

WESTON JESUIT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

CONSTITUTING IDENTITY – MEDIATING DIALOGUE
A Retrieval and Evaluation
Of Jacques Dupuis's Approach to the
Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ

A Thesis Submitted
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In Memory of

Jacques Dupuis, S.J.

And For All Who “Negotiate the Broken Middle”

With Gratitude and

Admiration

(I)n Christ God was
reconciling the world to himself,
not counting their trespasses against them,
and entrusting to us the message
of reconciliation
(2 Cor 5:19)

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INTRODUCTION

Between Paradox and Dilemma

The heightened contemporary awareness of religious pluralism tends to accentuate the tension between two beliefs of the Christian faith: on the one hand, the belief in Jesus Christ as *only* Lord and Savior, and on the other hand, the belief in the divine will for *universal* salvation (see, e.g., 2 Tm 2:3-6). The tensive relationship between these two beliefs approaches that of a paradox, when one considers that, approximately two thousand years since the advent of Christianity, Christians still constitute a minority of the world's population.¹ The tension between these two beliefs, which often finds expression in the issue of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, also constitutes a serious challenge for Christian theology for several important reasons.

First, if theology might still be thought of as faith seeking understanding (and praxis), then this issue presents Christian theology with an internal problem of self-understanding. Is the tension really a hopeless contradiction, such that one or other of the beliefs needs to be abandoned or reformulated? Or is there a way to arrive at some contemporary reconciliation between them both? And what consequences does the adoption of either of the foregoing alternatives have for Christian identity?

Further, the issue is not just a theoretical conundrum, but has important practical implications, especially for how the church conceives of and carries out its mission in

¹ According to a rough approximation offered by an internet website, Christians currently constitute thirty three percent of the world's population (see <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0904108.html>).

the world today. For example, how should Christians conduct themselves in a multi-religious milieu? How is the church to evangelize? And what are the theological bases for its missionary strategies? What is the proper relationship between dialogue and proclamation? Perhaps more concretely, the issue can also give rise to pastoral problems, especially in more recently evangelized territories. For example, the thought that after death one might not be reunited with those members of one's family who do not share one's Christian faith sometimes presents an obstacle to the spread of the gospel.

Related to this second factor is a third, which highlights the ways in which the issue of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is related to questions of social justice and peace. Historically, the global spread of Christianity has been associated with an imperialistic, often unjust and violent imposition of Christian belief on colonized peoples. And the relations between Christians and the other religions, especially Islam, continues to require close attention. To cling to an understanding of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ that unduly limits the scope of the saving will of God might be seen as a potential hindrance to more harmonious and peaceful relations among the world's religions.

From a more spiritual point of view, one might suppose that contemporary religious pluralism constitutes a sign of the times, a way in which God is speaking to the churches, calling all to a closer relationship. The ability to discern and respond to this call presupposes the possibility of somehow relating the perceived goodness in the

different religions to the Crucified and Risen One whom Christians believe to be the paradigmatic embodiment of the divine address to humanity (see Hb 1:1-2).

Singapore

All the above factors find resonance, at least to some degree, in the particular context from which this author writes. In the small island nation of Singapore, religious pluralism is just next door. According to a recent census, Christians constitute approximately fifteen percent of the population fifteen years and older (about five percent Roman Catholic, and ten percent other Christians), roughly on par with Muslims. About fifty one percent are adherents of Buddhism, Taoism or other traditional Chinese religions, and about four percent are Hindus (see, e.g., <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/keystats/c2000/religion.pdf>). Sikhism and other religions make up the rest.

For the most part, the different religions coexist peacefully and harmoniously. However, although concern for interreligious dialogue is not absent, the forms of Christianity that seem to attract more adherents tend to be those of a more evangelical variety, emphasizing the acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's personal Lord and Savior as sole criterion for salvation. Even among Roman Catholics, a concern to preserve orthodoxy and Christian identity, and to guard against syncretism, is clearly discernible. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that, in addition to the fact that Christianity remains a minority religion in a multi-religious milieu, this concern is related, at least to some extent, to the way in which Christian missionaries tended to portray the faith as a

contrast religion, emphasizing the need for converts to turn away from apparently *pagan* traditional practices, such as *ancestor worship* and the use of joss sticks. As such, in Singapore, Christian belief and practice remains largely untouched by the local cultures.

More broadly, and perhaps more profoundly, one might relate this tendency to the fact that Singaporeans are mainly descendants of immigrants, living in a relatively young nation state. *Founded* in 1819, Singapore remained a British colony until 1963 – when it became part of then newly independent Malaya – becoming a sovereign nation two years later, in 1965. This colonial history, together with the fact that Singapore has long been a cosmopolitan port city, means that Singaporeans live in a confluence of cultures and religions. Little surprise then that, consciously or not, issues of identity are often of primary concern, not least for Christians.

Reflecting upon this context, however, one cannot help but wonder if the present state of affairs is less than ideal. Quite apart from the difficult and crucially important issue of the need for Christian belief and practice to reflect its particular cultural context, one is led to wonder if Christians of Singapore, and other multi-religious populations, need to consider the religious others whom they encounter everyday more as partners in dialogue – or bearers of a divine call to a closer relationship – than simply as so many potential candidates for baptism. How might such a consciousness be cultivated? What theological attitudes need to be retrieved, revised, or rejected? And if such a consciousness does indeed come about, how might it affect the

constitution of Christian identity? Encounters are often transformative, and transformation is always risky. How does one prevent the fragmentation of Christian identity even as one strives to dialogue with and respond faithfully to the God who may be present in the other religions?

Our discussion of the contemporary context of religious pluralism has thus progressed from the issue of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ to the twin concerns that constitute two horns of a contemporary Christian dilemma: how to safeguard the constitution of an integral Christian identity and how to mediate interreligious dialogue. Given that this dilemma is born of the felt desire, responsibility and obligation to remain faithful to the God who wills the salvation of all in Jesus Christ, theological reflection cannot but find ways to address it.

A Thesis on Jacques Dupuis

It is thus with some sense of urgency and of enthusiasm that this thesis turns to the work of the Belgian Roman Catholic theologian, Jacques Dupuis, who has struggled courageously and passionately with these issues for much of his career, and not without some cost to himself. His research has culminated in his advocating a *Christian theology of religious pluralism*. This thesis will examine how, in articulating his project, Dupuis deals with the issue of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. The aim will be to show that a careful retrieval and evaluation of Dupuis's work in this regard is helpful for both constituting Christian identity and mediating interreligious dialogue today.

The thesis is divided into two parts of two chapters each. The task of the first part is *retrieval*. In the first chapter, we shall present a survey of pertinent aspects of the contemporary global *context* for theological reflection, and of recent developments in the *theology of religions*. The aim will be both to provide a horizon within which to situate Dupuis's work, and to argue for the continued viability of his approach. The second chapter will then focus specifically on the task of interpreting the *text*, so to speak, that is Dupuis's theological itinerary and project, in terms of a contemporary re-negotiation of Christian identity in response to the challenging experience of inter-religious encounter.

The second part will be concerned with *evaluation*. In carrying out this task, both chapters in this part will adopt a dialogical strategy. Chapter three will evaluate Dupuis's substantive propositions – or the *matter* of his project – concerning the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, by facilitating a dialogue between Dupuis and the two Vatican documents which relate directly to his work. In a similar fashion, chapter four will bring Dupuis's theological *method* into dialogue with a recent proposal for a postmodern approach to theology, with the aim of finding a nexus between Dupuis's substantive positions and his methodology.

The hope is that, by the conclusion of the study, some valuable lessons might be learnt that might be helpful for addressing the dual challenge presented by the religions to Christianity: that of constituting identity and mediating dialogue.

PART I
RETRIEVAL

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT

The specific focus and concern of this thesis is to examine and evaluate one aspect of Jacques Dupuis's *Theology of Religious Pluralism*: his approach to the Christian notion of the uniqueness and universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ. However, Dupuis's work is better appreciated when viewed within the context of the so-called *theology of religions*, which, in turn, can be seen as a particular response of Christian theology to a rapidly changing *global context* characterized especially by an ever increasing awareness of religious pluralism.

Therefore, it will be the task of this first chapter to survey this dual concentric context within which Dupuis's work might be situated. The approach will be more synthetic than historical. By this is meant that the concern will be to make connections between various aspects of the contemporary situation, without any claim to being exhaustive. The discussion will take place in two parts. First, we shall examine three significant interrelated aspects of the contemporary global context – globalization, shifts in the intellectual climate, and the rise of contextual theologies – and consider how these aspects converge upon the question of religious identity. This will set the stage for the second part of the chapter, which will focus more specifically upon the theology of religions. We shall begin the second part by briefly examining the well known and still current, albeit much critiqued, three-fold typology – *exclusivism*, *inclusivism* and *pluralism* – before exploring how recent scholarship has sought to revise, revolutionize or repudiate it. In particular, attention will be paid to the recent

emphasis on the constitution of Christian identity through interreligious encounters, as well as to the question of whether a theology of religions is still a viable enterprise in contemporary theology.

Contemporary Global Context

Globalization

The proximate contextual factor that accounts most for the growing interest in the so-called *theology of religions*, is the increasingly acute awareness of the phenomenon of religious pluralism. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen puts it this way:

Other religions, which used to be distant, exotic topics for enjoyable conversation, if not a vague reality that could be totally ignored, have come much closer to us whether we live in the West or elsewhere. No doubt the existence of and communication among world religions is the most significant challenge to and opportunity for the Christian church in the new millennium. With regard to theology, it is no longer possible to limit the consideration of theological topics to the Christian sphere; we must take into account the questions and answers posed by other religions. *This state of affairs naturally raises a host of questions that are not new... but that have gained a new urgency because of globalization* (Kärkkäinen 2003, 17, emphasis mine).

It would seem, then, that some understanding of the nature and effects of globalization is a prerequisite for contemporary theology in general, and the theology of religions in particular.

Although “everything about globalization turns out to be contested terrain, even its definition,” several key aspects have been identified: the technical, economic, political and cultural (Massaro 2002, 1). These aspects correspond to Anthony Giddens’ description of globalization in terms of four “overlapping trends” indicating that “something very new is happening in the world”: the world-wide communications

revolution, the advent of the weightless economy, a post-1989 (fall of communism) world, and “the transformations happening on the level of daily life... (such as) the growing equality between men and women” (Giddens and Hutton 2000, 1-2).

With a more explicitly theological agenda, Robert Schreiter, after presenting a similar analysis of globalization, summarizes its effects in terms of the *extension of modernity* and the *compression of the world*. The former refers to the “spread of modernization through the extension of its first product, Western culture,” such that “homogenizing patterns are becoming stronger and stronger as time goes on.” Even so, this does not result in the total homogenization of local cultures. “What becomes ever clearer is that the globalization process creates plural modernities.... plural forms that resemble one another yet are embedded in and reflect local cultures” (Schreiter 1997, 9, 10, 11).

“Compression,” on the other hand, refers to the way in which “(t)echnological innovations compress our sense of time and space. Events happening around the world are now experienced instantaneously.... Our sense of space is also compressed, symbolized in the computer chip... If *boundaries* play an important role in the semiotics of identity by helping us define who we are by who we are not, they are now so crisscrossed by globalizing processes that they *seem to have lost their identity-conferring power*” (Schreiter 1997, 11-12, emphasis mine).

The theological significance of this discussion is highlighted well by Schreiter, when he says: “the important moment for cultural (and theological) production becomes the line of encounter between the global and the local, where the two come up against

each other.... some of the most salient features of religion and theology today can best be described from the vantage point of the glocal” (Schreiter 1997, 12). And what is at stake in this cultural and theological production is nothing less than cultural and religious identity. “Fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change.’ It is not surprising, then, that identity should become an issue in a time marked by the pressures of globalization, a time of migration, compression of space, and intense cultural interaction” (Schreiter 1997, 68).

Intellectual Shifts

In describing the challenge of pluralism for Christianity, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen attributes the “more positive and tolerant attitude toward other religions (at least in part to)... the radical transformation of intellectual climate brought about by the Enlightenment.... and the rise of classical liberalism that followed” (Kärkkäinen 2003, 19). For Kärkkäinen, the resultant shift from pre-Enlightenment Christian imperialism and dogmatism to “a new appreciation of the ethical life and love of neighbor as the essence of religion” helped to underscore the commonalities between Christianity and the other religions (Kärkkäinen 2003, 19-20). To this benefit we might also add the advances consequent upon the scientific revolution and the increased attention to the values of freedom and equality.

There is, however, also a shadow side to modernity, which becomes clearer in the latter’s decline. According to Dan Stiver, a hermeneutical theologian inspired by the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: “Before theology had fully caught up to modernity, modernity began to collapse, in many respects taking theology with it” (Stiver 2001, 3).

And this decline also signaled the advent of postmodernity or postmodernism. This emergence of postmodernity has also been linked to the phenomenon of globalization.

Globalization... is not a process that affects just the former periphery or other, still untouched areas. It affects the West itself in a process of reflexivity whereby the outflowing of modernization curves back upon the West... (bringing) a sense of contingency or risk that has long been the experience of countries on the periphery. The risks caused by pharmaceuticals and chemical accidents, but especially by acts of terrorism of those profoundly opposed to the inroads that modernity has made into traditional societies... create a profound sense of unease and contingency in lives that modernity had promised to insulate from such vulnerabilities.... When globalization offers only progress that provides no *telos* that can explain why things have come to be as they are; when efficiency promised cannot be delivered; when the technical rationality does not address the sense of dread and fear that continues to arise, postmodernism in one or other of its forms will likely emerge. It may express itself in an anarchism that denies all value, or in a burrowing into a specific community or way of life as an enclave providing insulation against the contingencies one faces. Or, in the flood of information, it may seek the authoritarian ways of a guru who appears to be able to make the whole thing stop (Schreier 1997, 13).

While Stiver acknowledges that, like globalization, the meaning of postmodernity is much debated, he believes that “there is enough similarity among the various versions of postmodernism to identify a significant paradigm change in the West” (Stiver 2001, 4-5). First, “postmodernists almost universally reject the Western tradition’s demand for absolute foundations, clarity, and certainty, paired with its assumption of a dualistic intellectualism” (Stiver 2001, 5). Drawing from the work of Richard Bernstein, Stiver relates the notion of *foundationalism* to an *objectivism* which “includes the need for both a rock-solid foundation and a rigorous methodology” (Stiver 2001, 6). This concern for absolute foundations is rooted in the desire for an absolute form of knowledge, impregnable to doubt and ambiguity.

The effect on theology is seen in “how the conservative wing of theology attempted

to find certain foundations in an inerrant theory of scripture and how the liberal wing sought such indubitable foundations in human experience.... We live... in the ruins of the attempt” (Stiver 2001, 7). Failure to achieve this incredibly high standard of knowledge leads to a “*polar oscillation between objectivism and relativism* (which) is a striking feature of the modern paradigm.... (T)he concern for relativism when the parameters of knowledge are loosened is itself a modernist... reaction” (Stiver 2001, 7-8). Second, “while postmodernists do not reject all aspects of the modern turn to the self.... (t)hey do reject the atomistic self... in favor of a socially constructed and connected self. They usually see the self holistically and as essentially embodied. Knowledge is... integrally immersed in the body and in the world” (Stiver 2001, 10).

In terms of the constructive alternatives proposed by postmodernism, Stiver highlights the following aspects: An *epistemological holism* is advocated, which emphasizes the way in which concepts are embedded in a “form of life.” This is connected to the making of an *hermeneutical turn*, in which all knowledge is believed to be rooted in interpretation. Postmodernists also tend to have made the so-called *linguistic turn*: the realization that all knowledge is mediated by language. Expressions of this *turn* include the understanding of speech as a kind of act, the significance of metaphor and narrative, as well as the questioning of *metanarratives*. Finally, with the rejection of *foundationalism*, in postmodernism *argumentation proceeds dialogically*. Although inadequate according to the standards of modernity, the knowledge gained in this way is considered sufficient for practical certainty (see Stiver 2000, 10ff.).

In addition, in his description of the *postmodern condition*, Kevin Vanhoozer speaks

of “a return of the repressed” (Vanhoozer 2003a, 16). In contrast to the modern tendency to exclude and emasculate that which could not be comprehended within its universalizing and totalizing *metanarratives*, “(c)ommon to several currents of postmodern thought is an anti-systematic impulse, ‘a predilection for... everything that had been left out or relegated to the margins’” (Vanhoozer 2003a, 16). Vanhoozer cites the example of Emmanuel Levinas, whose ethics as ‘first philosophy’ “is not about moral systems or following rules; it is rather about respecting particularity and difference” (Vanhoozer 2003a, 16). Further, for Vanhoozer, “the return of the repressed includes the return of theology as a metadiscourse,” the implications of which we shall see shortly (Vanhoozer 2003a, 21).

So far, we have highlighted the positive aspects of postmodernity. But is there not also a shadow side? Two points in Vanhoozer’s account are pertinent in this regard. First, he proposes a theological deconstruction of postmodernity that reverses the tendency to “focus on the postmodern as the condition of theology.” Instead, he suggests that the return of the repressed Christian *metadiscourse* might result in the possibility of locating modernity and postmodernity *within* the “theodrama that situates the human within the narrative of God’s creative and redemptive activity.... the story that relates both what God is doing in the world through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and what the world is doing in response.” In this way, postmodernity becomes “a properly *theological* condition” (Vanhoozer 2003a, 21).

From this perspective, which is characteristic of the so-called Yale School of narrative theology, Vanhoozer argues that both modernity and postmodernity can also

be viewed as *spiritual* conditions, and as such, are as susceptible to deformation as to formation. In spiritual terms the former would amount to idolatry. And, for Vanhoozer, while the idol of modernity is *pride*: “pride in human reason... human goodness... human accomplishments,” the idol of postmodernity is *sloth*: the sin that ““believes in nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die.’ *The question is whether certain forms of postmodernity act as corrosives to the conditions for the possibility of commitment, poisoning the will by depriving it of anything in which to believe ultimately*” (Vanhoozer 2003a, 23-24, emphasis in original).

It would seem then that the intellectual climates or conditions within which we find ourselves – be they pre-modern, modern or postmodern – are ambivalent realities. If so, the Christian theologian might ask whether and how to discern in them the light from the dark, so as to appropriate the former and reject the latter. One’s response to this question – and perhaps even the extent to which one will entertain it – will depend, *inter alia*, upon one’s philosophical and theological presuppositions. In particular, epistemological considerations, notions of how identity is constituted, as well as understandings of divine revelation, will be among the key determining factors.

To illustrate the point to some degree, we might consider the two theologians quoted above. For a hermeneut like Stiver – for whom all knowledge is interpretive and dialogue is an essential component in the unveiling of truth and the constitution of identity – the question will be a crucial one, which cannot be resolved without resorting to dialogical interaction with one’s context. On the other hand, from Vanhoozer’s

perspective – focused as it is on the primacy of the biblical narrative for Christian identity and truth – to the extent that the question is considered, the solution will seem more clear-cut, since a particular reading of the biblical narrative always trumps everything else.

Closely connected to this question of theology and (post)modernity is the issue of the proper relation between the gospel and the particular context within which it is located. This is an issue that is at the center of what has been described as “an important shift in perspective in theology in recent years”: the rise of the so-called *contextual theologies* (Schreiter 1985, 1).

Rise of Contextual Theologies

Schreiter describes this shift in perspective as follows: “While the basic purpose of theological reflection has remained the same – namely, the reflection of Christians upon the gospel in light of their own circumstances – much more attention is now being paid to how those circumstances shape the response to the gospel. This focus is being expressed with terms like ‘localization,’ ‘contextualization,’ ‘indigenization,’ and ‘inculturation’ of theology. Despite slightly different nuances in meaning, all of these terms point to the need for and responsibility of Christians to make their response to the gospel as concrete and lively as possible” (Schreiter 1985, 1).

Schreiter also underscores the impetus for this development by noting that contextual theologies

developed in the 1970s and 1980s in cultures and groups where the prevailing Enlightenment theologies of Europe and North America did not respond to local needs. That latter form of theology strove to present a reflection that was universal in

scope, mirroring the universal message of the Gospel which was the subject of its investigation... (It) did not take up the issues that were the most pressing in many local circumstances: the burden of poverty and oppression, the struggle to create a new identity after a colonial past, or the question of how to meet the challenge of modernization and the commodification of the economy in traditional culture and village life (Schreier 1997, ix, 1).

Further, contextual theology is not just to be seen as a new phenomenon, contingent upon particular exigencies of history. Rather, Stephen Bevans asserts that contextual theology is a “theological imperative” (Bevans 2002, 3). On the one hand, Bevans acknowledges that contextual theology is radically new, especially in that, contrary to the earlier prevailing conceptions of theology, it more explicitly recognizes the validity of present human experience for theological reflection. “And so today we speak of theology as having three *sources* or *loci theologici*: scripture, tradition and present human experience – or context.... (C)ontext in all its dimensions is the inevitable starting point of theological reflection today (Bevans 2002, 4, 5, 7).

On the other hand, however, contextualization is also traditional. “A study of the history of theology will reveal that every authentic theology has been very much rooted in a particular context in some implicit or real way” (Bevans 2002, 7). Among the notable examples of this is the use, in the patristic period, of the Greek philosophical term *homoousios* (consubstantial) to express the relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father. Another example would be Thomas Aquinas’ appeal to Aristotelian metaphysical categories to arrive at his synthesis of faith and reason. Hence, rather than a single static and monolithic deposit of faith, the Christian tradition can be seen as “a series of local (contextual) theologies, closely wedded to and responding to

different cultural conditions” (Schreiter 1985, 93).

Bevans goes on to indicate several external and internal factors that render contextualization a theological imperative. He begins with the external factors, although the internal ones are considered more important. His first external factor is the “*general dissatisfaction*, in both the First and Third Worlds, *with classical approaches to theology*” (Bevans 2002, 9, emphasis mine). In the First World, the understanding of theology as an unchanging and finished science has been rejected for being irrelevant to the times. Theologians from places other than the West have highlighted the incoherence between Western theological categories and their cultures. For example, the foundational Western metaphysical principle of non-contradiction does not gel with the Taoist idea of Yin and Yang, which is based upon the notion that all things participate in the reality of their opposites.²

The second external factor is the *oppressive nature of older approaches*. For example, “the Latin American theologians have discovered that the traditional theology, rather than speaking a word of hope to the marginalized masses of Latin America’s poor, has often been used ideologically to justify the status quo of the continued domination by the rich and powerful” (Bevans 2002, 10). And the third external factor is the *growing identity of local churches*. Contextual theologies constitute one important, albeit tentative, way in which these local churches express their “new consciousness of independence and self-worth” (Bevans 2002, 11).

² A notable exception might be Bonaventure’s notion of the *coincidence of opposites*. See, e.g., Cousins 1978.

Finally, the fourth external factor, which underlies the first three, is the distinction drawn by Bernard Lonergan between a classicist and an empiricist notion of culture. “If one works out of a classicist conception of culture, there can be only one theology – one that is valid for all times, all places, in all cultures. However, if one works out of an empirical notion of culture, there not only can be a theology for every culture and period of history; there must be” (Bevans 2002, 11).

Next, the internal factors that, for Bevans, render contextualization a theological imperative are those that spring from within the Christian faith itself. These are the belief in the incarnational nature of Christianity, the belief in the sacramental nature of reality, the shift in the understanding of divine revelation, the catholicity of the church, and the doctrine of the Trinity.

Belief in the incarnation emphasizes that God is *Emmanuel* (God with us). God acts and is to be encountered from within the context of human experience. It follows then that theological reflection should begin from this starting point. Another aspect of this notion is the idea that God is to be encountered in all of reality. “This is the continuing task of theology: to reveal God’s presence in a truly sacramental world” (Bevans 2002, 13). Also, there has been a shift from the more cognitive notion of revelation in terms of eternal, propositional truths to a more interpersonal understanding of revelation as “the offer of God’s very self to men and women by means of concrete actions and symbols in history and in individuals’ daily life” (Bevans 2002). This new understanding points in turn to the importance of concrete human contexts as privileged meeting places with God.

Next, as a *mark* of the church, catholicity can be understood not just in terms of “universality,” but also as “the dimension of the church that champions and preserves the local, the particular.... Only as the church enters into serious dialogue with every culture can it be a witness to the ‘Pleroma’ that is Jesus Christ” (Bevans 2002, 15). And finally, contemporary retrievals of the doctrine of the Trinity have emphasized the notion of God as “a dynamic, relational community of persons, whose very nature it is to be present and active in the world, calling it and persuading it toward the fullness of relationship that Christian tradition calls salvation... (And so) Christian theologians need to do theology contextually because God is present and acts contextually” (Bevans 2002, 15).

In addition to these factors, we might also note that contemporary insights into the human condition in general and human knowing in particular – consequent upon the shifts in the intellectual climate described above – have served to further buttress the notion of the inevitability and indispensability of contextual theologies. For example, the notion of human existence as embodied and characterized by “social historicity.... implies the constant inevitable changes that are wrought by time itself... (and) not only is human existence as a whole a social phenomenon, but also each human person has been socially constituted” (Haight 2001, 3, 4). Hence theology, indeed any field of human knowing, cannot but be contextual and perspectival. Human knowledge is conditioned by its context and so always proceeds on the basis of certain prejudices, or biases. To reject the contextuality of human knowing would be to operate under these prejudices in a willfully unreflective manner.

This new focus on the contextual nature of the theological enterprise raises a number of crucial issues. Methodological questions include the form that theology should take, the proper practitioners of theology, and whether a non-participant in a particular context can theologize for, or from the perspective of, that context. There are also issues regarding the basic theological orientation to be taken. For example, should christology begin from a *dogmatic* starting point, or should it take a *genetic* approach?³ But perhaps the most crucial issue to be faced is that of religious (Christian) identity: How can one remain contextually engaged without compromising one's religious (Christian) identity or, in other words, lapsing into *syncretism*?

Religious Identity and Cultural Contexts

All three aspects of the global context we have been examining might be seen to converge upon (and complicate) the question of Christian identity. For example, Schreiter suggests three ways in which globalization has led to a change in the very notion of context for theology:

First of all, context as a concept has become increasingly *deterritorialized*.... Boundaries today are increasingly not boundaries of territory but boundaries of difference.... (that highlight) issues of difference rather than elements of commonality as the basis of identity.... Second, contexts are becoming *hyperdifferentiated*.... people are now participating in different realities at the same time – there is multiple belonging... Third, contexts are more clearly *hybridized*. The purity of culture was probably always more an aspiration than a reality, but in a globalized world it becomes increasingly untenable as a concept" (Schreiter 1997, 26).

Schreiter's approach to this issue is that of an *intercultural hermeneutics* that

³ For a fuller discussion of the issues raised by contextual theologies, see Bevens 2002, ch. 2, and Schreiter 1985. For the difference between the *dogmatic* and *genetic* approaches, see the discussion of Dupuis's theological method below, in ch. 2.

“builds upon intercultural communication.... explores the conditions that make communication possible across cultural boundaries.... (and) presses the questions of the nature of meaning and of truth under those circumstances” (Schreiter 1997, 28). His response consists in arguing that “structurally, syncretism and synthesis are not different from each other.... (but) are attempts to form religious identity.... In that sense all change is syncretic and aims at being synthetic” (Schreiter 1997, 83).⁴ Schreiter’s argument includes an examination of some ways in which religious identities are formed,⁵ as well as the proposal that intercultural communication be carried out in conjunction with the use of various theological criteria for Christian identity – cohesiveness, worship, praxis, openness to critique from the tradition, and capacity for contributing to the tradition as well as critiquing other contextual theologies.⁶

⁴ Cp., e.g., George Lindbeck’s *postliberal theology*, which views religion in *cultural-linguistic* terms (see Lindbeck 1984).

⁵ Religious identity is often formed through a variety of forms of *resistance*, especially “because power plays such a strong role in cultural encounter, and because that encounter is often intrusive, unequal, and violent, the reaction to the encounter is not infrequently resistance..... A second set of identity formations might be called *hybridities*. Defined simply, a hybridity results from an erasure of a boundary between two (cultural or religious) entities and a redrawing of a new boundary.... A third formation of religious identity might be called hierarchical. By this is meant that church leadership or its intellectual elite try to move the cultural and religious mixing in a certain direction” (Schreiter 1997, 73, 74, 78).

⁶ “The first criterion... (cohesiveness), is concerned with how the proposal squares with Scripture and subsequent church tradition.... The second and third criteria (worship and praxis) both look to the performance of the proposal, in the community at prayer and in its larger praxis.... The fourth and fifth criteria – accepting the judgment of other churches on the proposal, and a willingness to give judgment of the proposals to others – are tied, at the intercultural communication level, to the churches’ communication across intercultural boundaries” (Schreiter 1997, 82). Also see, in general, Schreiter 1997, ch. 4, Schreiter 1985, 117ff., and Bevans 2002, 22ff.

For our purposes, what seems especially noteworthy is Schreiter's emphasis on the need for the churches to "develop theologies of culture" that consider questions such as: "How might cultures be carriers of God's grace? How does God work in cultures before Christianity is even present, or continue to work outside the forms of the visible Church? A theological approach to culture that is explicit sets up guidelines that can be used in determining what may be embraced and what may be rejected, especially when it appears in signs and codes less familiar to traditional Christianity" (Schreiter 1997, 81-82). This recommendation might be accepted with the proviso that such theologies of culture be rooted in concrete engagement with particular cultures and be sensitive to the differences among them. As such, perhaps a better appellation might be *theologies of cultures*.

It seems apparent that the above developments in the global context have tended to converge upon the question of Christian identity. This convergence mirrors recent developments in the theology of religions, which is closely related to the notion of contextual theologies, since the former is a response of Christian theology to a particular aspect of the contemporary context, namely, religious pluralism.

Theology of Religions

Theology of Religions & the Three-Fold Typology

"The most dramatic shift (in the focus of theology) in recent years has undoubtedly been the turn towards the problematic of the non-Christian religions.... Not surprisingly, the precise nature of this discipline is itself a subject of theological discussion" (Merrigan 1998, 338). "Being a fairly recent development in Christian

theology, theology of religions has not yet established its canons (Kärkkäinen 2003, 23). However, Terrence Merrigan, in particular, offers a description that he thinks will find wide acceptance.

The Christian theology of religions is that branch of theology which considers the nature and function of non-Christian religious traditions in the light of Christian faith in the salvific character of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, the Christian theology of religions begins its reflection on the non-Christian religious traditions in the conviction that God has acted to save humankind in Christ. One could say, therefore, that *the whole Christian theology of religions turns on the question of salvation* and its mediation to those outside the Christian dispensation (Merrigan 1998, 338-9, emphasis mine).

Till now, it has been customary to distinguish the various approaches in the field in terms of the three-fold typology developed by Alan Race (see Race 1983).⁷ The three types are considered mutually exclusive *paradigms*; one cannot hold one position without repudiating the other two.

Exclusivism... consists in the claim that no one can be saved who does not make an explicit confession of faith in Jesus Christ.... The most important sources for this theology include the work of Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Hendrik Kraemer (1888-1965).... *Inclusivism*... does not insist on an explicit confession of Christ or membership in the Christian Church.... but insists that Christ is always implicated in the salvific process and regards explicit Christian faith as the completion of every religious system. The most important representative of (this)... position is Karl Rahner.... *Pluralism*... insist(s) that salvation is possible in and through a variety of independent and more or less equally valid religious traditions. The most important representatives... include John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Paul Knitter (Merrigan 1998, 339).

Although still relied upon in contemporary scholarship,⁸ this threefold typology

⁷ Also note the earlier four-fold typology developed by Peter Schineller (Schineller 1977).

⁸ E.g., Heung-Gyu Kim opines that “the threefold typology... can be used as the most workable scheme to explicate the central features of the contemporary Christian theology of religions” (Kim 2000, 142).

has been strongly criticized in recent literature. For example, it has been observed that the typology “is basically a simplification of a highly complex issue, ‘forcing diverse materials into easily controlled locations.’... (T)his ‘paradigm approach’ to theology of religions... tends to serve the interests of the pluralist agenda only.... Hick’s ‘normative pluralism’ claims to represent the only theologically plausible account of today’s world of many religions (Barnes 2002, 8).

Further, the pluralist approach itself has also undergone much criticism on different counts (see, e.g., D’Costa 1990 and Serretti 2001). In particular, it is seen to spring from a concept of religion that is characteristic of Enlightenment Deism, which “gave privileged place to a transcendent Absolute reality, the ultimate object of human understanding, and was rooted in what developed into an all-pervading dualism of sacred and profane.... With an essentially ‘modern’ self-confidence in its ability to comprehend the world, normative pluralism is unable to respond to the difficult conceptual issues of identity and relationality with which the practice of what has come to be known as ‘inculturation’ challenges the Church” (Barnes 2002, 10-11).

Not only the threefold typology and the pluralistic paradigm, but even the very notion of a theology of religions, focused on the issue of the salvation of members of religions other than Christianity, has been criticized. The focus of this critique is on the assumption in the so-called *liberal theology* (which tends to characterize inclusivists and pluralists) that there is a universal religious experience common to all religions. As we have discussed above, such an *essentialist* approach to reality has been debunked by more postmodern perspectives.

Beyond the Theology of Religions and the Threefold Typology

Theologians have offered various alternatives. Some have chosen the path of *revision*. For example, as we shall see in later chapters of this thesis, Jacques Dupuis has argued for a change in terminology, reflecting a change in emphasis, from *theology of religions* to *theology of religious pluralism*. This shift heralds a concern to progress from the question of “whether and what religious traditions have to do with the mystery of the salvation of their adherents in Jesus Christ.... (to consider) what positive meaning the religious traditions themselves have in God’s overall plan of salvation”, or, in other words, from a religious pluralism *de facto* to a religious pluralism *de iure*.

Also, while Dupuis continues to operate out of a threefold typology, he considers the three types as *models* instead of *paradigms* (for more on this distinction see, Bevans 2002, ch. 3). While “models are descriptive” of aspects of reality and must thus be “combined in order to yield a comprehensive view of the reality concerned,” paradigms are “principles of understanding,” and are thus “mutually exclusive” (Dupuis 2002, 75). In this way, Dupuis seeks to formulate an “inclusive pluralism” or “pluralist inclusivism” which combines “inclusive Christocentrism” with “a true theocentric pluralism” (Dupuis 2002, 90).

In a recent book, the pluralist Paul Knitter seems to have adopted Dupuis’s terminology of *theology of religious pluralism* (see Knitter 2002, 3). He also offers a revised typology of four *models*. His names for the models reflect the different ways in which each one perceives the relationship between Christianity and the other religions: *replacement*, *fulfillment*, *mutuality*, and *acceptance*. Two related questions that might

be raised here are: first, the extent to which Knitter's fourth model serves as a mere catch-all category, and second, whether the typology does justice to the differences between the positions of the fourth model and those in the earlier three models, not to mention the differences among the former. For instance, it might be argued that in spite of the change in terminology, in general, the first three types are still focused upon the issue of salvation, whereas those in the fourth seek to transcend it.

Among those who have *repudiated* the threefold typology is Gavin D'Costa, who argues that both pluralistic and inclusivistic approaches inevitably "collapse into differing types of exclusivism," in the sense that they all inevitably approach the problem, consciously or not, from the standpoint of a particular tradition. For D'Costa, any approach, including his "form of Roman Catholic trinitarianism," cannot but be exclusivistic since all are "historically contingent tradition-specific forms of enquiry and practice that are *irreducibly different* (D'Costa 2000, 3, emphasis mine). From this perspective, the threefold typology is seen to be untenable, and must thus be abandoned. However, one might well question whether tradition-specificity can be equated with exclusivism. Do not inclusivists claim to operate from within the Christian tradition even as they seek to understand how salvation is mediated to the other religions?

In its emphasis on a rather robust understanding of tradition-specificity, D'Costa's approach bears some similarities to George Lindbeck's *cultural-linguistic* approach. Focusing on the *incommensurability* or *untranslatability* of the different religions, Lindbeck seeks to by-pass soteriological concerns by examining Israel's

biblical relationship with the other religions as a model for Christianity's relationship with its religious others in the present (see Lindbeck 1997). Knitter critiques this approach for its apparent *isolationism*, *fideism* and *dualistic* separation of language and experience (see Knitter 2002, 224ff.).

To be fair, however, Lindbeck's approach does not necessarily imply that religions are *incomparable* (see, e.g., Green 2002, esp. 227f.). Neither does it deny the need for engagement with other religions. For instance, Lindbeck emphasizes that "helping other religions is imperative" (Lindbeck 1997, 448). Still, arguably, Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach does tend to present an image of Christianity as having clearly defined and impermeable boundaries (cp., Vanhoozer, *supra*). As such, one might question whether Lindbeck sufficiently considers the fact that all *living* languages and cultures *evolve* as they interact with their particular milieu. Also one might well doubt the relevance of such an approach in the midst of a global context characterized by *deterritorialization*, *hyperdifferentiation*, and *hybridization* (see *supra*).

Another line of critique that also seems to repudiate, or at least to postpone consideration of, the very notion of a theology of religions is that mounted by the practitioners of *comparative theology*. In particular, James Fredericks asserts that "generally speaking, inclusivist and pluralist theologies of religion can be associated with the Liberal claim regarding a universal religious experience" (Fredericks 1995, 83). Fredericks goes on to argue as follows:

At this time in the history of Christianity, as Christian believers look beyond their own faith into a world of immense religious diversity, *a completely satisfactory account of the meaning of non-Christian religions is no longer possible....* None of the three

basic candidates for a theology of religions meets the standards set by the two criteria we have been discussing (namely, the need for Christians to learn skills for living both *responsibly* and *creatively* with non-Christian believers). This being the case, *the question of a theology of religions should be put aside for the time being. Abandoning the quest for a theology of religions* will seem outrageous to some. However, honesty to our historical situation requires that we look for new ways to respond to the diversity of religions today (Fredericks 1999, 165-166, emphasis mine).

In place of a theology of religions, Fredericks proposes a comparative theology conceived as “the attempt to understand the meaning of Christian faith by exploring it in the light of the teachings of the other religious traditions. The purpose of comparative theology is to assist Christians in coming to a deeper understanding of their own religious tradition. Doing Christian theology comparatively means that Christians look upon the truths of non-Christian traditions as resources for understanding their own faith. In this respect... comparative theology is a better way for Christians to respond creatively to the fact of religious diversity today” (Fredericks 1999, 139-140).

Although proceeding from a different direction, Claude Geffré also seems to have reached a similar conclusion. While favorable to Dupuis’s shift from a theology of religions to a theology of religious pluralism, Geffré thinks that this is “still saying too little.... The new paradigm of religious pluralism seems to be inviting us to reflect on what true *interreligious theology* or even a *dialogical* theology might be” (Geffré 2003, 54).⁹ Further, a recent contribution to the debate might be seen to have helped lay the conceptual foundations for just such an *interreligious theology* by exploring the ways in which Christian identity is constituted in the midst of religious pluralism.

⁹ Note that Dupuis also seems to see his approach as a form of “interreligious theology” (see, e.g., Dupuis 2002, 11).

Christian Identity and the Religions

In his book *Theology and The Dialogue of Religions* (Barnes 2002), Michael Barnes critiques prevailing approaches to the theology of religions for engaging in an *a priori* theology for dialogue, without actually reaping the benefits of concrete encounters with other religious traditions. In response, Barnes seeks to develop “a theology which arises from the various forms of dialogue with other religions.... a ‘theology of dialogue’ rather than a ‘theology for dialogue’” (Barnes 2002, ix). He begins by highlighting the dilemma posed to Christianity by the contemporary context of religious pluralism: “How to remain faithfully rooted in my own Christian vision of a time-honored truth and yet become open to and respectful of those committed to sometimes very different beliefs and values... (T)his dilemma has serious implications... for how the whole project of Christian theology is to be pursued in... an all-pervasive ‘context of otherness’” (Barnes 2002, 3).

For Barnes, inter-faith dialogue is a religious experience rooted in the Church’s dual relationship with God and people of other religions, an experience that necessarily impacts the Church’s own sense of identity. His aim is thus to describe the intrinsically theological and ethical dimensions of dialogue, and in so doing, to articulate an understanding of a Christian identity that is continually being formed in the context of such inter-faith experiences. What he seeks to present is “a theology of inter-faith dialogue which responds to the post-modern ‘context of otherness’.... (by arguing that the theology of religions) needs to be taken back into the centre of the Christian project of reflection on its experience of the Trinitarian God” (Barnes 2002, 15).

Barnes finds validation of his project in the inescapable *context of otherness* within which Christianity is situated, as exemplified by the way in which Christianity originates in the religion of the Israelite people. Thus even the symbolic language used by Christianity to articulate its own vision of reality is rooted outside itself. “Christian faith depends in some sense for its coherence on the living tradition of Judaism” (Barnes 2002, 65). Then, drawing from the work of historian Michel de Certeau and philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur, Barnes constructs a description of the ways in which Christian identity is continually being constituted in the context of ongoing encounters with religious others.

Specifically, Barnes draws upon de Certeau’s notions of “the returning other” and “heterology.” The former is not unlike the notion of the *return of the repressed* discussed above, except that, in contrast to Vanhoozer – who focuses on the *return* of the Christian metanarrative – what is highlighted here is the way in which the narratives repressed by the dominant Christian metanarrative continue to *haunt* the latter. *Heterology* refers to “a phenomenology: a description of the logic peculiar to the post-modern experience of limitation in the face of the other and the practices of negotiation which this experience calls forth” (Barnes 2002, 72).

Barnes then turns to Levinas and Ricoeur for guidance in negotiating a response to the question: “How to allow for the inevitability of the ‘alteration’ of the subject without risking its fragmentation?” (Barnes 2002, 68). In particular, he appropriates Ricoeur’s notion of a *narrative subjectivity* in which the subject is called to continually affirm its self-identity through time, in response to transformative encounters with the other. “The process of narration which establishes subjectivity has to be repeated, or,

rather, constantly rebuilt and reinforced in response to different encounters with the other.... (S)uch a repetition begins with the faithful obedience to the terms of the tradition... but... opens up and demands further stages of interpretation,” which consist in the recognition of the claim of the other upon the self, and the use of the imagination to “negotiate the middle” between the self and the other (Barnes 2002, 122).

In this process, “all narratives are particular and have a particular defining context.” They thus preclude presumptions of having “mastered the ‘supreme plot’” (Barnes 2002, 127). Barnes opines that Christian self-identity is also formulated through dialogical encounters with religious others according to the same Ricoeurian dialectic. And “such an account of the Christian self has clearly got ‘something to do with God’ – with its promise of continuing revelation of ‘seeds of the Word’” (Barnes 2002, 128). In the second part of his book, Barnes proceeds to illustrate the way in which this process *works* by describing various “particular ‘micro-discourses’ or studies which... reveal... (the) logic of practice in the way people respond to a present ‘haunted’ by the other” (Barnes 2002, 138).

In Barnes’ approach, the threefold typology is retained but given a radical reinterpretation. Barnes understands *all three* types as “theological *tendencies* which emphasize theological instincts or values – for example, the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love, which are to be developed within the actual process of dialogue – they can be understood not as mutually exclusive positions but as complementary perspectives which need somehow to be held together” (Barnes 2002, 8).

Thus, “‘Exclusivism’ witnesses to that *faith* which speaks of what it knows

through the specificity of tradition. ‘Inclusivism’ looks forward in *hope* to the fulfillment of all authentically religious truths and values. ‘Pluralism’ expresses that *love* which seeks always to affirm those values in the present” (Barnes 2002, 184, with emphasis). For Barnes, these *tendencies* or *virtues* enable Christians to dialogue with people of other religions while maintaining true to their Christian identity, even as they allow that identity to evolve through such encounters.

Clearly, this approach revolutionizes not just the threefold typology, but the whole notion of a theology of religions as well. For instance, whereas the prevailing understanding of the theology of religions “turns on the question of salvation and its mediation to those outside the Christian dispensation,” Barnes’ approach radically expands the discussion in the direction of the constitution of religious identity through inter-religious encounters (Merrigan 1998, 339). In so doing, it provides the conceptual underpinning for a Christian theology that is rooted in interreligious dialogue. Barnes’ contribution to interreligious theology is thus most significant, and might be seen to parallel Schreier’s work in contextual theologies. However, it does tend to raise the question of whether this development necessarily sounds the death knell for the theology of religions.

Whither the Theology of Religions?

Collectively, the critique of the theology of religions presented by those – like Barnes, Geffré and Fredericks – who advocate some form of *interreligious theology* might be seen to operate on both substantive and methodological levels. On the methodological level, what is emphasized is the need for theologians to formulate their

views of other religions *a posteriori*, or, in other words, on the basis of actual concrete interreligious encounters and study. On the substantive level, there seems to be a desire to transcend the theology of religions's tendency to appraise the other religions in exclusively soteriological terms. Instead, proponents of interreligious theology emphasize that concrete experience of inter-faith encounters should impact Christian theology in all aspects. Where does this critique leave the theology of religions?

At the methodological level, the emphasis on the need for theological reflection upon the other religions to be based upon concrete interreligious dialogue should be conceded. Clearly, especially given the contemporary global context discussed earlier, a viable theology of religions must have interreligious dialogue as its primary stimulus, while remaining faithful to the Christian tradition. And insofar as earlier approaches to theology of religions, especially those within, and influenced by, the pluralist paradigm, have tended to neglect the requirement of actual dialogue, revisions need to be made.¹⁰

On the other hand, however, it would also seem that the case for an interreligious theological methodology should not be overstated. For example, a

¹⁰ See, e.g., Dupuis 2001a, 18: "More than a new topic *for* theologizing, the theology of religions must be viewed as a new *way of doing theology*, in an interfaith context; a new *method* of theologizing in a situation of religious pluralism.... Such an 'interreligious' hermeneutical theology is an invitation to broaden the horizon of theological discourse; it should... lead to discover (sic) at a new depth the cosmic dimensions of the mystery of God, of Jesus Christ, and of the divine Spirit.... Such a theology, in effect, does not look at the praxis of interreligious dialogue merely as a necessary condition, premise, or even a first step; it further maintains a dialogical attitude at every stage of the reflection; it is theological reflection *on* and *within* dialogue."

theology of religions might be considered as operating sufficiently *a posteriori* if it proceeds from the basis of interreligious encounters on levels other than the academic, such as the dialogue of life, or of commitment to justice, or of prayer and contemplation (see, e.g., Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue 1991, § 42). Turning to the substantive aspect of the *interreligious* critique, the argument, especially of Fredericks, seems less convincing. The embrace of an interreligious *method* does not seem to imply the necessity of abandoning or even postponing theological reflection upon the nature and role of the other religions and their proper relation to Christianity. Clearly, given the conceptual fluidity of religion as a concept, the great diversity of religions, as well as the fact that religions and cultures are continually evolving, any theology of religions will have a provisional quality, limited by its particular context in time and space. But is this not the case with any field of theology, and of human knowledge in general? Finally, just as Schreiter notes the need for developing theologies of culture(s) as an aid to the negotiation of Christian identity in contextual theologies (see Schreiter 1997, 81ff.), the theology of religions might also be seen to perform an analogous, and no less important, role in the negotiation of Christian identity in dialogue with other religions.¹¹

Still, the feasibility and even desirability of a theology of religions does not negate the criticisms leveled against the prevailing three-fold paradigm approach and

¹¹ See also Stephen Duffy's argument for "the compatibility, indeed the necessity of *both* theologies of the religions and comparative theologies. Neither by itself is adequate for a theology that wants seriously to bring Christianity into relation with the world's other great religious traditions" (Duffy 1999, 106).

the pluralist theology associated with it. As such, new approaches and means of ordering the field need to be, and are indeed being, explored. In particular, conceptual boundaries need to be continually revisited and revised as part of a general effort to continually negotiate Barnes' dilemma of fidelity to self-identity in the midst of concrete engagement with religious others. It is within the context of this challenge, posed especially by the reality of religious pluralism, that we shall examine Jacques Dupuis's approach in the chapters that follow.

Summary Observations

Before proceeding, let us bring this chapter to a close with the following summary observations: The *contemporary global context*, characterized especially by *globalization* and shifts in the *intellectual climate* from premodernity to modernity and postmodernity, necessitates changes both in *what* theology reflects upon, as well as in *how* it goes about its task. The rise of contextual theologies since the 1960s might be seen as both *illustrative* of the need for these changes, as well as *instructive* in how these changes might be negotiated.

In particular, we learn that in the new global situation, the constitution of (religious) identity in the midst of difference becomes a crucial issue. The *theology of religions* might be seen as a specific response of Christian theology to the new global context, especially to the increasing awareness of religious pluralism. While prevailing approaches to the theology of religions have rightly been criticized for being rooted in outmoded modern or Enlightenment ways of thinking, and calls for developing an interreligious theology are laudable, it does not seem to follow that the theology of

religions, as a distinct field of study within Christian theology, needs to be abandoned. Rather, it is at least arguable that a continually evolving theology of religions might yet play an important role in the constitution of Christian identity and the mediation of inter-religious dialogue within a religiously pluralistic contemporary context.

CHAPTER 2

TEXT

In the preceding chapter, we noticed how the dilemma posed to Christians by the contemporary context of religious pluralism – how to remain rooted in one’s tradition while being open to and respectful of other religions – has recently been discussed in terms of the constitution of Christian identity. In particular, we saw how emphasis has been placed upon the fluid nature of personal identity and how its constitution is an ongoing task consequent upon encounters with others. Along the lines of Michael Barnes’s appropriation of Paul Ricoeur’s notion of *narrative subjectivity*, these interpersonal encounters might be seen as challenging the self to continually renegotiate its prevailing narrative self-understanding in ways that balance between the extremes of inertia and fragmentation. Accordingly, the process of identity-constitution might be described in terms of the following three aspects: the *encounter* with the other, which challenges one’s *prevailing self-narrative*, thus necessitating a process of *imaginative re-narration*.¹²

The present chapter will interpret Jacques Dupuis’s proposal of a Christian theology of religious pluralism as an attempt to undertake just such a contemporary constitution of Christian identity prompted by the experience of interreligious encounters. Warrant for such an interpretation might, at least in part, be found in

¹² For Ricoeur’s philosophical discussion of the fluidity of personal identity and the mediating role played by narrative, see, e.g., Ricoeur 1992, 113-168.

several passages in Dupuis's work, in which he makes explicit reference to Christian identity. The following is but one example:

In the context of the present discussion of the theology of religions and of religious pluralism, it has been suggested that the call of the day is for a strong reaffirmation of the 'Christian identity' against all current tendencies towards theories leading to dogmatic and practical relativism. There can be no doubt that the Christian identity must be preserved in its integrity.... There can be no dialogue in a void or in a flux of personal religious persuasions. But the affirmation of the Christian identity need not be made in isolation from other religious traditions: much less in an opposition to them.... *Affirming Christian identity is best done in an open dialogue with the other religious traditions and in full recognition of God's active presence in them by way of revelation and saving deeds* (Dupuis 2004b, 13, emphasis mine).

Our discussion will be in three parts corresponding to the above three aspects of identity-constitution. In discussing the *challenge of encounter*, we shall examine some notable points in Dupuis's personal background, especially highlighting the pivotal significance of his years in India. In the second part, we shall consider Dupuis's account of the development of official Roman Catholic (RC) teaching on the religions from before Vatican II to the present, as a description of Roman Catholicism's *prevailing self-narrative* vis-a-vis the other religions. The discussion will also examine Dupuis's appraisal of current developments in the Christian theology of religions and the distance he perceives between them and the official RC teaching.

It is to articulate an intermediary position and to better meet the challenge of interreligious encounter, as he himself experienced in India, that Dupuis called for a Christian theology of religious pluralism via his own brand of hermeneutical theology and Trinitarian Christology. His proposals in this regard might thus be considered an *imaginative re-narration* of Christian identity, the contours of which we shall trace in the

third and final part of the chapter.

Challenge of Encounter: Dupuis's Background

Jacques Dupuis was born on December 5, 1923, in Huppaye, Belgium. Entering the Society of Jesus in 1941, he at first underwent the standard regime of formation for Jesuits at the time: two years of novitiate, two years of classical studies, three years of philosophy. However, in 1948, after having volunteered for the missions, he was sent for the next stage of formation to teach in India. Thereafter, he also did his theology studies in India, where he was ordained to the priesthood in 1954. Having completed a doctorate in the thought of Origen, he served as professor of systematic theology from 1959 to 1984, at what is now the Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies in Delhi.

In 1984, after spending a total of thirty six years in India, he was assigned to the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome as professor of Christology; becoming editor, in 1985, of the university's theological and philosophical quarterly, the *Gregorianum*. While in Rome, he also attended four synods as interpreter, in 1974, 1983, 1985, and 1987 respectively, and served as a consultant for the *Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue*. In this latter capacity, he made a major contribution to the Vatican's 1991 guidelines on inter-religious dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*.¹³ Dupuis remained based in Rome until his death on December 28, 2004, at the age of eighty-one.

¹³ For more biographical information, see Dupuis's obituary in Times Online (London), January 12, 2005 [<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,60-1435781,00.html>], as well as O'Collins 2003, and Kaiser 2003.

While Dupuis's writings are numerous (see the bibliography in Kendall and O'Collins 2003, 231-269), his name has most often been associated with that of Josef Neuner, with whom he co-edited six editions of *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*. The latest and seventh edition was edited by Dupuis himself (see Dupuis 2001b). But it is his 1997 book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, which sparked a grueling investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, that thrust Dupuis before the public eye. This was but the second of "three books on the same subject" that Dupuis wrote; the other two being *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* and *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* respectively (Dupuis 2002, 1). In addition, between the first two of these three works, Dupuis wrote an introduction to christology, *Who Do You Say I Am?*, which also included a discussion of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the religions (see Dupuis 1994, 140-167).

That this almost obsessive preoccupation with the question of Jesus Christ and the religions is rooted in Dupuis's experiences in India is beyond doubt. He has been quoted as having said the following in an interview given in London in September 2004: "I went through a conversion by living for so many years in India. If I had not lived in India for 36 years, I would not preach the theology which I am preaching today. I consider my exposure to Hindu reality as the greatest grace I have received from God in my vocation as a theologian" (quoted in Times Online [London], January 12, 2005). Some further insight into this conversion experience is provided by Robert Blair Kaiser when he writes,

It was in India, at St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, that Dupuis made his first acquaintance with young men who, though they were not Catholics, impressed him with their goodness, and with a kind of attractive piety they had learned from their (mostly) Hindu mothers and Hindu fathers. To Dupuis, it seemed clear that God had revealed himself in and through their Hindu faith. And so now Dupuis began to think harder about the variety of religions in the world. It was now much more obvious to him than ever: these religions weren't bogus. What were they then?... Dupuis had no other choice than to start thinking new thoughts about the providence of God – in a world where the majority of its people have never heard the name of Jesus.... This was Dupuis's first exposure to what he has called 'the concrete experience [that] opens one's eyes to reality.' Dupuis's life in India forced him to examine 'the interaction between text and context'" (Kaiser 2003, 223).

Convinced, however, that "the foundation of the Christian faith.... is the person and mystery of Jesus Christ, in function of which everything else, including the church and its mission, must be conceived and to which it is ordered," Dupuis's conversion experience in India led him to focus his theological energies upon what would become "the fundamental question that... concerned him throughout his life: the encounter of the mystery of Jesus Christ with the great religious traditions of humanity" (Dupuis 1991, 2, ix).

Thus, he begins his first book on the subject with three chapters describing various "stepping-stones"¹⁴ to Jesus Christ, that may be found in the Hindu tradition. The various questions raised by such considerations quickly coalesced, for Dupuis, into one central problem: how to reconcile the goodness that was to be found in the other traditions with the central Christian belief in the unique and universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ. In particular, he was concerned to address the crucial christological question being raised by the pluralist theologians of religions.

¹⁴ Dupuis would later eschew such terminology as expressive of a *fulfillment theory* of religions that he wished to transcend.

If there is one important conclusion that is already certain, it is that the christological problem constitutes the nub of this debate. The decisive question that governs everything else is whether a theology of religions that means to be Christian has any real choice between a christocentric perspective, which acknowledges the 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. In other words, can a theocentrism that is not at the same time christocentric be a Christian theocentrism? (Dupuis 1991, 110).

Prevailing Narrative: Official RC Teaching and the Theology of Religions

Reasons for a Historical Survey

In attempting a comprehensive treatment of the question in *Toward a Christian Theology*, Dupuis begins with a historical survey of the Christian scriptures and tradition. He offers three reasons for engaging in such a survey.

First... the present awareness of the Christian Church regarding the significance of religious pluralism... cannot be severed from the Christian memory which has developed over the centuries; it needs to remain in touch with the Christian roots and make constant reference to them. Second, the evaluation of the other religions has changed so dramatically in the course of the Christian tradition that it seemed advisable and, indeed necessary to give in the first place a substantial account of this centuries-long evolution before proposing... a synthetic view of the matter in keeping with the Church's present awareness. Third, the problematic itself has evolved remarkably over the centuries; to make these spectacular changes perceptible, it again seemed necessary to give a historical account of the successive problematics before presenting the subject matter in an organic way" (Dupuis 2001a, 20).

Hence, in the first part of the book, Dupuis traces, in seven chapters, the evolution of the question from the Old Testament till the present. This extensive study is much abridged in the later *Christianity and the Religions*, in which Dupuis spends three chapters respectively on the New Testament witness, the theology and official RC

teaching before, during and after Vatican II, and the present state of the question.¹⁵ A complete study of Dupuis's treatment of the historical data would be beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, we will briefly consider his summary of the way in which the question has evolved historically, before focusing on his discussion of official RC teaching as it has evolved from before Vatican II till the present, and the challenges posed by the contemporary theology of religions.

Overview of Three Theological Perspectives

For Dupuis, three theological perspectives can be distinguished in the way in which Christian theology has approached the question of the other religions. "For many centuries the issue was *the possibility of salvation of 'others' in Jesus Christ*. Starting from the clear affirmation of faith that Jesus Christ is the universal Savior, the question was whether others could attain salvation in him or not..... (And) for many centuries both theology and the official teaching of the church gave a mainly negative response to that question," on the basis of a rigid understanding of the axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* that could be traced back to the beginning of the fifth century (Dupuis 2002, 2-3, emphasis mine).

However, especially with the discovery of the "new world" in 1492, this negative view became much less tenable. It "was no longer possible for theologians to think and teach that one who had not come to explicit faith in Jesus Christ could not be saved.... (Thus) various theories were developed whereby implicit faith is sufficient for attaining

¹⁵ However, much of the historical data that is found in the first part of *Towards a Christian Theology* is integrated into the *synthetic* part of *Christianity and the Religions*.

salvation in Jesus Christ.... (However,) until almost the mid-twentieth century *the same perspective remained* the usual way theologians dealt with the issue, and was the common teaching of the church about the theological problem of the salvation of members of the other religions” (Dupuis 2002, 3, emphasis mine).

A change only became discernible in the decades leading up to the Second Vatican Council, when some theologians began to propose more positive approaches to the question. “Various theories were developed, offering an approach that was not so exclusively individualistic but was socially oriented. The problem... turned to *recognizing the positive values in the religious traditions themselves* which in some way could affect the personal salvation of their adherents” (Dupuis 2002, 4, emphasis mine). Two different conceptions and evaluations were adopted at this time, regarding these positive elements. We shall examine them more closely below.

Before that, however, we need to consider yet a third perspective that has developed in recent years. “No longer does it suffice to ask whether and what religious traditions have to do with the mystery of salvation of their adherents in Jesus Christ. More positively and profoundly, the question is *what positive meaning the religious traditions themselves have in God’s single overall plan of salvation*” (Dupuis 2002, 4, emphasis mine). It is within this third perspective that Dupuis situates his work. In this effort, he can be seen to be attempting to further the evolution of the prevailing Christian or, more specifically, RC approach to the question.

Before and after Vatican II

Dupuis’s account of the prevailing RC perspective on the question of the other

religions might be taken up from the decades immediately preceding Vatican II. As noted above, theologians developed two main approaches with which to evaluate and conceptualize the positive elements that they thought could be found in the other religions. The first group of theologians adopted the so-called *fulfillment theory*, according to which,

the various religions of humankind represented the innate desire of the human being to be united to the Divine, a desire present through various expressions in the diverse cultures and geographical areas of the world. In this perspective, Jesus Christ and Christianity denote in turn God's personal response to this universal human aspiration. Whereas all religions are simply varied expressions of *homo naturaliter religiosus* and hence of 'natural religion,' Christianity as divine response to the human search for God constitutes the only 'supernatural religion'" (Dupuis 2002, 46).

Jean Daniélou and Henri de Lubac were among the theologians who held this view.

Dupuis designates the second approach "the theory of the presence of Christ in the religions" or the "inclusive presence of Christ" (Dupuis 2002, 47). Theologians in this camp, who include Karl Rahner and Raimon Panikkar, held that

the various religions of humankind in themselves represent specific albeit initial interventions by God in the history of salvation. These divine interventions in history, however, are ordered to the decisive saving event in Jesus Christ. In that sense, they have played a positive role before the Christ event as *preparatio evangelica*; they still retain a positive value in the order of salvation by virtue of the active presence in them, and in some way through them, of the saving mystery of Jesus Christ.... Thus no religion is purely natural. In every religion a divine intervention in the history of the nations can be found historically, and an existential presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ is recognizable. All religions are accordingly supernatural for more than one reason (Dupuis 2002, 47).

These two developments had an important influence on the documents of Vatican II, which "was to be the first in the conciliar history of the church to speak positively, albeit guardedly, about the other religions" (Dupuis 2002, 60). In assessing

the council's teaching regarding the other religions, Dupuis distinguishes between two questions. First, regarding the question of the salvation of individuals belonging to other religions, the council was clear in its affirmative answer.

What in previous church documents was affirmed – firmly but cautiously – as a *possibility* based on God's infinite mercy and in any event left to his judgement is now being taught by the council with unprecedented assurance: in ways known to him, God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please him (Heb 11:5) (*Ad Gentes* § 7)... (And the council) proceeds further to explain how this concretely happens, that is, through the universal working of the Spirit of God. The clearest text in this regard is found in *Gaudium et Spes* where the council states: '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 (*tenere debemus*) that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being associated, in a way known to God, with the Paschal Mystery' (§ 22)" (Dupuis 2002, 61).

The council's answer to the second question – regarding the significance which other religious traditions may have in God's design for humanity and the role they play in the salvation of their members – is less clear. After examining a number of key passages from the conciliar documents, Dupuis concludes, "the council's doctrinal assessment of religions consists primarily of descriptive statements, in which various expressions are taken from the early tradition, without, however, their exact meaning in the council's mind being clearly defined. For example, it is never said how the 'seeds of the Word' are to be understood.... (T)he differences in the understanding of the 'seeds of the Word' lead to very different theologies of religions" (Dupuis 2002, 643-64). More specifically, the council did not definitively choose between either the *fulfillment theory* or the *presence of Christ* approach.

Thus, in seeking a "balanced critical appraisal" of the council's teaching on this

issue (Dupuis 2002, 64), Dupuis cites with approval the view of Karl Rahner, who opined that the council left the question open. “Do ‘non-Christians’ attain salvation outside of or within the life of their religions as such? Are such religions salvific in some manner or not? The question is not explicitly answered” (Dupuis 2002, 65).¹⁶ However, Dupuis also notes the view of H. Maurier, “who speaks of the strongly ‘ecclesiocentric’ perspective of the conciliar teaching in general, and of *Nostra Aetate* in particular. The church seems to recognize as positive and good only those things in the other religions that are found in it superabundantly.... Such a perspective easily leads to the ‘fulfillment theory,’ according to which, inasmuch as they represent the search of the human person for God, the other religions become obsolete by the very fact of reaching their fulfillment in Christianity” (Dupuis 2002, 65).

Turning then to the postconciliar magisterium, Dupuis finds there the same ambivalence. While the writings of Pope Paul VI tend to lean towards the *fulfillment theory*, more positive statements are found in the writings of Pope John Paul II, whose “singular contribution... to a ‘theology of religions’ consists... (in his affirmation of) the operative presence of the Spirit of God in the religious life of non-Christians and the religious traditions to which they belong” (Dupuis 2002, 69). The most explicit text on the work of the Holy Spirit is

¹⁶ For a contrasting interpretation of the conciliar documents on the same question, see, e.g., D’Costa 2000, esp. 105: “can other religions, *per se*, in their structures be mediators of supernatural revelation and salvific grace? While it is true that there is no explicit negative answer, there is certainly no positive answer.... it may well be the case that *the documents’ silences are intentional and should be read... as prohibiting any unqualified positive affirmation of other religions as salvific structures, or as containing divine revelation*” (emphasis mine).

to be found in the encyclical on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (May 18, 1986), where the pope explicitly mentions the universal activity of the Holy Spirit before the time of the Christian dispensation – ‘from the beginning, throughout the world’ – and today after the Christ event ‘outside the visible body of the Church.’ Before the time of the Christian dispensation, the activity of the Spirit, by virtue of the divine plan of salvation, was ordered to Christ. Outside the church today, it results from the saving event accomplished in him. Thus the pope explains the Christological content and pneumatological dimension of divine grace (§ 53) (Dupuis 2002, 70).

However, in more recent writings, John Paul II seems to favor the *fulfillment theory*. Citing a text (§ 6) from the pope’s apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (November 10, 1994), Dupuis notes that it “visualizes the fulfillment of the other religions in Jesus Christ and Christianity in terms of God’s self-communication in his Son incarnate in response to the universal human search for God expressed in the religious traditions.... The ‘fulfillment theory’ in its classic form is thus reproduced” (Dupuis 2002, 72).¹⁷

In contrast, Dupuis finds the closest affirmation of a positive role for the religions in the document jointly published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the*

¹⁷ Again, drawing from two papal documents, *Redemptoris Missio* and *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, D’Costa offers a rather more conservative interpretation of John Paul II’s position on the question: “while the Pope acknowledges, as with the Council, much that is good, true and holy in non-Christian religions, he is clear in keeping the Council’s silence intact regarding non-Christian religions as salvific structures *per se*.... It is also clear that the grace encountered in non-Christian religions is viewed as a *preparatio evangelica*, though *not* in terms of a division between the grace of creation and the grace of salvation, or natural and supernatural grace, but only because within the historical church is this grace finally properly ordered toward its eschatological fulfillment. Therefore, this grace is ‘not an alternative to Christ’ (RM 29)” (D’Costa 2000, 108-109).

Gospel of Jesus Christ (May 19, 1991). In particular, Dupuis cites § 29, which includes the statement, “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 the other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and received salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their Savior” (quoted in Dupuis 2002, 72, emphasis in Dupuis).

After his examination of the conciliar and postconciliar magisterium, Dupuis concludes that the official teaching of the church remains ambiguous. While the conciliar texts display a certain openness toward other religious traditions, they never explicitly recognized them as channels of salvation for their adherents. And while much of the postconciliar teaching seems to lean in the direction of the *fulfillment theory*, only one official document allows for the affirmation that God’s grace in Jesus Christ might reach the members of other religions through their religious traditions. “This is as far as the official doctrine enables us to reach, but no further” (Dupuis 2002, 73).

Clearly, this prevailing official narrative of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the religions falls short of the third perspective out of which Dupuis wishes to operate. More specifically, it leaves open the issue of the positive meaning that the religions might have in God’s single overall plan of salvation. As such, we might suppose that this prevailing narrative is perceived by Dupuis as failing to do justice to his own inter-religious experiences in India. He thus goes on to consider recent developments in the theology of religions, which had, “for some time taken on much broader dimensions” (Dupuis 2002, 74).

Recent Developments in the Theology of Religions

Dupuis describes the developments in the theology of religions in terms of the three-fold paradigm approach, which we examined in chapter one, as corresponding to a two-fold paradigm shift: from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism, and from christocentrism to theocentrism. The former corresponds to a shift from exclusivism to inclusivism and “implies a radical ‘decentering’ of the church, which now finds itself ‘recentered’ on the mystery of Jesus Christ” (Dupuis 2002, 77). The latter corresponds to a shift from inclusivism to pluralism. Theologians who advocate this second shift “wish to abandon not only the view that places the church at the center of the theological perspective but even that which situates there the mystery of Jesus Christ” (Dupuis 2002, 77).

Although some of these latter theologians reject the idea that Jesus Christ is *constitutive* of salvation, they still consider him as *normative*, that is, “as the most perfect symbol and even ideal model of human-divine relations.... For others Jesus is neither ‘constitutive’ nor ‘normative’” (Dupuis 2002, 78). Dupuis lists E. Troeltsch, P. Tillich, J.B. Cobb and S.M. Ogden as being among the thinkers in the former category. To this list, we might add Roger Haight (see Haight 1999). The “primary exponent” of the latter “extreme position” is John Hick (Dupuis 2002, 78).

In addition, Dupuis also examines other models that have been proposed in recent years, such as the *reality-centeredness* of John Hick, who sees all religions as oriented toward a Central Reality or Divine Absolute. Also noted is the *regnocentrism* or *soteriocentrism* of Paul Knitter, who sees the religions as different signs of the

presence of the Reign of God, and who emphasizes the need for collaboration in liberation praxis for eco-human well-being.

Dupuis also notes the *logocentrism* of thinkers such as Aloysius Pieris, for whom “(i)t is the Word (*logos*) as such that saves, whereas Jesus is only he in whom the Word is recognized by Christians” (Dupuis 2002, 83). Others tend to view the universal economy of the Spirit of God as independent from the historical event of Jesus Christ” (Dupuis 2002, 82). The name of Paul Knitter is associated with this *pneumatocentric* point of view. Finally, Asian theologians such as Aloysius Pieris and Felix Wilfred have also criticized the three-fold paradigm for being characteristic of a Western problematic that makes no sense in Asian categories.

In the midst of this diversity of theological approaches, Dupuis proposes to develop an approach that might facilitate the development of the prevailing narrative embodied in the official RC teaching, while avoiding what he perceives to be some excesses in the newer approaches. For Dupuis, “at the heart of the paradigm shifts... is the Christological question.... At stake... is the universal significance and constitutive role which Christianity attributes to Jesus Christ” (Dupuis 2002, 87). Thus, while he is sympathetic to the need to make the first shift, from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism, he rejects the second, from christocentrism to theocentrism, for two main reasons.

First, for Dupuis, “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 ‘medium’ (*le milieu*) of God’s encounter with human beings.... in him who has been constituted ‘Lord and Christ’

(Acts 2:36), God's saving action reaches out to people in various ways, knowingly to some and to others unknowingly" (Dupuis 2002, 88).

Further, Dupuis also observes that the "Christian tradition amply attests... 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.... Concretely, then, the choice between a Christocentric and a theocentric paradigm... depends on the option between a 'high,' ontological Christology and a 'low' Christology, deliberately anchored at the 'functional' level" (Dupuis 2002, 89). But some recent authors – notably Gavin D'Costa – have rightly rejected this as a false option set up by the pluralists, whose position has been shown to be untenable, because it emphasizes one of two basic axioms of traditional Christian faith – "the universal salvific will of God (1 Tim 2:4)" – at the expense of the other – "the necessity of the mediation of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Tim 2:5)" (Dupuis 2001, 89).

Dupuis also criticizes the *logocentric* and *pneumatocentric* paradigms for severing the salvific work of the Word and the Spirit from the Christ-event. The "Word-to-be-incarnate and the Word incarnate are a single indivisible reality. Logocentrism and Christocentrism are not mutually opposed; they refer back and forth to one another in a single divine economy of salvation which unfolds in history, and at the center of which stands the event of Jesus Christ the incarnate Word" (Dupuis 2002, 82) Also, "Christian faith holds that the action of the Spirit and of Jesus Christ, though distinct,

are nevertheless complementary and inseparable. Pneumatocentrism and Christocentrism.... constitute two inseparable aspects, or complementary elements, within a single economy of salvation” (Dupuis 2002, 83).

Dupuis thus calls for a combination of an inclusive Christocentrism, which is nonnegotiable for Christian theology, with a true theocentric pluralism. As we noted in the preceding chapter, he seeks to articulate an “inclusive pluralism” or “pluralist inclusivism” model of a theology of religions. In so doing, he might be considered as attempting to, on the one hand, imaginatively reconfigure the prevailing narrative of the official teaching in the direction of a more open and respectful dialogue with the religions, while on the other hand, repudiating some of the perceived excesses of recent theological approaches, especially insofar as these latter tend to compromise the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. For him, the “task... is that of showing how the affirmation of Christian identity is compatible with a genuine recognition of the identity of the other faith-communities as constituting different aspects of the self-revelation of the Absolute Mystery, though related to the Christ-event, in a single but complex and articulated divine economy” (Dupuis 2002, 94-95). We shall now proceed to examine Dupuis’s proposals more closely.

Imaginative Re-narration: Theology of Religious Pluralism, Hermeneutical

Theology & Trinitarian Christology

Aim: A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

The aim of Dupuis’s project is encapsulated in its name: a *Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. The new appellation is carefully chosen. First, the term *theology*

clearly distinguishes the discipline “from any human science of religion or religions, philosophy included.... Proper to theology is the formal reliance of its hermeneutic of religion and religions on the Christian revelation contained in the word of God and interpreted by the Church’s living tradition. The theology of religions is an integral part of the Church’s theological discourse.... (It) begins and remains at every step within a faith perspective, with the presuppositions which faith implies” (Dupuis 2001a, 5).

Next, contrary to W. Cantwell Smith’s call for a “world theology,” Dupuis asserts that “every theology is either ‘confessional’ or does not exist. ‘Confessional’ here refers to the faith-commitment of the person or religious community which is the subject of theologizing” (Dupuis 2001a, 6). However, Dupuis’s emphasis on the *Christian* character of his theology of religious pluralism is without prejudice to the “need to adopt a global perspective which embraces in its vision the entirety of the religious experience of humankind” (Dupuis 2001a, 6). The adoption of this truly universal horizon is also meant to facilitate a dialogical openness to the other religions, a searching for mutual enrichment through conversation. It thus “must leave room and indeed create space for other ‘confessional’ theologies of religions, be they Muslim, Hindu, or otherwise” (Dupuis 2001a, 7).

Also, a *Christian theology of religious pluralism* “seeks to interpret (the) existential experience of the (religious) ‘others’ in the light of the Christian faith and the mystery of Jesus Christ” (Dupuis 2001a, 8). While Dupuis highlights the requirement for distinct Christian theologies of particular religions, he also asserts that there “still remains room for a general theology of religions which embraces them all and asks

how the other religious traditions... relate to the Christian mystery.... It asks the general questions which apply to all cases and need to be studied before specific questions can be considered which concern Christian conversation with one particular tradition” (Dupuis 2001a, 9).

Finally, in calling for a change in terminology from *theology of religions* to *theology of religious pluralism*, Dupuis seeks to underscore the new theological perspective within which this approach operates. As noted above, this new perspective considers the positive significance that the religions have in the overall salvific plan of God. A Christian theology of religious pluralism thus “means to look at religious pluralism not merely as... a fact of history (pluralism de facto) but as having a *raison d’être* in its own right (pluralism de jure or ‘in principle’). The question no longer simply consists in 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, for the possibility of a mutual convergence of the various traditions in full respect of their differences, and for their mutual enrichment and cross-fertilization” (Dupuis 2001a, 11).

Method: Hermeneutical Theology

In seeking an appropriate theological method for his Christian theology of religious pluralism, Dupuis first examines the earlier *dogmatic* and *genetic* methods. The former proceeds from the Church’s dogmatic statements, which are then verified in scripture “by a process of retrojection,” before being probed more deeply in order to “derive from them further theological conclusions” (Dupuis 2001a, 14). Apart from its

tendency to be too abstract, this method fails to do justice to the revealed message in scripture. The *genetic* method, on the other hand, “follows the development of theological reflection on a specific theme of faith, to finally reach the questions which these centuries-old data meet or raise today. (It) has the advantage of being inspired by a serious return to biblical and patristic sources; however it runs the risk of assuming too linear a concept of doctrinal development” (Dupuis 2001a, 14).

In contrast to the *deductive* nature of these two methods – arguing from certain dogmatic or scriptural premises to their logical conclusions – Dupuis notes the development in recent theology of a more *inductive* method which begins from “the reality as experienced today with the problems it raises, to search for... a Christian solution to those problems” (Dupuis 2001a). For Dupuis, this *contextualization* of theology, implies the need for a *hermeneutical* theology. Drawing from, and developing, the work of Claude Geffré, Dupuis describes this theological method in terms of “a triangularity and... mutual interaction of three angles: the ‘text’ or the ‘given’ of faith, the historical ‘context,’ and today’s ‘interpreter’” (Dupuis 2001a, 15).

Here, *text* “covers all that goes under the term ‘Christian memory,’ the objective tradition.... (and) comprises scripture, tradition, and the Church’s magisterium (in its objective aspect)” (Dupuis 2001a, 16). The elements of the *context* will vary with particular times and places. However all its aspects need to be taken into consideration, including its sociopolitical, economic, cultural and religious dimensions. The *interpreter*, for Dupuis, is not just the individual, but the local church, “a believing people living its faith-experience in diachronic communion with the Apostolic Church

and in synchronic communion with the local churches – a communion over which the bishop of Rome presides in charity” (Dupuis 2001a, 16).

The interaction of these three elements constitute the process of theological reflection. “The context acts upon the interpreter by raising specific questions; it influences the precomprehension of faith with which the interpreter reads the text. The text, in turn, acts on the interpreter, whose reading of it will provide a direction for Christian praxis.... (The) interaction between text and context, or between memory and culture, takes place in the interpreter, that is, in the local church” (Dupuis 2001a, 16). For Dupuis, this rise of contextual and hermeneutical theology is to be found in the theology of religions, expressed especially in calls to begin with the praxis of interreligious dialogue, which only then gives rise to theological reflection as a *second act*.

While appreciative of the strengths of this *inductive* approach, Dupuis is also careful to indicate its perceived weakness. The “inductive operation... based as it is on the praxis of dialogue, has its own limits. Whether by ineffectuality or hesitancy, it may fail to attain its goal: a theological discourse that harmonizes with the Christian datum” (Dupuis 2001a, 17). We might suppose that here Dupuis has in mind some of the approaches in contemporary theology of religions that we examined above.

As such, Dupuis proposes a theological method that combines both the deductive and inductive methods, and whose “reciprocal movement would ensure the indispensable encounter between the datum of faith and the living reality of religious pluralism” (Dupuis 2001a, 17). In this regard, he cites with approval, Paul Knitter’s

description of a “global theological method” which consists in bringing the Christian tradition and human experience “into a mutually clarifying and mutually criticizing correlation” (Dupuis 2001a, 17).

Following upon these considerations of theological method, Dupuis goes on to assert that the theology of religions should not be viewed merely as a new *topic* for theological reflection. Rather, it “must be viewed as a new *way of doing theology*, in an interfaith context; a new *method* of theologizing in a situation of religious pluralism. Such an ‘interreligious’ hermeneutical theology is an invitation to broaden the horizon of theological discourse; it should... lead to discover (sic) at a new depth the cosmic dimensions of the mystery of God, of Jesus Christ, and of the divine Spirit” (Dupuis 2001a, 18). We shall now consider the way in which Dupuis sets out to articulate such a cosmic vision.

Approach: Trinitarian Christology

In applying his proposed hermeneutical theological method, especially in *Toward a Christian Theology* and *Christianity and the Religions*, Dupuis might at first glance be faulted for not paying sufficient attention to one of the *angles* of his hermeneutic triangle, namely, *context*. However, closer attention to his personal and professional background, as we have done above, tends to support the argument that *context* does indeed play a prominent role in his theology. For Dupuis, interreligious encounters raise the questions that challenge the Christian theologian to re-examine his/ her theological presuppositions. Some of these questions are given more attention in the first three chapters of his earliest book on the subject, *Jesus Christ at the*

Encounter (also see Dupuis 2001a, 268ff.). Dupuis also pays scrupulous attention to *text*, especially by beginning his theological treatment of the question of Jesus and the religions with an extensive historical survey, as noted above. Further, in *Christianity and the Religions*, much of this attention to *text* is integrated into Dupuis's synthetic treatment of the problem.

In *Christianity and the Religions*, this synthetic treatment takes the form of "a collection of monograph studies of the theology of religions, written from the standpoint of a religious pluralism envisioned by God in his sole design of salvation for humankind" (Dupuis 2002, 5). We shall present a brief overview of several of these studies before focusing on the two most pertinent for our purposes. In the first (synthetic) study, Dupuis situates the problem of the religions within the framework of a *theology of salvation history*. Here, he argues for the universal scope and trinitarian structure of salvation history, within which the salvific significance of other religions might be situated.

Turning, in the second study, to the *theology of revelation*, Dupuis argues for "the notion of a progressive, differentiated revelation and... an analogical concept of scriptural inspiration" (Dupuis 2002, 129). This move allows for the scriptures of the other religions to be considered as embodying divine revelation, and as being related to the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ in a "*mutual 'assymetrical' complementarity*" (Dupuis 2002, 136).¹⁸

¹⁸ The "assymetrical" nature of this relationship between Jesus Christ and the religions indicates that their "reciprocal complementarity is not understood to mean that anything is lacking within Christianity that it would have to receive from other religions,

The third and fourth studies are of central importance. Here Dupuis focuses on articulating a “Trinitarian and pneumatic Christology as model for an open theology of religions.... (that) while clearly holding to the full meaning of Jesus Christ with regard to the universal salvation of humankind, also opens the door to a recognition of the salvific value of ways or paths of salvation put forward by the religious traditions for their followers” (Dupuis 2002, 138). We will examine his proposal more closely below.

Finally, in the fifth study, Dupuis considers the problem of the relationship between the church and the religions by situating both within a *theology of the Reign of God*. Here the necessity of the church for salvation – Dupuis’s interpretation of the contemporary meaning of the axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* – is reconciled with the continued salvific significance of the other religions via the notion of the church as sacrament of the Reign of God, toward which all the religions are oriented.

In formulating his version of a Trinitarian and pneumatic Christology, Dupuis is concerned to put together and emphasize

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.... : (1) the universal reality and the effectiveness of the event of *Jesus Christ*, notwithstanding the historical particularity of this event; (2) 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; (3) 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 (Dupuis 2002, 138

without which it would not enjoy the fullness of divine revelation; but rather in the sense that God has provided gifts to human beings in other religious traditions as well, which even though they find their fulfillment in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, nonetheless represent authentic words of God, and additional autonomous gifts from God. Such divine gifts... do not in any way impede the transcendence and unsurpassability of God’s gift to humankind in Jesus Christ” (Dupuis 2002, 136).

emphasis mine).

Dupuis begins by demonstrating the relevance of a *theology of the Word of God* for the theology of religions. There are two steps in his argument. First, he seeks to explore the universal action of the *Word as such*. He is careful to begin by affirming the *inseparability* of the Word of God and Jesus Christ through the *hypostatic union*, which further implies that “the salvific effectiveness of the Word and (that)... of the historical event of Jesus Christ cannot be separated one from the other” (Dupuis 2002, 140). However, he then goes on to *distinguish* between the following: “the action of the Word-to-be-incarnate (*Verbum incarnandum*), that is, the Word before incarnation; the action of the Word incarnate (*Verbum incarnatum*), either in the state of kenosis during his human life or after the resurrection in the glorified state; and the perduring action of the Word as such which continues after the incarnation of the Word and the resurrection of Christ and is not constrained by the limits of his humanity (Dupuis 2002, 140).¹⁹

Having made the above threefold distinction without separation, Dupuis turns to the bible and the patristic writers for indications of the universal action of the Word-to-be-incarnate and the Word as such. He finds it in the Old Testament Wisdom literature, the prologue of John’s gospel and the doctrine of the *logos spermatikos* in the early Fathers of the church. On the basis of these sources, as well as with the support of several notable theologians, Dupuis concludes: “An illuminating and salvific action of

¹⁹ In the earlier work, *Toward a Christian Theology*, Dupuis uses the terminology “nonincarnate Logos” (*logos asarkos*) and “incarnate Logos” (*logos ensarkos*). See, e.g., Dupuis 2001a, 299. According to Gerald O’Collins, the change in terminology was a response to critics who thought that Dupuis was “‘doubling’ the Logos, as if he were holding that there were four persons in God” (O’Collins 2003, 25).

the Logos exists... even after the incarnation of the Word and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which makes it possible to discover a positive value of the religions of the world in the order of salvation according to the divine plan for humanity. The theology of the Word sowing his seeds is by itself capable of leading toward a theology of the history of salvation and of the religions of the world, in their relationship to the Christ event in which the self-manifestation of God to humanity culminates” (Dupuis 2002, 156).

In the second step of his argument, Dupuis explicates the relationship between this universal salvific action of the Word as such to the Christ event. For him, “the whole matter depends on the use of three words: separation, distinction, identification. The universal action of the Word and the historical event of Jesus Christ are neither identified nor separated; they remain, however, distinct.... (and) must be harmonized in the divine plan for humanity” (Dupuis 2002, 156). Thus Logocentrism – affirming the universal salvific action of the Word as such – and Christocentrism – affirming the centrality of the Christ event as constitutive of salvation – are not mutually opposed, but imply each other in a single divine plan of salvation.

Next, Dupuis focuses on the nature of this distinction. On the one hand, he affirms the constitutive uniqueness and salvific universality of the Christ event as rooted in the personal identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Thus, while agreeing with calls for a Christology *from below*, he emphasizes that such an approach must terminate in a high ontological Christology. On the other hand, however, in spite of his affirmation of the *hypostatic union* between the Word of God and Jesus Christ, and of the *metahistorical* or *transhistorical* salvific meaning of the Christ event after the

resurrection, Dupuis also asserts that “the historic event of Jesus Christ, of itself and of necessity, is particular and circumscribed by the limits of space and time.... (Further, while) Jesus’ human being 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” (Dupuis 2002, 158-9). This focus on the limited and incomplete nature of Jesus Christ, despite his constitutive uniqueness and universal salvific significance, “leaves space for an illuminating and salvific action of the Word as such, both before the incarnation and after the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (Dupuis 2002, 159).

Dupuis then goes on to show that this universal salvific action of the Word is organically united to the Christ event in a single economy of salvation by drawing upon the theology of the Word of God, according to which all revelations of God – including those to be found in other religions – are manifestations of the Word, or Logophanies. For Dupuis, then, the Christ event, while retaining its totally novel, constitutive and universal quality, is situated within, and does not *exhaust* the fullness of, this universal salvific action of the Word. Thus Dupuis is able to argue that “the salvific action of God, which always works within the framework of a single design, 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 Word of God is not exclusively linked to his becoming man historically in Jesus Christ.” (Dupuis 2002, 160).

This constitutes Dupuis’s first “tentative proposal” for situating the religions within a single divine plan of salvation – thus demonstrating the salvific significance of the religions, or religious pluralism *in principle* – without compromising the uniqueness

and universality of Jesus Christ. However, Dupuis is also conscious of not having described or defined “the ‘how’ and ‘in which way’... of the essential relationship between the universal action of the Word – and the Spirit – and the historical event of Jesus Christ.... (For) (t)heological apophaticism suggests silence” (Dupuis 2002, 162).

Having related the Word, Jesus Christ and the religions in this first *tentative proposal*, Dupuis goes on to situate the Christ event within “the ambit of the commitment of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to humankind through the entire history of salvation” (Dupuis 2002, 163). He does this by appealing to his version of a Trinitarian Christology. Before going further, however, Dupuis is careful to define his terms. In particular, he emphasizes that

the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ are neither ‘relative’ nor ‘absolute’ (but)... ‘constitutive,’ that is, they belong to the essence of salvation insofar as Jesus Christ has saving significance for all of humankind, and insofar as the Christ event... is truly ‘cause’ of the salvation of 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. Such an event is ‘relational’ insofar as it is inserted into an overall plan of God for humankind that has many facets and whose realization in history is composed of different times and moments (Dupuis 2002, 166, emphasis mine).

Dupuis then proceeds in a manner not unlike that in his treatment of the theology of the Word of God. He first reaffirms, against the pluralist theologians of religion, the constitutive uniqueness and universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ as rooted in the latter’s personal identity. However, Dupuis once again observes:

It is true that Jesus’ human existence, transformed by his resurrection and glorification, has reached beyond time and space and become ‘transhistorical’; but it is the historical Jesus who has become that. The universality of the Christ... 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.... *The historical particularity of Jesus imposes upon the Christ event irremediable limitations.* Just as the human consciousness of Jesus as Son could not, by its very nature, exhaust the mystery of God, and therefore God's revelation in him remains limited, likewise the Christ event does not – and cannot – exhaust God's saving power (Dupuis 2002, 175-6, emphasis mine).

And, as we have seen above, by emphasizing the historical particularity of the Christ event and its universal salvific significance, Dupuis opens up space for the saving action of the Word as such. The difference here is that the adoption of a trinitarian perspective allows Dupuis to reflect upon the universal presence of the Holy Spirit along with that of the Word as such. Although this Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit still retains his distinct personal identity and hence universal saving activity before and beyond the Christ event. In particular, Dupuis relies on Saint Irenaeus's metaphor of the two hands of God to explain how both Word and Spirit can keep their own personal identity as complementary aspects of a single divine economy of salvation. Further, in so doing, all three salvific aspects identified earlier are related theologically in a way that leaves room for the salvific significance of the religions. Dupuis next considers how this significance can be related to the Christ event, how the religions can also be considered valid paths to a common goal.

He first rejects the view of S. Mark Heim, who has argued for a diversity of religious ends. For Dupuis, Heim's view "is scarcely compatible with Christian tradition" (Dupuis 2002, 182). In contrast, Dupuis seeks to show that the various religions are different valid paths to the same "ultimate goal intended by God for all human life in any historic and religious context... (namely) personal union and sharing of life with the God

who revealed Godself in Jesus Christ” (Dupuis 2002, 182).

Beginning with the universal saving significance of the Christ event, Dupuis asks how this saving power reaches those of other religions. Given the historic and social character of the human being, Dupuis asserts that “if many members of other religious traditions have an authentic experience of God, the unavoidable conclusion is that in their institutions and social practices these traditions contain traces of the encounter of these human beings with grace” (Dupuis 2002, 187). The religions might thus be considered ways and means of salvation for their own adherents, in the sense that the religions are considered the “visible element, the sign, the sacrament” of their members’ experience of God in Christ. This view of the religions is without prejudice to the belief that “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” (Dupuis 2002, 188).

By distinguishing between “various modalities of the sacramental presence of the mystery (of Christ)... differing from one another not only in degree but in nature,” Dupuis is able to affirm the significance of the religions as *participated mediations* of salvation of which Jesus Christ remains the *unique mediator*. And it is the Word and the Spirit, the two hands of God, who work together to “inscribe ‘saving values’ into the religious traditions” (Dupuis 2002, 188, 190). Further, the sign by which these saving values might be discerned is *agapè*, which in turn finds its decisive theological foundation in Jesus Christ, in whom “God has united humankind in an irrevocable bond of love” (Dupuis 2002, 193).

Dupuis concludes his exposition on an eschatological note. All the religious traditions will converge in the eschatological fullness of the Reign of God, “the common final fulfillment of Christianity and the religions,” when all things will be recapitulated in Christ. Until then, however, “the religions must be constantly converted to God and his Reign, through a mutual action of testing, of encouraging, and of brotherly and sisterly correction” (Dupuis 2002, 194).

Concluding Observations

It has been the aim of this chapter to interpret the work of Jacques Dupuis, especially his call for a Christian theology of religious pluralism, and more specifically, his version of Trinitarian Christology, in terms of an imaginative reconfiguration of the prevailing RC narrative regarding the other religions, prompted primarily by Dupuis’s long and challenging years of interreligious encounter in India. His proposal is clearly an attempt to construct a middle position between the current official teaching of the RC hierarchy and the more recent approaches in the theology of religions.

On the one hand, Dupuis manifests clear dissatisfaction with the ambivalence of the former, and its failure to address the issue of the proper role of the religions in the overall divine plan of salvation. Whereas the success of a narrative depends upon its ability to integrate the diverse elements of a story into a coherent plot, for Dupuis, the prevailing Catholic narrative fails in its inability to adequately integrate the contemporary experience of religious pluralism in general, and his concrete experiences of the religions in particular. Not to seek to transcend it would thus be tantamount to submitting to *inertia*.

On the other hand, Dupuis is also especially critical of the pluralist theologians for their willingness to compromise what, for him, is a nonnegotiable aspect of Christian identity: the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. To accede to their insistent calls for a shift from a *christocentric* to a *theocentric* perspective would thus result in the *fragmentation* of Christian identity.

Dupuis's proposal of a model of *inclusive pluralism* might thus be seen as an attempt to imaginatively reconfigure the prevailing narrative in a way that might avoid both the *inertia* and *fragmentation* of Christian identity. Having considered his proposal in this chapter, we shall proceed to evaluate it in the chapters that follow. In the next chapter, we shall focus our attention on the *material* aspects of his work, before turning, in chapter four, to scrutinize his *method* in greater detail.

PART II
EVALUATION

CHAPTER 3

MATTER

On the basis of the discussion in the first two chapters of this thesis we might characterize Dupuis's call for a *theology of religious pluralism* as an exercise in *mediation* – attempting to negotiate a position between context and tradition, between inclusivism and pluralism, and between inertia and fragmentation. Terrence Merrigan, for example, has observed:

Jacques Dupuis's work has been characterized by a concern to do justice to both the traditional doctrine of faith and the reality of our pluralistic context. In its thoroughgoing Trinitarianism and its determination to incorporate the Asian experience, it might be said to have anticipated the shift in the theology of religions that is now becoming visible. Dupuis's description of himself as an 'inclusivist pluralist' can only be correctly understood against the background of this shift. By juxtaposing these terms and applying them to himself, Dupuis has not emptied the threefold typology of content. Instead, *he has chosen... to take up a position on the frontier, that is to say, the region 'in-between.'* In doing so, he encourages all of us to forego some of our certitudes and to accept the challenge of finding our bearings between the Other revealed in Christ, and those others whose demands and achievements can no longer be ignored or minimized (Merrigan 2003, in Kendall and O'Collins 2003, 67-68, emphasis mine).

Praise for Dupuis's pioneering work has been far from lacking (see, e.g., Kendall and O'Collins 2003). However, as with most attempts at mediation, Dupuis's theology has also come under fire both from those who champion fidelity to tradition, as well as those who emphasize engagement with context. So much so that, in an essay written in response to critics of his *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Dupuis was moved to state: "The book has... become a bone of contention, and even a sign of contradiction" (Dupuis 1999, 212). In particular, as mentioned in chapter 2, the publication of this book resulted in the "official questioning of the author by the

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF)” (Dupuis 1999, 212).²⁰

In this chapter, we shall evaluate those of Dupuis’s substantive positions that relate directly to the issue of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. Focusing on examining the extent to which Dupuis’s positions remain true to the Catholic faith,²¹ the argument will be made that although Dupuis’s project is both necessary and valid, certain of his positions may be less than conducive to a faithful exposition of the Catholic faith. The discussion will consist of two main parts.

Beginning by examining the relevant portions of the CDF’s *Notification on the Book Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J.* (hereafter referred to as the “*Notification*”), and the *Declaration “Dominus Iesus”: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (hereafter referred to as the “*Declaration*” or “*Dominus Iesus*”), the first part will *compare* these CDF documents with the pertinent positions of Dupuis. In particular, attention will be focused upon Dupuis’s use of the notion of a *distinction without separation* among the

²⁰ Dupuis notes: “The decision by the ‘Ordinary Assembly’ of the CDF (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) to submit the book to ‘examination’ and to ‘contestation,’ was taken on 10 June 1998, but communicated to the author only on 2 October; the author was given three months to respond, under the strictest secrecy, to the CDF’s questions and charges” (Dupuis 1999, 212). The investigation ended with the publication of a “*Notification*” on February 27, 2001. During the investigation, the CDF also issued, on August 6, 2000, the “*Declaration Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church.*” For a fuller account of the events surrounding the investigation, see O’Collins 2003, 20-22.

²¹ Dupuis himself has acknowledged that he made a “choice to address myself directly to the Catholic Church.... to show that, starting from the positive elements contained in magisterial documents of our Church, a way could be found for a more open evaluation of religious traditions than has been customary.... I was aiming at a change of mind – and of heart – in my own constituency” (Dupuis 1999, 215).

salvific activities of Jesus Christ, the Word as such, and the Holy Spirit, in a single but differentiated history of salvation.

The second part of the chapter will move from comparison to *analysis*. It will examine more closely Dupuis's use of the notion of a *distinction without separation* and relate it to two other of his positions: the *limited and finite* nature of the Jesus Christ event, and the Christian conception of time as *linear*. A critique of these positions will lead to a tentative proposal of other positions that better express the Catholic faith, while still upholding Dupuis's notion of a *religious pluralism in principle*. These alternative positions are: an interpretation of the notion of a *distinction without separation* that is in line with the CDF's more robust view of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, an appreciation of the Jesus Christ event in terms of the Rahnerian notion of *mystery*, and the Christian conception of time as *anamnetic*.

Comparison

The CDF Documents

The investigation of the CDF into Dupuis's *Toward a Christian Theology* culminated in the issuance of a *Notification* which concluded that while Dupuis had attempted "to remain within the limits of orthodoxy in his study of questions hitherto largely unexplored.... his book contained *notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points*, which could lead a reader to erroneous or harmful opinions. These points concerned the interpretation of the sole and universal salvific mediation of Christ, the unicity and completeness of Christ's revelation, the universal salvific action of the Holy Spirit, the orientation of all people to the Church, and the value and

significance of the salvific function of the other religions” (CDF 2001a, 434-435, emphasis mine).

Without citing particular examples of such ambiguities in the book, however, the *Notification* went on to present a “statement of the Church’s teaching on certain aspects of the above-mentioned doctrinal truths,” so as to provide “solid criteria for judgment,” and to refute “erroneous or harmful opinions, which... could be derived from reading the ambiguous statements and insufficient explanations found in certain sections of the text” (CDF 2001a, 435). This statement of non-negotiable doctrinal positions consists of eight propositions, which are drawn mainly from the CDF’s declaration, *Dominus Iesus* (see esp. CDF 2001a, at 437, fn. 1). In seeking to evaluate Dupuis’s approach to the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, we will compare his positions to the relevant criteria presented in the *Notification* and their elaborations in *Dominus Iesus*.

Necessity and Validity of Dupuis’s Project

However, before going on to discuss these more specific points in Dupuis’s christological approach, it seems important to highlight two rather more general points that arise from the two abovementioned CDF documents, which have a bearing on the necessity and validity of Dupuis’s project. The first issue relates to Dupuis’s account of the prevailing official Roman Catholic position on the religions. As we noted in chapter 2, according to Dupuis, the conciliar and post-conciliar magisterium of the Roman Catholic church manifest a certain ambivalence in their views of the religions. More specifically, the official teaching seems not to have decided between the *fulfillment theory* – which sees the other religions as mere expressions of the human aspiration for

God, reserving true divine revelation to the province of the Christian faith – and the *theory of the presence of Christ in the religions* – which finds in the religions, the existential presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ, and thus of divine revelation.

This ambivalence is strikingly illustrated in *Dominus Iesus*, which seems simultaneously to espouse *both* the *fulfillment theory* and the *theory of the presence of Christ in the religions*. For example, in § 7, the Declaration asserts that “the distinction between *theological faith* and *belief* in the other religions must be *firmly held*,” according to which “faith implies acceptance (in grace) of the truth of Christ’s revelation,” and “belief, in the other religions, is that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration.... (or) religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself” (emphasis in original). This rigid distinction between Christian *faith* and religious *belief* is a clear expression of the *fulfillment theory*. However, in § 8, when speaking of the sacred books of the other religions, the Declaration goes on to assert that these sacred books “*receive from the mystery of Christ* the elements of goodness and grace which they contain” (emphasis mine); an instance of the *theory of the presence of Christ*.

The ambivalence is just as, if not more, striking in § 21, wherein *Dominus Iesus* asserts, in the very same paragraph, on the one hand, that “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,” and on the other hand, that “one *cannot attribute* to (the prayers and rituals of the other religions) *a divine origin*” (emphasis mine). The only

plausible way in which to reconcile these two statements, it would seem, is to say that while the other religions do contain “religious elements that come from God,” these divine elements are to be found elsewhere than in their prayers and rituals. However, there does not seem to be any justification for such an assertion.²²

Given that the aim of *Dominus Iesus* is to “recall... certain indispensable elements of Christian doctrine.... (and) to set forth again the doctrine of the Catholic faith,” and that the Declaration does so by drawing extensively from the conciliar and post-conciliar documents that Dupuis examined, it seems fair to argue that the ambivalence that is found in the Declaration serves to confirm Dupuis’s appraisal of the prevailing official teaching of the church on the religions (CDF 2001b, § 3). Further, given that this perceived ambivalence in the official teaching was a key motivating factor for Dupuis, it might be argued that the continued ambivalence found in *Dominus Iesus* serves also to confirm the necessity of Dupuis’s project.

The second general issue has to do with the validity, in principle, of a *Christian theology of religious pluralism*. In *Dominus Iesus*, the CDF observes: “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* (or in principle). As a consequence, it is held that certain truths have been superceded; for example, the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ.... (P)roposals are developed... in which Christian revelation and the mystery of Jesus Christ and the

²² Others have also noted this ambivalence in *Dominus Iesus*. See, e.g., Egan 2002, 60-61; and Clooney 2002, 158-159.

Church lose their character of absolute truth and salvific universality, or at least shadows of doubt and uncertainty are cast upon them” (CDF 2001b, § 4). At first glance, this statement might be taken to impugn Dupuis’s project *in toto*, especially since, as we noted earlier, Dupuis adopts the terminology of *religious pluralism de iure*. A different interpretation might be taken, however, when one reads *Dominus Iesus* in conjunction with the *Notification*.

In its *Notification*, the CDF begins by acknowledging that Dupuis’s book is “an introductory reflection on a Christian theology of religious pluralism.... which seeks to investigate, in the light of Christian faith, the significance of the plurality of religious traditions in God’s plan for humanity” (CDF 2001a, 434). However, although the CDF goes on to mention Dupuis’s own awareness of “the potential problems in this approach,” it does not explicitly denounce such an approach as being necessarily heterodox in principle (CDF 2001a, 434). As such, reading *Dominus Iesus* § 4 together with the *Notification*, it seems reasonable to argue that the CDF is primarily concerned with safeguarding the particular aspects of Christian doctrine – especially the “character of absolute truth and salvific universality” of Jesus Christ – rather than with repudiating, in principle, all possible versions of a *religious pluralism de iure*. If such an argument is conceded, one can then argue that a *Christian theology of religious pluralism* might yet be considered a valid and orthodox approach to the religions, provided that the specific doctrinal points highlighted in the CDF documents are

safeguarded.²³

Jesus Christ, the Word, the Spirit, and the Religions

With these more general considerations in mind, we shall now consider those aspects of the doctrinal teaching highlighted by the *Notification*, which relate directly to Dupuis's approach to the question of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. These aspects revolve essentially around the relationships among Jesus Christ, the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the religions in a single divine economy of salvation.

Regarding Jesus Christ and the Word, the *Notification* emphasizes that "Jesus Christ... is the sole and universal mediator of salvation for all humanity," and that "the salvific action of the Word is accomplished in and through Jesus Christ... as mediator for all humanity. It is therefore contrary to the Catholic faith not only to 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" (CDF 2001a, §§ 1 & 2, emphasis mine).

On the same point, *Dominus Iesus* repudiates the theological proposal that

²³ See also Gerald O'Collins's view that *pluralism de iure* "may take a soft, Hickian (following John Hick) form: in principle all major religions have equal authority, and hence in principle are equally valid, separate paths to salvation. But *pluralism de iure* may take another form, as for instance, when the declaration *Dominus Iesus*... acknowledges that God becomes present to peoples through the 'spiritual riches' that their religions essentially embody and express (8)" (O'Collins 2003, 25). While *Dominus Iesus* might be seen to repudiate the first form of *pluralism de iure*, it does not rule out the second in principle. On the contrary, *Dominus Iesus* might be seen to encourage the former by inviting theologians "to explore if and in what way the historical figures and positive elements of... (the other) religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation" (CDF 2001b, § 14).

“there is an economy of the eternal Word... in addition to an economy of the incarnate Word,” and affirms that “the Word... is the same as he who ‘became flesh’,” that “Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth,” and that it is “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.... The one subject which operates in the two natures, human and divine, is the single person of the Word. Therefore, the theory which would attribute, after the incarnation as well, a salvific activity to the Logos as such in his divinity, exercised ‘*in addition to*’ or ‘*beyond*’ the humanity of Christ, is not compatible with the Catholic faith” (CDF 2001b, §§ 9 & 10, emphasis mine).

Next, regarding the relationship between Christ and the Spirit, the *Notification* emphasizes that “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 non-Christians. It is therefore contrary to the Catholic faith to hold that the salvific action of the Holy Spirit *extends beyond* the one universal economy of the Incarnate Word” (CDF 2001a, § 5, emphasis mine). Likewise, *Dominus Iesus* emphasizes “the unicity of the salvific economy willed by the One and Triune God... at the source and centre of which is the mystery of the incarnation of the Word” (CDF 2001b, § 11). It thus rejects “the hypothesis of an economy of the Holy Spirit with a *more universal breadth* than that of the Incarnate Word, crucified and risen.... (as being) contrary to the Catholic faith, which... considers the salvific incarnation of the Word as a trinitarian event” (CDF 2001b, § 12).

As for the relationship between the salvific significance of Jesus Christ and that

of the religions, the *Notification* emphasizes that “Jesus Christ is the mediator, the fulfillment, and the completeness of revelation. It is therefore contrary to the Catholic faith to maintain that revelation in Jesus Christ... is limited, incomplete or imperfect.... (And) the historical revelation of Jesus Christ offers everything necessary for man’s (sic) salvation and has no need of completion by other religions” (CDF 2001a, § 3). Therefore, while the *Notification* accepts that the goodness and truth to be found in other religions might be considered “a certain participation in truths contained in the revelation of Jesus Christ.... it is erroneous to hold that such elements of truth and goodness, or some of them, do not derive ultimately from the source-mediation of Jesus Christ” (CDF 2001a, § 4).

In *Dominus Iesus*, the pertinent passages in this regard are to be found in §§ 13-15. Here, the declaration reaffirms the “unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ... as a constant element in the Church’s faith” (§ 13). “The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the centre of mankind (sic), the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations.... It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history’s centre and goal” (§ 15). As such, given that “the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God,” the other religions can only be thought of as having salvific significance insofar as they constitute “*participated mediation(s)*... (which) must remain always consistent with the principle of Christ’s unique mediation” (§ 14,

emphasis mine).

How does Dupuis's approach measure up to the doctrinal standards thus expressed in the CDF documents? To begin with, we might recall that the theological positions that would *separate* the salvific significance of Jesus Christ, the Word and the Holy Spirit, are also criticized by Dupuis under the rubric of *logocentrism* and *pneumatocentrism*. As we have said before, his aim is to negotiate a position in between these *pluralistic* theories and the *christocentrism* of the prevailing Roman Catholic teaching. But to what extent does Dupuis's own articulation of such a middle position – in particular, his version of a Trinitarian and pneumatic Christology – remain within the CDF's doctrinal boundaries?

It might be helpful to briefly recall several key points in Dupuis's approach (see *supra.*, ch. 2). First, Dupuis explicitly affirms *a single trinitarian economy of salvation* centered upon the Jesus Christ event. He also affirms the *inseparability* of Jesus Christ, the Word, and the Spirit, as well as the *uniqueness and universal salvific significance* of the Jesus Christ event as rooted in the personal identity, or *hypostatic union*, of Jesus Christ with the Word of God the Father. In addition, in speaking of the salvific significance of the religions, Dupuis also uses the Declaration's terminology of *participated mediations* in the one unique mediation of Jesus Christ. Further, he also holds that all religions converge upon a common goal, namely, union with the Trinity. These affirmations at once distinguish Dupuis's position from those of *logocentrism* and *pneumatocentrism*, and echo the teaching of the CDF.

At the same time, however, Dupuis affirms a *distinction without separation*

among Jesus Christ, the Word as such, and the Holy Spirit, in one divine economy of salvation. This move seems to be necessitated by Dupuis's assertion that, while the Jesus Christ event has trans-historical salvific significance, especially after the resurrection, it still remains inextricably tied to the historical Jesus, and is thus subject to the finitude and limitations of human existence in space and time. According to Dupuis, "the 'fullness' of revelation in Jesus Christ must be understood correctly and with the proper precision. It is a qualitative rather than a quantitative fullness; it is of a singular intensity, but it does not 'exhaust' the mystery. Therefore, even though it is unsurpassed and unsurpassable, it remains limited. It still remains unfinished and will remain so until the completion of revelation in the eschaton" (Dupuis 2002, 131).

By thus positing a distinction without separation among Jesus Christ, the Word as such, and the Holy Spirit, premised upon the limitedness of the revelation in Jesus Christ, Dupuis is able to argue for a "*mutual 'assymetrical' complementarity*" between revelation in Jesus Christ and that to be found in the other religions (Dupuis 2002, 136). Thus, while continuing to affirm the centrality of the Jesus Christ event, Dupuis clearly situates it within the broader salvific activity of the "two hands" of the Father, namely, the Word as such and the Holy Spirit.²⁴ And it is this latter activity which, for

²⁴ See, e.g., Dupuis 2002, 160: "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 which became flesh in Jesus Christ. *The working of the Word goes beyond the limits which mark the presence of the humanity of Jesus even in his glorified state... notwithstanding the 'hypostatic union.'* Also see, e.g., Dupuis 2002, 186: "God's saving action, which always operates in the framework of a unified design, is one and yet multifaceted. It never prescind from the Christ event in which it reaches its greatest intensity in history. Nevertheless, *the action of God's Word is not limited to being expressed solely through the humanity of Jesus Christ; nor is the work of the Spirit in*

Dupuis, opens the way for a recognition of the salvific significance of the other religions. Although Jesus Christ is still considered as being *constitutive* of salvation for all,²⁵ his salvific significance is said to be *relational* vis-a-vis the other religions, whose significance can be traced directly to activity of the Word as such and the Holy Spirit.

In thus emphasizing the limitedness of the Jesus Christ event, and also in situating it within the broader salvific activity of the Word and the Spirit, Dupuis can be seen to fall short of the doctrinal standard presented in the CDF documents. For example, unlike *Dominus Iesus*, Dupuis is quite emphatic in his refusal to attribute an *absolute* quality to the Jesus Christ event (see, e.g., Dupuis 2002, 165; and cp. CDF 2001b, § 15). And Dupuis's approach does seem to fall within *Dominus Iesus's* repudiation of "the theory which would attribute... a salvific activity to the Logos as such in his divinity, exercised '*in addition to*' or '*beyond*' the humanity of Christ," as well as the *Notification's* warning against holding "that the salvific action of the Holy Spirit *extends beyond* the one universal economy of the Incarnate Word"(CDF 2001b, § 10; and CDF 2001a, § 5; emphasis mine).

history limited to its outpouring from the risen and exalted Christ. God's saving grace can reach humankind in different ways which must be combined and brought together" (emphasis mine).

²⁵ Dupuis explains "constitutive" in terms of causation (see, e.g., Dupuis 2002, 166), but the type of causation is unclear. For example, he cites with approval the earlier Rahnerian view of the significance of the Jesus Christ event as a *quasi-sacramental cause* (see Dupuis 2001a, 283, fn. 4), but also speaks of the "universal mediation of Christ... (as) the *instrumental efficient cause*, of grace for all" (Dupuis 2002, 211, emphasis mine). It seems clear, however, that as regards the church's salvific role, Dupuis understands the "causality involved (to be) not of the order of efficiency but of the *moral order and of finality*" (see Dupuis 2002, 211, emphasis mine).

An adequate answer to the question of whether or not this perceived distance between Dupuis and the CDF documents amounts to heterodoxy on Dupuis's part will require more in-depth study that goes beyond the scope of this thesis. We might note, however, that current theological opinion on this issue is mixed. For example, Gerald O'Collins argues in support of Dupuis as follows:

Over and over again Dupuis has insisted that he *distinguishes but does not separate* various things: for instance, the divine and the human operations of the incarnate Son of God, or distinct paths of salvation within the one divine plan to save all human beings. In using this language to make such points, he has shown himself a *faithful follower of the Council of Chalcedon* and its vitally important language about the two natures of Christ being distinct not separated. No critic has found a passage in Dupuis's book (or other writings) where he moves beyond a distinction and introduces a false separation, for example, between the incarnate Word's action within the Church and in the world at large. Critics have alleged that he separates the Word of God and the man Jesus into two separate subjects, but they have never produced chapter and verse to back up this accusation. What Dupuis has consistently argued is that *within the one person of Jesus Christ we must distinguish the operations* of his (uncreated) divine nature and his (created) human nature. Here he lines up with St. Thomas Aquinas, who championed the oneness of Christ's person but also had to recognize that Christ's 'divine nature infinitely transcends his human nature (*divina natura in infinitum humanam excedit*)' (*Summa contra Gentiles*, 4. 35. 8) (O'Collins 2003, 23-24, emphasis mine).²⁶

George Gispert-Sauch, on the other hand, offers a less favorable appraisal when he observes: "I am somewhat uneasy with this type of theology about God's revealing and saving action through a separate activity of the divine persons. *The explanation sounds almost tritheistic*" (Gispert-Sauch 2003, 969, emphasis mine).²⁷

²⁶ Also see, e.g., Merrigan 1998, 358: "the fundamental thrust of (Dupuis's) argument is manifestly orthodox.... (although) questions can be raised about the coherence of certain of (his) formulations with his system as a whole."

²⁷ See also Dupuis's reply to Gispert-Sauch, in Dupuis 2004a, at 220: "The point is that a theory is or is not orthodox. Similarly one is or is not a tritheist, but is not almost so."

What seems clear from the foregoing is that, in deciding the question of the orthodoxy of Dupuis's positions, much will depend upon close attention to his use of the notion of a *distinction without separation*, especially among Jesus Christ, the Word as such, and the Holy Spirit, in a single economy of salvation. Therefore, in the following part of this chapter, we shall begin by engaging in an analysis of his use of this notion.

Analysis and Alternatives

Distinction Without Separation

The first difficulty that presents itself against such an analysis is the fact that Dupuis himself is consciously vague about how he understands the relationships among Jesus Christ, the Word as such, and the Holy Spirit, or what he means exactly by a *distinction without separation*. As noted in chapter 2, Dupuis is of the opinion that, in this regard, "(t)heological apophaticism suggests silence" (Dupuis 2002, 162). Even so, his discussions of this issue do provide sufficient data for some inferences to be made.

In particular, one might note that the language used by Dupuis – for example, the salvific significance of Jesus Christ as *constitutive* but *relational* – tends to indicate that his understanding of the one but differentiated divine salvific economy consists in a *juxtaposition* of the saving activities of the Word and the Spirit, as two hands of the Father. Further, the activity of the Word is then thought of in terms of a juxtaposition between the Word's actions through Jesus Christ, and those through other expressions of the Word as such (see, e.g., Dupuis 2001a, 316-321). Within such a framework, the other religions are thought of as having permanent salvific significance because they

are expressions of the salvific activity of the Word as such (and the Spirit), which is not *exhausted* by that of Jesus Christ. What distinguishes this approach from *logocentrism* and *pneumatocentrism*, however, is Dupuis's assertion that the salvific activities of the Word as such and the Spirit remain *related*, in some incomprehensible way, to the central event of Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, thus resulting in a single unified salvific economy.

Assuming that the foregoing is an accurate interpretation of Dupuis's approach, the question that arises is whether such a *unity of relational juxtaposition* is sufficient to account for the centrality of the Jesus Christ event within the one economy of salvation. As we have noted above, the CDF documents indicate otherwise. In speaking, for example, of "the unicity of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, eternal high priest," the CDF documents favor an understanding that attributes a greater salvific significance to Jesus Christ.²⁸ Thus, in contrast to the notion of a *unity of relational juxtaposition*, presented by Dupuis's account, the CDF documents' description of a single economy of salvation might be said to present the notion of a *union in distinction*, in which the salvific effects of Jesus Christ, the Word and the Spirit, radiate from one central point.

In O'Collins's defense of Dupuis's positions (quoted above), reference is made to the language of the Council of Chalcedon. Dupuis himself also refers to Chalcedon. For example, after speaking of the distinction without separation between the salvific

²⁸ Also see, e.g., *Dominus Iesus* § 10: "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"; and § 12: "Hence, the connection is clear between the Incarnate Word and that of the Spirit, who *actualizes the salvific efficacy of the Son made man* in the lives of all people" (emphasis mine).

activity of Jesus Christ and the Word as such, he states: “This vision agrees with the Christological dogma of the Council of Chalcedon” (Dupuis 2002, 144. Also see, e.g., Dupuis 2004a, 221). By this, he means that the Chalcedonian notion of a distinction without separation between the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ provides sufficient warrant for his assertion that it is possible to speak of “an action of the Word of God, not only before the incarnation of the Word but also after the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, distinct from the salvific action through his humanity, provided that 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 for the universal salvation of humankind takes place” (Dupuis 2002, 144).

It seems important to note, however, that Dupuis uses the Chalcedonian notion of a *distinction without separation* in an analogous way. For whereas the Chalcedonian notion is used to distinguish between the human and divine natures within the *one person of the Word incarnate*,²⁹ Dupuis also uses it to distinguish among the salvific activities of the Word incarnate, the Word as such, and the Spirit, in a *single divine economy of salvation*. Further, pace O’Collins, Chalcedon’s affirmation of a distinction without separation between the two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ, does not seem necessarily to imply that there is a salvific activity of the Word as such *distinct from* the Word incarnate. Rather, it would seem that Chalcedon was focused primarily

²⁹ “We confess that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation. The distinction between the natures 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 (prosôpon) and one hypostasis” (Dupuis 2001b, no. 615)

upon the salvific activity of the Word *in and through* Jesus Christ. Even so, given this analogous relationship between the two uses of the notion, we might examine its Chalcedonian meaning, in order to gain some insight into Dupuis's use of it.³⁰

To this end, reference might be made to the second letter of Cyril to Nestorius, which the Council of Chalcedon "received, as being in agreement" with the faith it defined (Norris 1980, 158). In this letter, Cyril opposes Nestorius's description of the relation between the two natures of Jesus Christ in terms of a *conjunction*, and instead proposes a *hypostatic union*.

This is the sense in which we confess one Christ and Lord. *We do not worship a human being in conjunction with the Logos*, lest the appearance of a division creep in by reason of that phrase 'in conjunction with.' No, we worship one and the same, because the body of the Logos is not alien to him but accompanies him even as he is enthroned with the Father.... If... we set aside this *union in the order of the hypostasis* as if it were pointless or unseemly, we fall into the assertion of two Sons, for it becomes necessary to divide the integral whole and to say that on the one hand there is a proper human being dignified with the title of 'Son,' while on the other hand there is the proper Logos of God, who possesses by nature both the name and the exercise of sonship. Therefore, *the one Lord Jesus Christ must not be divided*

³⁰ But cf. the view of Charles Hefling. In reference to the notion of *oneness* in *Dominus Iesus*, he notes: "But the onenesses (sic) that *Dominus Iesus* insists upon are unquestionably different. The oneness of the one Lord Jesus is the oneness of a person, and that one a divine person. The person of the Son or Word is not the same as the person of the Spirit or the person of the Father. *The oneness of the Trinity, therefore, is not the same as the oneness of the Incarnation*, for in the Incarnation two natures are united whereas in the Trinity three persons are one God. *Nor is the oneness of the economy of salvation the same as the oneness of God*, for the Word's role and mission in that economy begins with his taking on a human nature; the role and mission of the Spirit does not. *Nor is the oneness of the incarnate Word the same as the oneness of the extension of the Incarnation in revelation, church, and sacrament*. For in the Incarnation there is one man and one historical life, whereas revelation, church, and sacrament involve many men and women, who are one inasmuch as they share a common life constituted by common understanding, common beliefs and practices, common ends and purposes. And so on" (Hefling 2002, 122, emphasis mine).

into two Sons. The correct expression of the faith is not assisted by taking this line, even when some allege that there is a union of persons, for Scripture says not that the Logos united to himself the person of a human being but that he became flesh” (Norris 1980, 134, emphasis mine).

Although Nestorius also posits a unity between the divine and human natures of Christ,³¹ he understands this unity in terms of a *conjunction*. And Cyril criticizes this Nestorian understanding for being insufficient to account for the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, not least because it results in Nestorius’s unwillingness to affirm that God was born of a woman, suffered and died on the cross.

When we turn then to consider the difference between Dupuis’s and the CDF’s respective understandings of the one divine salvific economy – as interpreted above – it would seem that Dupuis’s view is analogous, *mutatis mutandis*, to Nestorius’s version of a *unity of conjunction*. For, as noted above, Dupuis’s description of the relationship between Jesus Christ, the Word as such, and the Holy Spirit, might be understood as a *unity of relational juxtaposition* – analogous to Nestorius’s *unity of conjunction* – premised upon the limitedness of the Jesus Christ event. And this understanding of unity results in Dupuis’s unwillingness – analogous to Nestorius’s refusal to affirm that God was born, suffered and died – to attribute the salvific significance of the other religions directly to the Jesus Christ event. Instead, Dupuis prefers to speak of Jesus Christ as *constitutive* but *relational* savior.

On the other hand, the CDF’s understanding of the single salvific economy

³¹ See, e.g., Nestorius’s First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*: “God is undivided from the one who appears.... God has been joined to the crucified flesh, even though he has not shared its suffering” (in Norris 1980, 130).

seems analogous, *mutatis mutandis*, to Cyril's notion of a *hypostatic union*. The notion of a *union in distinction*, being *thicker*, as it were, than that of a *unity in relational juxtaposition*, allows the CDF to affirm, unhesitatingly and unapologetically, the absolute quality of the salvific significance of Jesus Christ in a single salvific economy. Therefore, especially given that the Council of Chalcedon repudiated the Nestorian understanding and upheld the Cyrillian, it seems at least questionable whether Dupuis's use of the notion of a *distinction without separation* can truly be said to "agree with" the Christological dogma of Chalcedon.

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, it would seem that "the correct expression of the faith (would be better) assisted" by adopting the CDF's understanding of the relationship among Jesus Christ, the Word, and the Spirit in a unified salvific economy, rather than Dupuis's (Norris 1980, 134). In that event, however, would it still be possible to argue for a religious pluralism in principle? How might we simultaneously affirm the CDF's more robust understanding of the centrality of Jesus Christ as well as the permanent salvific significance of the other religions? An answer to this question will necessitate closer consideration of yet another of Dupuis's substantive positions.

Limitedness of the Jesus Christ Event

It would seem that Dupuis's strong emphasis on the limited nature of the Jesus Christ event, and his consequent refusal to attribute to it an absolute salvific significance, also constitute key reasons for his positing of a unified but differentiated economy of salvation. As we have noted, however, this aspect of Dupuis's project contrasts with *Dominus Iesus's* affirmation that "Jesus Christ has a significance and a

value for the human race and its history which are unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute” (§ 15). Further, while Dupuis’s reluctance to attribute an absolute and universal significance to any human reality is understandable, one must question the extent to which his reluctance flies in the face of the Christian affirmation of the union of the divine and human natures in – and thus the absolute and universal salvific significance of – Jesus Christ. In the words of Christoph Schwöbel:

From the perspective of Christian faith absoluteness can only be regarded as a *divine* attribute which expresses what classical theology called the *aseitas Dei*, the fact that God, the unconditional ground of all being and meaning, is not conditioned by any external agency or cause. But in Christian theology this absoluteness is always understood as the unconditionality of God – the Father, the Son, and the Spirit – who has freely chosen to be the creator, redeemer, and savior, the condition for the existence of a finite world and its salvation and fulfillment. *It is therefore the absoluteness of the particular God who disclosed himself in the particular Jewish person Jesus of Nazareth as the creator and savior of the world* (Schwöbel 1990, 40, emphasis mine).

If, then, we are to affirm the universal and absolute salvific significance of Jesus Christ, the question once again arises: how to argue concurrently for the permanent salvific significance of the other religions? Will the latter not be lost by being engulfed in the absolute reality of Jesus Christ? A possible alternative would be to proceed in an opposite direction, as it were, to Dupuis’s approach. Whereas Dupuis seeks to make space for a religious pluralism in principle by emphasizing the *finite* nature of the Jesus Christ event, one might propose to do the same by arguing for the latter’s *infinite* richness and inexhaustible salvific significance.

In this regard, reference might be made to the Rahnerian concept of *mystery*. For Rahner, “mystery is not just a provisional limit of thought, as it usually appears in

the theology of the schools.” Rather, it is “the primordial and permanent” unknowing that characterizes the ultimate destiny of humanity, which is the beatific vision, and in which God always remains incomprehensible, even in God’s radical proximity (Rahner 1966, 44, 41). Access to the *holy mystery* that is the divine self-communication to humanity always presupposes grace, which in turn is “the grace of the *nearness of the abiding mystery*: it makes God accessible in the form of the holy mystery and presents him thus as the incomprehensible” (Rahner 1966, 56).

As applied to the mystery of the incarnation, this Rahnerian notion seems to allow for an ineradicable element of incomprehensibility according to which one cannot ever be said to know all there is to know about the Jesus Christ event. As the post-resurrection appearances in the gospels testify, integral to the encounters with the crucified and risen one, is an element of surprise and an initial failure of recognition, even on the part of those who had seen the Lord Jesus with their eyes, and touched him with their hands (see 1 John 1:1). On the basis of this abiding incomprehensibility and element of surprise might we not argue for the enduring salvific significance of the other religions? Might not these latter present Christians with ever new and surprising perspectives on the one unique, universal and absolute mystery of Jesus Christ? And even as one continues to affirm the completeness and finality of God’s revelation in Christ, might not an affirmation of its abiding holy mysteriousness allow for the concurrent affirmation of the no less abiding salvific significance of the other

religions?³²

This alternative suggestion is not entirely opposed to Dupuis's scheme. For he himself speaks "of the inclusive, universal saving mystery of the glorified Christ whose humanity has been transformed and has become 'transhistorical' by being raised from the dead" (Dupuis 1999, 238). More specifically, he argues that, for those of other religions,

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, the sacrament of that experience. This practice expresses, supports, bears, and contains, as it were, *their encounter with God in Jesus Christ*. Accordingly – and in this particular sense – the religious tradition of others is indeed for them a way and means of salvation.... Thus *the mystery of salvation remains one: it is the mystery of Christ*. But this mystery is present to men and women beyond the boundaries of Christianity.... In other religious traditions, it is present in an implicit, concealed manner, in virtue of an incomplete mode of mediation constituted by these traditions (Dupuis 2001a, 319, emphasis mine).

However, Dupuis goes on to assert that "the Christ-event, however inclusively present, does not exhaust the power of the Word of God, who became flesh in Jesus Christ," or of "the universal presence of the Spirit" (Dupuis 2001a, 319, 321). As we noted above, this move is necessitated in part by Dupuis firm insistence that the "historical particularity of Jesus imposes upon the Christ-event irremediable limitations" (Dupuis 2001a, 298). Further, it also seems apparent that this latter emphasis is related

³² Also cf. Michael Amaladoss's notion of the *mysteric Christ*: "The affirmation of the mysteric Christ is... the recognition that the mystery of Christ transcends its historical manifestation in Jesus. Some would object to the use of the word 'Christ' in this context and suggest that one should speak rather of the 'Word' or the 'Logos'. But since the Logos has entered human history in Jesus Christ, the term 'mysteric Christ' recognizes the necessary association of the Logos with the Jesus of history. It is Jesus who leads us to the Logos. The term 'Christ' recognizes and affirms this relationship" (Amaladoss 2000, 224).

to Dupuis's view that Christianity has a linear conception of time.

Christian Concept of Time as Linear

In his response to his critics from the *Revue Thomiste*, Dupuis notes:

(They insist) that there is no grace outside the mediation of the humanity of Christ and that all grace is 'christic,' having been merited by Christ on the cross (moral causality) and being 'communicated (by him) (instrumental efficient causality)'... through an 'efficient mediation of his humanity.' *Here it may be asked how this instrumental efficient causality of the humanity of Jesus operated before the mystery of the incarnation took place in history, and therefore before the humanity of Jesus existed.* The retroaction of the merits of Christ could be imagined; every grace before him is conferred *in view of and in relation to* the Christ event. *But it seems impossible to conceive of how the humanity of Jesus could act instrumentally in the conferring of grace before existing in time.* Some writers have suggested that the concrete humanity of Jesus existed before time began. This, however, seems irreconcilable with the teaching of Chalcedon (Dupuis 1999, 238, emphasis mine).

Dupuis's reasoning, in this regard, is understandable when it is considered in conjunction with his appropriation of Mircea Eliade's distinction among the cyclic, spiral and linear models of history. Characteristic of primitive cultures, the *cyclic model* "is based on the recurring rhythm of the cosmos and of living things.... 'Everything begins over again at its commencement every instant. The past is but a prefiguration of the future. No event is irreversible and no transformation is final. In a certain sense, it is even possible that nothing new happens in the world, for everything is but the repetition of the same primordial archetype.' For all its sophistication, the Greek philosophy and culture encountered by the Judeo-Christian tradition continued to preserve... many features of the cyclic model of history" (Dupuis 2001a, 212).

Similarly, in the *spiral model*, which characterizes the Hindu and other Eastern philosophies, although "composed of various periods, cycles follow each other without

a definite direction. As each cycle yields to the next in indefinite succession – hence the so-called spiral movement – history does not seem ever to have a definite aim, a final goal” (Dupuis 2001a, 213). In contrast, in the *linear model* of history “history is conceived as a creative advance toward a goal. It is moving toward fulfillment; it has a destiny. Here time is structured, dynamic, and forward-moving; events have meaning and value in themselves, in relation to each other, and, above all, in relation to the final goal of the totality of history.” And not only does Eliade observe “that the Hebrews were the first in the history of humanity to conceive and develop a linear model of history,” but he also demonstrates that this linear conception of history was “taken up and further developed by early and traditional Christianity” (Dupuis 2001, 213).

While Dupuis continues to hold that, for Christians, history is “seen as possessed of unique meaningfulness because at its heart (stands) the incomparable, prototypical event of Jesus Christ,” his emphasis on the linear conception of history can be seen to contribute to his questioning of the possibility of an “instrumental efficient causality of the humanity of Jesus (operating) before the mystery of the incarnation took place in history, and therefore before the humanity of Jesus existed” (Dupuis 1999, 238).

Here, two observations might be made in response. First, whereas it might be conceded that the attribution of an instrumental efficient causality to the Jesus Christ event *is perhaps* problematic,³³ one might propose the alternative of a sacramental

³³ See also Rahner 1979, 211: “the ‘causality’ of the saving death of Jesus for the salvation of all men must be the consequence and not the cause of the self-giving God to the world in grace. It does not mean a transformation in God, for God brings the

causality – which Dupuis himself seems to approve (see Dupuis 2001a, 283, fn. 4).

This notion is borrowed from Karl Rahner, who asserts: “the cross (together with the resurrection of Jesus) has a primary sacramental causality for the salvation of all men, in so far as it mediates salvation to man (sic) by means of salvific grace which is universally operative in the world. It is the sign of this grace and of its victorious and irreversible activity in the world. The effectiveness of the cross is based on the fact that it is the primary sacramental sign of grace” (Rahner 1979, 212).

Second, the linear character of the Christian conception of time should not be overemphasized. This is especially clear from the perspective of liturgical theology. For example, Anscar Chupungco observes:

In Christianity time and space are the stage where God and humankind meet each other. That is why *Christianity is a historical religion that moves in a spiral, different from the closed cycles of mythological religions*. We know for certain, though always in the light of faith, that God entered the sphere of human history. This certainty allows us to respond to him, equally in faith, through acts that recall his wonders and express our praise and thanksgiving. God’s action of breaking into time and space is essential to our understanding of the liturgy. Our *liturgical anamnesis* deals with God’s interventions in human history, centering on Christ’s own mission.... *Because of Christ’s incarnation, time is no longer merely cosmic and historical; it has acquired a soteriological dimension*. For Christians, time is no longer the simple succession of day, night, week, month, and season of the year.... *Time has become the privileged moment in which, through the liturgy, Christians experience the presence and saving power of Christ’s mystery...* (Chupungco 2000, xvii, xix, emphasis mine).

Perhaps even more to the point, Robert Taft notes:

Recent studies of Greek and Hebrew semantics and the relevant Old Testament

crucifixion to pass out of grace not out of anger, although the meaning of the cross does not consist alone in its power to convince us of the love and forgiveness of God. If the causality of the cross with regard to salvation were exclusively interpreted in this way, then any universality would be out of the question, since the majority of mankind (sic) have no explicit knowledge of the cross...”

material have concluded that there is no firm evidence for positing a peculiar sense of time in Hebrew thought, and that nothing in New Testament statements about time and eternity provides an adequate basis for a distinct Christian concept of time (emphasis mine). What is true, however, is [1] that the Bible presents an historical teleology, a strong sense of the sequence of historical events as purposeful movement toward a goal, [2] that it uses this sequence as a medium for presenting the story of an encounter with God, [3] that *it presents later cultic memorial celebrations of this encounter as a means of overcoming the separation in time and space from the actual saving event* [emphasis mine]. The salvation manifested in the past lives on now as an active force in our lives only if we encounter it anew and respond to it in faith, and we cannot do that unless we remember it. In the Old Testament, cultic memorial is one of the ways in which Israel remembered, making present the past saving events as a means of encountering in every generation the saving work of God. That *present* encounter is the point of it all. In memorial we do not take a mythic trip into the past, nor do we drag the past into the present by repeating the primordial event in mythic drama. For the events we are dealing with are not myths but history. As such they are *ephapax*, once and for all.... But that is not to say they are dead, static, over and done with....The events... may be past, but the reality is ever present... (Taft 2000, 13).

For our purposes, these observations serve to highlight the *anamnetic* quality of the Jesus Christ event for Christians; a quality that overcomes “the separation in time and space.”³⁴ On this basis, it might yet be argued that the Jesus Christ event bears a unique and universal sacramental salvific efficacy even for those of other religions, and those who came before Christ. For Christians are only able to affirm God’s saving

³⁴ Cf., also, Amaladoss 2000, 225: “One traditional view of salvation history sees these different manifestations (of the mystery of God) as developments from less to more perfect along a single historical line, so that Jesus will come as the most perfect, ultimate, word. With our present experience of other religions we can hardly maintain this picture of a single historical line. It is not a question of opposing a Greek-Christian linear to an Indian circular view of history. It is rather an attempt to see history as having multiple strands and multiple levels. Since God, being One, has only one plan for the universe, these strands have to be inter-weaving. Similarly, the mystery is working itself out in history in various ways, but transcends and, at the same time, unifies them.” And cf. Walter Lowe: “What time is it? It is perhaps time that we abandon the effort to situate the Christ event within a sequence that would lend it meaning. It is perhaps time that we reverse the procedure, inscribing the entirety of time/history within the Christ event” (Lowe 2003, 245).

activity to the extent to which they are able to recognize in faith, and celebrate in hope, the saving presence of Jesus Christ from the standpoint of the present moment, the liturgical *now*. From this standpoint, Christians can *see the face, hear the voice, and respond to the call*, of the crucified and risen Lord, in their encounters with other religions, and even in their consideration of historical events before the incarnation. It is in this sense that the Jesus Christ event is *trans- or meta-historical*.³⁵

Summary Observations

From our evaluation of Dupuis's key substantive positions regarding the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, the following summary observations might be made: Our *comparison* of Dupuis's positions with the CDF documents lead us to conclude, first, that both the *Notification* and *Dominus Iesus* can be read as confirming both Dupuis's appraisal of the prevailing official teaching of the Catholic church regarding the religions, as well as the necessity and validity of his call for a *religious pluralism in principle*. And, second, especially because he posits salvific activities of the Word as such and of the Holy Spirit that are distinct from, and "broader" than, the salvific significance of Jesus Christ, and also because he insists upon the limited and finite nature of the latter, Dupuis's approach falls short of the doctrinal standard

³⁵ See, e.g., Egan's description of Karl Rahner's view of the Christological character of the act of faith: "Rahner argued that the act of faith itself – which is always and everywhere possible – has a *Christological* character. Thus, no time or place existed in which Jesus Christ was not present and operative in non-Christian believers and religions. People were, are, and will be saved only through faith in *Jesus Christ*. Thus, the salvific revelation and faith found in non-Christian religions cannot be dissociated from the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even prior to the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus Christ was present and operative through his Spirit in non-Christian believers and their religions" (Egan 2002, 62-63).

proposed by the CDF in the *Notification and Dominus Iesus*.

Further, our *analysis* of Dupuis's positions show, thirdly, that Dupuis's use of the notion of a *distinction without separation* among the salvific activities of Jesus Christ, the Word as such, and the Spirit, is at best only analogous to the Chalcedonian usage. And when analyzed in conjunction with the Nestorian controversy that led up to the Council of Chalcedon, it is at least arguable that Dupuis's understanding of a *distinction without separation* is more analogous to the Nestorian usage than the Cyrillian. As such, following the CDF documents, it would seem that a correct expression of the faith is better aided by an understanding of a *distinction without separation* in the one divine economy of salvation that continues to attribute to the Jesus Christ a uniqueness and universality of an *absolute* character.

Finally, Dupuis's problematic notion of a distinction without separation among the salvific activities of Jesus Christ, the Word as such, and the Spirit, is closely related to his insistence upon the *limited nature of the Jesus Christ event*, as well as his view of the *Christian conception of time as linear*. The coherence of these latter positions with the Catholic faith, are also questionable. In contrast, an emphasis upon the Jesus Christ event as *mystery* and of the Christian conception of time as *anamnetic* respectively, might constitute possible elements in a viable alternative approach to a Christian theology of religious pluralism.

Having thus appraised Dupuis's substantive propositions in this chapter, and offered tentative suggestions for alternatives to its more problematic aspects, we shall go on, in the next chapter, to evaluate Dupuis's theological method.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

In our evaluation of Dupuis's substantive positions regarding the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, we sought to facilitate a dialogue between Dupuis and two documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: its *Notification* regarding the book *Toward a Christian Theology*, and the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*. Our study concluded that while necessary and valid in general, Dupuis's theology of religious pluralism also contains problematic positions. And to the extent that these positions fall short of the doctrinal standards officially enunciated by the Roman Catholic church, they might be seen to compromise Dupuis's project of mediation.

Turning now to the task of evaluating Dupuis's theological method, we shall adopt a similar procedure as in chapter three. Here, we shall attempt to facilitate a dialogue between Dupuis and a particular postmodern theological method. Our aim will be to show that the substantive problems in Dupuis's project of mediation are related to the fact that his methodology, while appropriate in general, still contains characteristic features of the *modern* intellectual paradigm, and that an appropriation of a more postmodern approach might be helpful in articulating a viable alternative method. As with the preceding chapter, our discussion will take place in two main parts. In the first part, we shall recall and expand upon some aspects of *modernity* that have resulted in a crisis in christology, before presenting the theological approach of Dan Stiver as a point of reference from which to evaluate Dupuis's theological method. This evaluation will be carried out, in the second part, with a view to highlighting the modern features of

Dupuis's approach. In particular, attention will be focused upon his use of scripture and tradition to argue for the salvific activity of the Word as such, distinct from yet related to the Jesus Christ event, as well as in relation to his insistence upon the limitedness of Jesus Christ. The discussion will include a consideration of concrete ways in which these perceived methodological shortcomings in Dupuis's project might be obviated.

Point of Reference

Modernity's Objectivism-relativism Dichotomy and Obsession with Method

As we noted in chapter one, a shift in intellectual climate from modernity to postmodernity constitutes a key aspect of the global context within which contemporary theology operates. Even so, the legacy of modernity continues to exert an influence in much of contemporary thought in general, and theological reflection in particular. A feature of this legacy, which is particularly important for our purposes, has been characterized by Richard Bernstein in terms of "an uneasiness that has spread throughout intellectual and cultural life. It affects almost every discipline and every aspect of our lives. This uneasiness is expressed by the *opposition between objectivism and relativism*" (Bernstein 1983, 1, emphasis mine).

Bernstein refers to this uneasiness as the *Cartesian anxiety*, because it is expressed paradigmatically in the philosophical project of Rene Descartes. "Descartes' search for a foundation or Archimedean point.... is the quest for some fixed point, some stable rock upon which we can secure our lives against the vicissitudes that constantly threaten us. The specter that hovers in the background... is not just radical epistemological skepticism but the dread of madness and chaos where nothing is fixed,

where we can neither touch bottom nor support ourselves on the surface” (Bernstein 1983, 18). Underlying this Cartesian *foundationalism* is thus the assumption that there are only two possibilities to choose from: either we arrive at some fixed epistemological foundation, or we succumb to intellectual and moral chaos. Corresponding to these two alternatives are the objectivist and relativist positions respectively.

(A)t the heart of *the objectivist’s vision*, and what makes sense of his or her passion, is *the belief that there can or must be some fixed, permanent constraints to which we can appeal and which are secure and stable*. At its most profound level the *relativist’s message* is that *there are no such basic constraints except those that we invent or temporally (and temporarily) accept*. Relativists are suspicious of their opponents because, the relativists claim, all species of objectivism almost inevitably turn into vulgar or sophisticated forms of ethnocentrism in which some privileged understanding of rationality is falsely legitimated by claiming for it an unwarranted universality. The primary reason why the (struggle) between objectivists and relativists has become so intense today is the *growing apprehension that there may be nothing – not God, reason, philosophy, science, or poetry – that answers to and satisfies our longing for ultimate constraints, for a stable and reliable rock upon which we can secure our thought and action* (Bernstein 1983, 19, emphasis mine).

A related expression of this Cartesian anxiety, is the *obsession with method*, which is again paradigmatically expressed in Descartes’ approach to philosophy. His proposed remedy for *anxiety* is a particular method – *universal methodic doubt* – by which the apparently ultimate and indubitable bedrock of truth can be attained. This tack is an expression of the modern belief that solid epistemological foundations might be arrived at if only all knowledge is subjected to an appropriately rigorous methodological process of critical analysis. The fruit of such a process can then serve as a foundation from which subsequent knowledge can be logically deduced. Only in this way can an appropriately stable epistemological edifice be constructed.

Three Antinomies in Modern Christology

The field of theology has not been immune to the impact of this modern intellectual dichotomy between objectivism and relativism, and its accompanying obsession with methodology. Christoph Schwöbel, for example, has noted: "It is not a sign of great originality to observe that modern Christology is in a state of crisis. There is nothing new about this situation, nor about the observation. Indeed, it could be said that this crisis has accompanied Christology since its inception, so that the term 'modern Christology' and the description 'Christology in crisis' are almost equivalents" (Schwöbel 1995, 113).

Schwöbel identifies three groups of assumptions or *antinomies* that constitute this crisis. Collectively, these antinomies serve to drive a firm wedge between the two integral aspects of the Christian belief in Jesus Christ: that Jesus Christ both walked the earth as a particular historical person and has universal salvific significance for all time and all of creation. "First of all, there is the antinomy between... 'the historical' and 'the ultimate', expressed with brilliant clarity in Lessing's thesis that contingent truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason" (Schwöbel 1995, 115). In christology, this antinomy has led to a

separation between a historical account of the person of Jesus and a theological account of the ultimate reality of God and Christ... (which has become) a regular feature in the problematic relationship between much of biblical studies and dogmatic theology where one is conceived as a historical discipline and the other concerned with the reflection of ahistorical ultimates.... In systematic theology this antinomy is today most frequently presented as a central problem of method: should it proceed from above or from below, from the historical reality of the person of Jesus of Nazareth or from the ultimate being of God (Schwöbel 1995, 116, emphasis mine).

Schwöbel's second antinomy is that between the past and the present, and is

expressed, for example, in the question: “How is it possible that an event in the past has ultimate significance in the present (and indeed for all time)?” (Schwöbel 1995, 117). Consequent upon the rise of historical consciousness, “(w)hat seems no longer possible in modern Christology is to present an integrated picture of Jesus Christ’s past and his presence for the church and the cosmos.... And again, it is in the area of questions concerning the method of Christology that this antinomy is most acutely felt: in the question of whether the approach to Christology should proceed from the historical Jesus or from the *Christus praesens* of contemporary Christian experience of faith” (Schwöbel 1995, 117).

Finally, the third antinomy consists in the “disjunction of being and meaning,” which creates a tension between questions concerning the person or ontological constitution of Jesus Christ and those regarding his significance for us. Once again, it is in the area of questions of method that this antinomy might be seen to be most influential: “should christological reflection proceed from Christology to soteriology or from soteriology to Christology?” (Schwöbel 1995, 119).

Schwöbel summarizes his description of this modern christological crisis in this way: “we have to conclude that we are presented with *a picture of disintegration*. Modern Christology seems to be increasingly unable to conceive and to conceptualize the unity of the person of Christ and seems to be left with the fragments of the ‘historical Jesus’, and the ‘Christ of faith’ and the ‘Son of God’ of christological Dogma. Therefore *modern Christological reflection seems mainly concerned with finding ways of integrating the fragments in a new synthesis*, of joining together what has been put

asunder” (Schwöbel 1995, 119, emphasis mine).

It is apparent that this crisis situation in modern christology is an expression of the modern intellectual paradigm as described by Bernstein. Proceeding from the assumption that all human knowledge must be firmly grounded upon foundations that are free from presuppositions, modern christology seeks a similar grounding for the Christian belief in Jesus Christ. It thus, for example, sets out to critically analyze the dual Christian belief in the particularity and universal significance of Jesus Christ. However, having taken apart the Humpty Dumpty of Christian faith in Jesus Christ, modern theologians find themselves faced with the apparently insurmountable task of putting him back together again.

To carry the metaphor a little further, christology finds itself in a situation in which Humpty Dumpty has already fallen. Therefore, as *Schwöbel* points out, it is

unrealistic to hope that the ills of modern Christology can be healed by a simple repristination of traditional ‘orthodoxy’. The past that has to be appropriated will always be one that has offered inadequate resources for preventing or combating the modern crisis of christological thought. Only if these inadequacies are appropriated as well and can be remedied, can one hope to point to future possibilities of overcoming the christological crisis.... The changes which can be initiated... will have to overcome the alternative between theological traditionalism and modernism” (*Schwöbel* 1995, 114-115).

A Postmodern Theological Method

It is in the face of this crisis situation that an appropriation of some elements of a postmodern intellectual paradigm might be helpful.³⁶ In particular, the postmodern

³⁶ As we noted in chapter one, *postmodernity* is itself a highly controverted notion. Here we shall consider only one particular perspective, namely, the hermeneutical theology of Dan Stiver.

critique of modernity has emphasized the impossibility of arriving at knowledge that is absolutely free from presuppositions. It has also repudiated modernity's obsession with method. Thus Dan Stiver notes: "At the fading of modernity, it has become clear in theology that methodology, or, as it is often technically called, prolegomena, was central to its assumptions. As many have pointed out, modernity generally relied on a secure foundation and then a secure method to build on the foundation – at least that was the goal. Postmodernism is the result of repeated failure to achieve such a lofty ideal; thus the postmodern turn especially rejects such reliance on foundationalism and method" (Stiver 2003, 170).

What then might be a possible way forward? First, in contrast to modernist foundationalism, a postmodern approach to theology emphasizes the situated nature of both the theologian and of the beliefs which s/he seeks to understand. Here Stiver's approach proposes "an unusual connection between 'postliberal theology,' also known as the Yale School, and a circumspect appeal to the hermeneutical philosophy identified particularly with the thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur" (Stiver 2003, 171). Thus, following the Yale School's appropriation of the later Ludwig Wittgenstein and W.V.O. Quine, Christian beliefs are thought of as having a "web-like structure," in which "some beliefs are more central and solid in relation to more peripheral beliefs, akin to foundational structures, but unlike a foundational structure the logical relations do not proceed in just one way. As Wittgenstein put it, 'One might almost say these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house,' and again, 'What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather

held fast by what lies around it” (Stiver 2003, 172-173). Individual beliefs can thus only be properly understood when considered against the horizon of a holistic view of Christian faith and practice.

Not only Christian beliefs, but the one – individual or community – who reflects upon them is also inevitably a situated entity. Drawing from Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, Stiver emphasizes that the modern search for a purely objective epistemological foundation is misconceived because “we always bring our presuppositions, or prejudices... to understanding, and rightly so” (Stiver 2003, 179). There is no purely objective knowledge. All knowledge is the fruit of interpretation. The modern dilemma of having to choose between objectivism and relativism is thus shown to be a false dichotomy.

This situatedness within a particular tradition or context does not imply, however, a solipsistic *isolation* from others. Rather, it is seen as *enabling* understanding across traditions and contexts, described in Gadamerian terms as a *fusion of horizons*. For Stiver, this view serves as a corrective to the notion that “postliberal theology implies such ‘Wittgensteinian fideism’... where the religious language-game is separable from all other games. Against such a misappropriation... of Wittgenstein, human beings are immersed in a plethora of language-games that interact in numerous ways.... In other words, intratextuality (understanding within a tradition, context, or language-game) is conditioned by *intertextuality* (understanding across traditions, contexts, or language-games” (Stiver 2003, 180, 181, emphasis is Stiver’s). And this capacity for understanding across horizons also implies the obligation to dialogue with those

operating from different perspectives, including those of different religions.

Consequent upon this embrace of human finitude and situatedness, a postmodern approach to theology also repudiates the modernist obsession with method that springs from the latter's foundationalist assumptions. Even so, Stiver believes that there is yet a place for methodological discussions in a postmodern milieu.

The purpose of methodology in a postmodern context... is to be not so much a blueprint to be slavishly followed as a map to be consulted periodically.... In a time of transition in philosophy and in a time of flux in theology, being clear about one's epistemological commitments and presuppositions continue to be desirable. The point is that methodology should be seen in this clarifying role, not as a foundation or as a proof.... For the sake of clarity, prolegomena spells out one's basic approach. This would include one's tradition and context and the major theological emphases that shape one's theology.... It should also reveal the philosophical and other commitments that characterize one's approach to theology (Stiver 2003, 171, 175, 176).

In sketching out his own "basic approach" to theology, Stiver appropriates aspects of the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. Stiver describes the dynamic of theological reflection in terms of a *hermeneutic arc* or *spiral* involving three interrelated moments: "a starting point – or *first understanding* – that is somewhat naive and is inherently shaped by interests and tradition.... followed... by a *critical moment of suspicion* and the use of whatever critical methodologies are available... (and) an appropriation that is undetermined by methodology... a "*post-critical naivete*" (Stiver 2003, 181-182, emphasis mine).

Elaborating upon the first moment of this hermeneutical framework, Stiver notes that "we do not start from scratch or first build a foundation but begin where we and the church are" (Stiver 2003, 182). Appropriating the insights of the postliberal theologians,

Stiver also emphasizes that “experience by itself lacks specificity... and... must be taken in a social or corporate sense. More precisely, the experience of the church in its practices, not just human experience in general, is especially crucial.... (T)heology is the self-description of faith. The hermeneutical arc may then begin with the *practices of the church* such as worship, prayer, ministry, and witness as much as a particular text” (Stiver 2003, 182, emphasis mine).

Next, the second – critical – moment is, for Stiver, the properly theological moment, in which one reflects upon and tests everything (cf., 1 Thessalonians 5:21). “In biblical language, we bring prophetic criticism to beliefs and practices with the understanding that sin and idolatry infect everything, sometimes especially the life of faith, as the biblical narratives in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament attest so clearly. The methods of criticism may be modern, or postmodern, but the practice is ancient” (Stiver 2003, 182).

Finally, the constructive moment of appropriation involves a renewed imaginative synthesis of the different aspects of Christian belief and practice, albeit duly chastened by the rigorous critique of the second moment. As with the first moment in the *arc*, this third moment of appropriation is not a purely theoretical move. Rather, it has an inherently practical aspect. Stiver explains this practical aspect of interpretation in terms of the Ricoeurian notions of *attestation* or *testimony*, and *risk* or *wager*. The new understanding arrived at via the hermeneutical arc never attains to the modern ideal of absolute certitude. Instead, it takes the form of an attestation, “a testimony to the truth that involves conviction and reasons but cannot rely on Cartesian

objectivism.... Such a confession of truth is a risk and a wager that is backed up by one's life.... 'We wager on a certain set of values and then try to be consistent with them; verification is therefore a question of our whole life'" (Stiver 2003, 183-184). It is important to emphasize, however, that this wager is neither capricious nor arbitrary. Instead it springs from a serious attempt to name the God whom one encounters even as one undergoes the hermeneutical process of theological reflection.

Using Stiver's postmodern approach as a point of reference, or partner in dialogue, we turn now to the task of evaluating Dupuis's theological method. We shall consider both Dupuis's method in general, as well as, more specifically, how he applies it vis-a-vis two of his more problematic substantive theological positions.

Critique and Alternatives

Dupuis's Hermeneutical Theology in General

When Stiver's theological method is compared with our description of Dupuis's method in the second chapter, various points of convergence can be discerned. First, we might recall that the general framework in which we portrayed Dupuis's project was that of a contemporary renegotiation of Christian identity in response to interreligious encounters that challenge the prevailing Christian self-understanding. The three-fold dynamic expressed in this framework closely resembles that of the hermeneutic arc proposed by Stiver. In contrast to the foundationalism of modernity, our description of Dupuis's approach to the religions portrayed the latter as beginning with a careful investigation into the history of Christian, or Roman Catholic, attitudes vis-a-vis the religions, leading to a description of the current official position. This first step might be

seen to resemble Stiver's first moment of a pre-critical naivete. The critical moment in Stiver's approach might then be seen to correspond to Dupuis's challenging experiences of interreligious encounters in India, as well as his consideration of the critiques by various contemporary theologies of religions of the prevailing Christian self-understanding. And the final constructive moment of appropriation is similar to Dupuis's proposed model of a Christian theology of religious pluralism.

Dupuis also explicitly adopts a contextual and hermeneutical theological method involving a triangular dynamic of *text*, *context* and *interpreter* (see, e.g., Dupuis 2001a, 15ff.). We have already presented, in chapter two, a brief description of this method, and will not repeat it here. Our concern, rather, is to highlight the fact that Dupuis's approach draws from the same resources in philosophical hermeneutics – Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur – as does Stiver. Thus the same concern and potential for transcending the modern intellectual paradigm that is found in Stiver, might also be found in Dupuis. In this regard, particularly noteworthy aspects of Dupuis's method are: the emphasis upon the situated condition of the interpreter, as well as the importance given to the praxis of interreligious dialogue within Dupuis's triangular hermeneutical dynamic. "The context acts upon the interpreter by raising specific questions; it influences the precomprehension of faith with which the interpreter reads the text. The text, in turn, acts on the interpreter, whose reading of it will provide a direction for Christian praxis" (Dupuis 2001a, 16).

We should note here, however, that while Dupuis's hermeneutical method is similar to Paul Knitter's *method of correlation* – which Dupuis explicitly endorses (see

Dupuis 2001a, 17) – this latter method has been criticized by Michael Barnes for positing the possibility of an objective human standpoint beyond tradition and experience.

The immediate issue is that of the objectivity of judgment. Where do the criteria for the proposed correlation come from? The *assumption of an independent vantage-point*, somehow distinct from both tradition and situation, ignores the fact that all judgments are particular, being rooted in time and place... *The negotiation involved demands not a formal correlation of concepts or points of view, but an engagement with persons which is logically prior to any such process...* (T)heology of religions demands not a version of the ‘method of correlation,’ which sets the subject above ‘tradition’ and ‘situation,’ but a far more risky enterprise which would speak of a self implicated in both and called, therefore, always to be responsible before the pressures of history, culture and politics (Barnes, 57-58, 105, emphasis mine).

Whatever its applicability vis-a-vis Knitter and his method of correlation, Barnes’s critique does not seem to implicate Dupuis’s hermeneutical method in general. First, as we noted above, hermeneutical theology is born of the contemporary consciousness of the inevitably contextual nature of all human knowledge. What is emphasized is the situatedness, rather than the objectivity, of the human knower. Further, as our account, in chapter two, of Dupuis’s theological itinerary has shown, his approach cannot be said to be a mere correlation of concepts, but involves actual interreligious encounters. Dupuis himself emphasizes the importance of “the praxis of interreligious dialogue,” and the need to “maintain a dialogical attitude at every stage of the reflection” (Dupuis 2001a, 19). Finally, as we noted in chapter one, Barnes’ own approach relies heavily on the thought of Paul Ricoeur, and thus might itself be considered another version of the hermeneutical theological method that Dupuis favors.

Thus far, Dupuis’s account of his preferred theological method seems to hold up

well to the postmodern critique as presented by Stiver. It is important, however, to proceed to a closer examination of how Dupuis actually applies his method. To this end, we shall next focus our attention upon two aspects of Dupuis's theology: his assertion that the Jesus Christ event bears "irremediable limitations" and his argument for the salvific activity of the Word as such, distinct yet inseparable from that of Jesus Christ (Dupuis 2002, 176).

Irremediable Limitations of the Jesus Christ Event

As we noted in the preceding chapter, Dupuis's emphasis upon the "irremediable limitations" of the Jesus Christ event is an essential piece of his theological synthesis. For it is this problematic assertion that provides *space* for him to argue for the distinct but inseparable activities of the Word as such, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ, in a single economy of salvation. The issue that concerns us here is the christological method by which Dupuis arrives at this conclusion.

It seems important first to reiterate that Dupuis's professed aim is to mediate between the pluralist theology of religions³⁷ – which advocates a theocentric view of salvation – and the more traditional christocentric perspective. Dupuis thus explicitly rejects the dichotomy set up by the former "between the particularity of the Jesus event, located in space and time and thereby irremediably limited, and the Christian claim of a universal significance for that event," and aims "to show that a well-pondered assertion

³⁷ We have already noted, in chapter one, that the pluralist paradigm has been associated with Enlightenment Deism. Other modern features of the pluralist approach include: its essentialist understanding of a common universal religious experience, and its exclusive use of the historical-critical approach to biblical exegesis.

of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ which unambiguously maintains his personal identity as the 'only begotten' Son of God leaves space for an 'open' theology of the religions and of religious pluralism" (Dupuis 2002, 162).

Thus Dupuis is careful first to distinguish his christology from that of the pluralists. He reviews the pluralist approach to christology, and especially notes the latter's insistence that "a valid use of historical criticism (in the field of biblical and New Testament exegesis) leads inevitably to a reappraisal of Jesus Christ.... (that) is plainly based on a 'revisionist' Christology, which may be characterized as a 'low' Christology or one of 'degree'" (Dupuis 2002, 169). For Dupuis, however, the "persistent flaw in the pluralist paradigm is that of imagining that the only real possible alternative to its own viewpoint is a dogmatic, exclusivist dismissal of the other religions" (Dupuis 2002, 171).

Instead, Dupuis attempts to hold in tension, on the one hand, the Christian claim regarding the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ, and on the other hand, the need for "a new interpretation of the New Testament" that takes sufficiently into account the context of religious pluralism as experienced in "the praxis of interreligious dialogue" (Dupuis 2002, 171). Thus, in keeping with his adoption of a hermeneutical approach, Dupuis's professed starting point for theological reflection upon the christological question is situated within two related contexts: that of the Christian tradition and that of the contemporary context of religious pluralism. In this way, Dupuis manifests the intention to transcend the modern intellectual paradigm.

At the same time, however, Dupuis's conception of the christological task can be seen to fall short of his intent, since he still speaks in terms of a search for *foundations*

and *grounding*. For example, he notes: “What has been stated (regarding the contextual nature of theological reflection and scriptural exegesis) does not dispense us from showing, in response to the ‘revisionist’ or ‘degree’ Christologies on which the pluralist paradigm of the theology of religions rests, that the Christian claim to a ‘constitutive’ uniqueness of Jesus Christ rests on *solid ground* and has a *valid foundation*” (Dupuis 2002, 173, emphasis mine). And again: “the Christological task must consist in showing that the Christian faith in Jesus-the-Christ is *firmly grounded in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth* – in other words, the church’s explicit Christology is grounded in the implicit Christology of Jesus himself” (Dupuis 2002, 174, emphasis mine).

This tension in Dupuis’s approach to christology is also evident in his book *Who Do You Say I Am?* Here, Dupuis devotes his first chapter to a survey of various recent approaches to christology, concluding with a proposal for an “integral approach” to christology. In particular, he argues for

a prudent and balanced use of the historico-critical method of exegesis.... (that) requires that it never be considered exclusive and standing in isolation from the ecclesial tradition and the Church’s teaching authority.... To apply the historico-critical method of exegesis in isolation from the Church’s memory would entail the risk of a christological reductionism that would fall short of the Church’s faith. Such a reductionism may consist of adopting an exclusively functional Christology that intentionally remains silent on the ontology of Jesus Christ or his personal identity as the Son of God (Dupuis 1994m 17).

Dupuis’s response to the “christological reductionism” of the pluralists, is to affirm the traditional ontological christology by grounding it in scripture. However, his approach to the scriptures remains essentially a historico-critical one. Treating the

scriptures largely as a historical resource, Dupuis seeks to ground the church's belief in the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ upon what the gospels reveal about the consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth. "In the last analysis, the Christology of Jesus' Sonship of God has, and could only have, as its last foundation the filial consciousness of Jesus himself. Such is its ultimate source. Only by going back in remembrance to what Jesus had said about himself could the mystery of his oneness with God be finally perceived" (Dupuis 1994, 70).

The foundationalism inherent in this approach is apparent. And consequently, Dupuis clearly remains caught up in Schwöbel's christological antinomies. This is evident also in the way Dupuis continues to speak in terms of christologies *from above* and *from below*.

In recent years Christology has rightly shown... that the starting point for the Christological discourse must be the human reality, even the human history, of Jesus of Nazareth. It means that – following the development already operative in the Christological reflection of the New Testament – *Christology must start 'from below,' not 'from above,'* that is, not from the person of the Word preexisting in the mystery of God. But, at the same time, it is also true that, in order to be whole and entire, *Christology 'from below' must lead through the intrinsic dynamism of the faith toward a christology 'from above,'* that is, a Christology that does not rest at the human being of Jesus, in whom 'God is present and working' (see Acts 2:22), but which with the Johannine Christological reflection ascends toward the mystery of the preexisting person of the Word of God, made man in Jesus Christ (Jn 1:1-14) (Dupuis 2002, 157, emphasis mine).

Such an approach is problematic in at least two respects. First, its apparently foundationalist procedure seems to fly in the face of the postmodern insistence upon the finitude of human knowing, and the impossibility of truly grounding faith convictions upon historical or empirical data. For example, Stephen Duffy asserts: "It is impossible

to determine historically whether a particular human is normative for all humans. Such significance eludes historical demonstration. The question concerning Jesus' universal normativeness can be answered only in belief. A positive reply is a matter of faith. Still, this faith response must have a basis in the history of Jesus, in reality; otherwise it is ideological" (Duffy 2000, 19, fn. 31).³⁸ And again: "Historical knowledge of Jesus cannot establish that he is the absolute savior; such a claim is the confession of those who experience God's healing presence in Jesus as the key to a new humanity. So much so that Jesus becomes part of the referential meaning of God" (Duffy 2000, 22).

Second, Dupuis's use of the historico-critical approach to ground the Christian belief in the ontological identity of Jesus Christ amounts to but an attenuated retrieval of Christian memory. In this regard, Seán Kealy, in writing about the work of biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, notes the latter's view that

one of the great deficiencies of the historical critical method is its disregard for the literary complexities of the texts, leading to the fragmentation of the texts into smaller pieces which are then used as historical sources. It is the final literary form of such texts which are canonized. Only when we attend to this literary dimension... are we engaged in the interpretation of the New Testament. To read these texts as merely sources of historical information is to 'miss the most important and explicit insight they offer the reader, namely, how the experience of the powerful Spirit of God that came through the crucified Messiah, Jesus, created not only a new understanding of who Jesus was but, simultaneously, a new understanding of God and God's way with the world'. Johnson is in a long line of theologians... who insist that historical

³⁸ For Paul Ricoeur, biblical texts should be read neither as purely historical, nor as purely symbolic or mythical accounts. Rather, they should be seen from the point of view of *testimony*, as presentations of unique historical events in a way that already includes an interpretation of their universal meaning. Such an approach tends to direct the attention of contemporary readers to what is essential in the biblical texts – their meaning for us here and now – without necessarily putting into question their historical basis (see, e.g., Schüssler-Fiorenza 1984, 29-46).

research cannot deny or confirm Christian faith. While a historian can produce a mini-biography of Jesus, a believer knows that they are addressed by the living, real yet mysterious Jesus and therefore can say much more about his deeper significance (Kealy 2000, 57-58).

To be fair, however, Dupuis does express an awareness that “Jesus’ personal identity is an object of faith; it is not open to any proof” (Dupuis 1994, 41). He also asserts that “biblical hermeneutics does not consider the sacred book to be a mere memory of a past word. The word is being ‘reactualized’ in present history, thus making present history part of the ongoing history of salvation.” Further, Dupuis emphasizes that the Word of God “is a dynamic rather than a static norm.... a complex whole, with the tensions involved between apparently contradictory, yet complementary, elements of truth” (Dupuis 2002, 172, 173).

Still, as we have seen, Dupuis’s approach tends to overemphasize the historical aspect of the biblical testimony. He also tends to present the relationship between the scriptures and the Christian belief in Jesus Christ as an evidentiary and logical one, reminiscent of the modern intellectual paradigm. What is compromised is a more holistic appreciation of how the scriptures and Christian belief are situated within a single communal Christian narrative of salvation centered upon the Jesus Christ event as having both historical and ultimate universal significance, as well as how this narrative is lived out in the praxis of the Christian community.

Dupuis’s insistence upon the limited nature of Jesus Christ might thus be seen as a side-effect of these modern features of his approach. Having abstracted from the wider horizon of Christian belief and practice, within which scripture and tradition are

situated, and focusing primarily on the historical particularity of Jesus Christ, Dupuis too easily downplays the full extent of the Christian conviction regarding the ultimate universal salvific significance of the Jesus Christ event. In this connection, it is striking that after having established the scriptural foundations for the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ, Dupuis offers no further scriptural support for his assertion that the Jesus Christ event bears “irremediable limitations”; relying instead upon the work of theologians such as Claude Geffré and Edward Schillebeeckx. Dupuis simply accepts the modernist assumption that *the historical* is necessarily incompatible with *the ultimate*, and so remains a captive of the modern christological antinomies articulated by Schwöbel.

The question that arises for us here is how, concretely, might a christology along the lines of Stiver’s postmodern method avoid the modernist pitfalls to which Dupuis seems to have succumbed. A presentation of a complete postmodern approach to christology is obviously beyond our scope. However, especially with regard to the retrieval of christological doctrine, reference might be made, once again, to the work of Schwöbel, who offers some orientations toward a “trinitarian hermeneutic for Christology” (Schwöbel 1995, 138). What is particularly helpful for our purposes is Schwöbel’s view regarding the task, context and proper point of departure for christology.

Developed from within the *framework of the trinitarian logic of Christian faith*, the task of Christology cannot be conceived as establishing the divinity of Jesus Christ by rational argument or historical proof. It should rather be interpreted as the *conceptual reconstruction of the truth claims concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ asserted, presupposed and implied in Christian faith as it is practised in*

worship, proclamation, confession and the Christian life. Christology of reflection already presupposes the Christology of witness and attempts to give it a coherent conceptual expression” (Schwöbel 1995, 138, emphasis mine).

Therefore, for Schwöbel, the starting point, and context, of christological reflection should not be conceived in dichotomous terms *from above* or *from below*, but rather “from the life of the Christian community where Christ is acclaimed, professed and proclaimed” (Schwöbel 1995, 138). The contrast between this proposal of Schwöbel’s and Dupuis’s approach – which focuses narrowly upon the need to establish the divinity of the man Jesus Christ via a historical reading of the New Testament – is clear. In the next section, we will offer more specific suggestions for helping Dupuis’s methodology to transcend its modernist shortcomings.

Salvific Activity of the Word as Such

We turn now to Dupuis’s argument for the salvific activity of the Word as such, distinct from that of Jesus Christ. Again, it is important to recall that Dupuis’s aim here is to mediate between the *logocentrism* of some pluralist theologies of religions and the prevailing *christocentric* perspective of the RC church. He thus seeks to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is both *constitutive* of universal salvation, and yet *relational* vis-a-vis the salvific activities of the Word as such and the Spirit in the other religions. However, as we have shown in chapter three, the resulting unity in distinction that Dupuis posits between the Word as such (and the Spirit) and Jesus Christ falls short of the union envisaged by the official RC teaching. It is our concern here to see how this shortcoming is related to the method that Dupuis adopts.

Dupuis’s approach to the problem is in two parts. First, he is concerned to

retrieve a *logos* theology, in order to argue for the universal salvific activity of the Word as such distinct from the Jesus Christ event. Having done this, he proceeds to assert the centrality of the Jesus Christ event as constitutive of universal salvation but situated within and related to the broader activity of the Word as such. What seems important to note is the way in which Dupuis begins with the presupposition of a distinction between the Word as such and Jesus Christ, and then proceeds to relate the salvific significance of the two in a single divine economy. This might be seen, once again, as a symptom of the modern intellectual paradigm, that is concerned first with analysis and only subsequently with a synthesis of the resulting fragments of Christian faith. That this is so will hopefully become clearer as we examine more closely Dupuis's retrieval of *logos* theology.

Dupuis's argument for a distinct salvific activity of the Word as such, consists of three main components: the Wisdom of God in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, the Word of God in the prologue of John's Gospel, and the doctrine of the *logos spermatikos* in the early fathers of the church.

For the first component, Dupuis draws from the work of Giovanni Odasso, who "gives close examination to four important texts from Wisdom literature in order to show the development through biblical revelation of the theology of the Wisdom of God, of its universal presence and effectiveness, and its relevance for a theology of religions. The four texts are the following: Job 28:1-28; Prov 8:22-31; Sir 24:1-32; Wis 9:1-18" (Dupuis 2002, 141). According to Odasso, these texts show that "religions present themselves as the fruit of the activity of Wisdom in the life of people" (quoted in Dupuis

2002, 141-142).

Turning then to the prologue of John's gospel, Dupuis indicates a divergence in scholarly opinion regarding the proper referent of the prologue. "Some exegetes read from the very first verses of the prologue, or at least from v. 6 (for example, R. Brown), a direct and explicit reference to Jesus Christ as the Word incarnate; others, however, insist, vv. 6-8 notwithstanding, that from the beginning until v. 14 (that is, from v. 1 to v. 13 inclusive) the prologue is referring to the Word-of-God-to-be-incarnate, considered before his incarnation as already present in the mystery of God and working from the very beginning of human history" (Dupuis 2002, 142). The second view, expressed especially in the work of X. Léon Dufour, also holds that the radical novelty of the incarnation does not supercede the prior activity of the Word as such, and allows Dupuis to assert: "It seems therefore possible to talk of an action of the Word of God, not only before the incarnation of the Word but also after the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, distinct from the salvific action through his humanity, provided that 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 for the universal salvation of humankind takes place" (Dupuis 2002, 144).

Having thus established the continuity of *logos* theology from the Old to the New Testament, Dupuis proceeds to consider its further development in the doctrine of the *logos spermatikos* of the fathers of the second century. In particular, he examines the work of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Clement of Alexandria. Space constraints prevent us from dwelling in detail upon Dupuis's discussion, except to note his more

significant conclusions. First, he points out that the “early fathers... courageously combined the Stoic concept of reason immanent in the universe with the biblical tradition of the Word which had sown its seed among men (sic). In this way they invite us to affirm the presence of the Word of God among humankind outside the Jewish-Christian tradition” (Dupuis 2002, 154-155).

Second, the role that the fathers gave to this active presence of the Word of God in Greek philosophy and elsewhere was that of a preparation for the gospel. However, even with the incarnation, the extra-ecclesial expressions of the universal presence of the Word “did not forfeit their role in the economy of salvation.... The difference, in fact, between the two ‘regimes’ of the self-communication of God in grace, before and after the Christ event, consists in the intervention in the second case of the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ, as universal channel of grace through his resurrection from the dead, and therefore, of the communication through it of the indwelling of the Spirit” (Dupuis 2000, 155).

Thus, on the basis of this retrieval of *logos theology*, Dupuis establishes the ongoing universal salvific activity of the Word as such, distinct but related to that of Jesus Christ. In evaluating Dupuis’s retrieval of *logos* theology, we shall consider first his treatment of the Old and New Testament witness, and then his appropriation of the *logos spermatikos* doctrine of the early fathers.

Wisdom Literature and Prologue of John

Regarding the former, it is once again noteworthy how dependent Dupuis is upon historico-critical exegesis, which tends to highlight the diverse historical contexts

of individual texts, and thus to fragment what has traditionally been understood as a single Christian biblical narrative. What is missing here is “the patristic and traditional notion of the unity of Scripture, according to which all biblical texts are rooted in and point to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ” (Kurz 2002, 205). And it is apparent that this lack contributes to Dupuis’s *thinner* understanding of the unity between the salvific significance of the Word as such and the Word incarnate.

This seems to provide another example of how Dupuis’s approach continues to operate within a modern intellectual framework and consequently fails to retrieve a holistic enough view of Christian belief and practice. The point is not that historico-critical exegesis should be discarded altogether, but rather, following Stiver, that it should be bracketed within a pre-critical and a post-critical naivete respectively, in such a way that the strongly christocentric character of the Christian interpretation of the bible might be retrieved.³⁹

A possible alternative that might address this shortcoming in Dupuis’s use of scripture would be to situate historico-critical exegesis within the broader context of the liturgy as the proper arena for Christian scriptural interpretation. For “the liturgical assembly... is the place where the Bible becomes the Bible” (Chauvet 2001, 212). And within the liturgical assembly, “texts taken ‘out of context’ now become texts in a new

³⁹ See Pontifical Biblical Commission 1993, 249: “The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts. Holy Scripture, inasmuch as it is the ‘Word of God in human language,’ has been composed by human authors in all its various parts and in all the sources that lie behind them. Because of this, its proper understanding not only admits the use of this method but actually requires it.”

context, namely the communal act of memory that is the liturgy” (Irwin 1994, 98). Within this new liturgical context, biblical interpretation takes on several important characteristics. For example, the following excerpt from the *Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* highlights the christological, salvific, doxological, trinitarian, anamnetic and eschatological aspects.

In the celebration of the Liturgy... *Christ is present* in his word, as he carries out the *mystery of salvation*, he sanctifies humanity and *offers the Father perfect worship*... Moreover the word of God *unceasingly calls to mind and extends the economy of salvation*, which achieves fullest expression in the Liturgy... The word of God constantly proclaimed in the Liturgy is always... *a living and effective word* through the *power of the Holy Spirit*. It expresses the Father’s love that never fails in its effectiveness toward us... When in celebrating the Liturgy the Church proclaims both the Old and New Testament, it is proclaiming *one and the same mystery of Christ*... The more profound our understanding of the celebration of the Liturgy, the higher our appreciation of the importance of God’s word. Whatever we say of the one, we can in turn say of the other, because *each recalls the mystery of Christ* and each in its own way *causes the mystery to be carried forward* (Liturgy Documentary Series 1 1998, § 4-5, emphasis mine).

In our present discussion, what is especially noteworthy is the christological perspective that would allow the interpreter to read the Wisdom literature and the prologue of John as referring to Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate. More specifically, we must not fail to note how the liturgy brings together Sirach 24:1-2, 8-12 (one of the Wisdom passages discussed by Dupuis), Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18 (which speaks of how from the foundation of the world God has destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ) and John 1:1-18 (the prologue) as the readings for the second Sunday of Christmas. Given this liturgical context, and also that “(a)ll Scripture texts proclaimed in the liturgy, influence how we hear them and how we ought to interpret them,” it might yet be argued that the Wisdom literature and the prologue of John’s gospel should be

interpreted so as to emphasize their reference to Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate (Irwin 1994, 96).

Again, this emphasis on liturgical interpretation of scripture does not necessarily imply the discarding of historico-critical exegesis. Rather, the challenge is to find an approach to scripture that is able to integrate historico-critical exegesis with biblical interpretation within a liturgical context. One way is to consider the bible as a *classic*, characterized by the “need for constant interpretation and a certain timelessness – even though the text is always rooted in its historicity... (arising) from its excess of meaning” (Baldovin 1992, 102). From this perspective, historico-critical exegesis, and for that matter, literary exegesis and the other modern scriptural approaches, might yet be taken into consideration and respected, without allowing the same to unduly restrict our interpretation of the bible to a narrow attention to the texts’ respective historical contexts. For example, the fact that Dupuis’s consideration of the prologue of John’s gospel uncovered a divergence of exegetical opinions, might be taken to indicate that it is just as exegetically respectable to interpret the prologue as referring to the Word incarnate as to the Word-to-be-incarnate.

Further, warrants for an approach to the interpretation of scripture texts that considers their juxtaposition in a particular liturgical context can be found from at least two sources. We have already mentioned the theological warrant, namely, the patristic notion of the *unity of Scripture*. A philosophical warrant is also available in the notion of *intertextuality*. For example, William Kurz observes:

It is reasonable to hold that every text utilizes and is related to other texts in its

cultural context, and in turn makes its own contribution to meaning in that context.... In other words, *all written texts are necessarily intertextual* in that they are constructed using preestablished language and cultural codes which were used in and influenced by other written texts.... Intertextuality... might also apply simply to the *mutual influence on contemporary readers* of all the relevant texts in the corpus or canon of texts.... (T)he intertextual intrabiblical interpretive approach... should also permit influence on one's interpretation of related Old Testament and New Testament passages *to flow in both directions* (Kurz 2002, 204-206, emphasis mine).

It thus seems reasonable to suppose that the situating of the historico-critical exegesis of the Wisdom literature and the prologue of John within a liturgical context makes it possible to see these scripture passages as references to the Word incarnate, and so obviate the need to relate them further to the Christian belief in the centrality of the Jesus Christ event. Further, this approach need not be seen to compromise the development of a Christian theology of religious pluralism. As we saw in the preceding chapter, the enduring salvific significance of the religions can be understood as being part of the manifold and infinite mystery of Jesus Christ, which always remains beyond the full comprehension even of Christians.

Logos Spermatikos Doctrine

Turning now to Dupuis's discussion of the doctrine of the *logos spermatikos* in the early fathers, we might observe how Dupuis focuses on this doctrine with seeming disregard for the wider context within which it was articulated. For example, he neglects to attend to the development of trinitarian and christological doctrine that was so much a preoccupation of the patristic writers. Once again, the modern analytical tendency, which focuses upon various elements in the tradition while abstracting from their wider context, is operative here. But what does Dupuis's approach miss by such an

attenuated attention to the *logos spermatikos* doctrine of the early fathers?

In order to offer one possible answer to this question, reference might be made to an essay by Frances Young, in which she offers “an interpretation of patristic Christology which is not simply a developmental account but seeks key features of its underlying structure” (Young 2000, 191). According to Young, “structurally patristic Christology is the resolution of the question how the Creator relates to the creation” (Young 2000, 202). Her argument is as follows: First, in the milieu within which the early Christians found themselves the universe was hierarchically conceived, and so, if Christ, or the Logos, were of any importance, each had to take his place within the hierarchy. Next, with the adoption of the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, after the theological struggles of the second century, a clear distinction was posited, within the hierarchical view of the universe, between God and the rest of creation.

However, and this is the third point, the pre-Nicene Logos-theology “worked precisely by avoiding such a distinction. It was the very role of the Logos to be a mediator between the different levels in a hierarchy of Beings, a continuous ladder of existence with no break point, a universe in which there was... (a) kind of blurring between the divine and the creaturely” (Young 2000, 200). This observation of Young’s leads her to a fourth point, which is that the Arian crisis had as its main issue “whether the Logos incarnate in Jesus belongs to the divine or created order, *a question which was bound to shatter the traditional Logos-theology and create what we know as the Christological problem*” (Young 2000, 200, emphasis mine).

And with the Nicene resolution of the christological problem, christology

henceforth became the lynchpin of Christian theology.

Christ is, and is not, God. The words of men in scripture are not, and yet are, the Word of God. The bread and wine of the eucharist is bread and wine, and yet also the Body and Blood of Christ. The church is the Body of Christ and yet a flawed human institution. The two natures may never be confused; yet they interpenetrate in ways beyond human analysis. Now all this means that Christology constitutes an affirmation of Christian monotheism and not the threat it is so often perceived to be. It is the divine Creator, not some other divine being, who is immanent in the creaturely human being, realising the image of God in humanity. It is humanity which is divinised in Christ, thus enabling particular humans to become fellow-heirs with Christ. *This Christ can and must have universal significance: for he is identified as Creator and identified with the human creature which God intended, the universal in whom human particulars may find their ultimate destiny* (Young 2000, 203, emphasis mine).

If Young's account is accurate, the doctrine of the *logos spermatikos*, which constitutes a key piece of Dupuis's project, when taken in its wider historical and doctrinal context, might be seen as an early theological synthesis that has since been incorporated into the trinitarian/ christological doctrine of Nicaea. Attending to this wider context in Christian tradition, tends to show that historically, the center of gravity, as it were, shifted from considerations of the universal activity of the Word as such to the ultimate significance of the Word incarnate. It might thus be argued that, in the Christian tradition, the *logos spermatikos* doctrine must be understood in reference to the Jesus Christ event.

This argument of ours is, of course, only tentative. However, whether or not it is accepted, it still remains evident that an analytical modern approach, which focuses upon the *logos spermatikos* doctrine abstracted from its wider context, tends to compromise the project of a holistic contemporary retrieval of Christian doctrine. In terms of Stiver's hermeneutical arc, what is missing is the pre-critical and post-critical

naivete, without which the full Christian message risks fragmentation. In contrast, an approach like Young's (or Schwöbel's) seems more helpful for facilitating such a project of retrieval, and thus presents a useful alternative to Dupuis's method. And we might note, once again, that the enduring significance of the religions, understood as expressions of the one universal Christic mystery, is not compromised by such an approach.

Summary Observations

In thus bringing Stiver's proposal for a postmodern theological method into dialogue with Dupuis's project, we have been led to make the following observations. First, pace Barnes, Dupuis's hermeneutical theology, at least as Dupuis describes it, provides an adequate model for a contemporary Christian theology of religious pluralism that might transcend the shortcomings of the modern intellectual paradigm.

However, and secondly, the way in which Dupuis actually applies his method continues to manifest characteristics of the modern paradigm. In particular, his over-reliance upon the historico-critical method in the interpretation of scripture, and the attenuated manner in which he seeks to retrieve Christian doctrine, have contributed to his arriving at theological positions – namely, the distinction without separation between the salvific activities of the Word as such and Jesus Christ, and the limited nature of the Jesus Christ event – that fall short of the official doctrinal teaching of the RC church.

In response, we have offered suggestions in two areas, by which Dupuis's method might be brought more in line with Stiver's postmodern approach. In the area of

biblical interpretation, we have suggested that the current historico-critical and literary approaches be situated within a wider liturgical context. And as regards the retrieval of Christian doctrinal tradition, we have also suggested adopting a more holistic view of the tradition, as exemplified by the approaches of Schwöbel and Young. It is hoped that these suggestions might lead to the development of a viable alternative postmodern approach to a Christian theology of religious pluralism, that is able simultaneously to retain the spirit of Dupuis's project, while remaining within the doctrinal boundaries of the Christian faith.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude our extended conversation with Jacques Dupuis, it might be helpful to recall the lessons learnt. In a contemporary global context, marked especially by an ever more acute awareness of religious pluralism, a *Christian theology of religions* or of *religious pluralism* might yet be considered a viable and valuable way by which Christians can approach the dual task of constituting Christian identity and mediating inter-religious dialogue. Such an approach, as exemplified by Dupuis's project, can be conceived of as a continual negotiation of *identity in dialogue*. That is, it demonstrates that identity and dialogue are really two sides of the same coin: identity is constituted only through encounters with others, and true encounters with others should have an impact upon Christian self-understanding.

As with Dupuis's project, however, such an approach to religious pluralism requires careful ongoing attention to what has been referred to as the *negotiation of the broken middle* (Barnes 2002). For example, on the one hand, in order not to risk the fragmentation of Christian identity, sensitivity must be had to the doctrinal boundaries set by official church teaching. In this regard, our facilitation of a dialogue between Dupuis and the CDF demonstrated both the necessity and validity of the former's project. However, certain of Dupuis's substantive positions were found to fall short of the doctrinal standards set by the CDF. We thus proposed possible alternative positions that might further Dupuis's project while bringing it within official doctrinal limits.

To Dupuis's notion of a *distinction without separation* among the salvific activities

of the Word as such, the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ in a single divine economy of salvation, we proposed the *thicker* conception of *union* expressed in the CDF documents. And to Dupuis's notions of the limitedness of the Jesus Christ event and the linear Christian conception of time, we proposed, respectively, a retrieval of the Rahnerian concept of *mystery* and of the sacramental view of time as *anamnetic*.

On the other hand, however, attention must also be given to the contemporary global context. In this regard, we sought, in our evaluation of Dupuis's method, to facilitate a conversation between Dupuis and postmodernity. In so doing, we demonstrated that while the hermeneutical method espoused by Dupuis was adequate, his application of it continued to manifest characteristics of the modern intellectual paradigm that has led to a crisis in theology in general and christology in particular. This was found to be especially evident in Dupuis's analytic approach to the scriptures and the tradition.

Thus, in place of Dupuis's apparent over-reliance upon historico-critical exegesis, we proposed attention to the liturgy as the proper arena for biblical interpretation. And in place of Dupuis's attenuated retrieval of isolated doctrinal positions, such as the *hypostatic union*, and the *logos spermatikos* doctrine, we proposed a more holistic approach that would carefully situate individual doctrines within their wider historical and doctrinal contexts. In so doing, we attempted to demonstrate that by adopting a postmodern theological method one could be simultaneously respectful of the contemporary global context, while remaining within the doctrinal boundaries set by the official *Magisterium*.

Even so, the tentative and unpolished nature of our suggestions is evident. As mere orientations, they require further constructive and critical work if they are to contribute to the development of a viable integral approach to the *Christian theology of religious pluralism*, in the spirit of Dupuis's invaluable pioneering effort.

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