutes the goal of the anticipated action of the Logos-to-become-man, and of the Spirit's universal working in the world before the incarnation; both are oriented toward the Christ-event, making it possible to consider the Spirit as the "Spirit of Christ" from the beginning of salvation history. The saving work of Christ and his Spirit are thus inseparable aspects of a single economy of salvation. The work of the Holy Spirit before the incarnation ought to be seen "in view" of the Christ-event, but this does not mean that the whole action of the Holy Spirit is reduced to the action of the Word-incarnate. Dupuis holds that the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit in religious others and in their religions cannot be reduced to a function of the risen Christ. The active presence of the Holy Spirit in the world of diverse religions and cultures is "unbounded." The Word and the Holy Spirit can be seen as the "two hands" of God, which "have and keep their own share" in that economy "in accordance with their character."¹⁰²⁷ Thus, he maintains the unity in the universal salvific economy of the Triune God and the constitutive necessity of the Christ-event in that economy. His insight into the universal presence and work of the Spirit in other religions provides him a necessary link to indicate their salvific role in one and the same economy of salvation.

For Dupuis salvation history is salvation in history. There are contingencies in salvation history, because they are part of history. These contingencies, however, do not destroy God's economy of salvation for humankind that included both Israel and other people lived under one God.¹⁰²⁸ Dupuis' understanding of salvation history leads him to go further in affirming that a certain divine revelation can be found in other religious traditions and that authentic religious experiences and the sacred books of other religions can serve as a "channel through which God says something through his Word and his Spirit to the nations."¹⁰²⁹ Dupuis not only affirms the elements of revelation in other religions and their sacred scriptures, but also the

¹⁰²⁷ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp.195 – 198.

¹⁰²⁸ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, pp. 233 – 247.

¹⁰²⁹ Cf. Dupuis, "The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited", *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 234.

complementarity of such revelation for what is less emphasized by revelation in Jesus Christ. Although God's revelation in Jesus Christ retains the "transcendence and unsurpassable character" of its fullness of divine revelation, such "fullness," for Dupuis, however, it is in terms of quality rather than of quantity. God's revelation in Jesus Christ is "decisive and outdoes in quality all other revelation of God in history," but "does not exhaust the mystery of God." "More divine truth may be found in the sum total of the sacred scriptures of religious traditions than is available in the Christian tradition alone."¹⁰³⁰ Dupuis holds for a qualified complementarity, that is, "asymmetrical complementarity of revelation" found in other religious traditions to the revelation in Jesus, but they are in no way "parallel" to it. He maintains the unique and transcendent character of revelation in Jesus Christ. It does not need to be "supplemented" by other revelations. The incarnation of Jesus Christ, according to him, marks "the unsurpassed – and unsurpassable – depth of God's self-communication to human beings."¹⁰³¹

4. Meeting of the Religions in the Trinity

Dupuis's *Trinitarian-Spirit Christology*, a theological foundation for his inclusive pluralism, represents a qualitative leap in contemporary Catholic theology. This perspective allows him to recognize the ongoing presence and activity of the Word Incarnate and of the Spirit of God in the world, in the cultures and religious life of people. Such a perspective, in keeping with God's universal plan of salvation, makes it possible to affirm a multiplicity of "ways" toward human salvation, all participating in the unique mediation of Christ, by the presence and work of the Spirit. He seeks to reconcile two positions of exclusivism and pluralism, which traditionally have been placed against each other. Dupuis proposes a Trinitarian Christology as a "model" for his theology of religions. In this way, he is able to affirm the universality of Jesus Christ as Saviour while asserting the salvific value or even the validity of other religions for their adherents.

His '*theocentric Christocentrism*,' model, thus, is totally different from the pluralist "paradigm" that denies the universal saving action of Jesus Christ. It is also

¹⁰³⁰ Cf. Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 388.

¹⁰³¹ Cf. Dupuis, "The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited", *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 240.

different from exclusivism, which denies salvation outside the Church. In this way, Dupuis goes beyond Christocentrism and theocentrism, which, in fact, call for each other. In other words, Dupuis takes the claims of pluralism and exclusivism, and tries to reconcile them in his new theological synthesis of inclusivist pluralism. An inclusivist perspective, while asserting the truth that Jesus Christ is God's decisive revelation and constitutive Saviour of all humankind, opens the door to a sincere acknowledgement of the salvific value of other religions, which participate in the mediation of Christ to become pointers of salvation to their followers. In highlighting the positive role that these religions play in the economy of salvation, he is adopting a pluralist position. For the pluralists, however, the many religions represent independently valid paths to salvation without any necessary relation to the mediation of Jesus Christ. Dupuis rejects such a position and clearly affirms that Christ is always implicated in the single economy of salvation. The identity of Jesus Christ as the only-begotten Son of God, namely, his divinity alone speaks for his implication for all salvation as the universal constitutive mediator.

5. The Accomplishment of God's Universal Plan of Salvation in the Reign of God

Dupuis deals the question of precisely how God's saving presence is mediated to the world. The concern for mediation explains the Church's understanding of itself as an essentially sacramental reality, that is to say, a visible and historical body by means of which God's saving presence is offered to humanity, especially through its celebration of the sacraments liturgical life centred on Eucharistic sacrifice. Since Vatican II, the Church regards the presence of God as universal, able to operate outside the confines of Christianity, in the hearts and minds of religious others. Post-conciliar theology has recognised the Spirit's active presence in their religious life, scriptures and religious rites and prayers; since God is Spirit and every prayer springs from the Spirit who prays in us, we can truly worship him in Spirit and truth. The fundamental question that Dupuis asks is precisely how this presence is mediated to the believers of other religions. His answer is that the most likely means is their religious traditions as such. This does not mean that he regards other religions as equal partners with Christianity in God's plan of salvation. Whatever value they possess, they owe to their "participation" in the saving work of the one mediator, Jesus Christ. For him, the salvific mediations found in other religious traditions are

“participated mediations.” They are in no way “parallel” or “alternative” to the mediation of Christ, nor do they contradict the mediation of Jesus. Rather they are essentially “relational” to the mediation of Christ and “ordained” to it.¹⁰³² While suggesting that other religions are “participated mediations” in the mediation of Jesus, he also unambiguously affirms the nature of the Church as the sacrament of the mystery of salvation. His idea of the relationship between the Church and the Reign of God makes clearer the place of the Church in relation to human salvation and in history. While maintaining the distinction between the Reign of God and the Church, he continues to maintain the indivisible bond between the two. The Church is not identical with the Kingdom of God but is its sign and instrument. The Reign of God in history is a reality that extends beyond the boundaries of the Church and is shared by both Christians and the members of other religions. The Church stands in a unique relation to the Reign of God, which it is called to serve and announce.

So to sum up, in the final analysis, Dupuis considers that God alone is absolute and not the religions. God, who shows no partiality, reveals himself to all his creatures, transcending the boundaries set by human concepts, categories and structures. He appreciates the richness and variety of the gifts poured out on the humankind in a Trinitarian rhythm, in and through the various religious traditions that have helped people to seek God and find him. Hence he asks, “Is not God perhaps “greater than our hearts” (1Jn 3:20) – and his plan of salvation larger than our theological ideas?”¹⁰³³ The universal plan of God for the salvation of all humankind is the one and the same for all humankind. Hence, God has envisioned religious pluralism in his sole design for the salvation of all humankind. Jesus Christ is the unique universal mediator in God’s economy of salvation. Salvation occurs in the universal presence and operation of the Holy Spirit without being confused or separated from the salvific mediation of Christ. The Church, being the universal sacrament and the fullness of God’s gift of salvation, the whole economy of salvation is oriented and ordained to it. While the Reign of God is the manifestation and the realization of God’s plan of salvation in all its fullness, the Church is the universal sacrament of God’s gift of salvation for all humankind; and so it is at the service of the

¹⁰³² Cf. Dupuis, “The Truth Will Make You Free: The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited”, *Louvain Studies*, 24 (1999), p. 246.

¹⁰³³ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, p. 4.

Reign of God. The religious others, along with their religions, find their unity in the Reign of God. Their religions, thus, participate in the unique mediation of Christ, by the universal presence operation of the Spirit in them. The Spirit works in them toward the actualisation of the plan of salvation and helps them for their convergence in the Reign of God. The eschatological fullness of the Reign of God is the common final achievement of Christianity and the other religions.

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