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A Contribution to an Asian Theology of Religions Based on the Threefold «Nexus» of *Nostra Aetate*, Karl Rahner and the FABC

Salvador G. Agualada Jr., CMF

Loyola School of Theology

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SALVADOR G. AGUALADA JR., CMF

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by Salvador G. Agualada Jr., CMF

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A Contribution to an Asian Theology of Religions Based on the Threefold «Nexus» of *Nostra Aetate*, Karl Rahner and the FABC

Moderatore

Prof. Dr. James Corkery, SJ

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by

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INTRODUCTION

1. **Relevance and Scope of Study**

A brief blurb, written at the back of James L. Fredericks' 1999 book, *Faith Among Faiths*, argues that «[in] the twenty-first century, the meaning of non-Christian religions for Christian faith will become a central question»[1]. Robert J. Schreiter, in a lapidary description of the same book in the same place, adds that the topic—about the meaning of Christianity in the light of the non-Christian religions—is «perhaps the most important discussion in theology today»[2]. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, referring to the overall theme of the symposium on *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism* (whose lectures were published in 1981), considers this problem «a central issue of the whole Church»[3]. Joseph Ratzinger, in his 2004 book, *Truth and Tolerance*, regards this subject «a major theme that affects us all»[4]. For Gavin D'Costa, «it is difficult to think of a more important question facing Christianity in the twenty-first century» than this question which is the subject matter of his 2009 book, *Christianity and World Religions*, saying that «Christianity's very existence in part depends on how it relates to the world religions»[5]. Similarly, for Dermot Lane, in his book, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, published in 2011, «[i]t is difficult to see how Christianity could survive or indeed remain credible without engagement with other religions… [since]… [t]he very nature of Christianity, its doctrines, and its inner dynamism demands dialogue with other religions»[6]. On its part, the International Theological Commission, in its 1997 article, «Christianity and the World Religions», declares

[1] J. L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*.

[2] R. J. Schreiter, blurb of J. L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*.

[3] W. C. Smith, «An Attempt At Summation», 196.

[4] J. Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 10.

[5] G. D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, x.

[6] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 96.

that «Christianity does not in fact and cannot remain on the margins of this encounter and consequent dialogue among religions»[7].

In spite of more than two decades of prodigious explorations and writings on the subject since Vatican II, characterized by a «rapidly growing awareness of religious pluralism as the context within which life must be lived and Christian reflection proceed»[8], Pope John Paul II, addressing the then Secretariat for Non-Christians in its 1987 Plenary Assembly, affirmed that «[t]here remain many questions which we have to develop and articulate more clearly» as regards Christianity's relationship with non-Christian religions[9]. The Pope acknowledged that when it comes to the question of the Christian theology of religions, there remains an exigent demand in the years ahead to carry on the theological reflection and conversation: «In the coming years, these questions and related ones will become more and more important for the church in a pluralistic world, and pastors, with the collaboration of experienced theologians, must direct their studious attention to them»[10]. That, indeed, the question of Christianity's relationship with other religions has become not just extremely important but also manifestly unsettling for the Catholic Church in the twenty-first century is attested to by an intense interest this question has continually generated in theological conversations as seen in the many conferences held in various parts of the world and in the voluminous literature published in recent years. In these conferences and publications, one cannot fail to sense the compelling need on the part of the Church and of theologians to reflect deeply on this subject and to respond to it with clarity and urgency.

Notwithstanding the substantial progress made by the Second Vatican Council through *Nostra Aetate* and other related documents (*Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes*, and *Gaudium et Spes*) in the Catholic Church's attitude towards non-Christian religions and their

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[7] International Theological Commission, «Christianity and the Word Religions», no. 2, p. 146.

[8] A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, ix.

[9] Cited by F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 85.

[10] Cited by F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 86.

adherents, and in spite of the abundant reflections on Christianity and these religions in the post-conciliar period, «the final word has certainly not been spoken in the debate on Christianity and the world religions»[11]. Much work still needs to be done, and «[t]he full import of this change of attitude towards the other religions has not been fully worked out and still awaits full reception»[12]. In fact, «the quest for an adequate theology of religions is at an *impasse*»[13], and the implications of the relationship between dialogue and proclamation especially in the Asian context «remain to be more fully investigated»[14]. Consequently, «theologians should be given the freedom to work creatively on these issues, reflecting upon the dialogical *praxis* of the local Churches»[15], believing that «there are many other creative, imaginative, and socially sensitive ways in which Christian theology can proceed in its encounter with the world religions»[16].

Likewise, Pope John Paul II, in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, issued in 2001, calls for the entire Catholic Church to «consider the great challenge of inter-religious dialogue to which we shall still be committed in the new millennium, in fidelity to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council»[17]. In an atmosphere of heightened cultural and religious pluralism expected to characterize the new millennium, the Pope looks at interreligious dialogue as particularly important in establishing peace in society and in warding off the spectre of religious wars in the world. Furthermore, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's (CDF) *Dominus Iesus*, promulgated in 2000, expressly encourages theologians and practitioners of dialogue and provides a space for them to do further reflection and research on the very question of how the saving grace of Christ is possible

---

[11] G. D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, xxii.

[12] D. A. Lane, «Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions», 148.

[13] J. L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*, 8; emphasis mine.

[14] FABC-OE, no. 52, in FAPA I, 346.

[15] FABC-OE, no. 53, in FAPA I , 347; emphasis in the original.

[16] G. D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, xxii.

[17] John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 55; cf. G. O'collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 195.

outside of explicit Christianity (DI 21). Indeed, despite the sharp nature of its language and content, this document calls for further investigation and exploration among theologians on the very question of Christ's relationship with the other religions. In his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis argues that the papal magisterium «should [not] be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world», and that, in the field of evangelization, «many questions… call for further reflection and study» (EG 16).

In view of these challenges, this dissertation aims to contribute to the exploration of an Asian theology of religions by tracing progressively the contribution of Karl Rahner to Vatican II's more open theology of religions and his influence on the evolving theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), especially on the question of the salvific meaning of other religions. While this is the key focus of this investigation, the work goes deeper by examining the question of *impasse* (read as «disagreements») in the Asian theology of religions occasioned partly by two magisterial documents, *Ecclesia in Asia* and *Dominus Iesus*, particularly on the question of the saving import of other religions, and how the FABC has addressed this issue and other related matters in its documents. Furthermore, it investigates the meaning and implications of Rahner's concept of God as incomprehensible mystery and his insight on the radical unity of love of God and love of neighbor vis-à-vis the Asian situations of religious pluralism and massive poverty in the attempt to offer ways of advancing beyond the *impasse*.

The dissertation attempts to answer the following questions:

1. In relation to the theology of religions through the centuries up until the Second Vatican Council, what are Vatican II's teachings on religions and their adherents, and why is the Council called a «watershed» in the development of a Christian theology of religions? What are its limitations vis-à-vis the question of the salvific meaning and significance of other religions?

2. What is Karl Rahner's contribution to Vatican II's more open and optimistic theology of religions? If the FABC is both an «act» and an «instrument» of Asian Catholicism's «reception» of the Council, what is the influence both of Rahner and of Vatican II on the FABC's evolving theology of religions? In what aspects of its theology of religions does the FABC go beyond Rahner and the Council?
3. What is the FABC's theology of religions in relation to the Catholic Church's documents, *Ecclesia in Asia* and *Dominus Iesus*, vis-à-vis the «neuralgic» issues of the salvific character of other religions, of the relationship between dialogue and proclamation, and of the relation of Jesus Christ and the Church with the Kingdom of God?
4. How can a couple of Rahner's central and foundational ideas in theology, when sufficiently explored and genuinely understood, provide a creative way of responding to the situations of religious pluralism and massive poverty and their implications for Christianity and the Asian Churches in the continent?

2. **Methodology of Research**

The dissertation employs three primary methods: historical analysis, theological analysis, and comparative analysis. Employing a combination of these three methods, Chapter 1 traces the historical and theological development of the Catholic Church's theology of religions through the centuries until Vatican II, compares the pre-conciliar and conciliar theologies of religions vis-à-vis some doctrinal teachings on salvation and religions, and examines both the Council's achievements and limitations on the question of the other religions. Using theological and comparative methods, Chapter 2, which deals primarily with Rahner's influence on Vatican II's more optimistic theology of religions, provides comparative studies of Rahner's and Jean Daniélou's pre-conciliar theologies of religions, their impact on diverse conciliar texts, and their traces in some selected post-conciliar documents dealing with other religions and their adherents. Making

use of theological-comparative analysis, Chapter 3 investigates Vatican II's and Rahner's post-conciliar impact on the FABC's evolving theology of religions, identifies the influence of three essential aspects of Rahner's fundamental insights on the FABC's theology of religions, and pinpoints a couple of areas where the FABC has gone beyond Rahner and Vatican II. Chapter 4 employs a theological-comparative analysis of *Ecclesia in Asia* and *Dominus Iesus* vis-à-vis their impact particularly on the ticklish issue of the salvific value of other religions and the praxis of interreligious dialogue in Asia. Using a theological analysis of numerous FABC documents, Chapter 5 examines both the questions of the relationship between proclamation and dialogue as two inseparable elements of the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission and of the relationship of Jesus Christ and the Church to the Kingdom of God, in response to some theological issues that appear in Chapter 4. In trying to draw attention to the continuing relevance of Rahner's theology in Asia, Chapter 6 employs a thematic presentation of Rahner's concept of God as mystery and how this incomprehensible God is experienced ultimately only in the praxis of love in virtue of the radical unity of love of God and love of neighbor, and explores their profound meaning and implications in the Asian contexts of diverse religions and hideous poverty.

3. **Limits of Study**

The focus of the dissertation is threefold, which also sets the limits of the research. While Rahner's influence on Vatican II and the FABC on the field of the theology of religions may be said to be the key focus of this investigation, there is more to this study than just the tracing of Rahner's influence on these two historical events and ecclesial entities. The research also deals with the question of *impasse* in the Asian theology of religions occasioned partly by a couple of magisterial documents that raise some objections to certain theological developments in the regional magisterium of bishops of Asia, and how such objections are addressed by the FABC in and through its copious documents dealing with the theology of religions and the praxis of interreligious dialogue in the continent. Furthermore, the study explores two principal themes in Rahner's

theology that may be of help in the attempt to advance beyond the *impasse* in the Asian continent: approaching the Divine Mystery with profound reverence, theological modesty and doctrinal humility in all our discourse on God and his salvific ways in the world; and living out the primacy of the praxis of Christian love, a self-emptying and life-giving love, in a continent marked by extreme poverty, one that cuts across religious barriers, among the followers of various religions who constitute the vast majority of the Asian population.

In relation to the key focus, in dealing with the Council on the question of the non-Christian religions and their adherents, there is a special accent on *Nostra Aetate*[18], yet the investigation also touches upon other conciliar documents that explicitly deal with non-Christians and their religious traditions. The research attempts to integrate *Nostra Aetate* with other related Council documents not only to present a more holistic view of Vatican II's theology of religions but also to indicate the presence in these documents of insights on the theology of religions that are wider than those propounded in the Declaration on religions. In other words, the study of Vatican II and the FABC and their commentaries in this key focus is limited principally to the tracing of Rahner's footprints in their documents within the context of the three-pronged investigation. Concomitantly, in relation to Rahner's writings and the works of those who have expounded on his theology, this research does not take up everything that Rahner and others have written on the subject of the theology of religions, but only those matters that are relevant and directly related to the discussion of his influence on the Council and the FABC. It does not enquire into a general theology of religions that is eclectic in character and content, but only into that which develops out of the threefold nexus.

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[18] The investigation of *Nostra Aetate* in this dissertation will not cover the question of the Jews and of Judaism found in the fourth article of the document, for the reason that such a theological question warrants its own distinct and separate exploration and discussion due to the unique character of Judaism in relation to Christianity. It is sufficient to say that what initially began as a purely «Jewish question», emanating from Pope John XXIII's desire to improve Christians' relations with the Jews, ended with the inclusion of the question of the other religions.

4. **Structure and Content**

4.1 *Chapter 1*

In *Chapter 1*, we begin with the observation that in spite of the historic significance of Vatican II, many Catholics greeted the Council's fiftieth anniversary in 2012 with blithe disregard, consequently taking for granted its most significant theological and doctrinal achievements. We note that the reason for this lack of appreciation of the Council, considered by many as the single most important ecclesial and doctrinal event of the Catholic Church in the last century, is the absence of historical perspective. Because most of these Catholics were not yet born before Vatican II or were too young then to see and appreciate the changes that the Council introduced to their life and to Catholic theology, Vatican II's achievements constitute, in many ways, the only Church reality they have ever known in their Christian life[19].

In trying to demonstrate the monumental achievements of Vatican II specifically in the sphere of religions, we trace the Catholic theology of religions through the centuries and show that the Church's attitude towards non-Christians, from the fifth to the twentieth century, was «a kind of teeter-totter», to use the expression of Paul Knitter, or a pendulum-like swaying back and forth, between the two biblical affirmations on God's universal saving will and Christ's unique saving mediation. We indicate not only that the pendulum stayed much on the side of Christ's role for salvation, but also that this side was not always *only* about Christ but *also* about the Church because of the belief that Christ could be encountered salvifically only in the Church. Consequently, the belief that Jesus Christ is the universal Savior and that the Church is the Body of Christ came to include the doctrine of the Church's necessity for salvation, which gave birth to the *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* axiom. Since the fifth century, when this principle began to be applied to non-Christians, the Church's attitude towards them was, in most cases, negative and hostile, with the Church's unyielding conviction that it was the exclusive channel of God's saving grace for the world.

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[19] R. R. Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, ix.

However, beginning in the sixteenth century, the Church's attitude towards the «religious others» underwent a huge doctrinal leap, with its admission of the possibility of salvation for non-Christians in the Council of Trent's «baptism of desire» formula. From the seventeenth to the middle of the twentieth century, a more positive attitude towards them began to appear in the Church teaching. In 1863, with Pius IX's Encyclical, *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore*, the Church acknowledged for the first time that non-Christians could attain salvation without belonging to the Church. In 1943, through Pius XII's Encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*, the Magisterium admitted that non-Christians could be saved by being «related» to the Catholic Church through «a certain unconscious desire» to belong to it. In 1949, the Holy Office, in relation to Fr. Leonard Feeney's case, rejected the rigid interpretation of the *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* principle and affirmed *Mystici Corporis*' argument. In spite of this exceptional shift in theological thinking, we underline two important observations: in *Mystici Corporis*, the Church never affirmed explicitly the *certainty* of salvation of non-Christians; and the pre-conciliar Church's enormous achievement of coming to a more positive attitude towards non-Christians *never* included a similarly more positive attitude towards their religions.

In Vatican II, we indicate that the religious landscape changed dramatically with the Council's rediscovery of the doctrine of God's universal saving will, which remedied the «imbalance» in the «teeter-totter». We spell out its three major breakthroughs vis-à-vis the theology of religions: (1) Vatican II affirmed *explicitly* and *unequivocally* the salvation of non-Christians; (2) it did so without any more invoking the *implicitum votum Ecclesiae* principle which had been the Church's mantra since *Mystici Corporis*; and (3) it dealt considerably with other religions, pronouncing many positive things about them for the first time in Church's conciliar and doctrinal history. We observe, however, that the Council was «silent» on the question of the salvific character of other religions, and examine the differing interpretations of some theologians of this «silence».

4.2 *Chapter 2*

In *Chapter 2*, we point out that Vatican II's «silence» regarding the salvific status of other religions has its roots in the pre-conciliar debate between Jean Daniélou and Karl Rahner concerning the relationship between nature and grace, which the Council did not settle definitively. We indicate that the argument between Daniélou's and Rahner's two divergent versions of «fulfillment theology» hinges on the interpretation of the relationship between nature and the supernatural. Daniélou's theory not only distinguishes nature and grace but also separates them sharply, implying that other religions are bereft of salvation. Rahner, on the other hand, refuses to separate the two orders while maintaining the necessary distinction between them, grounded in his conviction that humankind is graced from the beginning as a consequence of God's self-communication to humanity. Hence, if human beings are saved only within the religions that are concretely at their disposal, non-Christian religions are «ways» of salvation for their members.

We also delve into the very core of Rahner's influence on Vatican II by showing that the Council's more open theology of religions is grounded in Rahner's pre-conciliar insights, particularly in his 1961 lecture, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», which contains his insight on God's universal saving will, his understanding of the socio-historical character of man's relationship with God, his notion of nature and grace as not separate realms within the individual, society and history, and his assertion that other religions possess «elements of truth and grace». By juxtaposing the essential elements of Rahner's pre-conciliar theology with Vatican II texts dealing with religions and their adherents, we show «traces» of Rahner's concrete influence on the Council. In spite of the strong point of Rahner's argument, we note that Vatican II did not settle the issue once and for all in its documents. Hence, traces both of Daniélou's and of Rahner's differing positions can be found in conciliar documents. Nevertheless, we demonstrate that the Council on the whole gravitated towards the more positive and optimistic vision of religions proposed by Rahner, and the conciliar texts which

reflect Rahner's insights became foundational for Vatican II's more open theology of religions. Likewise, we observe that despite the «flip-flopping» in the earliest post-conciliar documents between their theologies, there was a gradual but definite moving away from the «fulfillment theory» espoused by Daniélou to the assertion of an active but mysterious presence of Christ in other religions championed by Rahner, in these documents.

4.3 *Chapter 3*

In *Chapter 3*, we explore the beginnings of the FABC as the Asian Churches' «act» and «instrument» of the reception of Vatican II. We indicate that, like the Council, the Asian Churches have an essentially «pastoral» character; hence, they have been more interested in conciliar texts that deal with the Churches' *ad extra* relations. For the FABC, the local Church in Asia can become truly Church and genuinely Asian only if it ceases being a Church *in* Asia and begin being a Church *of* Asia. Hence, every local Church, as the acting subject of evangelization, must be given «legitimate autonomy» in carrying out its mission, since it is the local Church that can discern and work out the way the Gospel is best proclaimed in its own place and time.

We point out that the FABC has embraced three essential elements of Rahner's theology of religions in its abundant writings: (1) on the salvific character of other religions, the FABC, since 1974, has regarded the other religions as ways of salvation for their members, albeit always in relation to Christ, the universal Savior; (2) on the presence of Jesus Christ in other religions through the Spirit, it argues that the risen Christ is savingly active in the life and traditions of the members of other religions through the Spirit; and (3) on the positive meaning of religious pluralism in God's plan of salvation, it affirms that Asian religions are part of God's providential design of salvation for humankind. Indeed, while a sort of «flip-flopping» has characterized the post-conciliar documents of the Church, in Asia, the FABC has consistently subscribed to Rahner's version of «fulfillment» theology.

While articulating Rahner's influence on the FABC's theology of religions, we also highlight a couple of areas where the FABC has

diverged from Rahner and Vatican II. In terms of approach to doing theology, the FABC, unlike Rahner, has arrived at the conclusion on the salvific meaning of other religions through an *a posteriori* approach, a conclusion drawn not from theological argumentation but from concrete experiences of the goodness, wisdom and holiness of non-Christians and their religions, experiences which compel the Asian Churches to confront the question of the salvific meaning of other religions with utter seriousness. In terms of approach to «naming» the «religious others», while Rahner and Vatican II define the other religions and their adherents *negatively* as *non-Christians*, the FABC addresses them consistently in an intimate, inclusive and reverential manner as «brothers and sisters of other faiths».

4.4 *Chapter 4*

In *Chapter 4*, we look at the «contribution» of *Ecclesia in Asia* and *Dominus Iesus* to the situation of *impasse* in Asia in relation to the question of the salvific import of other religions and of other related matters. We indicate that in spite of the FABC's long-standing regard of the place and role of the Asian religions in God's universal plan of salvation, these documents, in varying ways, do not consider them as salvific in themselves and, therefore, «derail», in a way, the Asian Churches' dialogue with adherents of other religions.

As regards *Ecclesia in Asia*, we note that the document plays a part in the state of *impasse* by what it fails to affirm in terms of the salvific meaning of other religions. We also point out its «unfinished» character as seen in the exclusion of some important concerns brought by the Asian bishops in the 1998 Synod for Asia, especially the need to recognize the pluriform character of the Asian Churches and their distinct, contextual theology, as well as their implications on the Churches' evangelizing mission of dialogue and proclamation in the continent. We argue that the immense diversity of theological issues and pastoral challenges that local Churches in Asia face demands distinct theological and pastoral responses, unique ways of implementing a vision of Asian Christianity that are profoundly responsive to the varied contexts of the continent, which entails the inapplicability of a uniform way of carrying out the Churches'

mission for the whole of Asia. We indicate that, in this chapter, the point of divergence between the Roman Magisterium and the Asian bishops as regards the Asian Churches' mission is not on the «who» and the «what» but on the «how» of evangelization.

As regards *Dominus Iesus*, we show that it contributes to the situation of *impasse* by what it affirms about the non-salvific value of other religions in the «sharp distinction» it makes between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions». Likewise, we clarify its statement that the «fullness» of God's revelation is reached in Jesus Christ, pointing out that «fullness» in this sense has to be understood as a «qualitative» and not a «quantitative» fullness. This means that while God's revelation in Christ is unsurpassed and unsurpassable in history owing to Jesus' identity as the Son of God, the kenotic character of the Christ-event implies that it does not grasp and exhaust the deepest mystery of God which will be revealed fully only in the *eschaton*. Moreover, we explore the Christocentric and ecclesiological dimensions of the regnocentric theology of religions, and explain why a correctly and theologically well-reasoned Kingdom of God perspective, which opens new and wider horizons for the Church's mission in relation to the Kingdom of God present in the world, may be explored and developed for Christian theology of religions.

4.5 *Chapter 5*

In *Chapter 5*, we look at a couple of essential elements of the FABC's theology of religions in exploring how the Asian Churches have responded to the situation of *impasse* in the continent. We examine the character of the Asian Churches' regnocentric theology of religions in response to *Dominus Iesus*' strong criticism against the FABC's regnocentric approach to mission, a criticism which alleges that such an emphasis could empty the intimate connection between Christ, the Kingdom, and the Church (cf. DI 18). We indicate that the FABC's earliest and most important reflections on this particular theme do not substantiate such an allegation. In spite of its repeated declarations on the necessity of interreligious dialogue in the multi-religious context of Asia and of its emphasis on the Kingdom of God

perspective in its theology and praxis, the FABC has consistently affirmed the primacy and centrality of the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the essential role of the Asian Churches in the preaching of the Gospel, and the exigency for the Christian communities to open their doors to those who wish to belong to the Church.

Within the discussion of dialogue and proclamation as two inseparable elements of the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission, we examine the role of «silent witness» of Christian life and the legitimate place of «conversion» in evangelization. We observe that while it insists on the primacy of the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel in Asia, for the FABC, the most effective means of proclaiming Christ in the continent is the silent witness of Christian life among the believers of other faiths, especially in politically and religiously difficult situations. Likewise, because of its adherence to the doctrine of God's universal saving will, the FABC has given a wider meaning and a more inclusive scope to the concept of «conversion». In its documents, conversion is broadly understood as essentially conversion of one's heart to God and his Kingdom, to Christ and to the truth, a kind of conversion that may not, however, always lead adherents of other religions to the door of the Catholic Church.

Likewise, we indicate that one of the most salient contributions of the FABC to the field of the theology of religions is its insistence on the Kingdom of God perspective. We observe that this perspective has come about because of the radical «shift of question» in the Asian theological horizon and because of the Asian Churches' «kenotic ecclesiology» which places the Kingdom of God, and not the Church, at the center of Christian life and mission. We assert that the theology behind this ecclesiological shift is not a devaluing of the role and place of the Church, but rather a correct establishment of its ecclesial nature and purpose. In this ecclesiology, the Church exists for the Kingdom, in order to serve the Kingdom, in order to bring about the values of the Kingdom in the world through its ecclesial institutions and ministries. As regards the «shift of question», if in *Nostra Aetate*, the question has to do with Christianity's and the Church's relationship to non-Christian religions, in the Asian theology of religions, the question has to do with

the place and role of Christianity and the Asian Churches within the religiously pluralistic world of the continent.

We indicate that the FABC has responded to this shift of question by appealing to the concept of the Kingdom of God in its theology of religions, arguing that the Asian Churches fulfill their role and task in the religiously pluralistic world of Asia as «co-pilgrims», «equal partners» and «servants» of adherents of other religions and of people of goodwill in humanity's common pilgrimage towards the Kingdom. We point out that within the Kingdom of God perspective, Christianity and other religions are linked among themselves by virtue of their essential relation to the Kingdom and by virtue of God's one divine saving plan which embraces the whole of humanity. We argue that in spite of its unique place and irreplaceable role in salvation history, the Church can never claim a monopoly of this pilgrimage but journeys alongside other religious traditions. As regards the Asian Churches' journeying with other religions as «equal partners» in interreligious dialogue, we conclude that if Christians and members of other religions can enrich each other spiritually, and if the beliefs and practices of these religions can become sources of profound religious and spiritual enrichment for Christians, then Christianity is not a self-contained religious narrative, totally sufficient in itself, but a narrative that grows in dialogue with other religious narratives. Furthermore, we show that in this spiritual pilgrimage, the Asian Churches consider themselves as «servants» of the Asian peoples and their religions, at their service, in imitation of their Lord and Master who came to serve and not to be served.

4.6 *Chapter 6*

In *Chapter 6*, we offer ways of moving forward out of the situation of *impasse* in Asia by employing a couple of Rahner's foundational themes in theology and applying them to the unique circumstances of Asia's religious pluralism and massive poverty: the nature of God as mystery and its demand for theological modesty and doctrinal humility in all our discourse on God in interreligious dialogue; and the radical unity between love of God and love of neighbors and how God is encountered ultimately only in love.

In relation to the absolute mystery of God who is theology's formal object, we stress the vital importance of recognizing the gap between God *and* the theological language we use in our attempt to articulate our human experience and knowledge of God, owing to the infinite and ineffable nature of God in relation to the permanently finite and fragile character of human knowing and understanding. Hence, even if dogmatic statements and faith-formulations may possess abiding validity in themselves, they are ultimately relativized in the face of God's incomprehensible mystery. We affirm the necessity of an approach to the question of God and his mysterious ways in the world not only with profound reverence but also with theological modesty and doctrinal humility, subsequently guarding dialogue partners against adopting inflated claims in theological conversations. Similarly, because we do not have full knowledge of the ways the mysterious God deals with human beings situated in diverse social, cultural and religious contexts, we call for a greater recognition not only of the diversity of ways God communicates to human beings in their varied circumstances but also of the diversity of human beings' responses to God embodied in different religions. We affirm that God's ways to humanity and humanity's ways to God are not only mysterious but also plural and diverse, hence the positive meaning of religious pluralism in God's universal plan of salvation.

As regards the universal language of love, we examine the argument that the incomprehensible God is encountered ultimately only in love and provide reasons for the demand for a shift of focus from an epistemology of theological correctness to a praxis of genuine love in a continent of teeming millions of poor people. We argue that because of the nature of God as mystery, because of the irreducible differences among different religions in terms of doctrines and practices, because of the magnitude of poverty which calls for an urgent response on the part of the Asian Churches, because of the «unfamiliar face» of God being revealed more clearly in the poor and by the poor, and because of the universality of love and its openness to manifold expressions in the world among various religions, the praxis of love takes primacy over an epistemology of correct knowledge of God and serves as a way of advancing beyond the *impasse* in the

continent. We observe that such a praxis of love is lived out by the Asian Churches in their dialogue with and self-emptying love for the poor, whom Pope Francis calls «society's most neglected members» (EG 186). We conclude that for the Asian Churches, genuine service of love for the poor is an expression of authentic discipleship, an essential dimension of the practice of Christian faith, in imitation of the *kenosis* of Jesus who is God's self-emptying compassion for all, especially for the poor.

The Conclusion of the dissertation highlights some of the findings of the research, and in these findings the dissertation's most important contributions to the literature are indicated. These findings and contributions appear, first, in the manner in which some discrete and separate materials have been gathered into a thematic order, and, second, into a distillation of new ideas.

As regards the first, we can mention several examples. In Chapter 1, both the achievements and the limitations of Vatican II on the question of the theology of religions are spelt out. The three major areas of novelty of the Council, its «silence» concerning the question of whether or not the other religions are salvific in themselves, and the varying interpretations of some theologians on this «silence», are examined. In Chapter 2, the root-cause of the «flip-flopping» in the post-conciliar period on the question of the salvific character of other religions, which is Vatican II's failure to settle definitively the pre-conciliar issue between Daniélou's and Rahner's two divergent insights on the proper relationship between grace and nature, is investigated. In Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, a couple of observations are indicated: the gradual but definite moving away in the post-Vatican II magisterial documents from Daniélou's «fulfillment theory» to Rahner's «theory of the presence of Christ in the religions», as well as the FABC's consistent subscription to and espousal of Rahner's version of «fulfillment» theology since 1974. In Chapter 4, the absence of reference to «Proposition 4» in *Ecclesia in Asia*, which speaks of the multi-contextual character of the Asian Churches, and the problematic of the «drastic distinction» between «theological faith» and «belief in the religions» in *Dominus Iesus*, and their implications for the Asian theology of religions, are examined. In Chapter 5, some issues

and problems surrounding the nature of dialogue and proclamation and their relationship with each other as inseparable elements of the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission, as well as the questions of the role of «witness» of Christian life and of the place of «conversion» in proclamation and interreligious dialogue, are explored.

Concerning the second, we can mention several instances. In Chapter 2, Rahner's major theological influence on and explicit contribution to Vatican II's more open and optimistic theology of religions, drawn principally from his pre-conciliar essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», are identified. In Chapter 3, Rahner's influence in the FABC's affirmations on religions as «ways» of salvation for their members, on the presence of Jesus Christ in the other religions through the Holy Spirit, and on the diversity of religions as positively willed by God, included in his plan of salvation, is probed. Likewise, a couple of divergences between Vatican II and Rahner *and* the FABC in terms of approaches to doing theology and to naming the «religious others» are indicated. In Chapter 4, in response to *Dominus Iesus*' criticism of the «one-sided accentuations» of some allegedly excessive «kingdom-centered» theology of religions, the inseparable link of the Kingdom of God to Jesus Christ and the Church in the FABC documents is shown. Despite the FABC's strong accent on the Kingdom of God and the urgency and necessity of the Asian Churches to engage in triple dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor, the chapter also discusses at length the primacy and centrality of the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel in the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission in the FABC documents. In Chapter 5, the reason for the FABC's emphasis on the Kingdom of God perspective, which is due to the shift of question *from* the relationship of Christianity to other religions *to* the place and role of Christianity within the multi-religious world of Asia, is investigated. Likewise, the Asian Churches' consciously-embraced gradation of roles—as co-pilgrims, equal partners, and servants of Asian religions and peoples in humanity's common pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God—is examined. In Chapter 6, the meaning and implications of Rahner's concept of God as mystery who is encountered ultimately only in the loving praxis due to the radical unity of love of God and love

of neighbor are explored and developed in the religiously pluralistic and poverty-stricken context of Asia. The reasons for the primacy of a praxis of love over an epistemology of theological correctness in the Asian context of massive poverty are spelt out.

5. **Originality and Contribution**

The unique contribution of this dissertation may be seen in three areas. First, it illustrates in a scholarly manner the theological «footprints» of Rahner on Vatican II's more open theology of religions and the aspect of his theology that was not embraced by the Council, as well as the influence both of Rahner and Vatican II on the FABC and the areas in the FABC's theology of religions where it has gone beyond Rahner and the Council. In themselves, each of the subject-matters of the threefold nexus is not altogether new on the theological horizon. There is an immense corpus of writings on Vatican II documents (*Nostra Aetate* and others) that deal with the question of religions and their adherents, on Rahner's theology of religions, which has been one of the most examined aspects of his overall theology, and on the FABC's reflections on the theology of religions and the praxis of interreligious dialogue. Yet, in most cases, these different subjects are all taken in isolation from each other. While there are numerous works dealing with each of them, I have not encountered any comprehensive work on the threefold «nexus» of Vatican II, Rahner and the FABC in relation to the theology of religions within the unique contexts of Asia. It is in view of the unavailability of this enquiry that the present investigation is undertaken. Secondly, the distinct contribution of this research may also be seen in its attempt to verbalize modestly the nature of and the reason for the state of *impasse* on the question of the salvific character of other religions and other related issues vis-à-vis *Ecclesia in Asia* and *Dominus Iesus*. Thirdly, the dissertation's particular contribution may be seen in the exploration of the abundant writings of the FABC and a couple of foundational themes of Rahner's theology in trying to provide a way of advancing beyond the theological disagreements in the Asian theology of religions brought about by the *impasse*. In this way, the research has contributed to a deepened understanding of the interdependence among Vatican II, Rahner and the FABC on the field

of the theology of religions, has helped in the process of clarifying some misconstrued elements of the FABC's theology of religions, and has offered practitioners of dialogue a modest way of advancing beyond the situation of *impasse* in Asia.

6. **Sources and Availability**

The main source for the investigation of *Nostra Aetate*, as well as *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes*, and *Gaudium et Spes*—Vatican II documents on the other religions and their adherents—is *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, OP. The major sources for the re-examination of Karl Rahner's theology in general and his theology of religions in particular are his *Foundations of Christian Faith* and his many essays found in the volumes of *Theological Investigations*, especially his 1961 lecture/1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», his 1974 paper entitled «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», which was subsequently incorporated into his *Foundations of Christian Faith*, and his 1975 lecture, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation». The principal sources for the exploration of the FABC's theology of religions are the five volumes, *For All the Peoples of Asia* (FAPA), which contain the FABC's documents from 1970 to 2012[20], as well as some FABC Papers (available online), which reflect on the Asian Churches' three «dialogue-tasks» with cultures, religions and the poor and other major themes and questions in relation to the Churches' evangelizing mission in Asia. This research also makes use of the important works of many theologians who have written on Vatican II, Rahner, and the FABC and the Asian theology of religions. The data of this research are gathered mainly from the Pontifical Gregorian University Library and from the *Instituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata* (Claretianum) Library, both in Rome, Italy, as well as from the Institute of Consecrated Life in Asia (ICLA) Library in Quezon City, Philippines.

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[20] Since Volume 5 of *For All the Peoples of Asia* includes only FABC documents issued until 2012, the Eleventh FABC Plenary Assembly (FABC XI) held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 2016 is therefore cited online.

CHAPTER I

Nostra Aetate and Other Conciliar Documents: Towards an Integrated View of the Second Vatican Council's Theology of Religions

1.1 Introduction

On October 11, 2012, the Catholic Church celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, hailed universally as the single most important ecclesial and doctrinal event in the Catholic Church in the last century. Since then until December 8, 2015, when the Church celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, it went on celebrating perhaps sixteen more anniversaries corresponding to the Council's sixteen documents. However, for all the historic significance of the event, «many millennial Catholics», Richard Gaillardetz observes, «have greeted the council's anniversary with one big celestial yawn»[21]. The reason for this, he speculates, is that Catholics who were not yet born before the Council, or who, during the Council, were too young then to see and appreciate the changes that Vatican II brought to their Catholic life and to the Church, «mostly take for granted the council's most important achievements» because, for many of them, «these achievements constitute, in many ways, the only Church reality they have known»[22].

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[21] R. R. Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, ix.

[22] R. R. Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, ix.

Consequently, particularly in the field of religions, there has been a tendency among many Catholics to judge some conciliar doctrines as actually not saying anything radically new and thus belittle their overall importance when juxtaposed with the more open, sensitive, and quite developed post-conciliar Catholic theology of religions. Hence, there is a need to go over the kind of theology of religions that characterized the centuries, decades and years following Vatican II so that one may be able to appreciate more fully the doctrinal achievements of the Council in terms of the non-Christian religions and their adherents and why the Council has been considered a «watershed» in this area.

This chapter, which attempts at formulating an integrated view of the Second Vatican Council's theology of religions based on *Nostra Aetate* and other conciliar texts dealing with non-Christians and their religions, has two major sections. The first section historically scans the Christian theology of religions down the centuries up to the years prior to the opening of Vatican II and indicates the «high» and «low» points in terms of the Catholic Church's theological assessment of, and concrete attitudes towards, the non-Christians in most of the Church's conciliar history. The second section examines the achievements as well as the limitations of Vatican II. It explores the reason why the Council is regarded as a «watershed» in the development of the Catholic Church's theology of religions, integrates *Nostra Aetate* with other conciliar texts that deal with the other religions and their adherents, and addresses the question as to why the Council, in spite of its great optimism concerning the salvation of individual non-Christians, is «silent» on the question of the salvific value of non-Christian religions.

1.2 **A Brief History of Christian Theology of Religions Through the Centuries Until the Advent of the Second Vatican Council**

Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Catholic Church, for the last fifty years or so, has witnessed an unprecedented opening of its door to the modern world in general and to the non-Christian religions in particular, marked by an entirely new, inspiring and courageous attitude not only towards the «religious others» but

also towards their religious traditions. This Twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church was, for Timothy Radcliffe, «the most important event in the life of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century», whose documents «changed the Church»[23]. As a groundbreaking event in the second half of the previous century, Vatican II steered the Church for over three years towards the path of *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement*, and of an unprecedented engagement with the modern world, setting in motion—among other auspicious developments—dialogue with non-Christian religions and their adherents.

In trying to understand what Vatican II in the 1960s pronounced about the non-Christians and their religious traditions, and did so for the first time in the Church's conciliar history, one must have clear ideas of what the Catholic Church previously held and taught through the centuries about those who were *extra Ecclesiam*. «Without a grasp of the main historical realities that constituted the ecclesial dimensions of the Church *before* Vatican II», writes James Heft, «it is difficult to understand the significant changes that the bishops at the council agreed to make»[24]. And by the expression, «*before* Vatican II», we can include not just the immediate decades prior to the Council, but also the many centuries of long ecclesial and conciliar history. Indeed, understanding the Catholic Church's doctrinal past enables one to better appreciate the Council and comprehend more deeply why and in what way it signaled such a radical change in the Church's attitudes towards non-Christian religions. Hence, a brief, historical exploration of this theological development may be in order.

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[23] T. Radcliffe, blurb of Y. Congar, *My Journal of the Council*; cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 45; V-M. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 111.

[24] J. Heft, *After Vatican II*, «Preface», vii; emphasis mine.

1.2.1 *Theology of Religions: A «Teeter-Totter» Between Beliefs in God's Universal Saving Will and in the Necessity of the Church for Salvation*

At the risk of generalizations, Paul Knitter describes the attitudes and mentalities of the Catholic Church towards non-Christian religions and their followers, from the patristic period up to the twentieth century, as «a kind of teeter-totter», a pendulum-like swaying back and forth between two basic biblical assertions—the belief in God's universal salvific will for all people and the conviction on the absolute and unique saving mediation of Jesus Christ (cf. 1Tim. 2:4-5)[25]. A panoramic view of the long doctrinal history of the Church albeit reveals not only that the pendulum stayed much on the side of the «teeter-totter» which insisted on the unique and universal role of Christ for salvation, but also that this «particular side» of the pendulum was not always *only* about Christ but *also* about the Church because of the belief that Christ could only be encountered and experienced fully and salvifically in the Church[26]. For Wolfgang Beinert, such a conviction has always been part of the Church's proclamation: that God has made known his salvation and his saving design for the world through Jesus Christ, and that this salvation is mediated by and transmitted in the Church through Word, sacraments, and service. Hence, if the Church is the Body of Christ, as the New Testament has constantly affirmed, and «[t]he basis of every Christian claim to absoluteness is Jesus Christ», then «it is logical… that the church in some way had to share in the claim to Christ's absoluteness»[27].

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[25] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 64. In this section, I will employ Paul Knitter's image of «teeter-totter» as a theological framework in collocating the «high» and «low» points of the Church's doctrinal theology on the «religious others» through the centuries prior to the Second Vatican Council. That the Christian theology of religions through these centuries can be described as such is implied by what Jean Jadot claims that the Vatican II teaching on this question is «not something new and sudden», but rather «rooted in a tradition of Catholic teaching which, while often submerged and at times almost forgotten, has never been absent from the teaching and practice of the Catholic church» (J. Jadot, «The Growth in Roman Catholic Commitment», 205).

[26] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 64.

[27] W. Beinert, «Who Can Be Saved?», 225.224-225.

Consequently, the Church's nuanced relationship with the «religious others» became evidently marked—this time—by «a teeter-tottering between two fundamental beliefs: God's universal love and desire to save, and *the necessity of the Church for salvation*»[28]. The insistence on the other side of the doctrinal equation that Christ *and* his Church are both necessary in the mediation of God's saving grace for the world has given birth to the famous dogmatic axiom, *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, which «postulates a vital relationship between whoever is on the road to salvation and the Church herself»[29], and which has typified most of the Church's doctrinal history. For Francis Sullivan, the «substance» of this doctrine is that «God has assigned to the Church a necessary role in the divine economy of salvation. As Christ is the one mediator, so his body, the church, has a subordinate but necessary role of mediation in the salvation of mankind»[30]. This ancient principle, which is shorthand for the doctrine that the Church is necessary for salvation, and which is a negative expression of a theological claim that the Catholic Church is the place where saving grace resides, has gained more prominence in history and in theology than the affirmation on God's universal saving love for all[31].

1.2.2 *Theology of Religions in the First Three Centuries of Christianity*

In the beginning of Christianity, the New Testament writers and the early Christian communities did not have to deal much with non-Christian religions since they were primarily more concerned with the question of their relationship with Judaism. However, as the Christian communities, beginning in the second century, moved deeper into the Greco-Roman world where they found themselves a minority, often a persecuted and endangered minority, they began to feel the need to explain to themselves and to their non-Christian neighbors how from the perspective of their Christian faith they understood this broader Hellenistic world and how they should relate to it with its

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[28] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 121; emphasis mine.

[29] M. Eminyan, *The Theology of Salvation*, 96.

[30] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 199.12.

[31] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 64.

many philosophies and religions[32]. In his Address to the Roman Curia on December 22, 2005, Pope Benedict XVI, quoting *The First Letter of Peter*, and with almost two millennia of Christian history behind him, spoke about the same necessity of explaining the Christian faith to others: «In his First Letter, St. Peter urged Christians always to be ready to give an answer (*apologia*) to anyone who asked them for the logos, the reason for their faith (cf. 3:15)»[33].

In the first three centuries of the Church, one of the ways in which the early Church Fathers tried to understand Christ and Christianity's relationship with the philosophies and religions of the Roman Empire was by reflecting on a central theme of the New Testament—the Word of God. Taking their cue from the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, the early Christians professed that the Word of God, the Johannine *Logos*, was «made flesh» in Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ is the supreme manifestation of the *Logos*. However, they also believed that before the Christ-event, and all throughout the Greco-Roman world, this *Logos* was scattered like seeds—hence the expression *logos spermatikos*, which literally means «seedlike word»[34]. In this vision of the world, the salvation which was offered to those who lived before Christ came to them through the *Logos*, God's Word, who would become flesh in the fullness of time. Karl Rahner observes: «When the early fathers kept a lookout for… an activity of the Logos, the beginnings of his Incarnation as it were, in saving history before Christ…, they were better advised than we are…. [R] eligions… [for them]… were an unconscious Yes or No to the Word of God who was to come in human flesh»[35].

Fully operative in Jesus but also present outside Christianity like seeds sown in non-Christian soils and cultures, this universally sown *Logos*, according to St. Justin Martyr (100-165), is «the

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[32] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 64.

[33] Benedict XVI, «Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia», 12.

[34] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 64-65; A. C. Bouquet, *The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions*, 138.

[35] K. Rahner, «Current Problems in Christology», 189.

Logos of which all mankind partakes»[36]. According to Alan Race, «[t]he identification of Jesus with the Logos was the key shift which enabled Justin to include the religious life of mankind within the Christian dispensation»[37]. This second century Greek apologist, the representative theologian of the «logos spermatikos» theology, could even say that «those who lived then [meaning *before Christ*], or who live now, according to reason [*logos*] are Christians»[38], even though they never heard of Christ or were thought to be atheists; that «the Logos also taught Greek philosophers, and that even though some of these might be accounted 'godless'..., they were, in so far as they lived 'according to Logos', *Christians before Christ*, the latter being the supreme manifestation of the Logos»[39].

For Alan C. Bouquet, the logical implications of this doctrine must be carefully examined since it affirms that «the statement *Christians before Christ* is capable of being extended so as to embrace most of the sages of Asia»; consequently, it represents the first serious encounter between the Gospel and the non-Christian milieu and was «developed as the semi-official way of relating the work and person of Jesus Christ to the larger world of Mediterranean thought, and of defining His position in relation to other religious teachers»[40]. In fact, for Jacques Dupuis, re-echoing the thought of Justin and other «logos spermatikos» theologians, «not only could individuals—Socrates, Buddha, and others—receive divine truth from the Logos, but human enterprises—philosophy, Greek or Asian wisdom—were also channels of divine light»[41]. And while Clement of Alexandria, another famous advocate of the *Logos* theology, considered Greek philosophy as «a stepping-stone leading towards the philosophy of

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[36] Cited by F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 15..

[37] A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 43.

[38] Cited by F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 15.

[39] A. C. Bouquet, *The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions*, 137. For Sullivan, «[i]t is remarkable that we find in the second century this anticipation of Karl Rahner's term "anonymous Christians" to describe those who are justified without Christian faith» (F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 15).

[40] A. C. Bouquet, *The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions*, 138.

[41] J. Dupuis, «The Spirit, Basis for Interreligious Dialogue», 30.

Christ (*Stromata* 6, 8)», for Race, this early Church Father «viewed the ancient thought and enlightenment of the Indian philosophers, the Brahmans, and the followers of Buddha as more authentic guides and teachers than some of the Greek philosophers to orientate the nations to Christ»[42]. Race concludes: «This amounts to an affirmation, by Clement, of the presence of divine truth in the religious traditions of the East and, therefore, their assignment to a positive place in the history of salvation»[43].

In his chronological treatment of some of the most important Church Apologists prior to St. Augustine in defense of their proclamation of Christ as the universal savior of humanity, Francis Sullivan, in his book, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, concludes that we find in the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, and John Chrysostom «a positive response to the question concerning the possibility of salvation for people who had lived before the coming of Christ», that «God had provided the means of salvation to both Jews and Gentiles during the pre-Christian era»[44]. Indeed, although these Church Fathers strongly insisted that the fulfillment of the «seeds of the Word» scattered in many cultures and religions of the world could only be attained in the fully embodied *Logos* in Jesus, still this period of the Church's history showed a strong affirmation of God's salvific grace and presence outside and beyond the confines of Christianity[45]; that in fact «an authentic revelation and possibility of salvation was offered to all peoples»[46]. For Dermot Lane, the intrinsic relation between the eternal *Logos* and the incarnate Word of God in Christ casts some relevant light into the contemporary discourse on the relationship between Christianity and other religious traditions. «At the very least this early Patristic outlook should alert Christians against making exclusivistic claims»[47].

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[42] A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 43; the first quotation, from Clement of Alexandria, also came from this same page of Race's book.

[43] A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 43.

[44] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 17.14-17.

[45] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 65.

[46] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 121.

[47] D. A. Lane, «Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions», 160.

1.2.3 *Understanding Cyprian's* Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus *Axiom Within the Context of Third Century Christianity*

For Francis Sullivan, although the *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* dictum has historically come to be associated with Cyprian (200-258)—because of his rigorous interpretation and frequent use of it in his writings—other Church Fathers before him, such as Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, and Origen, had already employed this principle in their homilies and writings[48]. Sullivan, in fact, suggests that Ignatius of Antioch was the first to have employed this adage when on his way to martyrdom in Rome, he wrote: «Be not deceived, my brethren: if anyone follows a maker of schism, he does not inherit the Kingdom of God; if anyone walks in strange doctrine he has no part in his [Christ's] passion»[49]. In the third century, these words of Ignatius were reformulated negatively for the first time by Origen in the East when the latter said: «Let no one persuade or deceive himself: outside this house, that is outside the church, no one will be saved»[50]. In the West, Cyprian, who was «the first to apply this axiom… with juridical exclusiveness and all its consequences»[51], declared: «[T]here is only one house of God, and there can be no salvation for anyone except in the church»[52].

In trying to understand the meaning of this ancient dictum, one must consider its context and its addressees in the third century. In Cyprian's time, this *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* principle was addressed to Christians as a warning not to leave the Church and join schismatic groups and heretical sects, or to those who had already deserted the Church and adhered to schismatic and heretical beliefs as a strong admonition to return to the Christian fold immediately. For Cyprian, who developed and repeatedly invoked this principle in trying to maintain unity and communion in the Church, «the unity of the Church was essentially a unity of love; and hence, anyone who

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[48] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 18-20.

[49] Cited by F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 18.

[50] Cited by H. Küng, *The Church*, 313.

[51] H. Küng, *The Church*, 313-314.

[52] Cited by F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 21.

violated this unity by heresy or schism sinned against the virtue of charity»[53]. For him, since not even martyrdom could purge away the guilt of schism, therefore there was no hope of salvation for anyone who persisted in this grave sin[54]. And so, when Cyprian and those Church Fathers before him «spoke of people being excluded from salvation by reason of their being outside the church, they were consistently directing this warning to Christians whom they judged to be guilty of the grave sins of heresy and schism»[55]. There was no instance or indication of them explicitly applying this axiom to *non-Christians* who composed the majority of the people in the Roman Empire at that time.

However, when, in the fourth century (especially after the Edict of Milan in 313 AD), Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire, and becoming Christians was now seen as a political, social and economic advantage, it witnessed the great majority of people flocking to the Church and embracing the Christian faith. During this time, all the other existing religions in the Holy Roman Empire had been proscribed, and subsequently non-Christians were even prohibited from holding public office[56]. In that new atmosphere of religious freedom for Christians, the *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* axiom had now begun to be applied to the minority who had not accepted the Christian faith, to the Jews and pagans. Under the presumption that the Gospel message had now been preached to the ends of the earth and everyone had had ample opportunity to accept it, there began to exist a judgment of guilt on the minority who, by not embracing the faith, were believed to have rejected God's offer of salvation[57]. At the same time, with the Roman Empire officially becoming a Christian empire, and thus, with the Bishop of Rome becoming «Pontifex Maximus» and therefore exercising not only spiritual but also political power, «[t]he welfare of the church was now

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[53] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 21.200.

[54] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 21.

[55] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 23.

[56] E. Hillman, *Many Paths*, 28.

[57] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 24.

wedded to the welfare of the state, which means that the enemies of the state [non-Romans] became the enemies of the church [non-Christians]»[58]. With the union of altar and throne, or of cross and sword, being outside the Church and being outside the Empire meant more or less the same. Inevitably, the Church's attitudes towards non-Christians, towards those who lived *extra Ecclesiam*, began to change.

1.2.4 *The Influence of Augustine in the Catholic Church's Theology of Religions from the Fifth to the Sixteenth Century*

One particular theologian, according to Paul Knitter, who theologically consolidated these tremendous developments through his writings and homilies was St. Augustine (354-430). Influenced by his own particular «reading» of St. Paul and by his own personal experience of spiritual powerlessness to change himself, Augustine came to the conclusion and thus asserted that we are saved *solo Christo* and *sola gratia*. For Augustine, without the grace of Christ, humanity was lost; and he turned to the barbarians who were threatening the Roman Empire, and by extension, the Roman Catholic Church, to find examples of this «lost» humanity, of *massa damnata*[59]. Gradually, Augustine came to the conviction that God's salvific grace could only be found within the Church, that there was no hope of salvation for those who lived outside it.

Karl Rahner, in his critique of Augustine, argues that «Augustine inaugurated and taught to Christendom a view of world-history according to which… world-history remained the history of the *massa damnata* from which in the last resort, by a rarely granted grace of election, only a few were saved»[60]. Augustine's teaching on «double predestination» was precisely a schematic presentation of his ecclesiocentric and exclusivist theology: «God, from all eternity,

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[58] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 65.

[59] Knitter observes: «The Visigoths captured Rome in 410 and were laying siege to Augustine's own city of Hippo as he lay dying in 430» (P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 65).

[60] K. Rahner, «The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council», 99-100.

predestines some to salvation within the church; the rest—the 'damned masses'—end in perdition»[61]. For Rahner,

> [e]ven though Augustine from time to time showed that he was aware of the presence in the Church of many who seemed to be outside it and vice versa, nevertheless for him the group of those who are saved and enter into glory is more or less identical with the community of those who believe explicitly in Christianity and the Church. As a result of an incomprehensibly just judgement of God, the rest remain in the massa damnata of humanity, and on the whole the outcome of world-history is to be found in hell[62].

The doctrinal influence of Augustine, whose morbid teaching in this area gained general acceptance in the Church principally because of his prominence as a theologian, was to weigh heavily on the Christian theology and attitudes towards the other religions throughout much of the Church's history. One of his students, Fulgentius of Ruspe (467-533), made this particular aspect of Augustine's theology more rigorous when the former declared:

> "[N]one of those who are outside of the Catholic Church, not only pagans," but also Jews, heretics, and schismatics, can become sharers of eternal life, but they will go into the eternal fire "that was prepared for the devil and his angels" [*Mt 25: 41*] unless, before the end of their life, they are joined to her…. "No one can be saved, no matter how many alms he has given, and even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church" (DS 1351).

In the shadow of Augustine's pessimistic outlook on salvation, the *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* principle signified that the Christian truth had to be imposed on the world so that the vast majority of its people would not end up in hell but would be saved.

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[61] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 65.

[62] K. Rahner, «The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council», 100. For Rahner, «[t]he later Augustine (at least after 418) no longer recognized in theological theory a universal salvific will for the *massa damnata* of fallen man. God wills to manifest his just judgment by leaving many in the inherited ruin of sin» (K. Rahner, «Salvation», 407).

In a nutshell, we can say that this great «imbalance» in the «teeter-totter»—which revealed more prominence to the particular side of Christ and the Church over the universal side of God's love for all people—lasted for more than a thousand years, from the fifth to the sixteenth century[63], a period in the Catholic Church's history which, due to its length and breadth, can only be explored very briefly. «With St. Augustine the problem of the salvation of infidels, from the field of apologetics, enters more directly into that of speculative theology, *where it was to remain ever after*»[64]. During this long period, the Church's attitude and mentality towards non-Christians was crystallized in the dogmatic axiom, *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. If during Cyprian's time, this dictum was developed and repeatedly invoked for heretics and schismatics who previously belonged to the Church but culpably endangered their salvation by abandoning it, from the time of St. Augustine up to the Council of Trent, this ancient principle was directed at non-Christians, with an equally powerful threat that those who lived outside the Catholic Church could end up in eternal damnation.

For Hans Küng, «[m]edieval scholasticism merely echoes Augustine»[65]. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) reprised the familiar words but included an emphatic adverbial phrase: «There is indeed one universal Church of the faithful outside of which no one *at all* is saved» (DS 802; emphasis mine). Pope Boniface VIII, in his bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302), rendered salvation more exclusive and ecclesiocentric by making acceptance of papal authority an absolute prerequisite for salvation: «Furthermore, we declare, state and define that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of all human creatures that they submit to the Roman pontiff» (DS 875). Then, the Council of Florence (1438-1445) repeated almost verbatim Fulgentius' condemnation and added:

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[63] For John Rist, Augustine's writings «set the Western theological tone for more than a thousand years» (J. Rist, «Augustine of Hippo», 9). Karl Rahner refers to this «more than a millennium of struggle» as «Augustinian pessimism in regard to the salvation of the individual» (K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 291).

[64] M. Eminyan, *The Theology of Salvation*, 19; emphasis mine.

[65] H. Küng, *The Church*, 314.

«No one can be saved, no matter how many alms he has given, and even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church" (DS 1351). Such a literal and excessively juridical understanding of salvation inspired ecclesial fanaticism that contributed to the perversion of attitudes and mentalities among Christians towards the members of non-Christian religions for centuries. The vision of countless infidels, of myriad unbaptized individuals, consigned to the everlasting fires of hell for their idolatry and unbelief impelled Christian missionaries in the ensuing centuries to exploits of heroism and martyrdom in foreign lands in their «thirst for souls», in their fervor to save souls from eternal damnation[66].

1.2.5 *Implications of the «Age of Discovery» for the Catholic Church's Theology of Religions*

Fifty years after the Council of Florence, Christopher Columbus «discovered» America in 1492, and what this meant for the Catholic Church became unambiguously clear almost instantly. The «Age of Discovery» was a period of immense importance in world history which particularly forced the Church to modify its theological understanding of the world and of reality. The «discovery» of vast continents inhabited by the aboriginals who had never heard of Christ and his Gospel unsettled some of the Church's previously-held dogmatic assertions, challenged its centuries-old presuppositions, and unleashed a horde of unheard-of theological questions and arguments. It prompted Catholic theologians to re-think their earlier, well-guarded assumptions and re-articulate the ancient axiom on the necessity of the Church for salvation in ways consistent with the doctrine of God's universal saving will for all people[67]. «[I]n the 16th century, vast continents, peoples, and religious traditions of whose existence European Christians had only been dimly aware, suddenly were imposed on their consciousness»[68]. Theologians and historians

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[66] J. Jadot, «The Growth in Roman Catholic Commitment», 207.

[67] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 66; F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 202.

[68] J. Jadot, «The Growth in Roman Catholic Commitment», 207.

have argued that the unyielding insistence on the *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* principle was both conditioned by historical and psychological factors. Historically, as mentioned above, the Catholic Church thought that the Gospel had now been proclaimed everywhere, that «the echo of the Gospel preaching had already reached the farthest limits of the earth»[69], and that, therefore, since everyone had had the chance to hear the Gospel there would no longer be any reason for anyone not to embrace it and belong to the Church. Psychologically, Christians could not imagine that anyone, upon hearing the Gospel, could not behold the truth and beauty of the Christian faith, and hence, not desire to belong to the Church[70].

Yet, in the newly-discovered continents of the Americas, for example, these two conditioning factors were shattered. Not only was it not true that the Gospel had already been preached to the farthermost ends of the earth, as evidenced by the presence of the natives who had never heard of Christ; many of these indigenous people, even after having heard the Gospel, also still preferred to go back to their traditional ways of religion[71]. For Jacques Dupuis, therefore, with the discovery of the «New World», «it became impossible to continue to believe in any guilt on the part of entire masses of people who had failed to join the Christian faith»[72]. In the Council of Trent (1545-1563), theologians came up with the «baptism of desire» formula, and argued that if pagans could not be baptized with water, they could be baptized «through desire», which simply meant that if infidels obeyed the dictates of their conscience and lived moral lives, they were implicitly manifesting a desire to belong to the Church and could thus be saved[73]. For Sullivan, the Catholic Church had to wait for several centuries more

> for the limits of the psychological horizon to expand sufficiently so that the presumption of guilt which was characteristic of the medieval

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[69] M. Eminyan, *The Theology of Salvation*, 19.20.

[70] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 66-67; cf. F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 201.

[71] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 67.

[72] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 99.

[73] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 67.

> judgment concerning all those outside the church, would gradually change, first into a recognition that some of them might be in good faith, and then into the general presumption of innocence which is now [since Vatican II] the official attitude of the Catholic Church[74].

According to Knitter, the theological development precipitated by the extensive overseas exploration of the «Age of Discovery» gave rise to a doctrinal shift from «*outside* the Church there is no salvation» to «*without* the Church there is no salvation»[75]. This means that individuals could be outside the Church in the sense that they were unbaptized; yet, if they followed their conscience and led upright and righteous living, they were somehow inside the Church, or related to it. From the seventeenth to the middle of the twentieth century, a more positive attitude towards non-Christians began to appear in the Catholic Church's teaching. Even though the fundamental belief still remained that the Church was necessary for salvation, «during the first half of the past century [twentieth century], they [theologians] devised all kinds of concepts by which they could include *within* the church any 'holy pagan' *outside* the church»[76]. Maurice Eminyan devotes the second part of Chapter II of his book, *The Theology of Salvation*, to exploring the different ways by which «justified non-Christians», as he calls them, are «related» to the Church: All non-Christians who obeyed God's voice written in their hearts and who lived virtuous lives belonged to the «soul» of the Church; were «attached», «linked», «related to» the Church; «belonged» to the Church; were «in» the Church; were «imperfect», «tendential», «invisible», «potential» members of the Church; were members of the Church through «grace» and by means of «voto»[77].

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[74] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 202.

[75] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 67.

[76] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 67; emphasis in the original.

[77] Cf. M. Eminyan, *The Theology of Salvation*, 117-181.

1.2.6 *Theology of Religions from the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century Up to the Advent of the Second Vatican Council*

During the second half of the nineteenth century, some important developments in the Catholic Church's relations with «justified» non-Christians marked this particular period of the Church's doctrinal history. The importance for our present discussion of the century immediately before the Second Vatican Council is evident in the fact that Pius IX (who reigned as Pope from 1846 to 1878) was the first Pope to have ever taught that non-Christians could be saved without becoming Christians, that is, without belonging to the Church[78]. In issuing his Encyclical, *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore* in 1863, a new and more positive view of salvation for non-Christians was introduced officially into the magisterium of the Catholic Church[79]. In the Encyclical, the Pope argues that

> those who suffer from invincible ignorance with regard to our most holy religion, by carefully keeping the natural law and its precepts, which have been written by God in the hearts of all, by being disposed to obey God and to lead a virtuous and correct life, can, by the power of divine light and grace, attain eternal life. For God, who sees, examines, and knows completely the minds and souls, the thoughts and qualities of all, will not permit, in his infinite goodness and mercy, anyone who is not guilty of a voluntary fault to suffer eternal punishment (DS 2866).

This means that if a person obeys God by following the dictates of his conscience (the precepts of the natural law inscribed in his heart) and leads a morally virtuous life, he can, by virtue of God's grace and light, achieve eternal life. As regards the long-cherished Catholic assertion of *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, Pius IX nevertheless affirmed that «it is a condition for extra-ecclesiastical salvation that a person be ignorant through no fault of his own "of our most holy religion" and its mediation of grace»[80].

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[78] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 68.

[79] M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 16.

[80] M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 16.

As regards Vatican I, Sullivan observes that although a draft of the Constitution on the Church at the First Vatican Council (December 8, 1869-October 20, 1870) followed Pius IX's teaching on this matter, only the articles in this draft dealing with the question of the papacy became part of the conciliar doctrine[81]. This means that, as Miikka Ruokanen observes, «[t]he Council did not continue the promising initiative of Pope Pius IX in his teaching on the possibility of salvation outside the Church»[82]. Ruokanen, thus, concludes: Vatican I «had nothing positive to say about other religions nor about the possibility of extra-ecclesiastical salvation»; the Council, in fact, maintained the ecclesiocentric and exclusivistic notion of salvation—that there is no justification and eternal life in the absence of faith, and that God instituted the Church, which is a sign to all the nations and which summons them to herself, so that this divine and justifying faith may be presented to human beings[83].

It was not until the 1940s that the question of the possibility of salvation outside the Church was again raised in the magisterium of the Church. In his 1943 Encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*, although Pius XII (who was Pope from 1939 to 1958) insisted on a strict identity between the Mystical Body of Christ and the Catholic Church, which implied that only those who belonged to the Church, that is, Catholics, were really its members, still «a door is left open to those who desire salvation even though they may not have access to the gospel»[84] when the Pope spoke about non-Catholic Christians and non-Christians. The Encyclical says:

> We urge each and every one of them to be prompt to follow the interior movements of grace, and to seek earnestly to rescue themselves from a state in which they cannot be sure of their own salvation. For even though, by a certain unconscious desire and wish, they may be related to the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they may remain deprived of so many and so powerful gifts and helps from Heaven, which can be enjoyed only within the Catholic Church (DS 3821).

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[81] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 69.

[82] M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 17.

[83] M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 17.

[84] V-M. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 111.

Several observations can be pointed out in this quotation. (1) The Encyclical does not categorically say *either* that non-Catholics and non-Christians can be saved *or* that they cannot be saved; it simply states that they are in a condition in which «they cannot be sure of their salvation». (2) However, even if the Pope declared the non-certainty of salvation *extra Ecclesiam*, if an individual possesses an unconscious desire and longing to belong to the Church, he, in a certain sense, is already part of it. And the document explains how the salvation of non-Catholics and non-Christians can be reconciled with the «outside the Church there is no salvation» principle, by appealing to the *in voto* precept, that though they are not members of the Catholic Church, they can be related to the Mystical Body of Christ «by a certain unconscious desire and longing» to belong to his Church[85]. (3) Indeed, even if the ecclesial mediation of salvation is maintained firmly, the idea of «Catholic unity», in the Encyclical, is nevertheless widened, with the boundaries of the Church being rendered not visible and strict. «Those non-Catholics and non-Christians who are sensitive to God's call in their inner self are in some secret manner latent members of that society to whom the explicit means of salvation are available»[86].

According to Sullivan, while it is true that Pope Pius XII «did not actually say that non-Christians can be saved, … this is surely implied by his saying that they may be related to the Mystical Body "by a certain unconscious desire"»[87]. That his interpretation of this particular aspect of the Encyclical was correct was, according to Sullivan, «confirmed six years later by a letter of the Holy Office addressed to Archbishop Richard Cushing of Boston, which rejected the rigid interpretation of 'No salvation outside the church' that was propagated by Leonard Feeney, S.J»[88]. In this letter, the Holy Office arbitrated:

> To gain eternal salvation it is not always required that a person be incorporated in reality (*reapse*) as a member of the church, but it is

[85] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 133; V-M. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 112.

[86] M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 18.

[87] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 69.

[88] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 69.

> required that he belong to it at least in desire and longing (*voto et desiderio*). It is not always necessary that this desire be explicit, as it is with catechumens. When a man is invincibly ignorant, God also accepts an implicit desire, so called because it is contained in the good dispositions of soul by which a man wants his will to be conformed to God's will. This is clearly taught by the Sovereign Pontiff Pope Pius XII in his doctrinal letter on the mystical Body of Christ (DS 3870).

However, in spite of this remarkable shift in theological thinking, one thing that is clear and must be pointed out in this survey of ecclesial history is that «all these efforts, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, to come to a more positive attitude toward people outside the church never included a more positive attitude toward *their religions*»[89]. Indeed, in spite of this huge doctrinal leap on the possibility of salvation *extra Ecclesiam*, the Catholic Church, before Vatican II, never made any positive statement on non-Christian religions and did not come up with any positive official declaration on them[90]. Certainly, in the discussion of the axiom, one has to consider, as Sullivan, Knitter and others have done, the historical factors that occasioned the insistence on the *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* principle. However, such a consideration does not remove the fact that historically, from the fifth to the sixteenth century, the Church's attitude towards non-Christians was generally harsh and negative, full of condemnations and anathemas, with very few exceptions scattered across centuries[91]. And even if that attitude went through an enormous leap beginning in the sixteenth century with the Magisterium's admission on the possibility of salvation outside the Church for non-Christians, still the theology of the Church prior to

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[89] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 67.

[90] M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 19.11.

[91] We may mention here—as illustrative examples of «exceptions» to the Church's negative and hostile attitudes towards the adherents of non-Christian religions during these centuries and beyond—the charismatic insights of St. Francis of Assisi and of the Renaissance Cardinal-theologian Nicholas of Cusa of the 13th and 15th centuries, and the daring and celebrated missionary *apertures* of Jesuit missionaries Matteo Ricci, Roberto de Nobili, and Pedro Paez, as well as of Franciscan friar Pedro de Anuaga, of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Vatican II never said anything positive about non-Christian religions, something that has to be insisted in order to better appreciate Vatican II, especially *Nostra Aetate*, as a watershed in the development of the Christian theology of religions. In fact, for Ruokanen, the Council Fathers had to take a theological initiative in formulating *Nostra Aetate* since they could not depend much on Christian tradition and doctrinal history. «[T]he history of Christian theology has seen only sporadic occurrences of assertions concerning other religions, rather than any authoritative or comprehensive theological conception of the Church's relation to non-Christian religions»[92].

Knitter asserts that with extremely few exceptions, theologians, Church hierarchs, and even ordinary Catholics all throughout this period «never imagined—or never dared to imagine—that God could make use of other religions to offer grace, revelation, and salvation»[93]. If God was touching people's lives outside and beyond the confines of the Catholic Church, it must be taking place through some kind of personal or mystical experience somewhere in the private depth of an individual. The assertion that there was only one true Savior could only lead to an unwavering conviction that there could only be one true religion— Christianity, the religion founded by Christ[94]. Indeed, that the Catholic Church, since Vatican II, acknowledges the presence of many positive elements in the non-Christian religions was at no time in the past—as I hope this brief review has demonstrated—the Church's officially sanctioned attitude towards the other religions in its chequered history. By the strength of its centuries-long juridical application, the *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* principle had become a formidable, ecclesial axiom that principally defined and determined the Catholic Church's attitudes towards and relations with non-Christian religions through the centuries up until the Second Vatican Council.

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[92] M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 43-44.

[93] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 67.

[94] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 68.

1.3 The Second Vatican Council's Theology of Religions: Achievements and Limitations

In Karl Rahner's assessment, the Second Vatican Council represents a «caesura» in the Catholic Church's relationship with non-Christians and their religions. It is true that the conviction which authorized the newly established Church's relationship with other believers and their religious traditions reflected especially in *Nostra Aetate* was already present in the Church's sense of faith throughout its history. Yet, in the pre-conciliar period, «[n]on-Christians were regarded simply as living in the darkness of paganism and assured salvation only through the preaching of the gospel», and «non-Christian religions as a whole were no more than the terrible darkness of paganism, all that man in his sin and without grace could produce from his own resources by way of religion»[95]. The Council was an event that distinctly marked a turning point in the situation of the Church's relationship with the world and its many peoples, cultures and religions, in the development particularly of a theology of religions in the Catholic Church.

In an almost lapidary description of Vatican II's achievements on this question, Paul Knitter argues: «Never before had a church, in its official pronouncements, dealt so extensively with other religions; never before had it said such positive things about them; never before had it called upon all Christians to take these religions seriously and dialogue with them»[96]. For Jacques Dupuis, the Council was «the first council in the conciliar history of the Church to speak positively of other religious traditions»[97]. When we consider how «Christian self-understanding prior to Vatican II was premised largely on a negative evaluation of the other religions»[98], the Council indeed was not just a historic milestone but also a crossroad, «a fork in the road»[99], as Knitter puts it. Faced with this crossroad and with the solemn promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* and

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[95] K. Rahner, «The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council», 97.98-99.

[96] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 75.

[97] J. Dupuis, «A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*», 124.

[98] D. A. Lane, «Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions», 147.

[99] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 75.

other pertinent conciliar texts on the other religions and their adherents, «things could never be the same again», for "[i]n the 'new order of personal relations' with the 'religious others', there could be no going back to a suspicious and often hostile past»[100]. In elucidating the overall effect and influence of Vatican II on the Church's life and mission in the world, marked by a totally new and fresh conciliar approach to non-Christian religions and their members, theologians from various religious quarters have hailed the Council as a «watershed»[101].

Yet, in as much as Vatican II forms a «watershed» in the Catholic Church's understanding of, and attitudes towards, the non-Christian religions and their adherents, Knitter argues that a «residual ambiguity» in the Council's understanding of the place of «truth and grace» within the religions exists, an ambiguity that, for him, lingers in the conciliar and post-conciliar period because of the doctrinal tension between the belief in God's universal saving will and the conviction on the necessity of the Church for salvation. The conciliar Church may have uttered entirely new and positive statements about the world's religions, nevertheless, it maintains the conviction that «the Church is necessary for salvation» (LG 14), since «it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be found» (UR 3)[102]. Employing an expression to denote this «ambiguity», post-conciliar theologians hold that the Council is «silent» on the question of whether non-Christian religions may be regarded as «ways» of salvation for their members—as instruments by which God draws various peoples to God's self.

1.3.1 *Second Vatican Council: A Watershed in the Development of a Christian Theology of Religions*

In his commentary on the Church's document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, Jacques Dupuis argues that when speaking of Vatican II's theology of religions, two questions have to be distinguished:

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[100] G. O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 197.

[101] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 121.125; M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 8.

[102] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 124

«one is the unequivocal conciliar declaration that salvation in Jesus Christ is possible for the members of the other religions and outside the Church; the other is the Council's evaluation of the religious traditions themselves»[103]. In his book, *Christianity and the Religions*, Dupuis spells out the second question as «the significance which these religious traditions may have in God's design for humankind and the role they ultimately play in the salvation of their members»[104]. In the same book, Dupuis remarks that when considering Vatican II documents (especially in *Lumen Gentium* 16-17, *Nostra Aetate* 2, and *Ad Gentes* 3, 9 and 11) on the question of non-Christians and their religious traditions, we can see three themes developed by the Council: «(1) the salvation of people outside the church, (2) the authentic values found in 'non-Christians' and in their religious traditions, and (3) the church's appreciation of these values and the consequent attitude which it takes toward the religious traditions and their members»[105]. As an offshoot of the first question, which is also the first theme mentioned by Dupuis in the book, another important question may be explicitly raised: If non-Christians are saved, and if they are saved always in reference to Christ, what is the role of the Church, the Body of Christ, in their salvation?

When we consider all these matters when dealing with the documents of the Second Vatican Council on the question of the non-Christians and their religions, including what the Council says about the role of the Church in the salvation of those *extra Ecclesiam*, four interrelated questions may be raised in the discussion: (1) on the salvation of non-Christians, (2) on the role of the Church in the salvation of non-Christians, (3) on the presence of positive elements and values in non-Christian religions, and (4) on the other religions as possible mediators of salvation for their members. In addressing these questions, we will inquire about what exactly Vatican II has essentially and positively contributed to the development of the theology of religions in the Catholic Church in terms of what it said about the non-Christians and their religions. We will also inquire about how far

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[103] J. Dupuis, «A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*», 123

[104] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 61.

[105] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 62.

the Council has gone in recognizing positive elements and values in the different religions and what significance (if any) it has assigned to these religious traditions in God's universal plan of salvation. We will address these questions by looking at the doctrinal «breakthroughs» or areas of «radical novelty» that the Council has brought to the theological discussion regarding non-Christian religions and the salvation of their adherents.

1.3.1.1 On the Salvation of Non-Christians

As we have seen in the previous section, since the Council of Trent's doctrine of «baptism of desire» (*in voto*) in the sixteenth century, which achieved its explicit affirmation in the Encyclical, *Mystici Corporis* published almost two decades before Vatican II, the Catholic Church has held the conviction that salvation in Jesus Christ is possible for all human beings. If Vatican II strikes a salient note in terms of its «radical novelty» concerning the salvation of non-Christians, it must be seen in what Rahner calls, and is re-echoed by Dupuis as, the «optimistic vision of the Council», that «what in the past has often been proposed as a *mere possibility* left to God's inscrutable design, is *affirmed by Vatican II as a concrete reality beyond discussion*»[106]. For Rahner,

> [t]his optimism concerning salvation appears to me one of the most noteworthy results of the Second Vatican Council. For when we consider the officially received theology concerning all these questions, which was more or less traditional right down to the Second Vatican Council, we can only wonder how few controversies arose during the Council with regard to these assertions of optimism concerning salvation, and wonder too at how little opposition the conservative wing of the Council brought to bear on this point, how all this took place without any setting of the stage or any great stir[107].

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[106] J. Dupuis, «A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*», 123; emphasis mine. For Gavin D'Costa, the *further* question in relation to Vatican II on the salvific mediation of non-Christian religions «absolutely takes for granted… that there is no doubt that the non-Christian may be saved» (G. D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 102).

[107] K. Rahner, «Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'», 284.

This optimism as regards salvation «remains one of the most astonishing phenomena in the development of the Church's conscious awareness of her faith in this development as it applies to the secular and non-Christian world»[108].

Indeed, by unambiguously affirming the ubiquity of grace and the universality of salvation, that the grace of salvation is present outside Christianity and operative beyond the borders of the Catholic Church, the question in the Second Vatican Council is no longer whether individuals who do not believe in Christ—who are not baptized and therefore do not explicitly belong to the Church—can be saved or not. This question has been affirmatively answered and definitively settled in the Council's four most quoted texts and clearest affirmations of this teaching—*Lumen Gentium* (LG) 13 and 16, *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) 22, and *Ad Gentes* (AG) 7[109].

In LG 16, Vatican II teaches that «[t]hose who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal life». It also expressly affirms that even self-confessed atheists, those who do not belong to any religion at all, who follow the promptings of their conscience and are moved by God's grace, may attain salvation[110]. The important point in this passage is the Council's insistence that the scope of God's saving action in the world and in history is not and cannot be arbitrarily restricted. GS 22 reiterates the teaching of LG 16 on this matter and acquires a more concrete structure. After saying that Christians come in contact with the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, the Constitution affirms that all

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[108] K. Rahner, «Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'», 286.

[109] All quotations from the documents of the Second Vatican Council are taken from A. Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, unless otherwise stated.

[110] Cf. K. Rahner, «Theological Considerations on Secularization and Atheism», 176.

people of good will achieve the same through the universal action of the Spirit:

> All this holds true not for Christians only but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery (GS 22).

Through the universal presence and work of the Holy Spirit, non-Christians can be united to the saving paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection despite their lack of an explicit knowledge of Christ or faith in him. Through the Spirit, all people, whether with some kind of faith or with no explicit faith at all, can be united, albeit mysteriously, to the crucified and risen Christ, and thus be saved. In AG 7, the Council, after speaking about the necessity of the Church and her obligation and sacred right to evangelize, re-echoes both conciliar texts cited above and affirms that «in ways known to himself 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. 11:6)». All this is because, as LG 13 affirms, «all men are called to salvation by the grace of God»[111]; no human being, whatever be his «religious belonging» in the world, is excluded from the sphere of God's universal saving design.

For Rahner, the possibility of salvation of non-Christians, polytheists and atheists is a theological conviction that can no longer be disputed with the advent of Vatican II. In fact, «such a possibility of salvation is taught explicitly and very clearly by the Second Vatican Council in a variety of places», such as LG 16, GS 22, AG 7, and NA, 1ff[112]. The Council has acknowledged both the possibility that these people can live in a subjective state of freedom from grave sin, as well as the possibility of their obtaining a supernatural salvation. Vatican II «positively asserts that it is possible for the non-Christian to attain

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[111] Cited from W. M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*.

[112] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 152; ID., «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 290.

salvation, though at the same time it declares that such salvation is achieved in ways that are known to God alone»[113]. Indeed, in the Catholic understanding of the faith expressed clearly in the Council, «there can be no doubt that someone who has no concrete, historical contact with the explicit preaching of Christianity can nevertheless be a justified person who lives in the grace of Christ»[114].

The Church, in Vatican II, has evidently assumed a humbler posture and attitude towards the workings of God, of the Spirit, within the much wider world outside the Church. For the first time, the Spirit's actions and operations are no longer viewed as restricted solely by the Church's ministry of Word and sacrament, but are perceived as already present and operative in the other religions[115]. The Council, in fact, did not stop at simply stating the possibility of salvation for non-Christians; by appealing to the universal presence and working of the Holy Spirit in making the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection available to all in GS 22, it also offered a kind of explanation as to how this salvation-without-the-gospel takes place[116].

Indeed, in spite of its significant contribution to the exploration of the possibility of salvation of non-Christians «by a certain unconscious desire and longing» to belong to the Church expressed in the obedience of conscience and in the living out of a morally virtuous life, *Mystici Corporis*, the «crowning document» of the *in voto* precept, does not make an *explicit* affirmation of the certainty of salvation of non-Christians when it says that «they cannot be sure of their own salvation» (DS 3821). In the Second Vatican Council, the Church is explicit and unambiguous about the possibility of salvation for those who belong to other religious traditions, that

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[113] K. Rahner, «Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'», 284.

[114] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 176.

[115] E. Fisher, «Interpreting *Nostra Aetate* through Post-Conciliar Teaching», 159.

[116] V-M. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 114-115; J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 61.

individuals who have never arrived at explicit Christian faith and baptism can attain salvation. In Vatican II, the traditional pessimism about salvation which had characterized the Church for centuries had freely yielded to an optimism about salvation.

1.3.1.2 On the Role of the Church in the Salvation of Non-Christians

As we have seen above, the official Catholic Church's teaching prior to the Second Vatican Council on the salvation of non-Christians was that membership in the Catholic Church—the «Mystical Body of Christ»—was necessary, that in order for the non-Christians to be saved they must be «related» to the Church at least by an implicit or unconscious desire to belong to it. Despite the strong ecclesiocentric emphasis of this doctrine, by invoking this *implicitum votum Ecclesiae* principle in order to affirm the twofold conviction of the universality of God's saving will and the necessity of the Church for salvation, a more positive outlook towards non-Christians has characterized the Catholic Church's attitudes and theology into the twentieth century[117]. Indeed, while pre-Vatican II magisterial documents insisted on the necessity of the Church for salvation, they nonetheless left the door open for those with unconscious longing to belong to it, so that without necessarily becoming actual members of the Catholic Church through explicit faith and baptism, both non-Catholic Christians and non-Christians could be «related» and «joined» in some way to the Church and be saved.

However, in Vatican II, not only is the possibility of universal salvation unequivocally affirmed, the Council also does so without *anymore* making an appeal to the *voto implicito* principle that had been the Church's expression for the last century before the Council. In other words, when Vatican II speaks about the possibility of salvation for non-Christians, it no longer grounds this teaching in the «presumption» that these non-Christians possess in their hearts an implicit intention to belong to the Catholic Church. Where the last hundred years prior to Vatican II had argued that non-Christians

[117] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 123.

could be related to the Church by an unconscious desire to belong to it, the Council, in contrast, merely says that non-Christians are «related» to the Church «in various ways», as mentioned in the final paragraph of LG 13 and eventually explained in LG 16.

In LG 13[118], the Constitution reads:

> All men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the People of God, a unity which is harbinger of the universal peace it promotes. And there belong to it or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful as well as those who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind. For all men are called to salvation by the grace of God.

Francis Sullivan, in his book, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, observes that both the first and the last sentences of the paragraph speak of a universal call—the first is the universal call to belong to the Church; the second is the universal call to salvation through God's grace. Not everyone may belong to the Church since it is evidently not possible for every person to enter the Church by baptism; everyone may be saved, however, since all are called to salvation and the grace of salvation is offered to all. The second sentence speaks of two different ways by which individuals stand in relation to the Church: either they—the Catholics and the non-Catholic Christians—«belong» to the Church, and this is possible by virtue of baptism, the sacrament that makes a person a member of the Church; or they—the rest of humanity—are «related» to the Church. It is the non-Christians that are «related» to the Church in «various ways», which is the subject matter of LG 16[119].

LG 16, which explains this «varied relatedness», begins the paragraph by saying: «Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the People of God». In LG 16, five groups of people are distinguished and are listed in a descending order

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[118] The conciliar passages from LG 13 and 16 are taken from W. M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*. My reason for choosing to cite these conciliar texts from the Abbot edition in the ensuing discussion is that it is also the texts cited by Francis Sullivan in his book, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, from which I derive some insights for the development of my argument in this section.

[119] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 152-153.

on the basis of their source and kind of knowledge of God and their closeness to biblical revelation and hence to Christian faith[120]: (1) the Jews, «the people to whom the covenants and promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh…. people… most dear to God»; (2) the Moslems who profess the faith of Abraham, and «along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind»; (3) «those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God»; (4) «[t]hose… who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience»; and (5) «those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace».

The question that begs to be answered is: How are these various groups of people, of non-Christians, «related» to the Church? For Sullivan, apart from the Jewish people who stand in a unique relationship to Christ and therefore to his Church, the only common denominator among the other groups is that they are all included in God's saving plan and all receive his offer of grace. Thus, «[i]t seems reasonable to conclude that it is because they are all recipients of God's offer of saving grace that they are also said to be 'related to the church'»[121]. In his article, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», Sullivan asserts that though this is not expressed in LG 16, a statement in the *relatio* of the theological commission on LG 16 gives us reasons to think that it was part of the intention of those who drafted the text: «Christ has objectively redeemed all men, and he calls and directs them to the church. All grace has a certain communitarian quality, and looks

[120] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 154-155.

[121] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 155.

toward the church»[122]. Thus, rather than being joined to the Catholic Church by an unconscious desire to belong to it, which has been the doctrinal teaching of the Church at least for the last century before the Council, as far as the Constitution is concerned, the non-Christians are now related to the Church by means of God's saving grace which is offered to all. And if non-Christians do respond positively to this offer of divine grace and hence are justified, «they will be related to the Church by a spiritual communion in the grace of Christ, even though they do not know him as its source»[123].

Likewise, by appealing to the Council's description of the Church as «sacrament of salvation», *Lumen Gentium* says not only that the Church is the goal toward which the various groups of non-Christians are «ordered» by means of God's saving grace, but also that the Church plays an instrumental and mediating role in their salvation, in the salvation of those who are not in contact with its ministry[124]. The conciliar document speaks about the Church as the «sacrament of salvation» in three places[125]. In LG 1, which spells out the nature and purpose of the Church by comparing it with the sacraments, understood as signs that cause the grace they signify, the Council describes the Church as being «in Christ as a sacrament or

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[122] Cited by F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 74. In his book, Sullivan offers three reasons for alluding to the communitarian character of grace and its orientation toward the Church, that «just as every offer of grace directs the recipient toward salvation, so also every offer of grace directs the recipient toward the church». Firstly, if the ultimate goal of saving grace is «participation in the "universal church" of the eschatological kingdom of God», it must also be «intrinsically ordered towards the church in its earthly state». Secondly, the grace that justifies a person «must make possible an act of faith», which, no matter how conceptually imperfect it may be, is «intrinsically directed toward the full profession of faith in divine revelation» *in* the Church. And thirdly, saving grace includes «the gift of supernatural love of God and neighbor», which is intrinsically ordered towards the Church, since «communion in charity» is «the inner life of the Church» (Cf. F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 155).

[123] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 74.

[124] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 74-75.

[125] These three quotations from *Lumen Gentium* are derived from Sullivan's article (F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 75).

instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity». This idea is clarified in LG 9 where the Council speaks of the Church as «taken up by Christ as the instrument of salvation for all, and sent as a mission to the whole world as the light of the world and as the salt of the earth». In LG 48, while describing the establishment of the Church, its universal role in the salvation of the world is emphasized: «Christ, when he was lifted up from the earth, drew all people to himself; rising from the dead, he sent his life-giving Spirit down on his disciples, and through him he constituted his body which is the church as the universal sacrament of salvation».

As to the question then of whether the Church exercises an effective and mediating role in the salvation of those people who have no contact with the Church, Sullivan proposes that the answer be found in the role of the Church as «priestly people», in the celebration of the Eucharist[126]. Quoting *Mystici Corporis* which affirms that «the salvation of many depends on the prayers and voluntary penances which the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ offer for this intention», Sullivan argues that there is more reason to attribute to the Eucharist, the one unique sacrifice which obtained for the whole humanity the grace of universal salvation, an instrumental role in the redemption of the whole world—affirmed by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 1 and 10 as well by the Third and Fourth Eucharistic Prayers[127]. The insights they contain in advancing the point that it is especially through the Eucharist that the Church mediates God's saving grace to all people justify describing the Church as the efficacious sign of the salvation of non-Christians despite its not being able to reach them directly by its ministry. They point out that the Church plays an effective and mediatory role in the secret and invisible work of the Holy Spirit for the redemption of those whose faith God alone knows and sees[128].

To conclude: For Sullivan, Vatican II has marked a decisive change in the Catholic Church's teaching about the salvation of non-Christians,

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[126] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 158.

[127] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 159-160.

[128] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 76.

of those who are not and will probably not become Christians in their lifetime. In *Lumen Gentium*, it has assiduously affirmed its doctrinal conviction of the necessity of the Catholic Church for salvation; however, instead of appealing to the centuries-old negative and misleading dogmatic axiom, *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, it has expressed this belief positively and profoundly in the image of the Church as the «universal sacrament of salvation», that the Church is both a sign and instrument of universal salvation[129].

1.3.1.3 On the Presence of Positive Elements and Values in Non-Christian Religions

For Francis Sullivan, the first time that a positive statement about the presence of positive elements among non-Christians appeared in the successive drafts of *Lumen Gentium* was in the October 1963 draft. While echoing the insight of the 1962 draft on the necessity of belonging to the Catholic Church at least by desire in order to obtain salvation, this draft nevertheless included a positive statement about those who seek God in images and shadows as seen in the affirmation that «[w]hatever of good is found among them is valued by the church as a preparation for the Gospel and as light given by God, who from the beginning of the world effectively intends the salvation of all people»[130]. Having been described as «light given by God», these elements are seen as of divine origin, and not just as the result of the human search for God[131]. Noting from the 1963 draft the inclusion of this positive statement, which is strengthened by LG 16 with its important revision, «[w]hatever goodness *and truth* is found among them», Sullivan concludes that this is the first insinuation that there exist elements of divine revelation in the beliefs and practices of non-Christians, and that one will never find any magisterial statement before Vatican II affirming the presence of elements of goodness and

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[129] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 160-161. «Most Catholic theologians… remain grateful that the Second Vatican Council never repeated the old slogan of 'outside the Church no salvation'—a slogan that many had explained… by talking of people being saved through 'implicitly desiring' to belong to the Church or by an 'implicit baptism of desire'» (G. O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 235).

[130] Cited by F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 71.

[131] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 72.

truth among them, or that such elements should be seen as light given by God[132]. Likewise, for Sullivan, the mention of «rites» in LG 17, which are described as «good», where the word «rites» clearly refers to the religious practices of other religions, can be viewed as the first positive reference to non-Christian religions in the Council documents. When *Lumen Gentium* was promulgated on November 21, 1964, all these teachings on the salvation of non-Christians became official doctrine of the Council, which in turn influenced the discussion and content of the other conciliar documents that were still going through revisions and had yet to be promulgated[133].

While *Lumen Gentium* describes the various groups of non-Christians in a «descending order» based on the proximity of their religions to biblical revelation in terms of knowledge of God, *Nostra Aetate* follows the opposite order—beginning with people who have «a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life» (NA 2), followed by a brief consideration of the Muslims (NA 3), and concluding with a more extended coverage of the Jews (NA 4). Such a perception of a «hidden power» in nature and in human life is «a recognition of a supreme being, or… of a Father», which «results in a way of life that is imbued with a deep religious sense» (NA 2). Then it describes Hinduism and Buddhism as religions «found in more advanced civilizations [which] endeavor by way of well-defined concepts and exact knowledge to answer… questions» enunciated in the first article. Finally, it speaks of the «other religions… found throughout the world» which «attempt in their own ways to calm the hearts of men by outlining a program of life covering doctrine, moral precepts and sacred rites» (NA 2).

In the Council's most celebrated pronouncement on the non-Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate* proclaims:

> The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways

[132] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 76. The brief citation from LG 16 is taken from Sullivan's article.

[133] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 76-77.

> from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men (NA 2).

Sullivan observes that in this famous quotation which expresses the Church's positive attitude towards non-Christian religions, an echo of John 1: 9—«the true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world»—is evident. The Church's acknowledgment of the existence of spiritual elements and values in non-Christian religions, as reflecting the divine light which the Word of God has brought into the world in the Incarnation, suggests the presence of «elements of divinely revealed truth» in these religions which provides «the basis for a response of supernatural faith»[134]. The Declaration ends its second article with an exhortation addressed to Christians:

> to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions…. [and] while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, [to] acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians… [and in]… their social life and culture (NA 2).

Ad Gentes contains several references to non-Christian religions[135]. AG 3 says:

> The universal design of God for the salvation of the human race is not carried out exclusively in a person's soul, with a kind of secrecy. Nor is it achieved merely through those multiple endeavors, including religious ones, by which people search for God, groping for Him that they may by chance find Him… For these initiatives need to be enlightened and purified, even though, through the kindly workings of Divine Providence, they may sometimes serve as pedagogy toward the true God, or as a preparation for the gospel.

This passage, which indicates that God's salvation is «not carried out exclusively in a person's soul, with a kind of secrecy», articulates the social dimension and structure of religions. It affirms that in the sacramental economy of salvation, God employs some concrete, visible means

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[134] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 78.

[135] The citations from *Ad Gentes* are taken from Sullivan's book in my attempt to be consistent with the vocabularies used in Sullivan's examination and analysis of the conciliar texts (F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 165-166).

in order to bring people to himself, in order for God to accomplish his saving plan for the world. Likewise, these religions may seem to represent simply human initiatives to reach out to God, yet they may actually usher non-Christians to the «true God» and thus serve as a «preparation for the gospel».

However, for Sullivan, texts from *Ad Gentes* 9, 11, and 15 suggest that there are elements in the other religious traditions that are not the result of purely human endeavors but have been sown in these traditions by the Holy Spirit. In AG 9, «whatever elements of truth and grace are to be found among the nations» are considered as «a sort of secret presence of God». AG 11 exhorts missionaries to become «familiar with the national and religious traditions» of non-Christians «and gladly and respectfully to uncover the seeds of the Word which lie hidden in those traditions». And in AG 15, which suggests the presence and activity of the Spirit through the sowing of the «seeds of the Word» among non-Christian traditions long before the arrival of Christian missionaries to preach the Gospel, the Spirit is described as the one calling «all men to Christ through the seeds of the Word and by the preaching of the gospel». For Sullivan, the statement that the Holy Spirit, «who calls all to Christ by means of the seeds of the Word and the preaching of the Gospel, stirs up in the hearts the submission of faith», can be understood «to mean that the Holy Spirit first calls non-Christians to Christ by the 'seeds of the Word' that lie hidden in their own traditions, and that in this way the Spirit may stir up in their hearts the submission of faith even before they hear the preaching of the Gospel»[136]. All these passages from *Ad Gentes* aim to recognize among non-Christian religions «the presence… not only of human values, but of divine gifts…. described not only as manifestations of goodness or holiness in non-Christians as persons, but as objective elements in their religious traditions and rites»[137].

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[136] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 79.

[137] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 166.

Gaudium et Spes 41 «suggests a relationship between the activity of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all people and the role of religion in their lives»[138]. The passage says:

> She [the church] knows that man is constantly worked upon by God's Spirit, and hence can never be altogether indifferent to the problems of religion. The experience of past ages proves this, as do numerous indications in our own times. For man will always yearn to know, at least in the obscure way, what is the meaning of his life, of his activity, of his death.

For Sullivan, the textual reference to «the experience of past ages» suggests that in non-Christian religions a manifestation of this «constant working of the Spirit» can be found, since it is in these religions that people throughout the ages have sought to discover the meaning of their life, their work, and their death[139]. In GS 92, the Council urges Christians to engage in interreligious dialogue with the adherents of non-Christian religions who «preserve in their traditions precious elements of religion and humanity».

To sum up the Council's doctrinal achievements: Vatican II rediscovered and recovered the doctrine of God's universal saving will, recognized the presence of positive elements and values in non-Christian religions, and declared that God's design for the salvation of non-Christians is not carried out exclusively, secretly in their souls. For Sullivan, when we combine these conciliar teachings with the empirical fact that after almost two thousand years of Christianity only less than one-third of the world's population are Christians, and that this vast majority of non-Christians will live and die as members of their own religions, «it would seem reasonable to conclude that the positive elements in the non-Christian religions must enter into God's plan for the people who adhere to these religions»[140]. Yet, as we will see below, it is a question that has not been answered clearly and definitively in the Council.

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[138] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 164. The two citations from *Gaudium et Spes* in the paragraph are taken from Sullivan's book (*Ibid*., 164.166).

[139] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 164.

[140] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 168.167-168.

1.3.1.4 On the Non-Christian Religions as Mediators of Salvation

In Karl Rahner's evaluation of the Council, in the words of Jacques Dupuis, Vatican II's «main achievement consists of having looked beyond the question of the salvation of individual non-Christians to a positive relationship of the church with the religions as such»[141]. Indeed, while in previous centuries, the focus of theological discussion on religions was the question of the possibility of salvation of individuals *extra Ecclesiam*, in the Second Vatican Council the question was broadened into the consideration of the non-Christian religions themselves as they relate to the Church. However, while the Council has considered with great optimism the supernatural salvation of individual non-Christians on account of God's universal, gracious self-gift to humanity, it has not explicitly professed the same optimism in connection with the other religions[142].

In his book, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, Dupuis considers the very title itself of the most important conciliar text on the question of the other religions, *Nostra Aetate*—«On The Relations of the Church with the Non-Christian Religions»—and recognizes that «[t]he question posed here is not directly that of the vertical relationship of humanity's religious traditions with the mystery of Jesus Christ… [but that of]… the horizontal relationship of these same traditions with Christianity or the Church»[143]. In spite of the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church, the second question, according to Dupuis, did not lead naturally in the direction of the first question which could have played a part in the recognition of an invisible presence of Christ's saving mystery in the religious traditions of the world, and of a certain mediation of this same mystery in and through these traditions. Hence, he asks:

> Is not this the reason why, despite the council's assertion of the presence of values and positive elements in these religious traditions, it does not explicitly venture in the direction of an acknowledgment

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[141] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 65.

[142] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 65.

[143] J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 98.

> of these same traditions as legitimate paths of salvation for their members, although necessarily in relation to the mystery of Christ?[144]

It is true that Vatican II contemplated the Church's relations with non-Christian religions in an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect, and exhorted Christians to engage in dialogue and collaboration with them. Yet, for Dupuis, the Council did so within explicitly defined theological frameworks, within the restraints imposed by its self-identity and its understanding of its ecclesial mission, and within the restrictions imposed by the fundamental, «nonnegotiable elements» of traditional Christian faith required and presumed in the conversation: «the 'uniqueness' of Jesus Christ in whom alone humankind could find salvation, [and] the irreplaceable role of the church as the universal sacrament of salvation in Jesus Christ»[145]. Though the rigorist understanding of the dogmatic axiom, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, was explicitly cast aside from the discussion, «still the space for negotiating different theological evaluations of religions seemed somewhat restricted», so that in the end «[w]hile [the Council] seemed to incline to the more positive vision [in its contemplation of religions in God's universal saving plan], it nevertheless left the theological debate open»[146].

For Paul Knitter, having acknowledged the presence of the «elements of truth and grace» (AG 9) and of goodness in other religions, Vatican II, in its desire to remain faithful to its ecclesial identity and experience, must insist on the uniqueness of the place of Jesus Christ, and by extension, of the Church, in God's universal plan of salvation. Since it is only in Jesus «in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19)» that people «find the fullness of their religious life» (NA 2), the various religions of the world can achieve their fullness only in Christ—which, for Catholics, according to Knitter, means the Catholic Church. The Council, therefore, looks at all the truth and grace and goodness of other religions «as something like a compass needle that naturally points north: because the Spirit of God is present

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[144] J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 98.

[145] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 74.

[146] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 74.

in these other communities, they are 'oriented toward' (*LG* 16) their fulfillment in Christ and the church»[147]. Indeed, while the Council forms a «watershed» and stands as a historic milestone in the Catholic Church's attitude towards and relations with non-Christians and their religions, «it wants to be a "faithful" milestone»—which means that «[w]hile it certainly pointed in directions never before explored by Christians, it also wanted to make sure that those directions did not lead away from the heart of the Gospel and the special place of Jesus Christ in expressing God's love for all»[148].

Thus, while Vatican II summoned the Church to a change of attitude and mentality towards non-Christian religions and their members, for Avery Dulles, «[t]he Council… kept mission and dialogue in a dynamic tension»—which means that

> [w]hile recognizing in… *Nostra Aetate*… elements of truth and goodness in all the great religions, and hence the desirability of respectful dialogue (NA 2), the council in… *Ad Gentes*… insisted on the God-given uniqueness of the Church of Christ and consequently on the abiding necessity of missionary labor so that Christ may be acknowledged among all peoples as universal Lord and Savior (AG 6-7)[149].

While the Council basks in the truth of the possibility of salvation for people outside the Church, it still insists on the necessity of proclaiming the Gospel to non-Christians. For Sullivan, «Vatican II provides no support for the idea that, given the presence of positive elements in the non-Christian religions, there is no further urgency about Christian missionary endeavor»[150].

Likewise, although Vatican II affirms that in the non-Christian religions are found many positive elements and values that are often of divine origin, nowhere does it explicitly say that other religions are vehicles of salvation for their members. The Council «did not

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[147] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 78.

[148] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 78.

[149] A. Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism*, 30-31.

[150] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 167.

provide a definitive answer to the question of whether the religions in themselves can be considered ways of salvation for those who belong to them»[151]. While Vatican II recognizes that «[e]lements of *truth and grace* are discovered not only in the hearts of men and women of good will but also in the constitutive elements of other religions», it «did not go as far as qualifying non-Christian religions as *ways of salvation*» for their members[152]. In fact, not only did *Nostra Aetate* remain silent on the question of whether non-Christian religions could be considered ways of salvation for their members, it also «did not spell out the theological implications of the Church's positive evaluation of non-Christian religions»[153]. This Council document may have pronounced a positive judgment on non-Christian religions, but it did not clearly and unambiguously take a position on the positive relationship that these religions may have towards the Ultimate. Indeed, as regards the question of the salvific value of non-Christian religions, one must avoid «a real danger of overinterpreting the council»; while Vatican II is clear and unambiguous about the possibility of salvation of those *extra Ecclesiam*, «the council maintains a studied ambiguity and restraint» as regards the question of how they are saved[154].

1.3.2 *The Need for an Integration Among Vatican II Documents Dealing with Non-Christian Religions and Their Adherents*

What the Second Vatican Council, through Pope John XXIII's urging, initially wanted to address in *Nostra Aetate*'s earliest version, *Decretum de Iudaeis*, was the problem of the relation between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people. Two factors emerged, however, that forced the Council to significantly widen the scope of the discussion until the text finally became a self-standing, independent document devoted not just to the question of the Jews but also to the question of non-Christian religions. First, the unrestrained interferences of the leaders of the Arab world who «were determined to prevent a Council

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[151] D-P. Huang, «Christ, the One Savior of the World», 196.

[152] C. Geffré, «The Christological Paradox», 169.

[153] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 70.

[154] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 227.

statement 'in favor of the Jews'»[155] resulted in the uneasiness of the bishops coming from the predominantly-Islamic Middle East about the political repercussions of any move to include the «Jewish question» in any conciliar document. Second, the bishops coming from Asia and Africa where Christianity was a conspicuous minority protested that the Council was bereft of interest in dealing theologically with the other major religions of the world, thus prompting the Council to «enlarge the schema to embrace two-thirds of the world's religious peoples who are not Christians or Jews»[156]. Their comment that the decree did not offer an adequate presentation of the Catholic Church for non-Christians, and their explicit wish that it be widened to include not just the Jews but non-Christians as well, provided the impetus for the Council to address the question of the non-Christian religions and led to the emergence of the Declaration on all non-Christian religions[157].

Indeed, as John Oesterreicher observed, «[t]he difficulties the Church encountered concerning the text on the Jews had a positive result. They made it necessary to be open to entirely new horizons»[158]. The final version of the text may have lost some significant emphases that emerged in the course of the successive drafts, yet, for Mauro Velati, in his commentary on *Nostra Aetate*, included in Volume V of Giuseppe Alberigo's *History of Vatican II*, «it had also been enriched by broadening its perspective to include the major religions of the world…. [and]… proved to be providential in redefining the identity of the schema as a first adoption by the ecclesiastical magisterium of a position on the subject of interreligious dialogue»[159].

Such an unprecedented openness on the part of the Catholic Church towards the non-Christian religions and their members was

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[155] J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 19.

[156] T. F. Stransky, «The Genesis of *Nostra Aetate*», 12.

[157] J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 86-90; cf. M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 37.

[158] J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 95; N. Tanner, *Vatican II: The Essential Texts*, 322.

[159] M. Velati, «Completing the Conciliar Agenda», 230; cf. M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 38.

promoted not just by the Council itself but also by several other major ecclesial developments taking place around this time[160]. On Pentecost Sunday, May 17, 1964, Pope Paul VI announced the establishment of the Secretariat for Non-Christians whose nature and function was delineated by its constitution: «To search for methods and ways of opening a suitable dialogue with non-Christians. It should strive, therefore, in order that non-Christians come to be known honestly and esteemed justly by Christians, and that in their turn non-Christians can adequately know and esteem Christian doctrine and life»[161]. On August 6, 1964, the Pope published his first programmatic Encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*[162], which beyond doubt profoundly influenced Vatican II's positive approach towards the modern world and its various religious traditions. On December 3, 1964, during his visit to India, Paul VI spoke with the adherents of other religions in a warm, friendly spirit, his speech certainly being «a programmatic statement applying the [enlarged] declaration of the Council to a concrete situation»[163]. Dupuis would reflect years later that «all these gestures were for the council an incentive to lift its gaze beyond the narrow confines of the Western world and to

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[160] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 159-160; ID., *Christianity and the Religions*, 60.

[161] Secretariat for Non-christians, «The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions», no. 4.

[162] The publication of this Encyclical «is not without significance for our subject», according to Dupuis, «as the Vatican II documents that were to deal with interreligious dialogue (*NA*, *AG*, *GS*) were still in the making» (J. Dupuis, «Interreligious Dialogue in the Church's Evangelizing Mission», 240). Similarly, Francis Sullivan asserts that since the time of the publication of the Encyclical there was no conciliar schema about non-Christian religions yet, therefore, «the positive statements of Paul VI in *Ecclesiam suam* expressing admiration… and respect for 'the moral and spiritual values of the various non-Christian religions' are rather an anticipation than a consequence of the doctrine of Vatican II» (F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 183-184).

[163] J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 88. Having been delivered less than a year before *Nostra Aetate*'s promulgation, Paul VI's speech must have influenced the final outcome of the Declaration. For Oesterreicher, however, «[t]he speech of the Pope was [also] evidently inspired by the enlarged declaration with its confession of unity and of the all-embracing brotherhood of mankind as well as of the dignity of the non-biblical religions» (*Ibid.*).

reflect 'on the Church's relations with non-Christian religions'... in terms not only of matters related to Judaism but also of religions the world over»[164].

On a smaller scale, Paul VI declared, in his Easter Message, on March 29, 1964, that «[e]very religion contains a ray of light which we must neither despise nor extinguish»[165], a declaration which might have been influenced by a particular statement in Pius XII's 1951 Encyclical, *Evangelii Praecones*, that «the Catholic Church neither despises nor rejects… the doctrinal teachings of other peoples»[166]. Such an intriguingly negative phraseology truly represented a significant change of attitude from a theological mindset that previously saw other religions as the work of the devil and legitimized the Church to despise these religions and reject their doctrines[167].

Of Karl Rahner's post-conciliar essays on the subject of non-Christians and their religions, it is in his article, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation», that he principally meditates on *Nostra Aetate*'s meaning and significance vis-à-vis the question of the salvific value and import of other religions for their adherents. For Rahner, *Nostra Aetate* is «an important aid for the dogmatic theologian», in that the document incorporates, in fact, «begins with an aspect that the Church had not presented with this clarity before Vatican II»—that «[t]here is a relationship of the Church to the non-Christian religions as such (that is, as concrete sociological realities with their doctrinal structures and their life as such) and not only a relationship to non-Christian individuals»[168]. As we have seen above, the Church's theology of religions, for centuries, had to do mainly with the possibility of salvation of non-Christians; in Vatican II the theological perspective was expanded into a deliberation of non-Christian religions themselves as they relate to Christianity. And in

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[164] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 60.

[165] Cited by J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 87.

[166] Cited by J. R. Dupuche, «*Nostra aetate*–stages of creation», 161-162.

[167] J. R. Dupuche, «*Nostra aetate*–stages of creation», 162.

[168] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 289.

this examination of non-Christian religions, «for the first time in the history of the Church's teaching, the way was prepared for a positive appraisal of the great world-religions»[169] precisely in this Declaration.

According to Rahner, without in any way suggesting that Vatican II raises doubts in the Church's understanding of itself as the locus of the fullness of divine revelation or about its duty to engage in missionary activity, the motif of the Declaration is not from the missionary mandate to baptize all nations in the name of the Triune God but from the Church's task of fostering unity and love among peoples and nations[170]. It affirms the Christian conviction that «[a]ll men form but one community» and spells out the three fundamental human conditions that make them «one community» and promote fellowship among them—their common origin in God the Creator, their common heavenly destiny, and God's providence and saving designs that extend to all (NA 1). Then, it sets the scene for the rest of the conciliar text by observing that human beings look to their different religions for «an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence»—the nature of man, the meaning and purpose of human life, questions about good and evil, the problem of human suffering, the question of happiness, the meaning of death, judgment and punishment, and the ultimate, ineffable mystery that enfolds our entire existence (NA 1). The Church, in the Declaration, regards the ultimate root of these religions not only in the human search for an answer to the unresolved enigma of human existence but also in the perception and recognition of a hidden power that is present and active in the course of human history and in the events of human life (NA 1-2) . For Rahner, the Council embraces an outlook of greater tranquility in its mission and missionary pedagogy, which opens up a way for the Church's patient and positive co-existence and dialogue with the other religions. The Church's foundation for this new way of relating to other religions is God's universal salvific will for all men, a

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[169] K. Rahner, «Basic Theological Interpretation», 81-82.

[170] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 289.

saving will which is not abolished by sin and which will last until the final consummation of the world and of history[171].

The most remarkable section of *Nostra Aetate*, which consists of five numbered articles, is found in the middle. The first article (NA 1) is a declaration on the unity of the entire human race and the innate spiritual impulse that binds all human beings together. The last article (NA 5) revolves around the biblical affirmation that «all men are created in God's image» and what this statement implies for the Christian faithful—the injunction to renounce any type of discrimination and harassment and to live in peace with all persons.

Enclosed by these two articles is a series of positive descriptions of the fundamental beliefs and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and other religions of the world, and a set of resounding exhortations on how Christians should conduct themselves in relation to non-Christians and their religions (NA 2, NA 3, and NA 4). In one of the most quoted texts of the Council on this question, already cited above, the document says: «The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men» (NA 2). As a consequence, Christians everywhere are urged to enter into «discussion [dialogue] and collaboration» with non-Christians, and while «witnessing to their own faith and way of life» as Christians, to «acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians» (NA 2).

In NA 3, the document speaks about a special relationship that exists between the Church and Muslims where Islam (the term is not mentioned in the document) is treated at great length because of its absolute monotheism and numerous links with Christian revelation found in the Scriptures. The Council, then, exhorts Christians and Muslims «to forget the past» and make a sincere effort «to achieve

[171] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 289.

mutual understanding», and «for the benefit of all men», to mutually «preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values».

In NA 4, the Declaration talks about the spiritual bond that exists between Christians and Jews, the special ties that bind «the people of the New Covenant to the stock of Abraham». In this article, the Jews are treated with even greater length because of their singular destiny in God's plan of salvation. Believing that both Christians and Jews have «a common spiritual heritage, this sacred Council wishes to encourage and further mutual understanding and appreciation», especially through biblical and theological studies and friendly discussions. In particular, the Council remarks that «neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his [Christ's] passion», and that while the Church is the «new people of God», they «should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed» by God[172]. Therefore, the Church «deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of antisemitism leveled… against the Jews», and proclaims «the cross of Christ as the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace».

Yet, in spite of the Catholic Church's remarkable exhortations in this document based on the Council's promising approach towards non-Christian religions, the conciliar Church nevertheless remains duty-bound «to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 1:6)» (NA 2). Because it is only in Christ that God has reconciled all things to himself, it is only in Christ that «men find the fullness of their religious life» (NA 2). Michael Barnes articulates the significance of *Nostra Aetate*'s admirable exhortations: «For a Church which, just a few years earlier, was uneasy about intra-Christian ecumenism, let alone relations with other religions, this is powerful stuff»[173]. For Rahner, the Declaration's acknowledgment

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[172] Edward Flannery articulates the remarkable achievement of *Nostra Aetate*, particularly its fourth article, when he affirms that this Declaration «terminated in a stroke a millennial teaching of contempt of Jews and Judaism, and unequivocally asserted the Church's debt to its Jewish heritage» (E. Flannery, «Seminaries, Classrooms, Pulpits, Streets», 128-129).

[173] M. Barnes, «Retrieving a vital memory», 5.

of what is «true» and «holy» in the world's diverse religions is an indication that their concrete forms and doctrines must be taken with straightforward seriousness. In short, the Council, in *Nostra Aetate*, summons the Catholic Church to take openly and seriously the non-Christian religions as such[174].

However, and at the risk of stating the most obvious, *Nostra Aetate* is not the last word on interreligious dialogue, and certainly not the Church's final word about non-Christian religions[175]. This document may have been a significant and auspicious beginning, yet it is no more than just that—a beginning of a long and arduous process towards the realization of a common world in which peoples from diverse cultures and religions genuinely live in dialogue and collaboration, in peace and mutual respect. If it is by far the shortest document issued by the Council, it might be because the Council Fathers did not really intend to come up with a theological and doctrinal treatise on non-Christian religions. Instead, they wanted simply to introduce an exhortation on what all human beings have in common in seeking through their religious traditions for answers to the questions that riddle human life, and how Christians ought to act and behave towards the rest of humanity that does not profess explicit faith in Christ. In fact, in evaluating this document, which, for Dermot Lane, is

> in one sense quite unremarkable, even bland from a theological point of view, and fairly flat in terms of what we call today inter-religious dialogue…. we must not assess this document through the eyes of the twenty-first century… [but]… must situate ourselves historically back in 1965[176].

In the absence of such a proper historical contextualization of the document, we may easily forget, partly because we live in a more theologically developed world of frenetic interreligious dialogue, that «the declaration made by the Catholic Church at the Second Vatican

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[174] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 289.

[175] M. Roukanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 10.

[176] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 69; M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 38.

Council was a *groundbreaking* and *innovative* point in the church's relations with other faiths»[177].

As the Catholic Church's official document on the other religions in the Council, *Nostra Aetate* indeed stands out in utter disparity to the negative and often belligerent representation of non-Christian religions before the Council. Its force and strength lies in its remarkably positive attitude and approach towards all religions, proclaiming a radically transformed mentality by repudiating the negative and often hostile outlook of the previous centuries in terms of the Church's stance towards the other religions and their adherents[178]. In this document,

> a Council for the first time in history acknowledges the search for the absolute by other men and by whole races and peoples, and honours the truth and holiness in other religions as the work of the one living God… To that extent the Declaration is an acknowledgment by the Church of the universal presence of grace and its activity in the many religions of mankind[179].

It is for this reason that, for Barnes, *Nostra Aetate* «represents a watershed in the development of a theology of religions»[180].

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[177] M. Siddiqui, «The Spirit of the Declaration», 17; emphasis mine.

[178] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 69; E. Hillman, *Many Paths*, 50; R. A. Graham, «Introduction to the Declaration», 659. If Nostra Aetate does not include an exposition of the religious errors of various religions, at least of those mentioned in the document, it is because, as Cardinal Bea stressed: «The purpose of the Declaration is not a complete exposition of these religions, nor of their discrepancies among themselves and from the Catholic religion. This council rather intends through this Declaration to show that there is a bond between man and religions which is meant to be the basis of dialogue and of collaboration. Therefore, greater attention is paid to those things which unite us, and are helpful in a mutual approach» (Cited by T. F. Stransky, «The Church and Other Religions», 157). The Declaration is meant to be positive in tone, and therefore criticism of other religions is absent, with possible criticism expressed more in silence rather than in openly critical remarks. Hence, in Vatican II's deliberations on the non-Christian religions, familiar and harsh words, referring to these traditions, such as «pagan», «idolatry», «error», and «fallacy», are totally absent (M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of the Non-Christian Religions*, 7).

[179] J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 1.

[180] M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 31.

However, even if Catholics, since this Declaration, may have begun to enjoy some official guidelines on how they should view and act towards the other religions and their members, still there exist differences of theological opinions among post-conciliar theologians as to how far Vatican II has indeed ushered in a radical reassessment of non-Christian religions in the Church[181]. Despite the many studies and investigations done on this document, Lane says that the full impact and import of its positive assessment of the world religions is only now coming into the open, has not yet been fully actualized, and still awaits full reception. «What originally appeared as a rather slight declaration may yet turn out to be the most radical of all the documents of the Second Vatican Council»[182]. For Eugene Hillman,

> this document might well be regarded by later historians as the symbol of the Council's single most revolutionary accomplishment… [whose]… implications, if taken very seriously, are certainly very far-reaching, raising profound questions not previously examined nor fully debated by theologians about the meaning of Jesus Christ and concerning the future shape of the church and its ministry among the nations[183].

On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, who at the time of Vatican II was just 35 years old, wrote a short article on his «personal memories» of the Council. He argued that the Council's aim, which was to engage the Church with the modern world, did not happen in *Gaudium et Spes* but in two «minor documents»: in *Dignitatis Humanae* and in *Nostra Aetate*. Despite its brevity, in *Nostra Aetate* the theme on the need to dialogue and collaborate not only with Judaism but also with Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other world religions was brought to the consciousness of the Church, whose significance and understanding only emerged gradually in the post-

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[181] G. O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, viii; M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 8.

[182] D. A. Lane, «Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions», 147.148.

[183] E. Hillman, *Many Paths*, 49.

conciliar period and could not be foreseen during the Council[184]. Reflecting on the Pope's insight, Barnes remarked:

> His [Benedict XVI's] comment is a welcome reminder that theological significance comes not from the hierarchical ordering of magisterial statements but from their capacity to form the theological imagination and energise pastoral responses. By drawing a line under centuries of Christian abuse and wilful ignorance of the Jewish people and responding more generously to the possibility of grace in other religions, *Nostra Aetate* initiated a process of dialogue which has changed the theological landscape.[185]

However, even if *Nostra Aetate*, «[a]s with all other Vatican II texts, … stands by itself», it presumes, according to Thomas F. Stransky, who participated «in all the phases of the drafting of Nostra Aetate»[186], that «one integrates its content with other major documents»[187]. Stransky identifies these conciliar documents as *Lumen Gentium* (LG), *Dei Verbum* (DV), *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), *Ad Gentes* (AG), and *Dignitatis Humanae* (DH). Likewise, according to Avery Dulles, theologians and historians will have to take into account, for the reception of Vatican II and its documents, the «principles for the interpretation of Vatican II» laid down in the «Final Report» of the Extraordinary Synod of 1985, especially the first principle, which, paraphrased by Dulles, declares: «Each passage and document of the Council must be interpreted in the context of all the others, so that the integral meaning of the Council may be rightly grasped»[188]. While for the establishment of a full picture of Vatican II's theology of religions it may not be necessary to consider absolutely Dulles' suggestion that «each» conciliar passage and document be interpreted

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[184] Benedict XVI, «A theme is opened up», 14-15.

[185] M. Barnes, «Retrieving a vital memory», 5.

[186] T. F. Stransky, «The Church and Other Religions», 154.

[187] T. F. Stransky, «The Church and Other Religions», 155. The discussion in the previous sub-section on Vatican II as a «watershed» in the development of a Catholic Church's theology of religions may already be viewed as an attempt to come up with an integrated presentation of *Nostra Aetate* and other conciliar documents dealing with non-Christian religions and their adherents.

[188] A. Dulles, «The Reception of Vatican II», 350.

in the context of «all» the other documents, still on the question of what the Council holds and teaches about the non-Christians and their religious traditions, *Nostra Aetate* can never be read, studied and understood in isolation from the other related documents of the Council.

Indeed, while *Nostra Aetate* is the central document that embodies the Council's positive approach towards non-Christian religions and their adherents, «other documents… also contain important references to the place of these religions in God's plan of salvation»[189]. The doctrinal teachings of this special Declaration are complemented by and must be read in conjunction with those of the other documents of the Council, especially *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Ad Gentes*—three conciliar documents that provide a broad theological framework for understanding the positive relationship between the Catholic Church and the other religions. Only then does this Declaration mark a significant development in the theological-doctrinal evolution of the Church's consciousness on this question[190].

For Dermot Lane, *Lumen Gentium* is «one of the most important documents of the Council, principally because it lays down deep biblical and theological foundations affecting other documents, including *Nostra Aetate*»[191]. Its most important paragraphs are LG 13, which, by declaring that «all are called by God's grace to salvation», provides us with an unambiguous affirmation of the universality of God's offer of salvation, as well as LG 16, which talks about the «varied relatedness» of those who have not yet embraced the Gospel and are thus outside the Church. For Kevin McDonald, we can find a dynamic relation between *Nostra Aetate* and *Lumen Gentium* as the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions is «an organic development

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[189] J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, «Vatican II and World Religions», 33.

[190] J. Jadot, «The Growth in Roman Catholic Commitment», 211; D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 68.70.87; G. O'Collins, «Implementing Nostra Aetate», 725; M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 9.

[191] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 67.67-68. The citation from LG 13 in the next sentence is taken from Lane's book.

of *Lumen Gentium* sections 13-16 which contain the Council's central doctrinal teachings on other religions as an integral part of its teachings on the nature of the Church»[192].

For Barnes, even if in *Nostra Aetate*, the Church has discovered its sense of self not apart and in isolation from the world of diverse religions but as a believing community that is essentially related to such a world, «[t]he point is made more strongly not in *Nostra Aetate* but in *Lumen Gentium*»[193]. In LG 16, the central theme of God's universal saving will for all people is expounded in terms of a sequence of relationships between the Catholic Church and other Christians, non-Christian religions, and «[t]hose who... seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience» (LG 16). LG 16 ends with a statement on the possibility of salvation even for these people, believing that no person is beyond the gracious mercy of God. While saying that «these too may achieve eternal salvation» (LG 16), for Barnes, it does not mean that the Church no longer has any duty in bringing God's saving design to the world, as the Church is «missionary» by its very nature (AG 2). However, if mission is what God *does*, and the mission of the Church is simply to cooperate in God's work, part of the Church's mission includes, according to *Nostra Aetate*, learning how to discern God's grace among «people of good will» and dialogue and collaborate with them in mutual respect for the realization of God's Kingdom in the world[194].

The question of how how God's salvation is communicated to the five groups of non-Christians mentioned in LG 16 leads us, according to Lane, to *Gaudium et Spes*, which affirms that «the Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known only to God, in the paschal mystery» (GS 22)[195]. In GS 41, the Constitution affirms that «man is continually being aroused by the Spirit of God

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[192] K. Mcdonald, «Reflections on *Nostra Aetate*, 50 years on», 4-5.

[193] M. Barnes, «Retrieving a vital memory», 7-8.

[194] M. Barnes, «Retrieving a vital memory», 8.

[195] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 67. The citation from GS 22 is taken from Lane's book.

and that he will never be utterly indifferent to religion—a fact confirmed by the experience of ages past and plentiful evidence of the present day». For Donald Nicholl, many features of *Nostra Aetate* only reveal their full significance when viewed from the perspective of both the dogmatic and pastoral Constitutions on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. In fact, the Declaration may truly be said to be «an early attempt by the Council to work out the implications of [GS 22]»[196]. For W. Richey Hogg, *Lumen Gentium* also «provides the indispensable context for considering *Ad Gentes*», which in turn is closely related to three other conciliar documents: *Nostra Aetate*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*»[197]. In *Ad Gentes*, the Council returns to the theme of the Spirit—«the Holy Spirit who calls all men to Christ and arouses in their hearts the submission of faith by the seed of the word and the preaching of the Gospel» (AG 15). The Decree also speaks about «elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God» (AG 9), recognizes «those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among [other religions]», and exhorts Christians through sincere and patient dialogue to «learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations» (AG 11).

On the question of dialogue, the call in the Second Vatican Council for the Catholic Church to engage in dialogue with other religious traditions is expressed explicitly in three places in the Council's documents. In *Nostra Aetate*, the Church

> urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration [dialogue] with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, as well as their social and cultural values (NA 2).

The same appeal is reiterated by *Ad Gentes* where the Council summons Christians through «sincere and patient dialogue» to «learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations» (AG

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[196] D. Nicholl, «Other Religions (*Nostra Aetate*)», 126.

[197] W. R. Hogg, «Vatican II's *Ad Gentes*», 146.

11). This call to dialogue with the other religions is also found and in fact further developed in *Gaudium et Spes*—considered the Council's *magna carta* of dialogue—where, speaking of the followers of other religions who «preserve precious religious and human elements in their traditions», the Church hopes that «frank dialogue will spur us all on to receive the impulses of the Spirit with fidelity and act upon them with alacrity» (GS 92).

According to Stransky, «much of the misinterpretation of *NA*» happens «in a lack of such integration», or in the tendency of some authors to force this Declaration «to say more than it intended in 1965 by reading into the texts later Roman Catholic development in thought, as expressed, for example, in Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), on evangelization, and even John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), on redeeming humanity»[198]. Miikka Ruokanen echoes the same danger when he argues: «An authentic scholarly interpretation of the teaching of the Council on non-Christian religions is not helped but actually hampered by reference to the later authoritative doctrinal evolution of the Church»[199]. If the principal aim of the Council as regards the question of the non-Christian religions was to promote dialogue and collaboration between the Catholic Church and these religious traditions, and if authentic dialogue presupposes a certain level of prior knowledge and understanding of the non-Christians as they understand themselves, then, for Stransky, «without the church's *yet* having the experience and the fruit of dialogue… one should not expect *NA* of 1965 to be more than an initial basis for *future* dialogue»[200]. According to Stransky, «[o]ne of the present naivetes is to criticize *NA*'s incompleteness or lament its unanswered questions, as if *NA* had already been a finished product of two decades of dialogue»[201].

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[198] T. F. Stransky, «The Church and Other Religions», 155

[199] M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 9.

[200] T. F. Stransky, «The Church and Other Religions», 156.

[201] T. F. Stransky, «The Church and Other Religions», 156.

1.3.3 *The «Silence» of Vatican II as Regards the Salvific Value of the Other Religions*

That the Second Vatican Council did not make an explicit pronouncement on the salvific character of the other religions is not a matter of discussion. There is a high degree of consensus among theologians that the Council's theology of religions does not go beyond this stance. However, while theologians agree that Vatican II was indeed «silent» on this question, they are nevertheless divided over the issue of how to interpret this conciliar «silence».

1.3.3.1 Paul Knitter and Others: The Positive Meaning of the «Silence» of the Council

One group of theologians argues that Vatican II's «silence» on the question of the salvific structures of the other religions should be interpreted positively—meaning that the Council *implicitly* affirms the presence of revelation and salvation in these religions. Paul Knitter, for example, claims that even if «Vatican II does not explicitly state that religions are ways of salvation, ... the majority of contemporary theologians hold the view that the Council teaches, or at least implies, that authentic 'religious experience' takes place in and through the religions»[202]. He contends that «[t]he majority of Catholic thinkers interpret the conciliar statements to affirm, implicitly but clearly, that the religions are ways of salvation»[203]. In «Interpreting Silence: A Response to Miikka Ruokanen», Knitter insists that while Vatican II is «silent» on the question of whether or not other religions are ways of salvation for their members, to interpret this «silence» to mean that the Council implicitly denies the presence of authentic revelation and salvation in these religions is not warranted. The broader context of Catholic theology, for Knitter, suggests «clearer and more persuasive reasons to interpret the Council's silence in a *positive* sense and to conclude, with the majority (not just "many") of contemporary Roman Catholic theologians that Vatican II implicitly

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[202] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 124.

[203] P. F. Knitter, «Roman Catholic Approaches to Other Religions», 50.

affirms the salvific potential of other religions»[204]. These theologians, according to Knitter, «endorse» Karl Rahner's theology of religions which acknowledges the presence of salvific structures in non-Christian religions, that the other religions are salvific in themselves. Pietro Rossano agrees with Knitter's interpretation. He writes:

> As for the salvific function of these religions, namely, whether they are or are not paths to salvation, there is no doubt that "grace and truth" are given through Jesus Christ and by his Spirit (cf. John 1:17). Everything would lead one to conclude, however, that gifts of "grace and truth" do reach the hearts of men and women through the visible, experiential signs of the various religions. Vatican II is explicit on this point[205].

Thomas Stransky asserts that *Nostra Aetate* proposes the view «that religions as such are not outside but within the history of salvation», that in this kind of dispensation, «*[i]n some way* an individual can be saved not despite but *in* one's community of faith, because *in some way* these religions incarnate sufficient "religious beginnings (*incepta religiosa*)" of a supernatural response to the revelation in Christ»[206].

From his various writings, Knitter offers diverse reasons for his interpretation of the «silence» of the Council. In *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Knitter argues that Vatican II «did not follow Rahner in expressly concluding that the religions are to be viewed as possible, or probable, 'ways of salvation'—instruments by which God draws people to God's self», which for Knitter is «a key ingredient in Rahner's new vision of religions»[207]. For him, the Church Fathers in Vatican II neither affirmed nor denied that religions are ways of salvation for their members, «[a]nd perhaps the reason they didn't decide this question is that they deliberately chose not to», knowing that «Vatican II, from the very start, was defined by Pope John XXIII as a pastoral, not a doctrinal, council»[208].

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[204] P. F. Knitter, «Interpreting Silence», 62.

[205] P. Rossano, «Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism», 102-103.108.

[206] T. F. Stransky, «The Church and Other Religions», 156-157.

[207] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 76-77.

[208] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 77.59.

In another place[209], Knitter's answer—as regards the question as to why Vatican II did not explicitly affirm in words what it implicitly held in spirit, of why the Council did not draw the logical conclusion from its premises—is: «out of a respect for tradition»[210]. *Nostra Aetate*'s positive judgment of non-Christian religions, which, for Knitter, implies their salvific value and their saving role in God's redemptive plan for the world, constitutes a radical change in Catholic theology. «Such changes are admitted only slowly, often indirectly, seeking to avoid the impression that mistakes were made in the past»[211]. This, according to Knitter, explains the «schizophrenic quality» of a great deal of conciliar teachings.

> Often, in areas that signified change or a development in Catholic consciousness, the Council would state something in one context, but not follow through, or would even contradict itself in another context (e.g., admitting that salvation is possible for atheists yet holding to the necessity of the Church for salvation, or affirming the collegiality of the episcopate but allowing the Pope to act "without consent" of the bishops); or the Council would declare something new without explicitly recognizing how this corrected previous teaching (e.g., religious liberty). Thus, for Catholic theologians, it is both "astonishing" and yet understandable that, in the 1960's the Council fathers could lay out the premises, could conclude to the positive values in other religions, but could not draw the final conclusion of recognizing their possible salvific role[212].

1.3.3.2 Other Theologians: The «Silence» of the Council as a Task of the Future for Greater Clarity

Some theologians are of the opinion that while it is true that Vatican II was silent on this question, the Council, nevertheless, wanted to

[209] Appendix B of Miikka Ruokanen's book, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, consists of theological conversations between Ruokanen and Knitter on this particular issue, which includes «Author's Reply» from both theologians. For Knitter's response to Ruokanen's comment on his article, «Interpreting Silence: A Response to Miikka Ruokanen», see P. F. Knitter, «Author's Reply», 153-156.

[210] P. F. Knitter, «Author's Reply», 154.

[211] P. F. Knitter, «Author's Reply», 154.

[212] P. F. Knitter, «Author's Reply», 155.

«[leave] to the future the achievement of greater clarity»[213], not only on this particular problem but on other conciliar issues as well, when «the thinking of theologians and the Magisterium on [this matter] would have matured»[214]. Thus, «on more than a few matters, the Council deliberately chose not to settle important issues but instead to state their terms and to leave it to theologians and others to work out a more coherent reconciliation than was possible at the time.»[215] The Council's «silence», therefore, is «a commission to later generations of theologians to develop these ideas and deepen their insights more clearly»[216]. In other words, «[t]he official interpretation is that other religions are not salvific… [though]… a loud majority speaks to the contrary», and argues that «[t]he reason for the division of opinions is that, at least in the judgment of most Catholic theologians, NA and other documents leave the… question open and, hence, allow for various possible readings»[217].

1.3.3.3 Karl Rahner: The Council Embraced the Premises Yet Did Not Accept Their Logical Conclusion

Karl Rahner provides a nuanced interpretation of this «silence» of the Council. In the article, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation», Rahner asserts that *Nostra Aetate* provides not just a «precious guide» for the dogmatic theologian but also «what is theologically the ultimate and essential question as a *quaestio disputata*», by leaving open the «essential problem» for the theologian[218]. A couple of insights can be glimpsed from this essay as regards the «silence» of the Second Vatican Council on the question of the role of other religions in the salvation of their members. Firstly, Rahner—without ever using the word «silent» or «silence» in the article—admits that the Council, on the question of the salvific status

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[213] A. Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism*, 19.

[214] D. A. Madigan, «*Nostra Aetate* and the questions it chose to leave open», 782.

[215] J. A. Komonchak, «Ecclesiology of Vatican II», 763

[216] A. M. Nolan, *A Privileged Moment*, 93.

[217] V-M. Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 115.

[218] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 289.290.

of other religions, is indeed «silent» on the issue—by saying that, and to quote it more fully, the «essential problem for the theologian has been left open», that «the properly theological quality of the non-Christian religions remains undefined», and that «*Nostra aetate* gives us no information about these questions»[219]. In another essay, entitled «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», Rahner also concedes that how a saving faith in a true divine revelation emphatically taught by *Lumen Gentium* 16, *Nostra Aetate* 1, and *Ad Gentes* 7 can come about outside the influence of the Old and New Testaments is a question on which Vatican II is «extremely reserved»[220].

Yet, it is a «silence» that does not have to be, according to Rahner, because Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* 16, *Ad Gentes* 7, and *Gaudium et Spes* 22 assert that even an individual who has not been reached by the historical message of Christianity, even an atheist, can be without fault and hence be touched «in ways known to God» by the saving grace of God, can have a redeeming *faith* and thus can arrive at salvation. As a result, «it is really obvious», Rahner argues, «that effects of this inward possession, even in the 'heathen', of the authentic content of revelation, acknowledged in a spirit of vast optimism, must be found in the religions themselves in which such a person concretely lives out his relationship to God»[221].

Rahner's assertion that non-Christian religions are mediations of salvation for their members is an assertion that is rooted in his beliefs, adopted also by the Council, in God's universal saving will for the entire human race and in the essentially social nature of human beings and the intrinsically historical and incarnational character of the economy of salvation. For Rahner, if God wants to save all people by bestowing upon them the grace of salvation, such a saving grace must be incarnated socially and historically in order for it to be at the disposal of human recipients. To repudiate this truth «fundamentally contradicts the historical and social character of Christianity itself.... contradict[s] the basic character of the Christian revelation

[219] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 290-291.

[220] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 40.

[221] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 290.

and the nature of man»[222]. And among the most likely mediating embodiments of this salvific grace are the various religious traditions of the world[223]. It is, however, a «conclusion» from the «premises» of the Council, but a «conclusion» that, for Rahner, is «not drawn by the council in *Nostra Aetate*» or elsewhere[224].

Indeed, the view that non-Christian religions are legitimate ways of salvation for their adherents is Rahner's conclusion in his theology of religions, which the Second Vatican Council did not endorse, even if its premises called for it. It is an argument that Vatican II did not pursue up to its logical conclusion; a conclusion that the Council should have made based on its premises, but had not done so. Vatican II did not follow Rahner in explicitly and unambiguously concluding that non-Christian religions may be regarded as possible «ways» of salvation for their members, vehicles by which God savingly draws people to himself. For Rahner, the Council embraced the premises but did not accept the logical conclusion of the premises. Knitter emphasizes this point very strongly in his «reply» to Ruokanen:

> *Concedo*—yes, Rahner would agree with Ruokanen's claim that Vatican II did not explicitly declare the religions to be "ways of salvation." But *nego*—no, Rahner would not agree when Ruokanen argues that the view of other religions as ways of salvation, proposed by Rahner and the majority of Roman Catholic theologians, "cannot be supported by the Conciliar texts"... This was the point of Rahner's essay: that when the Council left the issue of the salvific role of other religions open, as a *quaestio disputata*, it need *not* have done so! The

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[222] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 42.

[223] For Rahner, mediations of grace are not always of the specifically religious kind, since «[t]he transcendent reference to God can be found in the mediation of ordinary, secular material» (K. Rahner, «Anonymous and Explicit Faith», 55). Now, if secular realities can mediate grace and salvation even for people who profess no religions at all, how much more should religions be considered mediations of grace and salvation for their members, since religions are, for Rahner, about «God's relationship to men» and man's «right relationship to God» (K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 118.125).

[224] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 290.

> Council itself, Rahner points out, established the premises for a conclusion it did not draw![225]

Referring to the achievement of Vatican II in relation to this important question, Rahner, in another important essay, asserts:

> that the non-Christian religions even in their institutional form might exercise a positive salvific function for non-Christian humanity: none of this was actually explicit in the Church's awareness, but is present there now [referring to the Council] and can never again be excluded, since it is understood, not as a liberal mentality of modern times, but as an element of the Christian outlook as such[226].

Secondly, Rahner notes that after more than a thousand years of struggle theology has overcome the Augustinian pessimism as regards the salvation of human beings and achieved the optimism of Vatican II, guaranteeing supernatural salvation in the immediate possession of God to all those who do not willfully reject it through their own personal sin. In response to a statement that indicates that this optimism of the Council does not include non-Christian religions but only non-Christians, Rahner argues that «our question *now* must be whether theology can regard the non-Christian religions with

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[225] P. F. Knitter, «Author's Reply», 153. For Knitter, the Council establishes at least two Rahnerian premises for a conclusion that it has not drawn, premises that, as we will see in Chapter 2, may have actually been lifted from Rahner's pre-conciliar essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions»: «The first premise is the Council's clear and pervasive declaration of the universal saving activity of God's grace, which means the universal availability of authentic revelation.... The second is what Ruokanen calls "sacramentalism." For Roman Catholic theology in general, and for Vatican II in particular, the principle that God's saving grace cannot operate in an exclusively interior or individualistic manner but must take some kind of sacramental—that is, historical-social form—is not limited to ecclesiology (as Ruokanen suggests) but is fundamental to the way Catholics understand the divine-human relationship. Therefore, once you recognize that God's saving grace operates beyond the borders of the historical-social forms of Christianity (the first premise), you're going to have to admit other historical-social forms through which it operates (the second premise)» (*Ibid.*, 153-154). In another article, Knitter specifies these two Rahnerian premises as «*God's universal salvific will*» and «*humanity's essentially social nature*» (P. F. Knitter, «Roman Catholic Approaches to Other Religions», 50; emphasis in the original).

[226] K. Rahner, «The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council», 99.

the same optimism»[227]. Indeed, if optimism as regards the salvation of individual non-Christians marked the Council, can the post-conciliar Church regard not just the individual non-Christians but also their religious traditions with similar optimism? By referring to the question as «our question *now*»—meaning, at the time he wrote the essay which was sometime between 1973 and 1978, and therefore «after Vatican II»—Rahner acknowledges that previously in Vatican II the question of the salvific value and status of non-Christian religions had not been seen with the same optimism as that of the salvation of atheists and non-Christians[228]. Because the «question» refers to the post-conciliar debate on this issue, Rahner implicitly admits that indeed Vatican II never said anything explicit about the role of the non-Christian religions as regards the salvation of their members, that the Council was indeed «silent» about it.

While Vatican II did not intend to give an impression that it viewed the other religions as «ways» of salvation for their members, that it ventured to call them such, Jacques Dupuis inquires «whether this is not—at least partly—implied in the council's recognition of elements of "truth and grace" contained in them "as a sort of secret presence of God"»[229]. Vatican II's verdict on this particular issue may not have been certain and thus may have left the theological debate open, as others have argued, yet, for Dupuis, what the Council affirms suggests an affirmative answer and seems to gravitate to a more positive and favorable vision of the other religions[230].

1.3.3.4 Gavin D'Costa: The «Silence» of the Council as «Intentional Silence»

For Gavin D'Costa, *Nostra Aetate*'s «silence» on the question of whether non-Christian religions are ways of salvation for their members should be interpreted as a negative answer. It means that this conciliar «silence» should not be construed as leaving the

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[227] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 291.

[228] Cf. F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*,

[229] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 183.

[230] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 65.74.

question open but rather as implicitly putting an end to any further discussion, that no further reflection on this issue should be pursued.

Under the section, «The Status of Other Religions as Salvific Structures», in Chapter 4 of his book, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, D'Costa asks whether it can be argued that according to the Second Vatican Council non-Christian religions are vehicles of supernatural revelation, and thus, of salvation, for their adherents[231]. D'Costa contends that the conciliar documents are «silent» on this question, a «silence» that has sparked off two differing interpretations on the part of post-conciliar theologians. Depending on how they view the relationship between nature and grace, one group of theologians that advocates a very close relationship between the two argues that the conciliar documents affirm non-Christian religions as possible means of supernatural revelation; while the other group that tends to see a sharper distinction between the natural and supernatural orders repudiates the other religions as possible mediators of supernatural revelation[232].

In dealing with the «silence» of *Nostra Aetate* as regards the question of whether non-Christian religions are possible vehicles of supernatural revelation, and hence, of salvation, for their followers, D'Costa suggests that three basic observations must be mentioned in trying to contextualize the «silence» of the Declaration on this important question[233].

First, the religions are viewed as theologically and historically related to the Church in different and hierarchical ways. Judaism—being «the root from which the church springs out, out of 'Abraham's stock'» (NA 4)—is seen as the closest religion to Christianity, followed by Islam with its monotheism, and then, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the other religions found everywhere. *Only* in NA 4, the paragraph exclusively devoted to Judaism, however, is the term «revelation» (with reference

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[231] G. D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 102.

[232] G. D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 102.

[233] G. D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 102-105; cf. ID., «Vatican II and the Status of Other Religions», 11-16; cf. ID., «*Nostra Aetate*—Telling God's Story in Asia», 330-334.

to the Old Testament) used, which is understandable considering that Christianity, like Judaism, regards the Old Testament as both revealed and sacred. The sentence reads: «The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the *revelation* of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy deigned to establish the Ancient Covenant» (NA 4). This single exclusive use of the word «revelation» in NA 4 when referring to the Old Testament, and, therefore, its non-employment in the other sections of the document that deal directly with the other religions, demonstrates, according to D'Costa, that for the Council Fathers supernatural revelation is associated with the Judeo-Christian Scripture, as confirmed by *Dei Verbum* 14-16[234].

Second, there is *Nostra Aetate*'s silence on the question of the salvation of the non-Christians, hence, the need to turn particularly to *Lumen Gentium* 16, which, while silent on the question of the non-Christian religions, nevertheless talks unequivocally about the possibility of the salvation of non-Christians. In LG 16, the Council affirms the possibility of salvation of non-Christians, regardless of whether they are religious or not, or whether they possess an explicit knowledge of God or not, as long as three conditions are met: (1) that it is not their fault that they do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church; (2) that, aided by divine grace, they strive to lead a good life by means of following the dictates of their conscience; and (3) that all these positive realities in their religious life are but a preparation for the gospel—which, according to D'Costa, is exactly what *Nostra Aetate* indicates when it says that non-Christian religions «reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men» (NA 2). D'Costa observes that when the Declaration speaks of truth and holiness present in non-Christian religions, the Latin word *vera* is employed, whereas in the phrase just cited, the word *Veritatis* is used and translated with a capital 'T'. His conclusion is straight: «Hence, truths found in non-Christian religions, it is implied, are never more nor can they be, than the Truth found in Christ: 'that Truth which enlightens all men'». It is not therefore surprising that the following sentence in *Nostra Aetate* speaks of the Church in this way: «Indeed,

[234] G. D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 102-103.

she proclaims and must ever proclaim Christ, 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), in whom men find the fullness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself» (NA 2)[235].

Third, «the final context of the silence on this question is to be found in the way that negative qualifications are entered in documents apart from *Nostra Aetate* in regard to the reality of goodness and truth found outside the Church and their relation to the Church»[236]. D'Costa remarks that «Truth» (*Veritas*) is only employed twice in all the Council's documents when referring to the truth outside the revealed Truth of Christianity: in *Nostra Aetate* 2 and in *Ad Gentes* 9. However, while *Nostra Aetate* explicitly pays attention to the positive elements of the non-Christian religions, *Ad Gentes* offers a much more nuanced appreciation of the context of truth and goodness found in the other religions:

> But whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations, as a sort of secret presence of God, this [missionary] activity frees from all taint of evil and restores to Christ its maker, who overthrows the devil's domain and wards off the manifold malice of vice. And so, whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of men, or in the rites and cultures peculiar to various peoples, is not lost. More than that, it is healed, ennobled, and perfected for the glory of God, the shame of the demon, and the bliss of men (AG 9).

«This contextual qualification», according to D'Costa, «shows fulfillment proceedings via both continuity ('perfected,' 'ennobled') and discontinuity ('secret,' 'free from all taint of evil,' 'healed')»[237]. This same mix, which can also be found in LG 17, simply indicates that, at least for the Council, the other religions are a complex blend of both truth and error, and that they are neither simply entirely one nor wholly the other[238].

With the above considerations, therefore, «it is difficult», D'Costa concludes, «to read the Conciliar documents as giving a positive

[235] G. D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 103-104.

[236] G. D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 104.

[237] G. D'Costa, , *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 105.

[238] G. D'Costa, , *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity,* 105.

answer to the question: can other religions, *per se*, in their structures be mediators of supernatural revelation and salvific grace?»[239]. While maintaining the belief and the Council's optimism that supernatural saving grace is present in the non-Christian religions, and that in these religious traditions many spiritual elements that are true, good, holy, and admirable can be found, the absence both of an explicitly negative answer and of an unambiguously positive one may well be «intentional and could be read, as I would suggest, as prohibiting any unqualified positive affirmation of other religions as salvific structures, or as containing divine revelation»[240].

Against the backdrop of Knitter's observation that «[t]he majority of Catholic thinkers interpret the Conciliar statements to affirm, *implicitly but clearly*, that the religions *are ways of salvation*»[241], D'Costa raises the question, presuming that Knitter's observation is verifiably correct, as to whether these Catholic theologians are wrong, if he is right in his interpretation of the Council's silence on this question. D'Costa offers a couple of observations: First, he claims that Karl Rahner himself, known in Catholic theology for his defense of non-Christian religions as possible mediations of salvation for their members, concurs that the conciliar documents are silent on this matter[242]. D'Costa argues that the Council's silence was an intentional silence and should not be understood to mean that the question had been left open. Second, the opposed interpretations of the documents may have been due greatly to the polarized readings of the relationship between nature and grace, as we will see in the next chapter. As such, for those who wish to see a sharp distinction between nature and grace, the silence is meant to be a restraint; while for those who want to see a much closer relationship between the

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[239] G. D'Costa, , *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 105.

[240] G. D'Costa, , *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 105.

[241] P. F. Knitter, «Roman Catholic Approaches to Other Religions», 50.

[242] Yet, as we have seen above, it is a «silence» that should not have been since for Rahner the Council establishes «premises» whose «conclusion» can only be that religions are vehicles of salvation for their members.

two, this silence is intended to be an open question that has to be answered affirmatively[243].

Perhaps, the «silence» of Vatican II on this particular question and the post-conciliar theologians' differing interpretations of this «silence» can be understood more if we look at them within the whole context of the Council documents being what the sociologist William McSweeney calls «a monument of ambiguity»[244]. The Council Fathers had incorporated statements that seemed, if not actually were, truly opposed to each other in meaning, such that «considered as a whole, they [the conciliar documents] offer support for diverging and, at times, incompatible theologies»[245]. It is this ambiguity and divergence that has created problems and difficulties in their ongoing post-conciliar reception and interpretation in the Church. Avery Dulles himself argues that evading conflicts and tensions in the proper interpretation of Vatican II documents has been an arduous process and a challenging task because

> council fathers, under the direction of Pope Paul VI, made every effort to achieve unanimity and express the consensus of the whole episcopate, not the ideas of one particular school. For this reason, they sought to harmonize differing views, without excluding any significant minority. In some cases they adopted deliberate ambiguities[246].

For McSweeney,

> [w]hat distinguishes the Second Vatican Council and makes it unique in the history of the Church is that the disagreement of its participants—who form the highest teaching authority, or *magisterium*, of the Roman Church—is incorporated into the Council documents themselves and made manifest in the official teaching which that *magisterium* is believed infallibly to express[247].

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[243] G. D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 105.

[244] W. Mcsweeney, *Roman Catholicism: The Search for Relevance*, 138.

[245] W. Mcsweeney, *Roman Catholicism: The Search for Relevance*, 138-139.

[246] A. Dulles, «Vatican II: The Myth and the Reality», 7-8.

[247] W. Mcsweeney, *Roman Catholicism: The Search for Relevance*, 139; emphasis in the original.

Ann Michele Nolan affirms Sweeney's point when she says that «those from opposing sides who had the task of shaping the final documents had to do so by arriving at a compromise position in the case of each document»; that «this juxtaposition in the same documents of different viewpoints» was «put there to gain the consensus of all parties»[248]. The Council was thus extraordinary, Sweeney concludes, in that

> the consensus of the Council Fathers was reached, not on a number of specific propositions which excluded others as erroneous, but on general statements of attitude whose precise meaning is obscure and, in many cases, allowed to stand with other statements which are either inconsistent or contradictory. It might be said that the Fathers of the Council agreed to differ[249].

1.4 **Conclusion**

This chapter, with two sections, offered an integrated view of the Second Vatican Council's theology of religions. The first section presented a historical overview of the Catholic theology of religions through the centuries up to Vatican II. In describing the doctrinal history of the Church through the centuries, we employed Paul Knitter's image of «teeter-totter» or pendulum-like swaying back and forth between two basic, inseparable biblical assertions of the universal salvific will of God and the absolute saving mediation of Jesus Christ. We observed not only that the «pendulum» stayed much on the side of the unique salvific mediation of Christ but also that this side eventually signified the necessity of the Church for salvation, thus giving birth to the dogmatic axiom, *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. While doing so, we identified the «high» and «low» points of the Church's concrete attitudes towards the non-Christians in most of its doctrinal history.

In the second section, we looked at the doctrinal and theological achievements of Vatican II as well as its limitations. As regards the Council's achievements, we spelled out its three major areas of novelty or breakthroughs in relation to the question of the theology

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[248] A. M. Nolan, *A Privileged Moment*, 9.

[249] W. McSweeney, *Roman Catholicism: The Search for Relevance*, 140.

of religions: the Council affirmed explicitly and unequivocally the salvation of individuals *extra Ecclesiam*; it did so without anymore having recourse to the *implicitum votum Ecclesiae* principle which had been the Church's slogan for almost two decades before the Council; and it dealt significantly with other religions, uttering many positive things about them for the first time in Church history. Then we examined *Nostra Aetate*'s place in the Council's theology of religions in conjunction with other documents, such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes* and *Gaudium et Spes*, which partly deal with similar question. We indicated that while *Nostra Aetate* is the principal document that embodies the conciliar Church's positive approach towards non-Christians and their religions, other documents also contain significant insights on the place of the non-Christians in God's design of salvation, and thus provide a broad theological framework for understanding the positive relationship of the Church to other religions. As regards the Council's limitations, we explored the question as to why, in spite of its great optimism concerning the salvation of non-Christians and its positive appraisal of their religions, the Council, particularly in *Nostra Aetate*, is nonetheless «silent» on the question of the salvific character of these religions. We also examined some theologians' varying interpretations of this «silence».

In many ways, the Second Vatican Council was indeed an event of unparalleled importance in the history of the Catholic Church. In its shortest document, *Nostra Aetate*, the Church, for the first time in its conciliar history, not only faced the question of its relation with non-Christian religions in an official and authoritative way but also came up with a positive evaluation of these religious traditions of the world. This document marked a huge transformation not only in the history of Jewish-Catholic relations but also in the history of the Church's dealings with Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and, albeit unnamed, with the rest of the world religions. Prior to the Council, relations with these religious traditions, at best, consisted of mutual ignorance, suspicion and conflict. With Vatican II, especially with its declaration on the Church's relation to non-Christian religions, the

Church set the scene for contemporary discussion on the theology of religions in a new and fresh atmosphere of openness and dialogue.

However, while we can say that *Nostra Aetate* was a dramatic milestone in the Church's doctrinal history vis-à-vis the question of the non-Christian religions, it was never the aim of this Declaration to provide an extensive exposition of the various religions of the world, which was evidently beyond the scope of the Council[250]. And while the new theological vision which recognizes the presence of God and his Spirit beyond the borders of Christianity and the Catholic Church is present in Vatican II only in embryonic form, and mainly in conciliar documents other than *Nostra Aetate*, the Council, nevertheless, provides «a significant shift, a theological awakening… which paves the way for major development in the post-conciliar period»[251].

Indeed, in *Nostra Aetate* and other conciliar documents dealing with the question of the other religions and their members, the Catholic Church has shown fresh and courageous attitudes towards peoples of other faiths and even towards atheists and non-believers. With all its brevity and seeming theological blandness, this Declaration is thus considered the most groundbreaking Church document not only on Jewish-Christian relations but also on the question of the non-Christian religions. This document is viewed as an ecclesial gesture that truly signals «a radical reversal of previous attitudes and a new departure from earlier theological positions»[252]. As such, it is universally credited as having laid the foundation and groundwork for further advances not just in the exploration of the theology of religions but in the praxis of interreligious dialogue as well. This document, however, should be read with other conciliar documents dealing with other religions and their adherents, such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Ad Gentes*, in order for one to arrive at a more integrated understanding of Vatican II's more open theology of religions.

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[250] M. L. Fitzgerald, «*Nostra Aetate*, a Key to Interreligious Dialogue», 705.

[251] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 70.

[252] E. Hillman, *Many Paths*, 49.

CHAPTER II

Karl Rahner's Theological Influence on the Second Vatican Council's Theology of Religions

2.1 **Introduction**

When trying to articulate the overall significance of Karl Rahner (1904-1984) in the intellectual and theological life of the Catholic Church in the last century, Karen Kilby asserts: «Rahner was born into a kind of Catholic Church, and he died in a rather different one, and he himself, his own writing and lecturing, had a good deal to do with the change»[253]. In his 2004 article on Rahner's lasting significance for present-day Catholic theology, Paul Murray anticipates in a quite detailed manner Kilby's appraisal of Rahner:

> When Rahner was born in 1904 Pope Pius X and Secretary of State Raphael Merry del Val were warming up to pursue their vigorous anti-modernist campaign against any Catholic theologian judged as reductively accommodating Catholic faith to modern thought forms and modes of criticism. When Rahner died in 1984 Catholicism had for two turbulent decades been negotiating the decisive opening to the modern world and related process of *aggiornamento* signaled by the remarkable events of Vatican II. Few would doubt that, whilst he was by no means alone in this, Rahner more than any other single theologian was instrumental in helping to effect this transformation[254].

[253] K. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: A Brief Introduction*, xv.

[254] P. D. Murray, «The Lasting Significance of Karl Rahner», 10.

In the previous chapter, we have seen that the Second Vatican Council's radical optimism as regards salvation of non-Christians and positive appraisal of world religions are among Vatican II's most celebrated achievements. In this chapter, we will demonstrate that in the emergence of this Council's particular «theology of religions», there stands one man whose contribution to and impact on the shaping of such a theology is indisputably unmatched—Karl Rahner. As a major voice that prompted the positive attitude and optimistic outlook of the Catholic Church towards the non-Christian religions in Vatican II, Rahner singularly contributed to the evolution and development of an inclusive self-understanding of Christianity, and opened and ushered the way for dialogue and engagement between Christianity and the other religions[255]. If the summons of Vatican II for the Church to dialogue with these religions may prove to be «the Council's most revolutionary act» because of its far-reaching implications, «[m]ost Christian theologians would probably agree that Roman Catholics have been among the pioneers in this field and that *Karl Rahner has been a singular trail blazer*»[256].

This chapter, composed of three sections, devotes itself to the examination of Rahner's pre-conciliar theology of religions and how it has influenced the emergence and development of Vatican II and post-conciliar theology of religions as seen in the conciliar and post-conciliar documents and writings dealing with non-Christians and their religions. In these sections, Rahner's influence is explored alongside that of Jean Daniélou for reasons that will be clear and obvious along the way; yet, Rahner's theology of religions is given more substantial attention in the discussions as this chapter deals primarily with his influence on Vatican II and post-conciliar discourse on the question of the salvific character of other religions. The first section deals with two contrasting pre-conciliar theologies of religions represented by Daniélou and Rahner which were operative at the time of the Council and which had influenced the conciliar

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[255] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 125; J. H. Fletcher, «Rahner and Religious Diversity», 235; A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 45.

[256] E. Hillman, *Many Paths*, x; emphasis mine.

discussions on the question of religions. In presenting Rahner's theology of religions, we will particularly look at his 1962 pre-conciliar essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», his most important writing on the subject. The second section examines «traces» of Daniélou's theology of religions in Vatican II as well as Rahner's theological «footprints» on the Council's most significant texts on religions and their adherents based on his 1962 article and other pre-conciliar writings, and shows that the theological dispute between them was not settled definitively in the Council. The third section shows that this unresolved conciliar question on the role of other religions in the salvation of their members has continued in the post-conciliar debates on the theology of religions, as seen in some selected post-conciliar documents of the Church.

2.2 The Catholic Church's Theology of Religions Prior to the Second Vatican Council in Jean Daniélou's and Karl Rahner's Writings

In his book, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, Miikka Ruokanen suggests that in order to understand the doctrinal teaching of Vatican II on non-Christian religions, what he calls the Council's «dual background» has to be taken into consideration—«the long tradition of the Church… [which]… includes fragments of theological teaching on this matter», and the «theological investigation of non-Christian religions in academic Catholic theology» since the 1930s[257]. The first section of Chapter 1 explored the teachings of the Church in its long doctrinal-conciliar history; this part of the second chapter will examine the Catholic Church's theology of religions in the immediate decades before the Second Vatican Council.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, where the Catholic Church's official statements before the Council were tentative and cautious about the salvation of non-Christians, Vatican II is definite and unequivocal about the possibility of salvation for those *extra Ecclesiam.* It is on the question of how such people are saved and the role of their religious traditions in their salvation that the Council

[257] M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions*, 11.

is «silent» and ambiguous. For James Fredericks, «[t]he roots of the council's ambiguity lead back into pre-conciliar developments within the Catholic 'theology of religions'», into the differing theologies of Jean Daniélou and Karl Rahner[258]. The International Theological Commission, in its document, «Christianity and the World Religions», likewise argues that «[i]n the Catholic theology prior to Vatican II one can find two lines of thought relating to the problem of the salvific value of religions», mentions both Jean Daniélou and Karl Rahner as representatives of these two conflicting lines of thought, and briefly discusses their respective positions[259].

2.2.1 *Jean Daniélou's «Fulfillment Theory»*

Jean Daniélou (1905-1974), considered the first Western advocate of the «fulfillment theory», wrote extensively on the theology of religions from the early 1940s up to the 1970s. In his writings, Daniélou presents Jesus as the supreme fulfillment of human history and the fullness of humanity's authentic goals and genuine aspirations, prompting some contemporary theologians to describe his theology of religions as «fulfillment theory»[260]. In his book, *The Lord of History*,

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[258] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 227.227-231; cf. G. O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 50.

[259] International Theological Commission, «Christianity and the World Religions», no. 4, 146.146-147. In an excellent article by Adam Sparks, «Fulfillment Theology of Jean Daniélou, Karl Rahner and Jacques Dupuis», which investigates the use of fulfillment concept in these theologians, Sparks indirectly describes the concept of fulfillment espoused by Daniélou and Rahner: «Within fulfillment theology, there is a continuum along which various sub-categories of this fulfillment concept exist. Toward one end of the continuum is a view that understands Christ to be the only answer to the longed-for but unrealized spiritual quest of all. Within this definition a radical discontinuity between the prior worldview and Christianity is maintained. The various religions themselves play no part in the salvific process. All non-Christian religions are natural rather than supernatural…. At the other pole of the continuum is an understanding of fulfillment that emphasises continuity between the prior religion and Christianity. Within this scheme non-Christian religions represent distinct interventions of God in salvation history. All religions play a positive, albeit preparatory role» (A. Sparks, «Fulfillment Theology of Jean Daniélou, Karl Rahner and Jacques Dupuis», 633-634).

[260] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 47-50.

Daniélou argues that «[a]s far as it concerns the theology of history, the essential contribution of the New Testament is the affirmation of Christ as the present reality of the prophetic predictions of the Old»[261]. He points to two radically distinct streams of Old Testament prophecy—«the coming of Jehovah in the last days to judge the world from his eternal habitation, and the coming of Messiah to set Israel free from her enemies and to inaugurate a new people»[262]. He then concludes: «The essential doctrine of the New Testament is that these two things come together in Jesus»: that Jesus Christ is «the fulfillment at once of the prophecies that foretold the coming of Jehovah, and those concerning the Messiah», that Jesus «fulfills both types of prophecy»[263]. The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus Christ brings is further explained by Daniélou in this way:

> Granted that the person of Christ is the point of intersection of the two Old Testament themes, there is a further stage to make good, namely to grasp that this is not simply a point among others, a term of reference for a continuous line, but an absolute termination, in the sense that there can be nothing beyond: the possibilities of development are exhausted. Here we face a characteristic paradox of Christianity. Although the time-process continues, and the last day, or chronological end of the world, is in the future, yet the ultimate reality is already present, in the person of the incarnate Word; there is not, because there cannot be, anything beyond this[264].

However, just as the prophetic predictions of the Old Testament were «fulfilled» in Jesus Christ, so also in him is found the «fulfillment» of whatever is imperfect and incomplete in the non-Christian religions:

> Christianity perfects and fulfills, in the light of Christian wisdom, the incomplete truths that are to be found in paganism. It takes over the religious capital of the natural man and sanctifies it. In the first ages

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[261] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 185.

[262] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 187-188.

[263] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 188, 189.

[264] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 190.

> of Christianity, the riches of Greek philosophy were thus purged and assimilated. It may be that in future years Christianity will similarly cleanse and incorporate the treasures of Hindu asceticism and the wisdom of Confucius. The mission of Christianity, rightly understood, involves no destruction of pagan religious values, but liberation and transfiguration. Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfill[265].

In order to understand how Daniélou regards the precise significance and value of the different religious traditions of the world, and how, for him, they constitute a «preparation for the gospel», we need to know the sharp distinction he makes between nature and the supernatural, or, between religion and revelation[266].

Unlike the proponents of exclusivism, Daniélou does not consider non-Christian religions as downright flagrant superstitions or senseless speculations; instead, he affirms the possibility that they contain authentic and positive spiritual values[267]. For Daniélou, when contemplating the non-Christian religions «[w]e must... fairly allow the genuine spiritual growth that is in them», because, quoting *Divini Praecones*, «the Church has never despised pagan teaching, but rather freed it from its errors»[268]. We do not have to belittle other religions in order to appreciate Christianity; in fact, Christianity «will only stand the higher for a due recognition of the stature of all that it surpasses»[269]. However, Daniélou, when looking at non-Christian religions, is guided by a twofold conviction. First, while «[t]he spiritual values contained in the pagan religions are not underestimated... they [however] need, in the first place, to be purged of error and corruptions, especially idolatry. Conversion therefore always involves an abjuration—there is no gradual evolution from paganism into Christianity»[270]. This is because, in the words of Dupuis, re-echoing Daniélou's view of non-Christian religions, «[t]he religions

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[265] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 121.

[266] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 48.

[267] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 108.119.

[268] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 108. The citation from *Divini Praecones* is taken from the same page of Daniélou's book.

[269] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 108.

[270] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 121.

of the world, as we know them historically, are… a mixture of truth and falsehood, of light and darkness, of upright conduct and evil ways»[271]. Secondly, while Daniélou does not deny that non-Christian religions possess «a measure of God's truth», and that through the power of unaided human reason they could attain «the knowledge of God *ab extra*, of his existence, and of his perfections in so far as these are made manifest through his activity in the world», nevertheless, «beyond the reach of all human reason there is something else, an inaccessible threshold, an impenetrable cloud, the secret of God's private life: the inscrutable mysteries of the Holy Trinity, which no man can fathom, which could be revealed only by the Son of God»[272].

This second consideration, for Daniélou, brings us to «the heart and core of the irreducible originality of Christianity»—«that the Son of God came among us to reveal these two intimately related truths: that there is within God himself a mysterious living love, called the Trinity of Persons; and that in and through the Son we men are called to share this life of love»[273]. Although some attributes of God can be known through his activities in creation and in the world, only through divine revelation can human beings know the mystery of God as Triune, and only through it can they know that God's saving and supreme incursion into the world and history took place in Jesus Christ.

> Here we put our finger on the essential distinction, the specific element of Christianity, the ultimate reason of its unique transcendence: it is Jesus Christ, son of God, our saviour. The religions of nature bear witness (and this is the measure of their real worth) to the natural tendency of man towards God: Christianity is God's approach towards man in Jesus Christ, taking possession of man to bring him to himself[274].

Daniélou presents two distinct characteristics of the Christian religion in exhibiting Christianity's superiority to the other religions

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[271] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 49.

[272] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 118.

[273] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 118.

[274] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 118-119.

of the world. The first characteristic is «belief in an event, the resurrection of Christ, which represents an incursion of God's action into the historical process, a radical change in the conditions of human life, an absolutely new thing»[275]. Christianity is about an «event» that happened in history—the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The second characteristic is that «this divine act alone»—of God coming into the world in the person of Christ—«can save mankind; there is no salvation but in Jesus Christ»[276]. Daniélou does not underestimate the values of interior life and spiritual detachment found in the mystics of other religions, yet their religious mysticism, which is based on the presupposition that it is possible for them to reach God through their own efforts, is, for Daniélou, erroneous for two reasons. The first reason is the reality of original sin and its effect in the human. In original sin, man cut himself off from God and he has no power to cancel this alienation. The case of original sin is not like the situation of human beings who, «having taken the wrong road by pursuing outward appearances, need only turn away from corporal things in order to regain that life of pure spirituality which is their true life», since «the whole man, body and soul, is cut off from God, and God alone can set man free by grace from captivity»[277]. The second reason is that «our God is, absolutely, unattainable, so that he alone can confer upon man that participation in himself which we call supernatural life»[278]. There is a radical distinction between the uncreated God and the spiritual creature embedded in the Christian faith which begins precisely with the profession of God as the creator and the human as belonging to the created reality. Because of this radical distinction, «God alone can raise man up into that sharing in his own life which constitutes our supernatural existence and culminates in mystical union», which is «unattainable by human effort»[279]. The implication of this position, which highlights the singularity of Christianity, is that «salvation comes through faith in Christ Jesus our Saviour,

[275] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 109.

[276] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 112.

[277] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 112-113.

[278] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 113.

[279] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 113.

not through works», and that «[w]hat a man must do to be saved is to acknowledge himself as a sinner and open his heart to receive the grace of God» and not through some kind of proficiency in the practice and technique of asceticism, detachment, single-mindedness, etc. Summing up the essential point of the second characteristic of Christianity, which insists on the uniqueness of Christianity, Daniélou asserts: «Christianity does not consist in the strivings of man after God, but in the power of God, accompanying in man that which is beyond the power of man; human efforts are merely the response called forth by the divine initiative»[280].

In his other writings, Daniélou reiterates his contrasting notions of Christianity and the other religions. In *The Salvation of the Nations*, he makes a sharp distinction between Catholicism and other religions and argues that Jesus is the fulfillment of the aspirations of these traditions:

> Thus, the essential difference between Catholicism and all other religions is that the others start with man. They are touching and often very beautiful attempts, rising very high in their search for God. But in Catholicism, there is a contrary movement, the descent of God towards the world, in order to communicate His life to it. The answer to the aspirations of the entire universe lies in the Judaeo-Christian religion. The true religion, the Catholic religion.... is the religion in which God's grace has made answer to man's cry. In other religions grace is not present, nor is Christ, nor is the gift of God[281].

However, in the same book, Daniélou affirms that «[n]o man is a stranger to the grace coming from Christ»[282]. For Adam Sparks, Daniélou tries to resolve this apparent ambiguity by making «an important distinction between *non-Christian religions themselves* and *adherents* of these other religions»:

> Daniélou is here asserting that grace is available to all, but is not mediated by non-Christian religions. There is no salvation but through Christ. Those who are saved without knowledge of Christ… are not saved by

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[280] J. Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, 115-116.

[281] J. Daniélou, *The Salvation of the Nations*, 8.

[282] J. Daniélou, *The Salvation of the Nations*, 20.

> their religions—only Christ saves. And if they were saved it was because they, in a sense, already belonged to the Church, for there is no salvation outside the church[283].

In his 1964 article, «Christianisme et religions non-chrétiennes», cited by Francis Sullivan in his book, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, Daniélou makes a sharp distinction between «religion» and «revelation»:

> The religions are a gesture of man towards God; revelation is the witness of a gesture of God towards man.... The religions are creations of human genius; they witness to the value of exalted religious personalities, such as Buddha, Zoroaster, Orpheus. But they will also have the defect of what is human. Revelation is the work of God alone.... Religion expresses man's desire for God. Revelation witnesses that God has responded to that desire. Religion does not save. Jesus Christ grants salvation[284].

Indeed, Daniélou draws a radical distinction between the order of nature and the order of grace, between religion and revelation, and asserts that religions belong to the natural reason that does not save while Christian revelation belongs to the sphere of supernatural faith that does.

In the above paragraph's quotations from Daniélou's writings, Daniélou argues that non-Christian religions are simply varied religious expressions of human beings' innate desire for union with the Divine, hence they are just «natural religions». In Jesus Christ and in Christianity, God ultimately responded to this universal religious

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[283] A. Sparks, «Fulfillment Theology of Jean Daniélou, Karl Rahner and Jacques Dupuis», 639; emphasis in the original.

[284] Cited by F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 187. A couple of comments from Gerard O'Collins about this quotation. First, as regards religions having «the defect of what is human» and revelation being «the work of God alone», Christianity, from the very beginning, has also «displayed 'the defects of what is human' and that the ways in which revelation (and salvation) are mediated through the Church are by definition not 'the work of God alone'». Secondly, Daniélou is correct in saying that «[r]eligion does not save», but that also includes Christianity, for as the Council of Trent says: «God alone is 'efficient cause' of justification and salvation» (ND 1932). In the ultimate sense, religion does not save; only God does (Cf. G. O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 58-59).

aspiration of humanity, thus only in Christianity do we find the «supernatural religion». While God's saving grace in Christ reaches adherents of other religions as divine response to their human search for God, these religions, in themselves, do not possess any salvific value since they do not play any role in the salvation of their members. Only in Christianity can salvation be found, for Christianity alone is the universal means of salvation[285].

2.2.2 *Karl Rahner's «Theory of the Presence of Christ in the Religions»*

Because Karl Rahner's theology of religions is «a progressive theology of revelation within history in which Christ forms the apex», it is in this respect also a «fulfillment theology», like that of Daniélou[286]. However, the gap between these two versions of fulfillment theology is so substantial that Jacques Dupuis has come up with a different name—the «theory of the presence of Christ in the religions» or of the «inclusive presence of Christ»—to refer to the other position[287]. What binds the two views is how «they see the other religions as oriented to the Christ event in the history of salvation: in this sense both could be called "fulfillment theories", but with a difference, which amounts to a sharp contrast»[288]. The former is premised upon there being a separation between nature and the supernatural—between the human and the divine—that are all viewed as insurmountable; the latter, which aims at «transcend[ing] the dichotomies between the human pursuit of self-transcendence and God's effort to meet us», refuses to separate nature from grace, while maintaining the distinction between the two[289].

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[285] Speaking about the last quotation, Gerard O'Collins says that such an interpretation of non-Christian religions «clearly excluded any notion of God intending the religions and involving them in the one divine plan of salvation for all people…. [and]… ruled out revelation occurring anywhere but in the biblical history» (G. O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 58).

[286] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 229.

[287] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 47.52.

[288] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 59.

[289] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 52.

The one article that Rahner published a few months before the opening of Vatican II on October 11, 1962, in which he developed his pre-conciliar theology of religions in a more systematic way, was his 1961 seminal lecture on «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions»[290]. For Dermot Lane, this essay was Rahner's «first and by far the most important and original article on other religions», which was «unchanged in its published version in 1962»[291]. Because this article develops Rahner's main theology of religions before the Council, I will therefore use it as my principal source of insights in exploring his pre-conciliar theology of religions[292].

Rahner's starting point in his theology of religions touches on the difficult but necessary and indispensable task of holding together, of reconciling, two seemingly contradictory but inseparable biblical axioms that determine the different approaches to non-Christian religions found in 1Tim 2:4-5. While affirming with the «pluralists» that God wills all human beings to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth (v. 4), Rahner argues with the «exclusivists» that there is only one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus (v. 5). However, Rahner, in this essay, understands the latter axiom *ecclesiologically*: Christianity is the religion which binds human beings to God through Jesus Christ, and Christ continues his historical presence in the world through the Church[293]. Rahner emphasizes the

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[290] In a footnote in the essay, Rahner discloses that this lecture was «given on the 28th April 1961 in Eichstätt (Bavaria) at a meeting of the 'Abendländische Akademie'», almost a year and a half before the opening of Vatican II on October 11, 1962 (K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 117).

[291] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 142.

[292] The reason for according to this article an adequate focus in this sub-section is that it will also be against this pre-conciliar essay that we will look at Rahner's particular influence in Vatican II texts on the question of the other religions and their members.

[293] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 118. In his post-conciliar essay, «Church, Churches and Religions», Rahner reiterates this point. After saying that we must hold fast to the belief that God wills all human beings to be saved and that he does not deny the possibility and grace of salvation to a wide segment of humanity, Rahner argues: «And yet it is only in Jesus Christ that this salvation is conferred, and through Christianity and the one Church that it must be mediated to all men» (K. Rahner, «Church, Churches and Religions», 31).

necessity of a visible embodiment of God's saving grace in history, hence, the necessary place and role of the Church as instrument and tangible expression of salvation in the world.

In this essay, Rahner spells out his views on Christianity's relation to non-Christian religions in four theses[294]. The first thesis, which affirms not only Christ but also Christianity, argues that «Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right», a proposition which, for Rahner, is «self-evident and basic for Christianity's understanding of itself»[295]. Christianity is an absolute religion because it is a religion intended by God for all people. This adherence to Christianity as the absolute religion must, however, recognize the problem in knowing and the complexity in discerning when Christianity has begun to be the absolute religion for all people, «when the existentially real demand is made by the absolute religion in its historically tangible form»[296]. In fact, as a religion with a history, with a temporal and spatial beginning in the Christ-event, which

[294] Because the fourth thesis is not so pertinent to my discussion here, I will not include it in the «summary» of the essay and in the review of Rahner's theology of religions in this section. Some of the most significant insights in these «theses» will be explored more lengthily in sub-section 2.3.2 below on Rahner's influence in some conciliar texts and passages dealing with the question of the religions and their adherents.

[295] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 118. Walter Kasper, in an article published in 1972, follows Rahner's conclusion based particularly on the necessity of Christ's saving mediation between God and men: «The context of our question is none other than the basic Christian confession of faith: that God, through Jesus Christ as the unique mediator between God and man, wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2, 4f). This confession is at the same time exclusive and universal. It is exclusive because it confesses that there is salvation in no other name except in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4, 14); it is also universal because God wishes the salvation of all men through Jesus Christ. The light of Jesus Christ enlightens every man, who comes into this world (Jn. 1, 9). Consequently the proclamation about Jesus Christ can say: "What you worship but do not know—this is what I proclaim" (Acts 17, 23). On the basis of this absolute and universal claim, Christianity can never understand itself as a religion among other religions. It is the God-willed religion» (W. Kasper, «Are Non-Christian Religions Salvific?», 157).

[296] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 119.

means that it did not always exist but began at some point in history, Christianity has not always and everywhere been the way of salvation for all people, «at least not in its historically tangible ecclesio-sociological constitution»[297]. Hence, while maintaining that Christianity is the absolute and the only religion intended for all human beings, «[w]e leave it, however, an open question (at least in principle) at what exact point in time the absolute obligation of the Christian religion has in fact come into effect for every man and culture»[298]. Rahner's considerable sensitivity to historical and existential aspects (e.g. to the fact that the Christian gospel has not reached all men and women), according to Gavin D'Costa, «avoids the difficult exclusivist claims that all religions are rendered invalid at the moment of the incarnation»[299]. Those who existed before Christ, and those who exist after the Christ-event but have never had the opportunity to encounter the Gospel through no fault of their own, are, for Rahner, not excluded from God's saving plan and his saving grace.

The second thesis starts with a short paragraph that is worth quoting in full:

> Until the moment when the gospel really enters into the historical situation of an individual, a non-Christian religion (even outside the Mosaic religion) does not merely contain elements of a natural knowledge of God, elements, moreover, mixed up with human depravity which is the result of original sin and later aberrations. It contains also supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ. For this reason a non-Christian religion can be recognized as a *lawful* religion (although only in different degrees) without thereby denying the error and depravity contained in it[300].

Rahner divides this thesis into two parts. The first part argues that it is *a priori* quite possible to assume that there are supernatural, grace-filled components in non-Christian religions, without saying that the

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[297] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 118-119.

[298] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 120.

[299] G. D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, 84.

[300] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 121.

religious, ethical and metaphysical aberrations present in them may be considered harmless either in theory or practice[301]. This theological consideration is rooted in the truth of God's universal saving will for the whole of human race, that «God desires the salvation of everyone»[302]. However, «this salvation willed by God is the salvation won by Christ, the salvation of supernatural grace which divinizes man», intended for those who have lived before and after Christ, «in nations, cultures and epochs of a very wide range»[303]. The Christological affirmation, therefore, does not restrict salvation only to those who have responded in faith to the Christian revelation through their explicit acceptance of the Christian message within the Church. Yet, salvation, wherever it is said to exist, is always of Christ, is always and «specifically *Christian*... [since]... there is no salvation apart from Christ»[304].

Likewise, since one cannot separate nature from grace, a person who encounters the Christian message and hears the Gospel for the first time does not hear it as a purely «natural» person but as someone who is already «graced» in his very constitution because of God's loving self-communication. For Rahner, it is impossible to think that this offer of salvation, of supernatural, divinizing grace made to all human beings on account of God's universal saving will, remains inefficacious in most cases because of man's personal guilt. The reason is that we have every reason to think optimistically that God and his saving will are more powerful than the evil that human beings are capable of doing, that God has the last word and that his last word is his powerful word of reconciliation and forgiveness, and that in Christ, salvation is not just possible but is also and already actual[305].

The second part of the thesis also affirms that actual pre-Christian religions must not be considered as simply illegitimate from the beginning, but must be viewed as quite capable of possessing a positive significance, must be considered «lawful religions». For Rahner, a

[301] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 121-122.

[302] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 122.

[303] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 122-123.

[304] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 123.

[305] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 123-124.

«lawful religion» means «an institutional religion whose 'use' by man at a certain period can be regarded on the whole as a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for the attaining of salvation, a means which is therefore positively included in God's plan salvation»[306]. It is not included in this notion of «lawful religion» that such a religion ought to be pure and positively willed by God in *all* its elements in order for it to be considered a lawful religion for its adherents. Hence, when we come across a non-Christian religion, we must divest ourselves of the dilemma that such a religion must either originate from God in all its components and hence correspond to God's will, or simply be a purely human construction and hence not coincide with God's saving providence. All human beings, in all ages and in all situations of human history, must have the possibility of sharing in an authentic redeeming relationship with God; otherwise, there could be no question of a serious and actually efficacious saving purpose of God for all men at all times and in all places[307]. For Rahner, this conviction is based on «the social nature of man» and «the necessarily social nature of all religion in the concrete»[308]—which means that if in practice, man, as a social being, can live his proffered relationship to God only in society, and there is no other way, then man can pursue his relationship to God only within the society and the religion offered to him by the concrete historical condition of his human existence[309].

The third thesis, which follows from the second, asserts that «[i]f the second thesis is correct, then Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an anonymous Christian»[310]. If a non-Christian has experienced the grace of God, has embraced this grace as the ultimate, bottomless life-giving force of his existence, then he has already been given revelation in a true sense even before he has been

[306] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 125.

[307] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 127-129.

[308] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 128.129.

[309] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 131.

[310] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 131.

reached by missionary activity from outside, a revelation which is the expression in objective categories of something which an individual has already achieved or could have achieved in the depth of his rational existence. Hence, if such a person, as the object of the Church's missionary endeavor, may be already an individual on the way towards his salvation and in certain circumstances discovers it without being reached by the preaching of the Christian message, and if this salvation which envelopes him in this way is Christ's salvation since there is no other salvation, then he can be «not only an anonymous theist but also an anonymous Christian»[311]. The preaching of the Gospel does not simply transform someone totally forsaken by God and Christ into a Christian, but turns an anonymous Christian into a person who now knows and explicitly professes his Christian faith in the depths of his grace-filled being within the social structure of the Church. We should not, however, draw a conclusion from this idea that, since an individual is an anonymous Christian even without it,

[311] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 132.131-132. According to Eamonn Conway, the term «anonymous Christian» is mentioned in sixteen volumes of Rahner's *Theological Investigations* (E. Conway, The Anonymous Christian—a Relativised Christianity?, 18). Rahner also discusses the substance of this theory in his major work, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, without ever mentioning the term because of its controversy, both as far as the name and the theology behind it are concerned. The most important essay that develops Rahner's thought on his theory of the «anonymous Christian» is K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 115-134. He has developed and defended this theory in other essays, which include: K. Rahner, «Anonymous and Explicit Faith», 52-59; K. Rahner, «Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church», 161-178; K. Rahner, «Anonymous Christians», 390-398; K. Rahner, «Church, Churches and Religions», 30-49; K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ and the Non-Christian Religions», 39-50; K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation», 288-295; K. Rahner, «The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation», 199-224; and K. Rahner, «Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today», 3-22.

explicit proclamation of the Christian message is thus superfluous[312]. For Rahner, the intuitive self-realization of a previously anonymous Christianity is necessitated (1) by the incarnational and social structure of the grace of Christianity, and (2) because the person who comprehends Christianity in a clearer, purer and more reflective way has, other things being equal, a greater chance of salvation than a person who is simply an anonymous Christian[313].

Since the publication of this essay, Rahner went on prolifically developing its theme and defending his theology of religions in the post-conciliar period. According to Knitter, in this seminal article and in his earlier and more foundational investigations on the relationship between nature and grace and between universal and special salvation history, all considered «bold explorations into unfamiliar theological territory», Rahner «broke new ground… [and]… not only prepared the way for Vatican II but indirectly contributed to much of its substance»[314]. For Lane, this essay «enabled the Catholic theologians to adopt and work out an inclusive view of other religions, which is now taken for granted»[315], because it has been the theology of the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. This essay «has paved the way for the development of what is now known by some as 'inclusive pluralism' and by others as 'open inclusivism' within the current state of debate about inter-religious dialogue»[316].

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[312] In one of his post-conciliar essays on the subject, Rahner argues emphatically: «It would be quite foolish to think that this talk about 'anonymous Christianity' must lessen the importance of mission, preaching, the Word of God, baptizing, and so on. Anyone who wants to interpret our remarks about anonymous Christianity in this way, has not merely fundamentally misunderstood them, but has not read our exposition of them with sufficient attention» (K. Rahner, «Anonymous Christians», 396-397).

[313] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 132.

[314] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 125.

[315] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 152.

[316] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 153.

2.2.3 *Karl Rahner's Conclusion: Religions are «Ways» of Salvation for Their Members*

Indeed, unlike Daniélou, Rahner refuses to make a separation between the natural and the supernatural orders. For him, grace is ubiquitous, and is therefore always already operative and at work in human beings in their concrete lives. Rahner's theology of religions begins with the conviction of God's universal saving design for the entire humanity, grounded in the biblical belief in God's universal salvific will for all people. By virtue of this saving plan which encompasses the whole world, with its various peoples and diverse religions, non-Christian religions are seen not only as already existing within the ambit of God's saving mystery, but also as God's particular, though initial, interventions in the history of salvation which culminated in the Christ-event. If the major religions of the world are where human beings are situated concretely with their deepest religious aspirations and spiritual longings, then that is also where God's saving grace will be made available to these spiritual subjects considered as «addressees» of God's self-communication and «recipients» of his salvific grace.

Hence, the other religions can never be regarded as purely «natural» but as already «supernatural» because of the discernible presence of Christ's saving mystery in them. They cannot be viewed as simply natural expressions of the human search for God, but as already «ways» of communicating God's revelation and salvation to their members, albeit in a mixture of truth and error. They are not merely «preparations for the gospel» (*praeparatio evangelica*) but are already God's supernatural acts that make the divine saving grace available to their adherents, as already mediating God's supernatural grace of salvation to those who belong to them. Christians, therefore, must recognize in non-Christian religions the operative saving power of God in Christ who saves the adherents of these traditions not *in spite of* their religious allegiance and practice but in fact *through* them[317]. Dupuis sums up the disparity between Daniélou's and Rahner's theories:

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[317] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 230.231.

> For while the first holds on to the dialectic of nature-supernatural, human search-divine gift, the other overcomes such dichotomies to visualize the unfolding of God's saving history as a process entailing diverse modalities of God's revelation and personal involvement in human history. While for the former, the "pre-Christian religions" lose their propaedeutic value with the coming of the Christ event, for the latter, their positive role in the order of salvation remains in place by virtue of their organic link to the all-embracing mystery of Christ, at least until the "promulgation" of the gospel understood as to individuals[318].

As a theory that was developed in the years preceding Vatican II, Rahner's theory of «the inclusive presence of Christ» alone «succeeded in looking at other religious traditions with greater openness, seeing in them the operative presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal Savior»[319]. In this sense, Rahner can be said to have influenced the Council's spirit of openness and dialogue with the other religions more than Daniélou; Rahner, in fact, chiefly embodies in his theology the Council's positive and optimistic turning toward the world and its various religions in respectful engagement. The saving presence of Christ in non-Christian religions is certainly hidden and remains anonymous to their members, but it is real; and there may be «salvation without the gospel», but «it is not a salvation without Christ or apart from him»[320]. It is in reference to this hidden and unknown operative and saving presence of Christ in other religions that Rahner has coined the term «anonymous Christians».

2.3 **The Theological Influence of Jean Daniélou and Karl Rahner in Vatican II Documents Dealing with Theology of Religions**

The important question is: Which of the two lines of thought discussed above did the Second Vatican Council adopt in its theology of religions? Did the Council subscribe to the «fulfillment theory» in its classical form, or did it embrace the theory of the «presence of Christ's saving mystery» in the other religions? For Jacques Dupuis,

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[318] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 59.

[319] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 53.

[320] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 53.

the question does not readily submit itself to a simple answer—for the reason that the conciliar documents pertaining to the other religions contain expressions belonging to the two opposing views. It is true that expressions belonging to the domain of «fulfillment theory» describing the Church's attitude toward the other religious traditions—such as «to assume and to save, to heal and to restore, to ennoble and to bring to perfection»—are found in some conciliar documents. However, the recognition of the «elements of truth and grace» operative within the other religious traditions (in their teachings, theirs rites, their ways of life, or in their creeds, cults, and codes of behavior) «as a sort of secret presence of God»—an expression articulating the concern of the theory of the «inclusive presence of Christ» in the other religions—also rings loud in the documents[321]. Indeed, the unresolved pre-conciliar debate between Daniélou's and Rahner's theologies of religions regarding the proper relationship between nature and grace has continued, and lingered, in Vatican II and influenced passages pertaining to non-Christian believers and their religions.

2.3.1 *The Influence of Jean Daniélou's «Fulfilment Theory» in Vatican II Documents on the Religions*

We can see the influence of Daniélou's «fulfillment» theology in the following conciliar texts. The opening paragraph of *Dignitatis Humanae* which expresses the belief that «[the] one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus committed the duty of spreading it abroad among all men» (DH 1), with the implication that the other religions are false, manifests a Daniélou-like «fulfillment» theology. In *Lumen Gentium*, the Council declares that «[whatever good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life» (LG 16). In *Ad Gentes*, the other religious traditions are described as «efforts» in which people «seek God in an attempt to touch him and find him», efforts that «need to be enlightened and corrected» so that «they may lead one to the true God and be a preparation for the Gospel» (AG 3). In AG 9, the Council affirms

[321] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 64.

that «whatever goodness is found in minds and hearts of men, or in particular customs and cultures of peoples, far from being lost is purified, raised to a higher level and reaches its perfection, for the glory of God». The verb «fulfill» is not mentioned in these two passages from *Ad Gentes*, yet the verbs «enlightened» and «corrected» (in AG 3) as well as the verbs «purified», «raised», and «perfected» (in AG 9) imply the sense of «fulfillment» that Christianity brings to other religions. As we have seen above, for Daniélou, whatever good, noble, and beautiful elements we find in the other religions are, as LG 16 says, simply «*praeparatio evangelica*».

2.3.2 *Karl Rahner's Theological Influence on Conciliar Themes Dealing with the Question of the Religions*

2.3.2.1 Introduction

In this sub-section, we will examine some of the most important components of Rahner's pre-conciliar theology of religions based not only on his 1962 essay but also on his other writings before Vatican II, and by juxtaposing them thematically with the Council's pertinent texts on non-Christian religions and their adherents, we will trace Rahner's influence on the Second Vatican Council's more open theology of religions. Paul Knitter affirms that «[i]f Vatican II is a watershed in Christian attitudes toward other religions, Karl Rahner is its chief engineer»[322].

2.3.2.2 Addressing Some Preliminary Questions Vis-à-vis Karl Rahner's Major Theological Influence on Vatican II's Theology of Religions

As regards Rahner's major influence on at least twelve of the Council's documents, Karen Kilby, a Rahner scholar, raises a couple of issues that have to be addressed at the beginning of this sub-section on Rahner's impact on and contribution to the shaping of conciliar themes and documents that deal with Vatican II's theology of religions.

First, Kilby contends that—referring to Rahner's «influence» on the conciliar documents—«[t]his is difficult to measure precisely,

[322] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 125.

given the complexity of the process by which the documents emerged, and given that elements from Rahner's theology which make an appearance in them can often also be traced to other sources»[323]. This also seems to be the point of Herbert Vorgrimler when he argues:

> If we survey the sixteen texts which the Second Vatican Council passed and solemnly proclaimed, it is difficult, indeed impossible, at this stage to trace the influence of Karl Rahner in detail…. But Rahner so agreed with the other theologians of the generation concerned for renewal that it cannot be said with certainty that the introduction of a particular [conciliar] passage is to be attributed to him (alone)[324].

When I make an assertion that Rahner must have influenced the relevant texts and passages of the Council that expressly deal with the question of the salvation of non-Christians with greater openness, I am not saying that *only* he must have influenced those texts and passages. Since theologians can and do in fact write on similar topics almost contemporaneously with each other, it is possible that the Council may have derived ideas and insights on the theology of religions not solely from Rahner but from other theologians as well. Yet, and this what this section will point out, in Vatican II's positive and optimistic theology of religions we are dealing *precisely* with a kind of theology (or with some of the most important aspects of this theology) that clearly and essentially belonged to Rahner's pre-conciliar theological *corpus*.

We may consider the following anecdotal accounts in trying to discern the extent of Rahner's influence in Vatican II, accounts that can serve as a broad horizon against which his specific contribution to the Council's theology of religions may be viewed and appreciated[325].

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[323] K. Kilby, «Karl Rahner», 93

[324] H. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 100.

[325] While such anecdotal accounts do not mean much in terms of really establishing Rahner's theological «footprints» in the conciliar passages that deal with the question of non-Christian religions and their adherents, neither can they be totally disregarded in showing Rahner's overall influence in the Council.

Years before the Second Vatican Council was even contemplated, Rahner had already made a name for himself outside the German-speaking world due to his many lectures and writings, so that those who were acquainted with his talks and publications assumed that he would be invited to the upcoming Council as a theological consultant. In fact, except Volume V of his *Theological Investigations* which was published a few months before the opening of Vatican II, the first four volumes were published years before the Council. In the Second Vatican Council, Rahner was the *peritus* of Cardinal Franz König, Archbishop of Vienna, who «was asked to sit on the Preparatory Commission, which was made up mainly of bishops and was *supposed to prepare possible subjects for discussion at the Council*»[326]. With his appointment as one of the theological experts of the Council by John XXIII and performing such a role to Cardinal König and other prominent Council Fathers during the conciliar sessions, Rahner was soon regarded «as 'the most powerful man' at the council»[327], and «the 'Holy Ghost Writer' of the Council»[328]. During the first two sessions of the Council, Rahner «held at least twenty-three public lectures on various topics connected with the Council»[329].

We may add another important information in this brief survey of Rahner's role in the Council and of his crucial involvement among the German-speaking bishops and their subsequent contribution to the deliberations and shaping of conciliar themes and documents. Aside from his earlier, pre-conciliar writings in theology that were to prove

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[326] F. König, «It Must Be the Holy Spirit», 5; emphasis mine.

[327] G. B. Kelly, *Karl Rahner*, 21. In Rahner's February 27, 1963 letter from Rome to Herbert Vorgrimler, the conciliar *peritus* writes: «Balic begged me to do something (said *I was the most powerful man*) to see that a theological conference is held on scripture and tradition, which is his proposal» (H. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 163; emphasis mine). Vorgrimler mentioned this detail in his book, saying that in this climate of widespread acceptance and appreciation, Rahner had become, in the words of the conservative Mariologist C. Balic, OFM, «'the most powerful man' at the Council» (H. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 99).

[328] K. Rahner, *I Remember*, 82.

[329] D. Marmion, «Karl Rahner, Vatican II, and the Shape of the Church», 31.

highly significant in the development of many conciliar themes[330], the immense contribution of Rahner to the conciliar discussions and deliberations can be seen directly in his singular influence on the Fulda Conference whose many proposals and resolutions had enormously shaped the proceedings of the Council beginning in the Second Session[331]. When Pope Paul VI announced the September 29, 1963 opening of the Second Session, the Council Fathers all over the world resumed their investigations of the different schemas. In some countries, such inquiries were tackled collectively by the episcopal conferences, and among the gatherings of episcopal conferences in various parts of the world, the one that attracted most attention, according to Ralph Wiltgen in his book on Vatican II, *The Rhine Flows Into the Tiber*, was the Fulda Conference in Germany, held on August 26-29, 1963[332]. Wiltgen, speaking about Rahner's huge and invaluable influence on this Conference, writes:

> Since the position of the German-language bishops was regularly adopted by the European alliance, and since the alliance position was regularly adopted by the Council, a single theologian might have his views accepted by the whole Council if they had been accepted

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[330] Commenting on Rahner's overall influence in the Council's documents, Vorgrimler writes: "Certainly K. Neufeld is right to say that no trace of Rahner's influence can be found in four texts: on the means of communication, on the eastern churches, on Christian education and—remarkably—on religious freedom. *In all the rest, beginning with the constitution on the liturgy, we can see traces of Rahner's theology*» (H. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 100; emphasis mine). In terms of theological questions and issues, «[t]races of [Rahner's] theology», according to William Dych, «can be found in the Council's teaching on the Church, on papal primacy and the episcopate, on revelation and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, on the inspiration of the Bible, on the sacraments and the diaconate, on the relationship of the Church to the modern world, on the possibility of salvation outside the Church even for non-believers, and many other areas» (W. Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 13).

[331] Cf. R. M. Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows Into the Tiber*, 78-80.

[332] R. M. Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows Into the Tiber*, 78.

> by the German-speaking bishops. *There was such a theologian: Father Karl Rahner, SJ*[333].

When Pope Paul VI was delivering his Closing Address towards the end of the Council in 1965, Wiltgen recalls that among the four Cardinal-Moderators of the Council seated closest to the Pope, «[a] lmost no one in the vast assembly, after the Pope, had been more influential in the passage of the Council legislation than Cardinal Frings» who, although he had Joseph Ratzinger for his *peritus*, «had leaned heavily upon the theologian Karl Rahner»[334].

Rahner was indeed an international theologian whose writings had been read by people before and during the Council, a very powerful and influential Council *peritus*, and the most influential mind of the Fulda Conference that had strongly influenced the Council. Hence, it is not farfetched that when Vatican II speaks about some of the most significant concepts that constitute the Council's theology of religions, concepts that are particularly so dear to Rahner and about which he has written quite copiously, they must indeed have been influenced more fundamentally by Rahner than by other theologians who might have also written on the same subjects. After all, Rahner—and only he—is universally credited as the «chief engineer» of Vatican II's theology of religions. Hence, while we note Kilby's and Vorgrimler's comments on Rahner's exact influence on and contribution to the Council's theology, it does not preclude us from pursuing a scholarly attempt of looking for traces of Rahner's theology in the conciliar texts and documents, with the help of more recent theological studies and hermeneutical findings. And this is actually the purpose of this present investigation—to dig deeper into the question of what exactly was Rahner's theological influence on the Council's theology of religions (in *Nostra Aetate* and in other documents) until a more distinct and solid «profile» of Rahner's actual contribution in the Council emerges. Understanding

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[333] R. M. Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows Into the Tiber*, 80; emphasis mine. For Wiltgen, «he [Rahner] might well be called the most influential mind at the Fulda Conference» (*Ibid*.).

[334] R. M. Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows Into the Tiber*, 285.

the Council means understanding the theology of people who have been behind the development and shaping of its theology.

Secondly, Kilby argues that «Rahner himself was agnostic about the exact nature of his impact on the Council»[335]. Kilby must have based her assertion on Rahner's own self-effacing admission vis-à-vis his overall role and participation in the Council on Meinold Krauss' autobiographical interview of Karl Rahner in 1979[336]. When Krauss tells Rahner that the highpoint of the latter's accomplishment could be seen in his being «one of the most significant, internationally renowned key figures of the Second Vatican Council», Rahner dismisses Krauss' accolade as «an exaggeration», to which the interviewer retorts: «Your great modesty shows itself again»[337]. And when Krauss presses on that it was no accident that the Cardinals called him «the "Holy Ghost Writer" of the Council», Rahner disregards his interviewer's remark as «nonsense»[338]. Perhaps, an attitude like this on the part of Rahner was what prompted B. R. Brinkman to ask in his tribute to Rahner: «Was it a weakness in Rahner that he did sometimes relativize himself?»[339]. Shortly before his death in 1984, with already a legacy of theological works that is incredible and unparalleled for its sheer volume and for the range and variety of its subject matters, Rahner reflected on his experiences as a Catholic theologian and modestly thought of himself as «someone who was given the task of being a theologian, but who is not quite sure whether he has done justice to this task»[340].

Perhaps, an excellent way of looking at Rahner's self-effacing «admission» of his contribution to Vatican II is by making a distinction between two significant sources of knowledge about him in terms of his role and participation in the Council—his personal letters (to Herbert Vorgrimler, for instance) and his interviews (to Meinold Krauss, for example). Interviews are ordinarily done for

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[335] K. Kilby, «Karl Rahner», 93.

[336] Cf. K. Rahner, *I Remember*, 81-83.

[337] K. Rahner, *I Remember*, 81-82.

[338] K. Rahner, *I Remember*, 82.

[339] B. R. Brinkman, «Theology Present to Itself: A Tribute to Karl Rahner», 259.

[340] K. Rahner, «Experiences of a Catholic Theologian», 298.

the purpose of either immediate or future publications so that the ideas and insights of the persons interviewed may be more widely disseminated to the public. Private letters, on the other hand, are normally written for the «recipients» and «for their eyes only»—that is, for the recipients' private «consumption» *alone*. Hence, because there is no prospect of publication—whether immediate or future—in the case of letters, as they are personal and private correspondence, one tends to be more open and sincere, frank and honest, candid and forthright in one's private letters than in interviews, especially when in interviews one is categorically asked about one's accomplishments or one's importance and rightful place in the world.

Applied to Rahner, we can say that in terms of what he was personally asked to contribute—as a private adviser of Cardinal König and as a *peritus* of the different commissions where he was drafted—and what he actually did and accomplished in the Council, Rahner's implicit appraisal of himself and his role in Vatican II in his letters to Vorgrimler has more «substance» than in his explicit «admission» in the interviews of his self-deprecating impact on the Council. Hence, what Rahner intimated in his letters to Vorgrimler, which the latter included in his 1985 book on Rahner (a year after Rahner's death), in terms of his activities and involvement in Vatican II, carries more import than in the interviews when one is looking for a more accurate and honest reading of Rahner's role and participation in the Council. As far as some of his remarks about himself are concerned, Rahner tried to refrain from entertaining any exalted idea of himself and his self-importance in the world; hence, it seemed normal that he would «belittle» or not brag about his theological contribution in the Council in the interviews[341]. A

[341] In his November 5, 1962 letter to Vorgrimler from Rome, Rahner, referring to Vorgrimler's book, *Karl Rahner*, writes: «Your biography of me has also come. Very many thanks; I'm extremely touched. Of course I can't promise when I shall read it, because I'm not very interested in myself» (H. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 157-158). Some decades later, when Rahner was recounting his official appointment as lecturer in the faculty of theology at the University of Innsbruck in 1937, he described such an assignment as merely filling a need in the ranks of professors: «My religious superiors were of the opinion that I wouldn't do it any worse than many others» (Cited in R. Kress, *A Rahner Handbook*, 3).

classic example of this was when, in another interview, he sweepingly referred to himself, «in comparison to professional scholars», as a «theological dilettante»[342], an extremely modest self-designation for a theologian who had written so abundantly on almost all topics in theology. Indeed, for someone who had written so immensely in this field, Rahner's most modest remark about himself and his theological achievements was his self-effacing description of himself as merely an «amateur» in the domain of theology. Thus, Krauss' observation: «Your great modesty shows itself again»[343].

Having said all this, we will now trace Rahner's influence *textually*, in an attentive, careful study of his theological insights in some of his pre-conciliar writings, particularly in his 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», and then show their «presence» in some of the most important texts and passages of the Council dealing with non-Christians and their religions.

2.3.2.3 On God's Universal Salvific Will

For Rahner, perhaps the most radical achievement of the Second Vatican Council has been the retrieval of the belief in God's universal salvific will, in the possibility of salvation for all, what he has specifically identified as the Council's «optimism of universal salvation»[344], a universality of salvation that can no longer be denied with the advent of Vatican II[345]. In his opinion,

> these assertions of optimism concerning salvation… marked a far more decisive phase in the development of the Church's conscious awareness of her faith than, for instance, the doctrine of collegiality in the Church, the relationship between scripture and tradition, the acceptance of the new exegesis, etc.[346].

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[342] K. Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 174.

[343] K. Rahner, *I Remember*, 82.

[344] K. Rahner, «The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council», 99.102.

[345] Cf. K. Rahner, «Salvation», 407.

[346] K. Rahner, «Observations on the Problem of the Anonymous Christian», 284.

Vatican II is an event marked by an explicit declaration of the possibility of salvation of those *extra Ecclesiam* and by an unusually positive evaluation of non-Christian religions, both grounded in a strong emphasis on the universal and efficacious saving will of God—a theme that was truly dear to Rahner and about which he wrote quite immensely.

In constructing his theology of religions, Rahner, as we saw above, begins from the Scriptures (cf. 1Tim 2: 4-5) in terms of how Christianity must view salvation, specifically the salvation of non-Christians. The challenge to theology, in Rahner's opinion, will always be to acknowledge the two fundamentally inseparable beliefs of Christian faith: God's universal saving will for all people and the absolute and unique salvific mediation of Jesus Christ. His point of departure for a more constructive theology of religions is a conviction that is actually an integral element of the fabric of Christian teaching, but which, as shown in the previous chapter, has been subdued theologically and drowned in the doctrinal history of the Church: the belief in the universal saving will of God[347].

In fact, Rahner asserts that the Church's foundation, in Vatican II, for a new way of relating to other religions, which includes entering into dialogue with them, is God's universal salvific will for all people[348].

> This attitude of the Church came into existence of course only after a very long period of development. But it became clear and irreversible in the Second Vatican Council.... Formerly theology asked apprehensively, how many are saved from the *massa damnata* of world-history. Today we ask whether we may hope that all are saved. This question, this attitude, is more Christian than the former and is the fruit of a more mature Christian awareness that has grown over

[347] Cf. K. Rahner, «The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council», 99-102.

[348] Cf. K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 289.

> a long period and is slowly coming to terms more closely with the ultimate basic message of Jesus on the victory of God's Kingdom[349].

For most of its past, the Church declared that, minus a few rare exceptions in its long history, the salvation of those *extra Ecclesiam* was impossible. Human logic, however, dictates that if God wills the salvation of the world and of the whole human race, God will act on his will by offering all men and women the grace and means of salvation. Thus, if God wills to save humankind, this divine will must effect and must be efficacious «since God's word and will *effect* what they say»[350]. On account of his universal saving will, God enfolds the whole human race in his grace and offers all human beings the grace of salvation. Hence, «even though a person is co-conditioned by original sin in his situation of salvation and sin, he always and everywhere has the genuine possibility of encountering God and achieving salvation by the acceptance of God's supernatural self-communication in grace» because God's universal salvific will «is promised to every person regardless of where or at what time he lives»[351]. Indeed,

> in spite of original sin and also the personal sinfulness of men God truly and sincerely wills *all* men to be saved, and... in virtue of willing the universal salvation of all in this sense he offers every man, whatever the circumstances of life in which he finds himself, a genuine possibility of attaining to his own salvation[352].

If Vatican II's major achievement as a theological event is the recovery and rediscovery of this central biblical truth—on God's will to save the whole of humanity—then Rahner may truly be said to have

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[349] K. Rahner, «The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council», 101. For Rahner, «[i]f we ask what the Council has produced that is new in this one-track, irreversible progress, the main answer must be that at this Council, Catholic Christendom adopted expressly a different, a new attitude toward other Christians and their Churches and toward the non-Christian world-religions and ratified it as truly Christian» (*Ibid*., 98).

[350] K. Rahner, «Anonymous Christians», 393; emphasis in the original.

[351] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 146-147.

[352] K. Rahner, «Church, Churches and Religions», 33.

precipitated such a recovery and rediscovery, for it is present in his pre-conciliar writings.

In his 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», Rahner argues that the main reason for his argument that supernatural, grace-filled elements are found in non-Christian religions is «basically a theological consideration…. [that] rests ultimately on the fact that, if we wish to be Christians, we must profess belief in the universal and serious salvific purpose of God towards all men which is true even within the post-paradisean phase of salvation by original sin»[353]. Rahner insists that Christians should think optimistically about the possibilities of salvation outside the borders of Christianity, no matter how much error and perversion they may seem to find in the non-Christian world, because God's «salvific will… is more powerful than the extremely limited stupidity and evil-mindedness of men»[354]. To think pessimistically of the possibility of human beings being saved is to trivialize God's love and his saving grace. According to Rahner, if it is true that God's eternal *Logos* has become flesh and in his Incarnation has destroyed sin and wrought our human salvation, then Christians have no right to think that the future of humanity takes the same direction as a consequence of human sin and unbelief as it would have taken if the Son of God had not come. «Christ and his salvation are not simply one of the two possibilities offering themselves to man's free choice; they are the deed of God which bursts open and redeems the false choice of man by overtaking it»[355]. In Jesus Christ, «God not only gives the *possibility* of salvation, … but the actual salvation itself, however

[353] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 122.

[354] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 123.

[355] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 124. In another important pre-conciliar essay (given as a lecture in 1960) that specifically treats this question and in fact predates this argument, Rahner holds that Christian eschatology is not a parallel treatment of a «doctrine of the two ways», the doctrine of double and parallel predestination to heaven and to hell, for «on principle only one predestination will be spoken of in a Christian eschatology. And it contains only one theme which is there on its own behalf: the victory of grace in redemption consummated» (K. Rahner, «The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions», 340).

much this includes also the right decision of human freedom which is itself a gift from God»[356].

For Rahner, in *Lumen Gentium* 16, *Gaudium et Spes* 22 and *Ad Gentes* 7, conciliar passages that we have already seen in Chapter 1,

> a salvific will of God—even after the Fall—is proclaimed as so universal and effective that it can be restricted only by a person's decision made with a bad conscience and at no other point; an opportunity of really salvific faith in revelation is admitted even outside Christian verbal revelation[357].

In these texts, the Council argues that even an individual who considers himself an atheist, yet nevertheless follows his conscience, is united to Christ's paschal mystery; that every person in a manner known to God alone can be in touch with God's revelation and can really believe by an act of faith that is salutary; and that those who seek the unknown God in shadows and images are not far from the true God who desires their salvation provided they endeavor to lead a righteous life[358]. All these conciliar passages reveal not only that no one is beyond redemption and God's gracious mercy, but also, and more powerfully, that everyone is included in God's plan of salvation. Such conciliar insights, which express Rahner's view on this central theme, truly reveal his influence on Vatican II's theology of religions

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[356] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 124. «[T]his grace, in Christ, is not merely the offer of bare *possibility* of salutary acts, but must be acclaimed as triumphant, because rendered efficacious by God» (K. Rahner, «The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions», 340). In a post-conciliar reflection (cited here to show that Rahner has truly and seriously delved into this matter before and after the Council), Rahner reiterates this point: «God by his own sovereign efficacious grace has already decided the totality of the history of freedom... in favour of the salvation of the world in Christ, and in Christ has already promulgated this event. Without detriment to its freedom the world as a whole is "conquered" and delivered by the love of God. That is the saving will of God with which Christian hope is primarily and fundamentally concerned» (K. Rahner, «Salvation», 408).

[357] K. Rahner, «Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council», 82.

[358] K. Rahner, «The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council», 100.

which is basically rooted in the recovery and rediscovery of God's universal saving will.

However, as early as in *Lumen Gentium* 13, the Council already articulates an insight on God's universal salvific will for all, and therefore echoes Rahner's fundamental idea:

> All men are called to belong to the new people of God.... All men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God which in promoting universal peace presages it. And there belong to or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful, all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind, *for all men are called by the grace of God to salvation*[359].

Francis Sullivan, as we have seen in Chapter 1, identifies the presence of two universal calls in the first and the last sentences of the paragraph: the universal call to belong to the Church and the universal call to salvation through God's grace. For Sullivan, «[t]he last sentence is an expression of belief in the universal salvific will of God, by whose grace all are called to salvation», «the grace through which the call to salvation is given… [which]… make[s] it possible for everyone to be saved»[360]. Although everyone may be saved since, as the last sentence of LG 13 affirms, all are called to salvation and the grace of salvation is offered universally, not everyone, however, may belong to the Church since it is obviously not possible for every person to enter the Church by baptism. And the reason why LG 16 can assert that «those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways» is that LG 13 clearly argues that «all men are called by God to the grace of salvation». LG 13 provides us with the only common denominator among non-Christians (excluding the Jewish people who stand in a unique relationship to Christ and thus to the Church) that makes them all «related» to the Church: they are all included in God's saving plan, and are therefore offered the grace and means of salvation[361].

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[359] W. M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican* II; emphasis mine.

[360] F. A . Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 152-153.

[361] F. A . Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 155.

2.3.2.4 On the Ubiquity of Grace

Before the discussion of the «fourth draft» of what eventually would come out as *Nostra Aetate*, John Oesterreicher, in his «Introduction and Commentary» to the Declaration, offers an excursus on «the omnipresence of grace»[362]. He observes that the «enlarged Declaration» of 1964—and especially its final form of 1965—was not satisfied simply to reject the pessimistic view of God articulated in the propositions that Pius V, Innocent XI and Clement XI condemned. These censured propositions argued that «[a]ll works of non-believers are sin and the virtues of the philosophers are vices; pagans, Jews, heretics and others are doomed to perdition because they are under the dominion of vice. They are outside the Church, and God's grace does not work outside the Church (*D* 1025, 1295, 1375)»[363]. Contrary to the ideas of these condemned propositions, *Nostra Aetate* argues: «[S]he [the Church] looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men (cf. Jn 1:9)» (NA 2)[364].

In this 136-page article on *Nostra Aetate*, Oesterreicher, in some powerful insights that are originally in the form of a question, implies that the power of God destroys the wall that separates the Catholic Church from the non-Christian world, that there are religious communities outside the borders of the Church that are touched by the grace of God, and that non-Christians are not alien to the order of grace established by Christ, but related to the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation[365]. Towards the end of the excursus, Oesterreicher writes:

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[362] J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 90-93.

[363] J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 90.

[364] Cited by J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 90-91.

[365] J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 91.

> What has happened, and what is expressed in the Declaration, is the overwhelming realization that mankind bears the seal of Christ, even if it is far from being Christian… [that]… [a]ll men are images of the eternal Word made flesh, however blurred their contours… [that]… [w]hether they know it or not, all have been offered a share in the divine life… [for] [t]he traces of God are everywhere, and we must open our eyes to them… [and that]… [t]hough all these considerations are not expressed in the Declaration in so many words, they are nevertheless basically there»[366].

And immediately after saying this, Oesterreicher asserts: «*They owe much to the work of Karl Rahner*, even though substantially this theology is by no means new»[367].

If Oesterreicher makes this bold assertion on Rahner's essential theological influence on *Nostra Aetate*, at least on its theology of the «omnipresence of grace», is there anything in Rahner's 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», that speaks about the ubiquity of grace which the Council might have adopted? Does the Declaration's inclusivist theology—of the non-Christian world bearing the «seal of Christ», of all persons finding in themselves «images» of the Word incarnate and being offered «a share in divine life», and of everywhere reflecting «traces of God»—reflect footprints of Rahner's theology? The answers to these questions are of course in the affirmative. The entire essay, in fact, grounds its theology on the strong and unambiguous conviction of the universality of God's grace.

Within his treatment of the «second thesis» of the essay, Rahner writes: «And hence we have every right to suppose that grace has not only been offered even outside the Christian Church (to deny this would be the error of Jansenism) but also that, in the great many cases at least, grace gains the victory in man's free acceptance of it,

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[366] J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 92-93; emphasis mine. In our search for Rahner's footprints in *Nostra Aetate*, this assertion of John Oesterreicher may prove to be the most authoritative and substantial remark about Rahner's explicit theological influence on the Declaration.

[367] J. M. Oesterreicher, «Declaration on the Relationship of the Church», 93; emphasis mine.

this being again the result of grace»[368]. On the same page, but which trickles onto the next, Rahner, referring to a non-Christian, affirms: «Once we take all this into consideration, we will not hold it to be impossible that grace is at work, and is even being accepted, in the spiritual, personal life of the individual, no matter how primitive, unenlightened, apathetic and earth-bound such a life may at first sight appear to be»[369]. In fact, for Rahner, the only way to reconcile the two seemingly irreconcilable aspects of God's universal saving will and of Christ's unique salvific mediation is by asserting that every human person is essentially exposed to the influence of divine, transcendental grace which offers supernatural salvation and by means of which God bestows himself to the human whether the person accepts or refuses God's offer of grace, which is God's very self[370].

Without going deeper into this point, Rahner's insight on the ubiquity of grace is intrinsically linked to his concept of God's universal saving will. The reason is obvious: If God wills everyone to be saved, and if salvation is a divine gift that is absolutely gratuitous and totally unmerited, then God must bestow on every human being the grace and means of salvation. God's supernatural saving grace must be given to every person, at least as an offer or in the mode of an offer, prior to any exercise of human freedom. Indeed, «this offer of supernatural, divinizing grace [is] made to all men on account of the universal salvific purpose of God»[371]. Hence, if one seriously believes in God's universal salvific design for all people in Christ, we cannot doubt that gratuitous influences of properly Christian supernatural grace are conceivable in the life of all human beings and that these influences are accepted despite the sinful conditions of men and their seeming estrangement from God[372]. For Rahner, every person ought

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[368] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 124. In an important post-conciliar essay, Rahner reiterates this point: «God's grace is not only offered to man's freedom, but also that it largely prevails universally in this freedom» (K. Rahner, «The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council», 101).

[369] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 124-125.

[370] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 123.

[371] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 123.

[372] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 125.

to and must have always and everywhere the possibility of gaining access to a saving relationship with God, «[o]therwise there could be no question of a serious and also actually effective salvific design of God for all men, in all ages and places»[373].

In his pre-conciliar essay, «Nature and Grace», Rahner speaks of the whole spiritual life of man as being always affected by grace, that grace is not a scarce and infrequent event simply because it is unmerited. For him, «[t]heology has been too long bedevilled by the unavowed supposition that grace would be no longer grace if it were too generously distributed by the love of God»[374]. Speaking about man and religions in his 1962 essay, he declares:

> In fact, if every man who comes into the world is pursued by God's grace—and if one of the effects of this grace, even in its supernatural and salvifically elevating form, is to cause changes in consciousness… then it cannot be true that the actually existing religions do not bear any trace of the fact that all men are in some way affected by grace[375].

And if we have not really seen traces of grace in other religions and their adherents, it is because, for Rahner, «perhaps we may only have looked too superficially and with too little love at the non-Christian religions and so have not really seen them»[376]. He concludes: «It would be wrong [therefore] to regard the pagan as someone who has not yet been touched in any way by God's grace and truth»[377].

And because the human person's entire spiritual life is always and everywhere imbued with grace, thus rendering human existence a *graced* existence, Rahner understands the human as a «spiritual» being who exists with an absolute supernatural orientation. In his book, *Hearers of the Word* (published in 1941), he asserts that «[h]uman persons are spirits and, as such, we always already stand before the infinite God… in the daily drift of our existence… we continually reach out into the domain that only the fullness of God's absolute

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[373] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 128.

[374] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 180.

[375] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 130.

[376] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 130.

[377] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 131.

being can fill»[378]. Calling it the «basic make-up» of the human subject, affirmed in all his acts of knowledge and freedom, Rahner describes man's spiritual nature in this way:

> To be human is to be a spirit…, i.e. to live life while reaching ceaselessly for the absolute, in openness toward God. And this openness toward God is not something that may happen or not happen to us once in a while, as we please. It is the condition of the possibility of what we are and have to be and always also are in our most humdrum daily life. Only that makes us human: that we are always already on the way to God, whether or not we know it expressly, whether or not we will it. We are forever the infinite openness of the finite for God.[379]

For Rahner, it is evident that human beings are constituted as spiritual subjects; God belongs unavoidably to human experience. Whether we open ourselves to or shut ourselves from his presence, our entire life is fundamentally graced and dynamically oriented towards God who is the absolute ground and horizon of our human existence.

In *Gaudium et Spes* 22, we find the Council aligned and consistent with Rahner's understanding of the universality of grace[380]. In the passage in question, the Council declares: «For, by his incarnation, he, the son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man» (GS 22). This conciliar idea re-echoes what Rahner, in his 1962 essay—in speaking about religion as God's relationship to men—affirms: «*This* relationship of God to man is basically the same for all men, because it rests on the Incarnation, death and resurrection of the one Word of God become flesh»[381]. Almost towards the end of the same paragraph, the Constitution asserts: «All this holds true not for Christians only but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly» (GS 22; cf. 2, 16)—a truly Rahnerian insight, as examined at length in the 1962 essay's «second thesis». The reason for this, the conciliar document continues, is that «Christ

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[378] K. Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 54.

[379] K. Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, 53.

[380] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 231.

[381] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 118.

died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery» (GS 22).

2.3.2.5 On the Social Nature of Man and the Historical Character of Religion

The influence of Karl Rahner's pre-conciliar theology of religions on *Ad Gentes* (promulgated on December 7, 1965) can be seen in the opening sentence of Article 3 of the Decree, which specifically argues for the social nature of religion, for the socio-historical character of the human person's relationship to God. The passage reads: «This universal design of God for the salvation of the human race is *not carried out exclusively in the soul of a man, with a kind of secrecy*» (AG 3; emphasis mine).

One of the most significant pre-conciliar insights that Rahner developed in arguing for non-Christian religions as concrete mediations of salvation for their members is the social nature of man and the historical character of religion, that «the inherence of the individual exercise of religion in a social religious order is one of the essential traits of true religion as it exists in practice»[382]. Rahner deepened his theological reflection on this subject in his post-conciliar writings[383], but as early as in his 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», he already spoke about it, and

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[382] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 128.120.

[383] It is a salient feature in Rahner's post-conciliar works dealing with the question of the salvific value of the other religions. Just to cite one example, in *Foundations of Christian Faith*, published in 1976, Rahner goes back to this point: «A person always forms his own secular self-understanding only within a community of persons, in the experience of a history which he never makes alone, in dialogue, and in experience which reproduces the productive self-interpretation of other people. Therefore in his religious experience, too, man is always an interpersonal being, and this extends to the ultimate uniqueness of his subjectivity. The historical self-interpretation of one's own religious existence is not a solipsistic affair, but takes place necessarily in and through the historical experience of the religious self-interpretation of one's own world, of one's own "religious community"» (K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 160).

he did so quite lengthily, as we will see below. In fact, in a much earlier article, on «The Dignity and Freedom of Man», delivered as an address in 1952 and eventually published in 1955, Rahner already spoke about the social nature of man and antedated, to a certain extent, his affirmation in his 1962 essay on this subject:

> *He is* (qua *human* person) *an incarnate, mundane person* who realizes himself in his ultimate core only in a spatio-temporal, pluralistic expansion, in concern for his bodily existence... and within a community communicated in a tangible manner.... The personality of man, therefore, cannot be relegated to an absolutely internal realm. It requires of necessity a certain space for realizing itself. Such a space, although it is to a certain extent 'external' to it... is nevertheless essentially necessary and hence must be constructed that it permits personal self-realization. Seen even from this point of view, a retreat into the merely 'private', the inner 'conscience', the 'sacristy', etc., is contrary to nature[384].

In a very important statement in «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions» on this particular theme that must have influenced the passage (of *Ad Gentes* 3) in question, Rahner argues:

> In view of the social nature of man and the previously even more radical social solidarity of men, however, it is quite unthinkable that man, being what he is, could actually achieve this relationship to God… in an absolutely private interior reality and this outside of the actual religious bodies which offer themselves to him in the environment in which he lives[385].

As we have previously seen, in order to safeguard the question of God's serious and truly efficacious saving will for all people, Rahner argues that human beings must have, always and everywhere, the possibility of participating in a genuine salvific relationship with God, which is what religion is all about, religion being «God's relationship to men» and man's «right relationship to God»[386]. Moreover, in the concreteness of human existence, «the nature of religion... must include a social constitution—which means that religion can exist

[384] K. Rahner, «The Dignity and Freedom of Man», 239-240; emphasis in the original.

[385] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 128.

[386] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 118.125.

only in a social form», which means further that man as a *homo religiosus* must «seek and accept a social form of religion»[387]. Thus, if a person possesses a positive, saving relationship to God, he can have it only «within *that* religion which in practice was at his disposal by being a factor in his sphere of existence»[388]. No human being can live religious life as «something intangibly interior», as something that is «performed only indirectly, a merely transcendental religion without anything which could become tangible in categories»[389].

For Rahner, the non-Christian's response to God's self-communication can never be understood as a purely inward, private affair that has nothing to do with the concrete existential demands of his socio-historical situation, or as a kind of human response to God that is devoid of any social and communal expression. Simply put, «[a] human being is called to be a "religious person" in order to attain salvation, but he becomes this religious person in the concrete religion in which he finds himself»[390]. Hence, the essentially social character of human existence—which necessitates some kind of social articulations and communal manifestations of believers' response to God—demands that, when Christianity is not a viable option for a group of people, due, for instance, to what Rahner terms as «the absence of any sufficient historical encounter with Christianity»[391], it

[387] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 120.

[388] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 128.

[389] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 129.

[390] J. H. Wong, «Anonymous Christians», 614.

[391] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 121.

must be within God's providential design that they articulate their worship of God in the religion that is accessible to them in society[392].

Because religion is inescapably social in nature, to think that non-Christian believers could be saved apart from their religions—institutions that mediate saving grace—would be to think of these people as ahistorical and asocial beings. To deny to non-Christian religions a role—and a positive role for that matter—in the salvation of their own adherents would mean contradicting the social, historical and incarnational character of the economy of salvation. It is tantamount to believing that salvation can assume an asocial and ahistorical form. Consequently, non-Christian religions can be generally considered «as a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for the attaining of salvation, a means

[392] Walbert Bühlmann articulates Rahner's insight on other religions as ways of salvation for their members based on the social nature of man and religion in a quite extensive way: «Daily experience demonstrates that the human being is a religious being. In all the painful marginal situations of life—illness, failure, death; and even in gladness, which is never full and never lasts—we look out beyond ourselves, questioning and hoping, and are gripped by an ultimate mystery in our life. This same human being is by constitution a social being. He or she will therefore exteriorize religious feelings and strivings in religious activity. This activity, in turn, will concretize within the clan or tribal unit in set prayers, rites, and exercises. If, in order to achieve salvation, a human being must follow his or her conscience, and that conscience directs them to these ancestral rites—hence to a religion—it follows immediately that this human being is obligated to live a life of fidelity to this religion. But then, if we are logical, this religion must have been foreseen and willed in God's salvation plan, and this human being will be saved in and by practising it.... We must therefore conclude that the religions, too, perform a God-given function» (W. Bühlmann, *The Chosen Peoples*, 222-223). Following Rahner's argument and his conclusion, Walter Kasper, in a lecture given in Nagpur, India in 1971, argues: «Historically and concretely, God's saving grace normally encounters man not isolated in the solitude of his conscience but within his total socio-cultural situation. Normally man, particularly the "simple", little educated, unenlightened man, lives his religious life in the forms which are proposed to him through his religious community. Here he normally encounters what for him, in his historical situation, is the final binding call of conscience. On that basis the non-Christian religions can be means of salvation for such a man. He will not be saved despite his religion but rather in his religion but *through* Christ» (W. Kasper, «Are Non-Christian Religions Salvific?», 165; emphasis in the original).

which is therefore positively included in God's plan of salvation»393. Indeed, if non-Christians are saved—something that, as Rahner insists, we have to think optimistically if we are to believe seriously in the universal and efficacious salvific will of God for all men—then they are saved through and not despite their own religions. Commenting on this, Knitter remarks: «Subsequently, he [Rahner] attempted to show how the council opened doors to a genuinely new stage in the history of the church—an opening, he suggests, of which many of the conciliar fathers were not fully aware»394.

James Fredericks articulates his nuanced observation about this particular extract from *Ad Gentes*. It is true that in this particular passage from *Ad Gentes* 3 we find a conciliar text that is not simply consistent with Rahner's theology of religions in general, but also appears to have been conceptually lifted from his 1962 essay on the social nature of man and the historical character of religions. However, while this conciliar text «move[s] in a Rahnerian direction to the extent that… [it]… recognize[s] grace to be operative and efficacious in the lives of people who are not Christians», for Fredericks, this text «do[es] not go as far as Rahner would in recognizing the other religious paths themselves as mediations of Christ's salvation»[395]. In other words, «[n]owhere in its documents does the council unambiguously recognize the other religions as actual mediations of the saving grace of Jesus Christ as Rahner argues in his theology»[396]. Commenting on Fredericks' conclusion, Peter Phan affirms that Fredericks «correctly summarizes Vatican II's position on non-Christian religions», but that as regards the last quotation, «[t]he operative word here is "unambiguously," since Fredericks himself acknowledges that there are passages in Vatican II's documents (e.g. *Gaudium et Spes 22* [sic] *and Ad Gentes 3*) that seem to lean towards Rahner's position»[397].

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[393] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 125.

[394] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 125.

[395] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 231.

[396] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 233.

[397] P. C. Phan, «John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue», 245.

At any rate, in this concrete citation from *Ad Gentes*, we see clearly the trace of Rahner's pre-conciliar insight on the social dimension of religion, and therefore, of Rahner's influence on this Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity.

2.3.2.6 On Nature and Grace

As we have seen above, while both Daniélou and Rahner believe that nature and grace must be distinguished, Daniélou's distinction is so «sharp» that his distinction amounts to separation. In contrast to Daniélou, Rahner distinguishes but does not make a strict separation between the natural and the supernatural orders within the human person and in the world. For Rahner, while the two orders must indeed be distinguished, they cannot be separated precisely because nature, the whole of created reality, is graced from the very beginning. What Rahner's distinction but non-separation between nature and grace implies for his evaluation of non-Christian religions will become clear in the discussion below.

In his 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», in which he speaks of «nature and grace» only once, Rahner asserts: «[O]ne cannot regard nature and grace as two phases in the life of the individual which follow each other in time»[398]. The essay may be scarce in terms of references to this particular subject matter, but, as we will see below, this single sentence on nature *and* grace appears as a lapidary summary of what Rahner has been saying on this topic in his pre-conciliar writings. We should only look at Volume I of his *Theological Investigations*, which was published in 1954, and we will find a couple of articles on nature and grace and on uncreated grace: «Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace» and «Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace». Volume IV of the *Theological Investigations*, which was published in 1960, also includes an essay on «Nature and Grace».

Briefly stated, Catholic theology on nature and grace since the mid-nineteenth century up to the years before the Second Vatican

[398] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 123.

Council, a theology embodied in a doctrine called «extrinsecism»[399] (or extrinsicism), was characterized by the neo-scholastic *duplex ordo* theology[400]. In this extrinsicist view, and in Rahner's own words, grace appears as «a superstructure beyond the realm of consciousness… acknowledged to be the most sublime and divine element in man, his only salutary possession»[401], «a mere superstructure, very fine in itself certainly, which is imposed upon nature by God's free decree»[402]. Nature, on the other hand, is «that which we know about ourselves without the word of revelation.... [N]ature alone and its acts are the components of the life which we experience as our own»[403]. Such a neoscholastic theology proclaims a two-storied world, a double-decker world consisting of «grace» on top and of «nature» below regarded as substantially separate from each other. For in this «two-tiered» theology, grace is seen merely as an accidental add-on which, by remaining beyond human experience, has little to do with nature and its transformation. Thus, much of human existence is perceived to be unaffected by grace, which is superimposed on nature viewed as self-contained and self-sufficient. In other words, «the relationship between nature and grace is conceived in such a way that they appear as two layers so carefully placed that they penetrate each other as little as possible»[404], grace as being just «a superstructure imposed from without upon a nature in itself indifferent with regard to it»[405].

When grace is viewed in this way, as a mere superstructure appended to the soul or as an embellishment extrinsic to nature, God cannot be regarded as the absolute goal and deepest longing of the human, even if such an addendum may bring ultimate perfection to

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[399] K. Rahner, «Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace», 298.

[400] D. Coffey, «The Whole Rahner on the Supernatural Existential», 103.

[401] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 166.

[402] K. Rahner, «Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace», 298.

[403] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 167.

[404] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 167.

[405] K. Rahner, «Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace», 303.

human nature. If «[o]f itself, nature would find its perfection just as readily and harmoniously in its own proper realm, in a purely natural end, without an immediate intuition of God in the beatific vision»[406], it is difficult to contemplate the «desirability» of such a grace, why nature «'should have much time for' these highest goods»[407] . If this is the case, «then it is not surprising—though not of course justifiable—that man should take very little interest in this mysterious superstructure of his being. After all, he does not find grace where he finds himself, in the immediate activation of his spiritual being»[408]. And because «this supernatural was displaced into a region beyond consciousness, as an unconscious modality of what was spiritual and moral in nature, ... it was very hard to say what use it was at all»[409]. In this understanding of grace, the human vocation to supernatural communion not only appears as a disturbance to nature, which otherwise acts in its own sphere; this view also risks ascribing everything that man experiences *to* nature even though all are in fact experiences of grace or of graced nature[410]. «[T]he supernatural character of grace does not mean that man is in fact a closed, self-contained and finished system, which he can work out in his 'natural' existence, while grace is a sort of pure superstructure imposed on it, but leaving the lower element unaltered in itself»[411].

For Rahner, there is no such thing as «pure nature» or purely natural human existence, for the whole of human life is permeated by God's grace. There is never any human being to whom God has not communicated himself, has not made his divine self-offer in Christ; the ungraced person, the purely natural individual, for Rahner, simply does not exist. There never was a time when human nature was *only* «pure nature» devoid of grace; there never existed a time

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[406] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 167.

[407] K. Rahner, «Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace», 298.

[408] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 168.

[409] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 168.

[410] Cf. K. Rahner, «Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace», 300.

[411] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 173.

when human nature was un-graced or graceless. Human existence was never without God's grace, and we have no experience of human life that was without grace, because we are conditioned by that grace even when we refuse it in sin and unbelief. «The whole spiritual life of man is constantly affected by grace» because human nature is «a nature which is continually being determined... by the supernatural grace of salvation offered to it»[412]. When we consider that all human beings in their concrete existence live within the sphere of the supernatural existential that is due to God's universal saving will, no clear and absolute demarcation line can therefore be drawn between nature and grace—no one can easily delineate what in human life is of nature and what belongs to grace because human nature is *graced* in its deepest constitution. In his 1960 essay, «Nature and Grace», Rahner argues:

> Our whole spiritual life is lived in the realm of the salvific will of God, of his prevenient grace, of his call as it becomes efficacious: all of which is an element within the region of our consciousness, though one which remains anonymous as long as it is not interpreted from without by the message of faith. Even when he does not 'know' it and does not believe it, that is, even when he cannot make it an individual object of knowledge by merely inward reflexion, man always lives consciously in the presence of the triune God of eternal life[413].

An important, logical question may be raised: What does this theology of nature and grace imply for what is said (and may be said in other parts of the dissertation) about grace in non-Christian religions?

In an insight that paved the way for what he would say more forcefully in his 1962 article, Rahner, in his 1960 essay, «Nature and Grace», mentioned above, enunciates what his theology of the relationship between nature and grace implies as regards the question of the non-Christians:

> Thus when man is summoned by the message of faith given by the visible Church, it is not the first time that he comes into spiritual contact with the reality preached by the Church: such conceptual

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[412] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 180.183.

[413] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 180-181.

> knowledge of it is not primary. The call only makes him consciously aware of—and of course forces him to make a choice about—the grace which already encompassed him inarticulately but really as an element of his spiritual existence. The preaching is the express awakening of what is already present in the depths of man's being, not by nature, but by grace. But it is grace which always surrounds man, even the sinner and the unbeliever, as the inescapable setting of his existence[414].

In his essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», Rahner asserts that, since saving grace is always and everywhere already at work and operative in every human being in the concreteness of the social and historical circumstances of his life, it would be a mistake to treat the pagan as a person who has not yet been touched in any way by God's grace and truth[415]. Another more explicit response of Rahner to the above query appears elsewhere in the same 1960 article in the form of questions:

> Who can say that the utterances of earthly philosophy, even of a completely non-Christian or pre-Christian type, are merely the voice of pure nature (and perhaps of its guilt)? May they not be the sighing of the creature, secretly moved by the Holy Spirit of grace, which longs for the glory of the children of God and already unwittingly feels itself to be such a child of God?[416]

And if this grace, referred to in both essays, always takes a visible and tangible form in the religions of the world, then there is no basis for excluding the various religions of humanity from the supernatural influence of grace. We should rather view these religions as mediating concretely the saving grace of Christ to their adherents.

Indeed, Rahner's pre-conciliar writings on the relation between nature and grace, which distinguish but never strictly separate the natural and the supernatural orders, must have influenced and contributed to much of Vatican II's positive attitude and optimistic outlook towards the non-Christians and their religious traditions. When asked, in an interview, about the lasting significance of Vatican II, Rahner pointed

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[414] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 181.

[415] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 131.

[416] K. Rahner, «Nature and Grace», 187.

out, among others, the «end» of neoscholasticism in the Catholic Church, of a neoscholastic period of theology in the Church[417]. If this is so, that means that the Second Vatican Council put an end to the extrinsicist conception of grace, to the neoscholastic extrinsicism of making a strict separation between nature and grace[418].

2.3.2.7 On «Elements of Truth and Grace» in the Religions

Perhaps, the most famous conciliar expression that has been universally attributed to Karl Rahner and his 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», is the expression, «elements of truth and grace», found in *Ad Gentes* 9. After saying that missionary activity, which involves preaching and the celebration of the sacraments, especially of the Eucharist, makes Christ present, AG 9 continues: «It purges of evil associations those *elements of truth and grace* which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God».

In Jacques Dupuis' book, *Christianity and the Religions*, the author mentions the expression, «elements of truth and grace» (or elements of «truth and grace»), seven times. Out of seven references, he indicates five times that its conciliar source is *Ad Gentes* 9, and twice that the Second Vatican Council «lifted» this expression from Rahner's 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions»[419]. Dupuis argues that, on the basis of Rahner's philosophical and theological analysis of the "supernatural existential" inherent in the humanity of every person, Rahner «was able to counter Karl Barth rather explicitly with his assertion that "elements of truth and grace" exist and may be found in every religious tradition in the world»[420]. Then Dupuis continues, saying: «It may be noted in passing that the Rahnerian expression, the "elements of truth and grace," used in an

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[417] K. Rahner, *I Remember*, 89.

[418] It was a wish that Rahner expressed as early as 1954 (the year the essay was published in *Theological Investigations*, Volume I), when he wrote: «It would seem to be a genuine concern of theology to put an end to the extrinsecism» (K. Rahner, «Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace», 303).

[419] Cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 8-9.64.160.241.256-257.

[420] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 8-9.

essay originally published in 1961, was taken up by Vatican II—even though most of the member bishops were unaware of it!—in *Ad Gentes* § 9 (1965)»[421]. In the second place where the conciliar expression's provenance from Rahner is mentioned, Dupuis asserts that the expression «elements of "truth and grace" (*Ad Gentes* § 9)» was «borrowed from an essay written by Karl Rahner shortly before the council»[422].

A personal observation. I have read this article in its English translation several times, looking precisely for the expression «elements of truth and grace», but have not found it. The closest resemblance to this phrase is found on page 131 of the essay: «It would be wrong to regard the pagan as someone who has not yet been touched by God's *grace and truth*». Since Dupuis claims that this expression has been lifted (or borrowed) by the Council from Rahner's 1962 essay, I was expecting to find an exact expression, or verbatim, from his essay. Elsewhere in the essay, Rahner speaks of «supernatural grace-filled elements in non-Christian religions» (p. 121), «elements of a supernatural influence by grace» (p. 131); in many places he speaks of «grace» and «supernatural grace». But nowhere is the so-called Rahnerian expression, «elements of truth and grace», precisely found. Paul Knitter seems to be guilty of the same mistake when he remarks that «*Ad Gentes* lifts a phrase directly from Rahner's 1962 essay when it recognizes in the religions "elements of truth and grace" (9)»[423], without mentioning the particular page from which this so-called Rahnerian expression is lifted. Another writer guilty of such a slip is Eugene Gorski who, after claiming expressly that «*Ad Gentes*.... uses a phrase directly taken from Karl Rahner's 1962 essay, when it recognizes in the religions "elements of truth and grace" (AG 9)»[424], similarly provides the entire pages of Rahner's essay instead of *the* page from which the expression must

[421] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 8-9. Contrary to Dupuis' claim that the essay was published in 1961, it may be recalled here that the essay was published only in 1962, from a lecture that was given in 1961.

[422] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 64.

[423] P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 76.

[424] E. F. Gorski, *Theology of Religions*, 261.

have actually been taken. Without mentioning that the expression «grace and truth» (not «truth and grace», as is found in AG 9) hails from Rahner's famous 1962 essay, Gerald O'Collins argues that «*Ad Gentes*, *Lumen Gentium*, and *Nostra Aetate* did… all follow Rahner (and others) in speaking of the elements of 'grace and truth' to be found in those who had not or had not yet heard and accepted the gospel»[425]. O'Collins' employment of the expression, in the order in which he has distinctly arranged the two words in the sentence cited, indicates that he has quoted the essay on page 131, for the two words exist on that page in such order, albeit without mentioning it in a footnote, or without coming up with a footnote at all.

While I expect that Dupuis, Knitter, Gorski and O'Collins cite Rahner's essay in a very accurate manner when they say that this conciliar phrase, «elements of truth and grace», precisely comes from Rahner's 1962 article, I ask: Is this important expression from *Ad Gentes*, which has been universally held as having been «lifted» from Rahner's 1962 essay, a case of something «lost in translation», something that perhaps literally exists in the original German version, but which has disappeared in the English translation? And hence, when Dupuis and others claim that this *Ad Gentes* expression is derived from the essay of Rahner, might they actually be referring to the essay in its original German? But again, in two places where Dupuis explicitly argues that this expression came from Rahner's essay, he offers in the footnotes Rahner's article *in* English, and *not in* German, and instead of specifying the exact page on which this phrase can be found, he provides the pages of the entire article. Or is it possible that this expression simply sums up what Rahner may have been saying in the essay, that the non-Christian religions contain «elements of truth and grace»?

The answer to this last question is in the affirmative: Rahner's entire essay speaks of the presence of the «elements of truth and grace» in other religions. Hence, we can still affirm that *Ad Gentes*' expression, «elements of truth and grace» (AG 9), truly comes from the collective meaning and spirit of Rahner's 1962 article, and signifies precisely what Rahner wants to convey in this essay about

[425] G. O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 56.

non-Christian religions—that extra-Christian religions contain «supernatural, grace-filled elements»[426]. It may be the case that this *Ad Gentes*' expression, «elements of truth and grace», lives in the minds of many post-conciliar theologians, who then tend to identify it as Rahner's actual words, whereas in fact it may only be a kind of summary of Rahner's ideas in his article on «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions». In fact, O'Collins adds that the Council Fathers in Vatican II «were to align themselves with Rahner in recognizing the *'grace-filled elements'* in world religions, presumably understanding such elements to be 'supernatural'»[427].

One last thing before we close this particular discussion. If the «elements of truth and grace» found in non-Christian religions are a kind of «secret presence» of God in these religions (AG 9), therefore God is present in the other religions. His presence may be «secret», but it is nonetheless «real». And if God is present in these religious traditions, albeit in a secret manner, therefore divine revelation and salvation—the latter being achieved through faith which is the human response to God's revelation—are present and operative in non-Christian religions. It is difficult to think that God is present in these religions but abstains from doing any revealing and saving activity among their adherents, when God's fundamental and universal will is to save all human beings. This «secret presence of God» among people who have not yet encountered the Gospel enables them to perceive the message precisely as a Christian message since a non-Christian «has already been given revelation in a true sense even before he has been affected by missionary preaching from without»[428]. And the revelation which comes to him from outside «is not in such a case a proclamation of something as yet absolutely unknown... [but]... the expression in objective concepts of something which this person has already attained or could already have attained in the depths of his rational existence»[429].

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[426] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 121.122.130.

[427] G. O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 57.

[428] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 131.

[429] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 131.

Having said this, we must say that the recognition of the «elements of truth and grace» found and operative in the other religions which prompts the cognizance of «a sort of secret presence of God» in these religions enunciates the concern of the Catholic Church's inclusivist understanding of Christianity. In fact, it is this explicit acknowledgment of such «elements» in the religious traditions of the world in *Ad Gentes*, together with those relevant texts from *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Nostra Aetate*, that theologians draw on to ground the Council's more positive vision as regards the question of the salvific value of non-Christian religions[430]. In fact, Peter Phan argues that it is the Council's «affirmation of the presence of "elements of truth and grace"—a phrase borrowed from Karl Rahner—in non-Christian religions that is theologically significant for interreligious dialogue»[431]. Indeed, even if the Council did not venture to call these religions «ways» or «mediations» of salvation, in spite of its openness to and its recognition of the positive values and elements within them, still a question may be asked whether this is not at least partly implicit when Vatican II recognizes in these religious traditions a «secret presence of God» through the «elements of truth and grace» contained in them.

2.3.2.8 Conclusion

Not only are the footprints of Rahner's theology of religions, which he initially developed in his 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», quite evident in Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes*, and *Gaudium et Spes* that deal with the question; some of his theological «expressions» in the essay—such as «grace and truth», «self-communication», and «dialogue»—also pepper the same conciliar documents[432]. This essay of Rahner offers us his conviction on the universality of God's saving will for humanity

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[430] J. Dupuis, «A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*», 124; ID., *Christianity and the Religions*, 73.

[431] P. C. Phan, «John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue», 243-244. Recalling what we have been saying above, this is another instance of a theologian who claims that the expression «elements of truth and grace» has been borrowed from Rahner without bothering to cite its actual source from Rahner's work.

[432] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 152.

which makes divine grace ubiquitous, his understanding of the social nature and character of man and religion, his notion of nature and grace as not separate realms within the individual, society and human history, and his assertion that the other religions contain «elements of truth and grace». When we combine all these insights of Rahner discussed in this sub-section based primarily—but not exclusively—on this essay, then the logical conclusion is that non-Christians are reached by God's grace in the very religions offered them by the concrete reality of their human existence. This is Rahner's conclusion in his theology of religions, a conclusion whose premises are found precisely in this groundbreaking essay and in his other pre-conciliar writings. Rahner's insights explored in this section may indeed be utilized as «avenues» through which his conclusion that religions are ways of salvation for their members may be viewed and understood.

2.3.3 *The Dispute Between Jean Daniélou's and Karl Rahner's Theologies of Religions Unsettled in Vatican II*

Vatican II, as evidenced by the presence of both Daniélou's and Rahner's theologies of religions in some conciliar documents, did not settle the theological controversy between these two theologians on the precise relation between nature and grace, between the natural and the supernatural spheres. Jacques Dupuis offers three reasons[433] why the Second Vatican Council, having its sessions in the midst of a theological-doctrinal debate that drifted in the very door of the Council, could not declare itself in favor of one of the two theological opinions.

First, for Dupuis, Vatican II had no intention of making a choice between these two opinions because its perspective was pastoral

[433] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 59-60.

rather than doctrinal[434]; and when it came to the question of the non-Christian religions, the Council's aim was simply to foster new and fresh attitudes of mutual understanding, esteem, dialogue and cooperation between Christianity and the other religions. In its pursuit of such a goal, it was deemed unnecessary for the Council to opt for a particular theological position in the ongoing debate on this ticklish issue among bishops and theologians present at the Council.

Second, having come from vastly different theological backgrounds, which would render the Council Fathers strongly divided on the properly theological issues, the Council's intention was just to garner the highest possible majority on the Council floor in favor of a change of attitude and mentality of the Catholic Church towards the adherents of the other religions, an objective that could not be jeopardized by entering into intricate theological discourses.

Third, for Dupuis, it is important to situate Vatican II in the long conciliar history of the Catholic Church. Although beginning in the sixteenth century, the Church, in the Council of Trent, with its doctrine of «baptism of desire», had solemnly upheld the possibility of salvation of non-Christian individuals, which had been reaffirmed by later Church documents, the Catholic Church over the centuries had never made any official statement, conciliar or otherwise, on religions as such, let alone in any positive fashion. The Second Vatican Council was the first Council in the long doctrinal history of the Church to speak positively about non-Christian religions. In its effort to put an end to past prejudices and negative assessment of non-Christian religions, which could be achieved only by pointing to and affirming

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[434] In his introductory remarks on *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Avery Dulles writes: «Although called a Dogmatic Constitution, the most solemn form of conciliar utterance, *Lumen Gentium* does not actually define any new dogmas…. In accordance with Pope John's directive that the Council should be predominantly pastoral in character, Vatican II wished to propose its teaching without anathemas and condemnations» (A. Dulles, «The Church», 11). While saying this, Vatican II's approach to the issue of the religions is not purely pragmatic and bereft of any doctrinal import, for its pastoral approach to this question had to be established on some doctrinal foundation (Cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 61).

the presence of positive elements and values in such religions, Vatican II, then, «could not be satisfied to speak about the orientation of non-Christian *individuals* to the church… [but]… had to speak—and did so in a positive manner for the first time in conciliar history—about a relationship of the church to non-Christian religions as such»[435].

For Dupuis, therefore, to offer an affirmative answer to the important question of whether the Second Vatican Council regards the other religions as «means» or «ways» of salvation for their adherents would mean going beyond the explicit teaching of the Council. All that can be affirmed is that «the Council's positive approach and its explicit recognition of "elements of grace" in those traditions goes in that direction, opening the way for theological elaborations which would further develop such a view»[436]. From a brief and hurried survey of the Council's theology of religions, the following conclusions may, according to Dupuis, be drawn:

> The relevant texts of the council, without wishing to take sides on disputed doctrinal issues, display a certain openness toward the other religious traditions which, while remaining limited, is without precedent in previous official documents of the church. While never formally recognizing in the other religious traditions channels of salvation for their members, the council seems to incline in that direction by implication when it acknowledges the existence in those traditions not merely of positive human values but also of elements of "truth and grace" "through a hidden presence of God in the midst of the peoples" (AG §9)[437].

In Gerard O'Collins' brief discussion of Daniélou's and Rahner's theologies of religions before the Council in his book, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, he concludes:

> Despite Daniélou's considerable influence at the Council, *Nostra Aetate* was to acknowledge, with a clear nod towards John 1:9, that the religions often 'reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all people' (no. 2). Hence it is insufficient to say that they are merely

[435] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 61.

[436] J. Dupuis, «A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*», 124.

[437] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 73.

> 'creations of human genius', simply human attempts to know God and achieve salvation through one's own resources. They also express 'gestures' of God towards human beings. As we will see later, *Lumen Gentium* and, even more, *Nostra Aetate* also implied that divine revelation comes to those of extra-Christian religions, while *Ad Gentes* clearly presents revelation as a universal reality. Yet Daniélou's view of other religions doubtless helped to inhibit the Council from ever clearly stating (as Rahner did above) that the religions were in any way positively intended by God and were genuine, if imperfect, ways of salvation for their followers. Moreover, Daniélou's vision of the extra-Christian religions merely expressing a human search for God cast a long shadow over the reception of Vatican II's teaching on those religions and their followers[438].

Indeed, Vatican II did not formally espouse either one or the other of the two ways proposed by Daniélou and Rahner respectively. Again, while it seemed predisposed to the more positive vision adopted and put forward by Rahner, «it nevertheless left the theological debate open»[439]. However, in the conciliar discussion on the theology of religions, the rigid interpretation of the ancient axiom, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, was definitely excluded, as pointed out in Chapter 1—a process that began as early as in the 1949 «Boston Heresy Case» involving Fr. Leonard Feeney.

I wish to make a couple of comments on our present discussion before we move to the examination of Daniélou's and Rahner's influence on some of the post-conciliar documents. First, if it is true, as Vatican II implies, that adherents of other religions can be reached by the grace of Christ and thus be saved in a mysterious way precisely by being part of their traditions, and if salvation is essentially always God's initiative, which means that human beings can never be saved unless God bestows upon them his saving grace, then Daniélou's conclusion that religions are merely a human search for God devoid

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[438] G. O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 59. For Dupuis, «[t]he fulfillment theory proposed by Daniélou…. has had a significant impact on the magisterium of the church, and it is still found in some post-Vatican II documents» (J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 50).

[439] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 74.

of grace, of Christ, and of God's gift is untenable. After all, «[t]he human person does not have the initiative in searching for God; God's self-gift in Jesus Christ is the source of our search for him»[440]. Secondly, it can be observed, as regards the conciliar passages and texts indicative of Daniélou's and Rahner's theologies of religions, that even if Daniélou's and Rahner's views can each be glimpsed in some conciliar passages, still those texts that reflect Rahner's theology (GS 22; LG 13, 16; AG 7; NA 2) seem to be more foundational of Vatican II theology of religions as seen in their being consistently cited by authors dealing with the Council's theology of religions.

2.4 **Tracing Jean Daniélou's and Karl Rahner's Theologies of Religions in Some Post-Vatican II Church Documents**

Because the Second Vatican Council did not settle the theological controversy between Daniélou and Rahner on the question of the precise relation between nature and grace, the argument was left open concerning the question of the salvific character of non-Christian religions and their role and place in God's all-embracing plan of salvation. Indeed, for Paul Knitter, while «Vatican II forms a watershed in Roman Catholic attitudes toward others faiths», there still remains «a residual ambiguity in its understanding of just how effective the truth and grace within the religions are»[441]. Such a «residual ambiguity», which in effect means the absence of an unambiguous affirmation on the salvific status and import of non-Christian religions, has trickled down to the post-conciliar statements on the other religions. Hence, for Jacques Dupuis, «[i]t is not surprising that the question that Vatican II had left unanswered surfaced often in post-conciliar discussions, in particular, in theological conferences and congresses»[442]. Likewise, Giuseppe Alberigo, writing twenty years after the Second Vatican Council, observed: «At present, the postconciliar period is marked largely by

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[440] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 53.

[441] P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 124; cf. J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 67.

[442] J. Dupuis, «Interreligious Dialogue in the Church's Evangelizing Mission», 243.

a continuation of the tensions experienced at the Council itself; nor it is an accident that almost all the leading figures on all sides today attended the Council»[443]. Let us investigate relevant post-conciliar Church documents and see where they align themselves in the debate[444].

2.4.1 *Paul VI's 1975* Evangelii Nuntiandi

First, we examine Pope Paul VI and his 1975 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), which views non-Christian religions in a quite positive manner. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 53, the Pope looks at these religious traditions with respect and esteem because «they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people», «have taught generations of people how to pray», and are, therefore, «natural religious expressions worthy of esteem». However, for Paul VI, these religions merely «carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart». Because «[t]hey are all impregnated with innumerable "seeds of the Word"», they «can constitute a true «preparation for the Gospel». Hence, in a statement that is reminiscent of Daniélou's sharp distinction between Christianity and the other religions, the Exhortation argues: «In other words, our religion [Christianity] effectively establishes with God an authentic and living relationship which the other religions do not succeed in doing, even though they

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[443] G. Alberigo, «The Christian Reception after Vatican II», 8.

[444] My intention in this sub-section is not to examine all post-Vatican II documents of the Church that deal with the theology of religions, whether wholly or partly, and even if I consider only some documents, I do not also intend to examine them in their entirety. My aim is simply to cite some passages from several post-conciliar documents and show that there is a kind of «flip-flopping» between Daniélou's and Rahner's theologies of religions among these documents. A more thorough exploration of the Church's post-conciliar documents dealing with this subject will be done in Chapter 4.

have, as it were, their arms outstretched towards heaven»[445]. The other religions are mere human efforts to reach the Divine.

Commenting on this particular paragraph of the document, Francis Sullivan observes «two faces» of Paul VI's thought—«esteem for the spiritual values to be found in non-Christian religions, and at the same time a sharp contrast between them and Christianity»—and inquires as to how the Pope «understand[s] these two aspects of his thought to be consistent with one another»[446]. He asks:

> If the non-Christian religions are "all impregnated with innumerable seeds of the Word," how can they be merely natural expressions of religious striving toward God? Would not the presence in them of such "seeds of the Word" mean that the Holy Spirit had sown these seeds, as Vatican II suggested (AG 15)? Would not the elements of "truth and grace" to be found among them manifest a "sort of secret presence of God," as Vatican II also said they would (AG 9)?[447].

For Sullivan, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, it is quite clear that between the two opposing theologies of religions discussed above, Paul VI opted for the direction taken by Daniélou and not the one taken by Rahner and many other respected Catholic theologians[448].

2.4.2 *John Paul II's 1979* Redemptor Hominis

We now look at Pope John Paul II and some of his writings on the subject of the theology of religions. For James Fredericks, John Paul II was one theologian who made a significant contribution to this theological question, who tried to address the reality of religious pluralism by developing a theology of the Holy Spirit, his personal contribution that goes beyond the teaching of the Second Vatican

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[445] Compare *Evangelii Nuntiandi*'s expression that non-Christian religions do not succeed in establishing a genuine and living relationship with God even with «their arms outstretched towards heaven» (EN 53), with Daniélou's sentence quoted above that non-Christian religions «are touching and often very beautiful attempts, rising very high in their search for God» (J. Daniélou, *The Salvation of the Nations*, 8).

[446] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 185.189.

[447] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 189.

[448] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 189.

Council[449]. Yet, although the Pope's theology of religions can be generally described as pneumatological, the first two Encyclicals that will be discussed below, while containing some important insights on the Holy Spirit, are actually about Jesus Christ, his identity and his mission in God's economy of salvation.

In his first Encyclical Letter, *Redemptor Hominis* (RH), published on March 4, 1979, John Paul II explicitly recognizes that «the firm belief of the followers of the non-Christian religions» is «an effect of the Holy Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body» (RH 6). If this is so, if the Holy Spirit is present and active in the belief of the non-Christians, then it is hard to maintain that such a «firm belief» does not contain anything salvific at all for the adherents of the other religions. However, there is an insight in the Encyclical that is more celebrated than this implicit acknowledgement of the salvific role of the Holy Spirit in the religious life of non-Christians, and it is a statement about the identity and saving role of Jesus Christ in RH 14. We can discern the import of this insight by considering a couple of comments about John Paul II's first Encyclical that are relevant to our present discussion.

Firstly, Gerald Anderson, in his response to Pietro Rossano's speech entitled «Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism in Roman Catholic Perspective», argues that this Encyclical, in no. 14, contains the most creative and significant insight in the whole document by relating the redemption in Jesus Christ to every human being without exception. For Anderson, this insight constitutes «the single most

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[449] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 233. In trying to investigate Pope John Paul II's «theology of religions»—whether it bears affinities with Rahner's theology or with Daniélou's—one has to look not only at his writings (Encyclicals, Exhortations and Apostolic Letters) but also at his «gestures» (his visits to synagogues, mosques and temples). In fact, one also has to consider his radio «addresses», even if they were eventually published. Yet, in this section, we will modestly examine only his papal writings, and only those that pertain to the theme of our present discussion. For a quite elaborate discussion of this theme, please see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.4 which partly explores John Paul II's Encyclicals, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), *Dominum et Vivificantem* (1986), and *Redemptoris Missio* (1990).

significant doctrinal statement of the Catholic Church for mission theology since Vatican II»[450]. *Redemptor Hominis* 14 affirms that

> [t]he human person—every person without exception—has been redeemed by Christ; because Christ is in a way united to the human person—every person without exception—even if the individual may not realize this fact. "Christ, who died and was raised up for all"—for every human being and for all human beings—"can through His Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny."

According to Anderson, paragraph 14 of this Encyclical has attained such an importance because while the view that «every person without exception... has been redeemed by Christ» «is grounded in biblical and patristic testimony, and has never been entirely absent from Catholic doctrine, it has seldom—if ever—been singled out in the official teaching of the church with such clarity and visibility for the kind of unqualified emphasis that is given to it here by Pope John Paul II»[451].

Secondly, also commenting on *Redemptor Hominis*, Gregory Baum asserts that by making this «new», «startling» and repeated emphasis «on the redemptive presence of Jesus Christ to the entire human family—to people everywhere, to every single human being in his or her concrete historical situation», John Paul II «*takes sides here with modern theologians like Karl Rahner* who, assimilating an ancient patristic theme, look upon the incarnation as the revelation of God's union with the entire human family»[452]. This Encyclical indicates that God is revealed to every human being in Christ, thus making every human existence supernatural precisely in its being constituted as a dialogue in which God is redemptively present to every human person[453]. The Pope goes back to this Rahnerian argument in his address to the Roman Curia on December 22, 1986: «Just as there is no man or woman who does not bear the sign of his or her divine

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[450] G. H. Anderson, «Response by Gerald H. Anderson», 111.

[451] G. H. Anderson, «Response by Gerald H. Anderson», 111.

[452] G. Baum, «The First Papal Encyclical», 55; emphasis mine.

[453] G. Baum, «The First Papal Encyclical», 55.

origin, so there is no one who can remain outside or on the margins of the work of Jesus Christ who "died for all" and is therefore "the Saviour of the world" (cf. Jn 4:42)»[454].

Redemptor Hominis contains another fundamental insight that makes it closer to Rahner's theology of religions. In RH 55, the document argues that God «does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression even when they contain 'gaps, insufficiencies and errors'». It is an argument that, as we will see below, will be alluded to by John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 28.

2.4.3 ***John Paul II's 1986*** **Dominum et Vivificantem**

In his fifth Encyclical, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (DV), promulgated on May 18, 1986, which examines the role and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and of the world, John Paul II affirms that, in trying to discern the Spirit's deeds and manifestations in history and in the world, Christians must perform a twofold movement: «go[ing] further back» and «go[ing] further afield» in time and space (DV 53). In doing so, we will discover that the Holy Spirit's presence and activity cannot be confined to the Catholic Church and cannot be restricted to the actual two-millennium history of Christianity, but embraces the entire human history and the whole of creation (DV 53), which certainly include the various religions. Like *Redemptor Hominis* and *Redemptoris Missio*, the Pope in this Encyclical also quotes *Gaudium et Spes* 22 that «the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery». Clearly, its insight on the Holy Spirit and its citation of GS 22 show that this papal document, as a whole, inclines towards Rahner's theology of religions.

2.4.4 ***John Paul II's 1990*** Redemptoris Missio

In his Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), issued on December 7, 1990, subtitled «On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate», John Paul II elaborates more his

[454] John Paul II, «Pope's Christmas Address to the Roman Curia», 56.

theology of religions in connection with the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the other religious traditions. In paragraph 28, one of the most important paragraphs dealing with the ubiquity of the work of the Spirit, the Pope argues that the Spirit's presence and activity are «universal, limited neither by space nor time», that the same Spirit is «at work in the heart of every person, through the "seeds of the Word"», which can be found in human and religious enterprises that help humankind «to attain truth, goodness and God himself» (RM, 28). In this paragraph's most significant statement that clearly leans towards Rahner's theology of religions, the Pope asserts that «[t]he Spirit's presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and *religions*» (RM 28; emphasis mine).

Likewise, for Michael Paul Gallagher, John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*, published six years after Rahner's death, «strongly affirmed the reality of universal grace and salvation and developed it in words that echo the essentials of Rahner's vision»[455]. In paragraph 10, which affirms the presence of grace active in every human being, the Pope writes:

> The universality of salvation means that it is granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church. Since salvation is offered to all, it must be made concretely available to all. But it is clear that today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the gospel revelation or to enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions. For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation (RM 10).

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[455] M-P. Gallagher, «Karl Rahner: the magnetism of mystery», 40. On the next page, Gallagher, referring to the celestial Rahner, comments: «Rahner must have been delighted to read this endorsement of a presence of grace active in everyone. This was the reality that he sought to identify and evoke in people's self-experience» (*Ibid.*, 41).

The only quotation from Vatican II documents towards the end of the paragraph comes from *Gaudium et Spes* 22 which speaks of the Holy Spirit offering to everyone the possibility of sharing in Christ's Paschal Mystery in a way known to God—a conciliar insight that has a solid affinity with Rahner's theology of religions.

2.4.5 *John Paul II's 1994* Tertio Millennio Adveniente

For Fredericks, to deduce that John Paul II's theology of the Holy Spirit does not just bear affinities with Rahner's theology of religions but even amounts to a vindication of Rahner's influence on the Council's theology of religions «would be tempting, but premature»[456], for in the Pope's 1994 Apostolic Letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, published four years after *Redemptor Hominis*, we find a passage that contains affinities with Daniélou's fulfillment theology. In exploring «*the essential point by which Christianity differs from all the other religions*, by which the human search for God has been expressed from earliest times», John Paul II writes:

> Christianity has its starting-point in the incarnation of the Word. Here, it is not simply a case of a human search for God, but of God who comes in person to speak to human beings of himself and to show them the path by which he may be reached.... *The Incarnate Word is thus the fulfilment of the yearning present in all the religions of humankind:* this fulfilment is brought about by God himself and transcends all human expectations. It is the mystery of grace. In Christ, religion is no longer a "blind search for God" (cf. *Acts* 17:27) but the *response of faith* to God who reveals himself.... *Christ is thus the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion* (TMA 6; emphasis mine).

Commenting on this paragraph, Jacques Dupuis argues that «[t]his seems to leave no room for recognizing in the other religious traditions themselves a first divine initiative toward human beings, no matter how incomplete, and for attributing to the religious traditions a positive role in the mystery of salvation of their followers»[457]. The

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[456] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 235.

[457] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 72.

Pope maintains a strict divergence between the «human search for God» and the «God who comes in person», and this stark contrast, for Fredericks, constitutes the essential point of distinction between Christianity and the other religions, as well as a significant digression from John Paul II's theology of religions in his earlier encyclicals[458]. Indeed, the «fulfillment theory» in its classic form, the one espoused by Daniélou, is revived by John Paul II in this document.

2.4.6 *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 2000* Dominus Iesus

We can also include in this post-conciliar discussion the controversial Declaration, *Dominus Iesus* (DI), issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2000, and examine whether this document bears affinities with Daniélou's «fulfillment» theology or with Rahner's «inclusive presence of Christ»[459]. In *Dominus Iesus* 7, the Declaration makes a drastic distinction between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions», a distinction that the document insists must be «firmly held» and must be «always borne in mind» (DI 7). Such a drastic distinction between «faith» and «belief», according to Fredericks, is suggestive of Daniélou's fulfillment theology and his scholastic distinction between the natural knowledge of God found in the other religions and the supernatural faith contained in Christianity[460]. For the Declaration, the other religions can offer only «religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself» (DI 7). The problem with this stark distinction between «faith» and «belief» is in relation to the biblical assertion that «without faith it is impossible to please God» (Heb. 11:6) and be saved. Hence, if non-

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[458] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 236.

[459] A more critical and thorough evaluation of this Declaration will be made in Chapter 4, Section 4.3, which deals, among others, with the problematic of the document's sharp distinction between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions».

[460] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 232.

Christian religions *merely* possess «belief», which has no salvific value for their adherents, and not «faith», which alone saves and which Christianity alone possesses, therefore the other religious traditions are bereft of any salvific import for their members. It is indeed this sharp distinction between «faith» and «belief» that constitutes the most serious obstacle to *Dominus Iesus*' approach to other religions.

Likewise, the employment of Vatican II documents in *Dominus Iesus* 8 indicates a predisposition towards Daniélou's approach to religious diversity. Against the tendency in some religious quarters that suggest that Christians consider the sacred writings of the other religions as inspired, the Declaration, emboldened by its citation of *Dei Verbum* 11, which speaks of the inspired character of the Judeao-Christian scriptures, argues that the designation of «*inspired texts*» is reserved only to the books of the Old and New Testaments since only these are «inspired by the Holy Spirit». While the document, referring to the sacred writings of other religions, acknowledges that «some elements in these texts… may be *de facto* instruments by which countless people throughout the centuries have been and still are able today to nourish and maintain their life-relationship with God», it nevertheless insists on maintaining the radical distinction between the inspired Scriptures of Christianity and the sacred writings of the other religions. The document makes this sharp distinction even if it mentions *Nostra Aetate* 2 which affirms that the other religious traditions, «although differing in many ways from her own teaching,… nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men». For Fredericks, *Dominus Iesus*, for the most part, is indeed more at ease with Daniélou 's theology of religions than with Rahner's[461].

2.5 **Conclusion**

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church took a radical turn and made a giant leap forward in its understanding of and relations to other religions and their adherents.

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[461] Cf. J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 231-233.

The one theologian who made this revolutionary change in Christian attitude and mentality possible was Karl Rahner. Even though before the Second Vatican Council, Rahner did not go out of Germany that much, did not study other religions or converse much with the «religious others», his knowledge of the Scriptures and of Christian tradition, as well as his own profound Jesuit spiritual life, convinced him that God was not a religious monopoly of Christianity, that God's grace existed beyond the borders of the Catholic Church, and that God's world was much bigger and wider than the Christian world[462].

This chapter looked into a couple of very important theological questions. The first question dealt with the relation between nature and grace, an issue that was already present in the differing pre-conciliar theologies of religions of Jean Daniélou and Rahner, and which, as we have seen, was not settled clearly and definitively in Vatican II. It was this «residual ambiguity» in the conciliar doctrine on non-Christians and their religions that was responsible for the doctrinal ambiguity in the post-conciliar Catholic theology as seen in the «flip-flopping» of some magisterial writings on the subject. Despite the Council's «silence» on this issue, we saw not only that Rahner's appraisal of other religions was far more positive than that of Daniélou but also that if the Second Vatican Council represented a landmark in this aspect because of its courageous openness to and positive evaluation of non-Christian religions, then the conciliar theology of religions was closer to Rahner's theology than to Daniélou's.

The second question explored Rahner's contribution to Vatican II's theology of religions. And we examined his influence on the Council by looking precisely at his theological «footprints» in the texts and passages of Vatican II dealing specifically with the question of the other religions and their adherents. And for this purpose, the most important part of this chapter is the sub-section that analyzes in a scholarly manner the provenance of the most important texts and passages of the Council's theology of religions from Rahner's pre-conciliar writings, especially from his seminal

[462] Cf. P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 68.

1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions». Vatican II has constructed its theology of religions around some of the most important insights of Rahner in this essay, without, of course, the Council embracing Rahner's conclusion on the salvific status and value of the other religions.

What this chapter attempted to do was to show that what Rahner said about Christianity in relation to other religions in several of his pre-conciliar writings, especially in his 1962 article, was a departure from the traditional Church teaching before the Council and could be found in *Nostra Aetate* and in some other related conciliar documents. This chapter showed that it is possible to affirm that Vatican II documents, such as *Nostra Aetate*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Ad Gentes*—when they are all seen in an integrated manner in terms of theology of religions—have Rahner's «footprints» when they make positive assertions about non-Christians and their religious traditions.

CHAPTER III

The Second Vatican Council's Influence and Karl Rahner's Theological «Footprints» in the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' Theology of Religions

3.1 **Introduction**

In Chapter 1 of this dissertation, we look at the history of the Catholic Church's theology of religions as a «teeter-totter» between two Christian beliefs in God's universal saving will and in the necessity of the Church for salvation. It shows how for the most part of the Church's history the necessity of the Church for salvation as expressed in the dogmatic axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* has been emphasized to the detriment of the other Christian assertion on the universal salvific will of God. It examines how such an «imbalance» has been remedied by Vatican II in its recovery and rediscovery of God's universal saving will for all people. Chapter 2, which deals primarily with Karl Rahner's impact on the Second Vatican Council, attempts to demonstrate Rahner's influence especially in the conciliar texts that have been significant in understanding the Council's more open theology of religions. That chapter particularly looks at Rahner's 1962 essay on «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», and how some significant insights in this article were taken by the Council in its documents dealing with the question of non-Christians and their religions.

If the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), as we will see below, is both an «act» of the reception and an «instrument» of the implementation of Vatican II, Chapter 3 looks into how the Asian Churches[463] have received the Council, the influence of the Council's documents on these Churches' continuing reflection on the theology of religions, and how Rahner's insights in his pre-conciliar and post-conciliar theology of religions can be glimpsed in some of the themes and statements that have found their way into the consciousness of the FABC. This chapter, then, consists of three sections. The first section offers some preliminary remarks on Rahner, the FABC, and the Asian Churches' reception of Vatican II. It looks into the FABC's boldness in rethinking theology in a collaborative manner, into an aspect of doing theology that is akin to Rahner's theologizing, and initially explores the beginnings of the FABC as the Asian Churches' act and instrument of reception of the Council. The second section examines thematically some of Rahner's essays on Jesus Christ, Christianity and other religions and explores his influence on three of the essential elements of the FABC theology of religions—the question of the other religions as «ways» of salvation for their adherents, the presence and action of Jesus Christ through his Spirit in these religions, and religious pluralism as possessing positive significance in God's overall plan of salvation. The third section takes a look at a couple of areas where the FABC has gone beyond Rahner and Vatican II—in the

[463] The immense geographic, ethnic, linguistic, social, cultural and religious diversities that characterize Asian countries with the Catholic Church's «presence» make it extremely difficult to lump all such countries together and refer to them simply as «Asian Church». Christianity is lived differently in many Asian countries because of the diversity in terms of ecclesial origins, of rites, of ecclesiastical disciplines, of pastoral problems, needs and challenges, and of economic, political, socio-cultural and religious situations—hence, the expression «Asian Churches». Peter Phan specifically refers to «Asian Churches» as «the members of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), a transnational organization comprising fourteen full members (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos-Cambodia, Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, Myanmar [Burma], Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam) and ten associate members (Hongkong, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macau [Aomen], Mongolia, Nepal, Siberia, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan)» (P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 26-27).

aspects of «doing theology» and of «addressing» the followers of other religions—thereby exhibiting its distinct and positive contribution to the ongoing discourse on the theology of religions and the praxis of interreligious dialogue in Asia.

3.2 **Karl Rahner, the FABC, and the Asian Churches' Reception of Vatican II**

3.2.1 *Karl Rahner and the Question of Dialogue*

The fact that, relative to the four thousand books and articles that Karl Rahner published in his lifetime, a few articles examine directly the question of the other religions renders inaccurate, according to Dermot Lane, the idea that interreligious dialogue was a central preoccupation in Rahner's entire theological enterprise. For Lane, it would be more appropriate to say that Rahner was passionate, and perennially so, about dialogue—dialogue between Christianity and the world in general—in his effort to engage the Christian message with and make it relevant and responsive to the problems and challenges of modern men and women. Rahner advocated the necessity of dialogue not only in his writings but also in his personal encounters with various people within and outside Christianity, particularly with those who professed no Christian faith or with those who espoused no faith at all, and it is within this broader context of dialogue with the world that dialogue with non-Christian religions and their adherents emerges[464]. While saying this, what Rahner has to say about dialogue between Christianity and the world, about the inherently dialogical character of Christianity itself, about the critical correlation that exists between the Church and the world, was enormously novel and creative and has a direct import for interreligious dialogue, and «[i]t is this larger theology of dialogue that constitutes the context for understanding what he had to say about inter-religious dialogue»[465].

If the word «dialogue» entered into the very consciousness and vocabulary of the universal Church through Pope Paul VI's 1964

[464] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 141; cf. H. Vorgrimler, Understanding Karl Rahner, 111-120.

[465] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 141.

Encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, Rahner already employed the term in his 1962 essay when he remarked that «there is *one* history of the world, and in this *one* history both the Christians and the non-Christians (i.e. the old and the new pagans together) live in one and the same situation and face each other in *dialogue*, and thus the question of the theological meaning of the other religions arises once more and with even greater urgency»[466]. Indeed, though his essays on dialogue with non-Christians and their religions are few, they are nevertheless no less important in their bearing on his overall theology of religions and in their contribution to the Catholic Church's general discourse on the other religions in the post-conciliar period. Whether interreligious dialogue has been at the heart of his theological preoccupation or not, Rahner has contributed immensely to the development of Vatican II's more open theology of religions and the subsequent post-conciliar discussion of the necessity and urgency of dialogue as part of the evangelizing mission of the Church.

As a theologian, Rahner engaged in dialogue with non-Catholic Christians, with natural scientists, with philosophers, and with Marxists, and he was one of the first theological experts of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers established by Paul VI in 1965[467]. In the case of other religions, it was only in the latter years of his life that Rahner reflected on the theological issues emerging from the Asian situations of immense cultural and religious diversities, reflections contained in some of his essays gathered in Volume 18 of the *Theological Investigations* (written from 1973 to 1978) which deal individually and concretely with Asian religious traditions[468]. Yet, as his famous 1962 essay on «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions» shows, even before Vatican II Rahner had already begun theologizing on non-Christian religions, albeit always as an issue *internal* to Catholic theology and from the perspective of a dogmatic theologian. While he could not make even the slightest concession over any aspect in Christianity

[466] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 121; emphasis mine.

[467] H. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 111-116.118-120.

[468] P. G. Crowley, *Rahner Beyond Rahner*, «Preface», ix; F. X. Clooney, «Rahner beyond Rahner», 4.

that he thought was non-negotiable as far as the faith was concerned, Rahner was nonetheless convinced not only that truth and morality could also be found outside Christianity and the Catholic Church, but also that Christianity and the Church had not yet found a language in which they could genuinely convey the Christian message[469].

For Rahner, this is partly because «even Christianity and the Church themselves are constantly in process of seeking the final perfection of their own nature»[470]; thus, the search for fresh and innovative ways of formulating Christian faith and doctrine must be constantly pursued. During his time, Rahner was «acutely aware that the language of preaching and church teaching often rang hollow for believers themselves, and that merely repeating Christian truths in old formulas had become pastorally futile»[471]. In fact, the traditional dogmatic language of Catholic theology, particularly in the world and cultures of the West that had become very secularized, no longer appeared intelligible even to Christians who wanted to take their faith and the Christian message seriously. Hence, in his attempt to respond to these challenges, Rahner never regarded the specific theological developments in the spheres of doctrinal pluralism and of plurality of religions as something to be opposed or complained about but as something to be welcomed and appreciated, as something that could enrich tremendously our Christian knowledge of God and his dealings with humanity and the world[472].

3.2.2 *Karl Rahner and the FABC: On Boldness in Rethinking Theology Collaboratively*

3.2.2.1 Karl Rahner's Boldness in Rethinking Theology Collaboratively

According to George Greiner, part of Rahner's immense appeal lies in «his energetic and bold willingness to rethink everything, and to do

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[469] H. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 111.

[470] K. Rahner, «Church, Churches and Religions», 40.

[471] M-P. Gallagher, «Karl Rahner: the magnetism of mystery», 37.

[472] Cf. K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 115-134; cf. D. Marmion, «Some Aspects of the Theological Legacy of Karl Rahner», 6.

it collaboratively»[473]. Regarding the first, *his boldness to rethink theology*, Rahner did not merely reaffirm the common wisdom of his period, but often challenged its established beliefs; he did not just rehash old theological concepts and dress them simply with new words, but really «renewed the face of our theology»[474]. While insisting that the modern-day theological enterprise had to be scholarly, theology, for Rahner, was not an end in itself and did not exist for its own sake, but was at the service of the Church's life of faith and its mission of proclaiming the Gospel in the present age[475]. As a result, in many of his writings, Rahner strove for a contemporary understanding and articulation of the Christian faith, for a kind of theology that addressed current pastoral questions and ecclesial concerns.

Hence, despite the difficulty and uncompromising rigor of his work, it is important to understand that Rahner's basic orientation in theology is not abstract or academic, but pastoral, that when the word «pastoral» is taken in a broader sense, then «almost all of Rahner's theology, even when it is concerned with the Trinity, the Incarnation, the notion of heresy, or the significance for theology of the theory of evolution, is pastoral»[476]. His writings were «always in the service of human hearts that had been addressed in time by grace»[477]. Rahner himself admitted this in two separate interviews. In an interview that covered Rahner's life and theological career from 1965 to 1982 and which was published in 1986, Rahner refused to call his «writings», in the *Theological Investigations*, «scholarly». For him, his «publications address individual questions» which «only attempt to clarify those individual questions that modern readers are interested in understanding better», and he says that «I have always done theology with a view to kerygma, preaching, pastoral care»[478]. In a 1979 interview, he argued:

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[473] G. E. Greiner, «Rahner and the Pacific Rim», 58.

[474] J. B. Metz, «Learning and Teaching the Faith», cited by H. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, «Preface», x.

[475] W. V. Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 8.

[476] K Kilby, «Karl Rahner», 96.97.

[477] L. J. O'Donovan, «In Memoriam: Karl Rahner, S.J., 1904-1984», 130.

[478] K. Rahner, «On Becoming a Theologian», in H. Biallowons – H. D. Egan – P. Imhof, eds., *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 256.

> I think that ultimately my theological work was really not motivated by scholarship and erudition as such, but by pastoral concerns. This likewise explains why a large part of my published work is filled with immediately religious, spiritual, and pastoral concerns. It also explains why in my theology and in my individual works… I have always chosen, and in fact had to choose, tasks and themes that somehow dealt with the actual moment, with the questions of our day. And this explains, too, why a large portion of my theological output… is made up of individual essays on the most diverse subjects, prompted, as they certainly were, by the concrete conditions of the time, the Church and pastoral need[479].

Rahner's theology, indeed, is preeminently, supremely pastoral, «characterized by a pastoral concern with the problems faced by Christians in the modern world»[480].

One of the enduring legacies of Rahner is his insistence that theology speak to people and address contemporary pastoral needs and concerns[481]. Rahner's fear was that theology would fossilize into a self-enclosed conversation detached from and unresponsive to the challenges and criticisms of other intellectual disciplines and the affairs and exigencies of society. He insisted that, in the words of Declan Marmion, «[s]ome form of correlation between theology and the contemporary postmodern context is necessary if theology is not to become a thoroughly introverted affair»[482]. It is no wonder that Rahner theologized on varied topics in theology and spirituality—with interests ranging practically across the whole theological spectrum—in his desire to be in touch with people's situations, respond to their needs, and provide pastoral guidance and discernment. Even his most controversial theory of the «anonymous Christian» was a theory that he developed in response to an *internal* Christian controversy, in an effort to offer a Christian response to the fundamental question about the salvation

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[479] K. Rahner, *I Remember*, 22.

[480] G. D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, 82; H. D. Egan, «Translator's Foreword», 5-6.

[481] J. H. Flethcer, «Rahner and Religious Diversity», 235.

[482] D. Marmion, «Some Aspects of the Theological Legacy of Karl Rahner», 21.20-21.

of non-Christians and the status of non-Christian religions in God's design of salvation.

What contemporary theological jargon would later on refer to as «signs of the times»[483], Rahner designated as «new questions» and «new tasks» of the day that the Church must fully integrate into its speculative theological project with the hope not only of compelling the Church and the Christian tradition to come to terms with a new world, with a modern worldview, but also of touching on the dynamics of historicity, of the historical conditions of Christianity and the Church themselves[484]. One of such «questions» and «tasks» is the existence of religious pluralism in the world which, for Rahner, is the gravest scandal and the most serious vexation for Christianity, for it challenges and puts the Christian religion's absolute claim into question[485].

Likewise, by being attentive to his description of the Second Vatican Council as embodying the first rudimentary expression of the Catholic Church as a «world Church», with its profound and far-reaching implications for Christianity's presence in the world of various cultures and diverse religions[486], and to the Foreword that he wrote for the 1981 Japanese translation of his *Foundations of Christian Faith*, it may be possible, using the expression of Francis Clooney, to «trace the outward trajectory of Rahner's thought»[487]. In the Foreword, Rahner observes the widened ecclesial map and what it means for Christianity:

> I am aware also that Japanese Christianity and Japanese theology cannot be built up only through translating Western books into Japanese. In the Catholic Church and in Catholic theology today,

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[483] C. G. Arevalo, «…The Time of the Heirs», xix; C. Geffré, «The Christological Paradox», 155.

[484] G. E. Greiner, «Rahner and the Pacific Rim», 57.

[485] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 115-116.

[486] Cf. K. Rahner, «Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council», 77-89; ID., «The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council», 90-102.

[487] F. X. Clooney, «Rahner beyond Rahner», 16.

> one is more aware than ever before, that in the non-European cultural spheres of Asia, Africa and South America as well, despite the unity of the Christian faith and the Church, independent Churches and theologies can and must develop, which make clear that Christianity is not a European export[488].

Concerning the second, *his effort to rethink theology in a collaborative way*, Rahner worked collaboratively not only with publishers but also with fellow thinkers and experts of others fields, as seen in the many publications that he did with various people. Indeed, aside from his numerous books and essays, Rahner also published dictionaries and encyclopedias in theology in collaboration with many individuals in his attempt to gather more intellectual minds and provide readers with excellent theological materials from different perspectives[489].

Such a collaborative spirit can be understood more deeply, however, when we look at it as an expression of a theologian who seriously understood the limits of his personal endeavor and capacity. «[Rahner] knew his limits—what he could and could not say»[490]. He was conscious of a sense of incompleteness in his own theological enterprise, that no matter how grand and extensive his knowledge of a theological system might be, it was not possible for him, as it would not be for anyone, to know everything that could be known about a particular subject, or to exhaust the discussion of a certain topic in just one or several essays. He was wise enough to know and admit his own sense of limits. And not only did he recognize the shortcomings of his theology, he also saw the need for other theologians to develop his thoughts and to draw out their meanings and implications in new and fresh directions[491]. For example, in his 1983 essay on «Aspects of European Theology», Rahner offers a number of points, in terms of proposals, that are significant in interreligious dialogue, but without much elaboration, making Dermot Lane conclude that Rahner

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[488] Cited by G. E. Greiner, «Rahner and the Pacific Rim», 54.

[489] Cf. K. Kilby, «Karl Rahner», 95.

[490] P. G. Crowley, «Encountering the Religious Other», 574.

[491] F. X. Clooney, «Rahner beyond Rahner», 4-5; D. Marmion, «Some Aspects of the Theological Legacy of Karl Rahner», 10.

leaves this undeveloped area in his theology for the next generation of theologians to develop[492].

We can demonstrate several instances of Rahner's modesty and humility in acknowledging the limits of his theological pursuit, of what he could say about a certain subject matter in theology. Speaking in the early seventies, Rahner observed:

> When I began my theological studies forty years ago, I was far cleverer than I am today, if I take all the possible branches of knowledge and intellectual problems as my criterion of measurement. For today there is such a vast number of questions and areas of knowledge of a historical, metaphysical, philosophical, linguistic, sociological and religious kind that in the face of this mass of theological material I feel much stupider than I did then[493].

At the beginning of his article on «Experience of Transcendence from the Standpoint of Catholic Dogmatics», after qualifying himself as merely a teacher of Catholic dogmatics and not an Indianologist, he declares: «I must leave it to the Indianologists, the historians of religions, and the historians of the different interpretations of mystical experience to see for themselves whether these reflections of a teaching theologian can provide them with any assistance in dealing with their own problems»[494]. For Rahner, the limits of his own theological reflections, of what he could possibly say in this essay, must therefore be stated expressly. In another essay, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation», Rahner begins his reflections with these remarks:

> In these reflections a systematic theologian can obviously speak only of what lies within his own field. Consequently he cannot incorporate into his reflections what the empirical sciences of religion, especially history of religion and phenomenology of religion, can contribute to

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[492] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 148-149; cf. K. Rahner, «Aspects of European Theology», 97-98.

[493] K. Rahner, «The Foundation of Belief», 6-7.

[494] K. Rahner, «Experience of Transcendence», 173.173-174.

> this theme.... [I]t gives the dogmatic theologian a better right and a better conscience to keep within the limits of his own competence[495].

He ends the essay, saying, «[h]ere the systematic theologian must stop and hand over the question to the historian of religion working on experience», and then addresses a series of relevant suggestions to the historian of religions[496]. Even speaking about his milestone book, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, in an article in *Theological Investigations* with the same title, Rahner admits: «Any book by a theologian has its flaws and deficiencies. The most important of these are bound to escape the author's attention, otherwise they would have been avoided»[497]. Francis Clooney sums up in one tightly-packed sentence Rahner's diffidence with regard to the limitations of what the latter could say about religions in some of his essays in Volume 18 of the *Theological Investigations*:

> And so he often apologized, in a wise way, for all the things that he did not know: I am not a scientist, I am not a New Testament scholar, I am not an expert in all the details of Church history, I am not a canon lawyer, and so on. Aware of the limits of what he could say, he would try to narrow down his topic, admitting that he had just a few small contributions to make[498].

However, the main reason for Rahner's acknowledgment of the limitations of his theology, of the limitations of anybody's theology for that matter, lies in God himself who, as the main object of theology, is incomprehensible mystery, a fact that for Rahner demands deeper modesty and greater humility in theological conversation. «A theology that wishes to answer all questions clearly and thoroughly is guaranteed to miss its proper 'object'»[499]. If Rahner is an «'unsystematic'

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[495] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 288.

[496] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 295.

[497] K. Rahner, «Foundations of Christian Faith», 12.

[498] F. X. Clooney, «Rahner beyond Rahner», 6; cf. K. Rahner, «Oneness and Threefoldness of God», 106.

[499] K. Rahner, «Why Doing Theology Is So Difficult» in H. Biallowons – H. D. Egan – P. Imhof, eds., *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 216.

theologian»[500], as Marmion asserts, for J. A. DiNoia, «[t]he absence of system in Rahner's theological program finds its final explanation in the nature of mystery», of God as mystery[501].

3.2.2.2 The FABC's Collaborative Effort in Rethinking the Christian Faith in the Religiously Unique Context of Asia

When we look at the workings of the FABC from this twofold source of Rahner's broad appeal, we may observe that the Asian Bishops' collaborative efforts to rethink the Christian faith in the diverse and constantly changing circumstances of Asia may be said to be in keeping with Rahner's way of doing theology and thus in tune with his methodological legacy. In trying to understand the Asian Churches' arduous process of rethinking the Christian faith in a collaborative manner in the post-conciliar period, a brief history of the Churches of Asia in relation to Vatican II will be in order.

The Second Vatican Council may be said to be the first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church that the bishops from Asia participated in, even though many of them were not Asian-born but were missionaries from other continents[502]. The Asian Catholic Churches' contribution to Vatican II was «modest», owing largely to the relatively small number of Asian bishops in attendance and the missionary status of their churches in so-called mission territories[503]. Likewise, even if Vatican II was, for Karl Rahner, «the Church's first official self-actualization as a world church… the first major official event in which the Church actualized itself as a world Church»[504], the Council was essentially a European affair, monopolized by European bishops and theologians and dominated by the questions and preoccupations of the Western Churches[505]. When the Catholic Church opted for a fresh

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[500] D. Marmion, «Some Aspects of the Theological Legacy of Karl Rahner», 22.

[501] J. A. DiNoia, «Karl Rahner», 202.

[502] P. C. Phan, «Reception of Vatican II in Asia», 162.

[503] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 26-27.

[504] K. Rahner, «Towards a Theological Interpretation of Vatican II», 8.

[505] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 27.

and positive approach to non-Christian religions in Vatican II, «there was practically no contribution by Asian theologians to the conciliar documents of [*Nostra Aetate* and *Ad Gentes*]»[506].

While saying this, when we look at the history of how the initial *Decretum de Iudaeis* (Decree on the Jews) eventually included, after long and much heated discussions, the treatment of other religions whose adherents made up two-thirds of humanity, we can see the influence of some Asian bishops on the floor, at least in terms of pushing for what in the end became *Nostra Aetate*[507]. No matter how small, the bishops from Asia—who brought along with them the specific issues and particular problems of their dioceses—contributed to the Council's deliberations on the areas of liturgy, inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and mission, which revealed their pragmatic outlook in the Church and their concern for practical reforms over and above doctrinal questions and issues[508]. Their focus was less on the doctrinal articulations of the Christian faith than on the practical aspects of how it could be efficaciously practiced in the immensely diverse socio-cultural, economic, and religious situations of Asia. We can say then that while the Asian bishops' contributions to the Council were not as extensive as those of their counterparts from other continents, they were nevertheless not insignificant[509].

However, if the pre-conciliar Asian bishops' responses to the appeal of Vatican II's «ante-preparatory commission» for proposals and suggestions to the upcoming Council were, in the words of Peter Phan, «weak» and «anemic»[510], and the voices of the Asian bishops in the Council did not carry much weight for reasons mentioned above, the post-conciliar Churches of Asia have maturely evolved into Churches that not only «receive» but also «give», Churches that

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[506] G. Evers, «The Specific Contribution of Asian Theologians», 67.

[507] T. Stransky, «The Genesis of *Nostra Aetate*», 12.

[508] Cf. M. Lamberigts, «The Liturgy Debate», 126.143-149.

[509] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 32.

[510] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 29.41-42.

not only «learn» but also «teach»[511]. It was shown particularly during the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia in 1998—a Synod that has been considered «the first official recognition that the Churches of Asia have come of age»[512]. In fact, for Phan, «[w]hat the Asian bishops did not or could not do at the Second Vatican Council, their successors did splendidly during the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia»[513]. This was the case so much so that «[t]he frankness (what the New Testament calls *parrhesia*) with which many Asian bishops expressed themselves during the synod, even in front of the pope, was alarming to some curial officials who wondered aloud about the legendary meekness of Asians»[514]. The responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences to the *Lineamenta*, the speeches of the Asian bishops at the Synod of Asia, and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, of Pope John Paul II clearly reveal how far the Asian Churches have grown from their scarcely noticeable participation in Vatican II to their exceptional contribution to the Asian Synod. This ecclesial maturity has come about because of their committed reception of Vatican II and by working on the Council's unfinished business in their efforts to bring true renewal to the Churches of Asia[515]. For, and the Asian bishops have affirmed this as early as 1979,

> in practice… "mission" is no longer, and can no longer be, a one-way movement from the "older churches" to the "younger churches"…. Now... every local church is and cannot be but missionary. Every local church *is* "sent" by Christ and the Father to bring the Gospel to its surrounding milieux, and to bear it also into all the world.

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[511] CF. FIRA II, no. 3.5, in FAPA III, 128; International Congress on Mission, no. 3, in FAPA I, 144; BIRA V/5, no. 10, in FAPA II, 169.

[512] P. C. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 217. For Phan, «[i]n addition to the FABC, perhaps the major landmark in the history of Asian Catholicism's reception of Vatican II is the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops», which has been universally hailed «as the coming of age of the Asian Catholic Church» (P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectory for Vatican II in Asia», 306).

[513] P. C. Phan, «Reception of Vatican II in Asia», 179-180.

[514] P. C. Phan, ed., *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, «Preface», ix.

[515] P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 306.310.

> For every local church this is a *primary task*. Hence we are moving beyond both the vocabulary and the idea of "sending churches" and "receiving churches," for as living communities of the one Church of Jesus Christ, every local church must be a sending church, and every local church (because it is not on earth ever a total realization of the Church) must also be a receiving church. Every local church is responsible for its mission, and co-responsible for the mission of all its sister-churches. Every local church, according to its possibilities, must share whatever its gifts are, for the needs of other churches, for mission throughout mankind, for the life of the world[516].

Historically, it was the visit of Pope Paul VI in Manila, Philippines, in 1970, as part of his papal journey in East and Southeast Asia, that provided the proximate occasion for some Asian bishops who were in Manila for the Pope's visit to come together on November 9, 1970 in a momentous event that would later be known as the Asian Bishops' Meeting (ABM). It was at that historic meeting that the need to organize «a permanent structure»[517] that would enable Asian bishops to have more interactions and cooperation among themselves was voiced. Such an aspiration of the Asian bishops came to fulfillment at the First FABC General Assembly of 1974 in Taipei—«the first formal coming together of the bishops of these regions as a federation»[518]. However, the desire among the pioneer Asian bishops to set up a Federation came much earlier, probably as early as during the Second Vatican Council in Rome, which afforded the bishop-participants from Asia the opportunity to meet with each other, form closer ties, and talk about the situations and concerns of the Churches in Asia. It is in this sense that one can say that the beginning of the FABC goes back to the Council itself[519]. Indeed, if Asian bishops had more contacts with Rome than with one another *before* the Council, that state of affairs gradually changed during and especially after Vatican II. This is because one of the immediate positive results of the Council during its four

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[516] International Congress on Mission, no. 14, in FAPA I, 130; cited also by C. G. Arevalo, «…The Time of the Heirs», xx-xxi.

[517] Asian Bishops' Meeting, no. 1, in FAPA I, 8.

[518] C. G. Arevalo, «…The Time of the Heirs», xviii.

[519] C. G. Arevalo, «…The Time of the Heirs», xviii.

sessions was gathering them together, conferring upon them a corporate identity as bishops of the Asian Churches, and impressing upon them the need and importance of creating a permanent structure for pastoral collaboration and effectiveness.

Undoubtedly, the FABC has brought about horizontal communications between and among Asian bishops and episcopal conferences and has promoted a spirit of collegiality, communion, and collaboration among them[520]. Years later, although referring primarily to their social action plan, the Asian bishops gathered for the Fourth Bishops' Institute for Social Action in 1978 actually re-echoed the kind of collaboration that has marked the FABC from the very beginning: «in the spirit of Vatican II we will study these matters more closely, singly and as a group, so that we can render better service to all men»[521]. In the Third FABC Plenary Assembly held in Bangkok in 1982, the Asian bishops acknowledged that through the instrumentation of the FABC, which has built bridges of communication and facilitated mutual support and collaboration among the local Churches in the region, they

> have come to know and understand one another better, and bonds of friendship and solidarity have grown among them...[,] have come to appreciate better what the episcopal conferences and local churches in each country are doing, what the situations and problems they face are like, so that in a significant way, their joys have become the joys of all, and their setbacks and sorrows, griefs which touch the lives of all[522].

The bishops have also been taught

> to learn from each other's programs and projects, progress and failure; to share common pastoral and theological concerns; ... to work together at common tasks; lend or give of our material and personnel resources—in brief, increasingly to become truly sister

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[520] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 35; F. Wilfred, «The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)», xxix.

[521] BISA IV, no. 16, in FAPA I, 214.

[522] FABC III, no. 3.1, in FAPA I, 54.

churches in the one family of communities of the gospel which is the Church of Jesus Christ[523].

In their Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly in 2000, the Asian bishops drew attention to their deepened understanding of, and more integrated approach to, mission, service and ministry as including everyone in the Church—«[t]he whole community, every group, every person»—as belonging to the entire Church; that as agents of evangelization, bishops, priests, religious, and lay people cannot exist in isolation in specialized groups but should relate to one another in mutuality and exchange, thus underlining «the participatory and mutual character of our ministry and service»[524]. They believed that «[n]o real service takes place that is not collaborative, that is not actively involving the other person or community, that does not become a real "exchange of gifts"»[525]. As the Asian bishops gathered for the Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly in Vietnam in 2012 and looked back at the FABC existence for the past forty years, they saw that «[t]he FABC process has been truly a dialogue among local churches, where Bishops in communion, solidarity and effective collegiality collaborate to announce the Good News of Jesus and of God's Kingdom»[526].

3.2.3 *The FABC and the Asian Churches' «Reception» of Vatican II and its Documents*

3.2.3.1 The FABC as an «Act» of Reception of Vatican II and Its «Instrument» of Implementation

Immediately after the closing of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, the various local Churches all over the world promptly attended to the matter and question, to the exigent demands, of the «reception» of the Council and its sixteen documents. For many Episcopal Conferences all over the world, the first order of the day was the translations of the Council documents into vernacular languages for wider circulation and dissemination. In Asia, the «reception» of

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[523] FABC III, no. 3.2, in FAPA I, 54.

[524] FABC VII, in FAPA III, 12.

[525] FABC VII, in FAPA III, 12.

[526] FABC X, no. 15, in FAPA V, 57.

Vatican II and its documents swiftly went beyond this first «phase», as the Asian Churches immediately paid attention to other equally decisive and urgent areas of conciliar reception—such as in the fields of liturgical reforms and the use of vernaculars in liturgical celebrations, liturgical inculturation, liberation and inculturation, commitment to interreligious dialogue, engagement in the work of social development and liberation, commitment and working for ecumenical unity, and the foundation of missionary societies[527].

For Peter Phan, in an article entitled «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II by the Asian Churches?: A New Way of Being Church in Asia», «reception» refers to the ongoing process by which the community of faith, aided by its *sensus fidei*/*sensus fidelium*, recognizes that a teaching or a practice taught and commanded by Church authority is an authentic expression of the Church's faith and therefore true and binding, and appropriates that teaching or practice as its own. It is not to be conceived as a juridical approval by the community of a teaching or a practice in question whose truth and validity will derive from such an approval. Rather, it is an ecclesial act whereby the community recognizes and confirms that such a teaching or a practice contributes to the building up of the community's insight into and life of faith[528].

This process of reception, according to Phan, should not be understood as a simple act of obedience and passive absorption, nor should it be regarded as always and necessarily a full acceptance, of what is enjoined by Church authority. At times, reception may consist of a partial and even a total rejection of what has been given. In either way, «it is *always* a re-making», or «an "inventing" of the tradition»; and it is this inevitable dimension of reception that Phan alludes to when he speaks of the word «subversion» in his article[529]. In an article that contains some insights which illumine our understanding of «reception», Michael Lawler and Todd Salzman assert that reception

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[527] Cf. P. C. Phan, «Reception of Vatican II in Asia», 177.164-177.

[528] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 27.

[529] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 28; ID., «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 295.

«does not make a teaching true, but it confirms that the teaching is both accepted as true in virtually the whole church and is in agreement with the tradition on which the church stands»[530]. The implication is clear: «A non-received teaching is not thereby necessarily false or invalid; it is simply irrelevant to the life of the church»[531]. And as «[t]he act of reception does not receive the tradition of the past unchanged» because «the past is always received in the present», so the enculturation of every doctrine and every doctrinal reception are also conditioned by factors like time, place, and people's culture[532].

In the light of the «reception» of Vatican II by the Asian Churches, the question for Phan is how far and to what extent these Churches have and have not recognized and accepted what Vatican II has enjoined upon them in the years and decades following the Council, and what alternatives they have come up with, developed and proposed for their life and mission in the varying circumstances of Asia[533].

First of all, it must be said that the Second Vatican Council is the first ecumenical Council to meditate extensively on the nature of the Church and on the manifold aspects of its inner life, on the *ad intra* dimensions of its life. However, since the Church cannot merely devote its energy to navel-gazing but is summoned to assume for itself «[t]he joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men [and women] of our time» (GS 1), the Council has also reflected on the *ad extra* relations and missions of the Church vis-à-vis the modern world. Like Vatican II, the Asian Churches have an essentially «pastoral» character. As such they «received» the Council only in so far as its conciliar teachings and pastoral orientations have been found helpful in meeting and responding to the internal and external challenges of the Churches of Asia. Likewise, their predominant concern has always been to implement ways of being truly local Churches of Asia that are appropriate and responsive to the unique sociopolitical, economic, religious and cultural situations of the

[530] M. G. Lawler – T. A. Salzman, «Catholic Doctrine on Divorce», 331.

[531] M. G. Lawler – T. A. Salzman, «Catholic Doctrine on Divorce», 331.

[532] M. G. Lawler – T. A. Salzman, «Catholic Doctrine on Divorce», 331-332.

[533] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 28.

continent[534]. Hence, even if the Asian Churches have «received» all the sixteen documents of the Council as authoritative guides both for their *ad intra* and *ad extra* programs and activities, they have not received these documents with the same measure of acceptance. According to Phan, «[f]rom the frequency of citations, *Lumen Gentium*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Ad Gentes*, and *Nostra Aetate* have obtained pride of place»[535]. In the same article, Phan contends that in appropriating the Council, the Asian Churches have been more interested in conciliar documents that deal with the Church's *ad extra* relations, and mentions *Gaudium et Spes*, *Ad Gentes*, and *Nostra Aetate* as the documents «most frequently invoked»[536]. In another article, Phan argues that, among the conciliar documents, *Nostra Aetate* «has exercised a profound influence on the Asian Churches, since it is they (and not the Western Churches) that have to rub shoulders daily with followers of other religions»[537].

The Asian reception of Vatican II and its conciliar teachings as contained in its sixteen documents was not undertaken systematically and comprehensively until after 1972 when the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences came into existence. Although the FABC was an immediate offshoot of the Asian Bishops' Meeting in Manila in 1970 on the occasion of Paul VI's papal visit, it was after a couple of years, on November 16, 1972, that the FABC obtained an ecclesiastical and juridical recognition when its statutes and structures were approved by Rome. As one of the manifold functions of the FABC is «to study ways and means of promoting the apostolate, especially in the light of Vatican II and post-conciliar official documents, and according to

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[534] P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 301.307.

[535] P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 302; cf. BIRA IV/3, no. 5, in FAPA I, 258.

[536] P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 307.

[537] P. C. Phan, «Reception of Vatican II in Asia», 173. Ruben Mendoza provides an extensive exploration of how *Nostra Aetate* has been received by the FABC in its numerous documents, focusing particularly on a couple of significant themes in the Declaration that have been received well by the FABC: the importance and necessity of interreligious dialogue, and the discernment of «rays of truth» in the other religious traditions (Cf. R. C. Mendoza, «"Ray of Truth That Enlightens All"», 148-172).

the needs of Asia»[538], in a sense, the FABC was established in order to serve as a «permanent structure» for the ongoing reception of Vatican II and post-conciliar Church teaching.

The emergence of the FABC can be further appreciated when we look at the Federation both as an «act» of reception of Vatican II as well as the very «instrument» for implementing the Council, as «both the concrete result of the reception of Vatican II and its effective instrument of implementation»[539]. Like the Second Vatican Council that had to establish various post-conciliar commissions and secretariats that would devise concrete ways and means of carrying out and implementing the many reform programs instituted by the Council, so also the Asian bishops in the post-conciliar period had to create mechanisms so that the Asian Churches could appropriate Vatican II's teachings and respond to the reforms called forth by the Council. And the local Churches' reception of Vatican II in Asia could not have been carried out successfully and creatively without the guidance and supervision of the FABC whose establishment has been hailed as a landmark in the history of Asian Christianity and as the most significant organizational innovation of the Asian Churches in the continent[540]. Indeed, if it was because of Vatican II that the FABC came into being, it was in turn principally through the FABC that the Council's teachings and reform agenda have been implemented in Asia[541].

The FABC includes Churches of ancient origins, with their various rites and ecclesiastical disciplines, from eighteen episcopal conferences as full members and nine associate members coming from all the five regions of Asia, including Central Asia. Hence, when we look at the Federation as characterized by the same kind of diversity, plurality and multiplicity pervasive in Asia, one can indeed say that

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[538] FABC, *Statutes of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, 2.

[539] P. C. Phan, «Reception of Vatican II in Asia», 177-178; ID., «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 304.

[540] F. Wilfred, «The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)», xxiii; P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 303.

[541] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 35.

«more than any other continental episcopal conferences, the FABC embodies the ideals and reality of the "world church" that Vatican II ushered in»[542]. Likewise, when we examine the names of the FABC's nine offices responsible for organizing workshops and seminars for Church ministers of various kinds and levels, it is obvious that «no area of Christian life, including the teachings and reforms of Vatican II itself, is left untouched by the FABC»[543].

3.2.3.2 Becoming Churches Not *In* Asia But *Of* Asia in Their Exercise of Legitimate Autonomy

For the FABC, the goal of the inculturation of Christian faith is for the local Churches to have an authentic «Asian face», for the Churches in Asia to be «truly Asian». And they can acquire a truly, genuinely Asian face only when they cease being Churches *in* Asia and begin being Churches *of* Asia. Only such an inculturated Church may be considered «a Church of Asia [and] not simply a Church in Asia», and may «be perceived as no longer an alien presence»[544]. While inculturation is one «dialogue-task» that the local Churches must carry out in their evangelizing mission in Asia, in a sense the whole process of enfleshing the Gospel on the Asian soil really demands that local Churches engage in triple dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor. Since their First FABC General Assembly in 1974, the Asian bishops have affirmed that the «basic mode of mission in Asia must be dialogue», that the local Churches' evangelizing mission in modern-day Asia must be carried out in three «dialogue-tasks», a modality of mission that «explore[s] the interface of the Gospel's meanings and values with the realities of Asia and its many peoples—

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[542] P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 305.304-305.

[543] P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 306. The nine offices are: Office of Human Development, Office of Social Communications, Office of Laity, Office of Theological Concerns, Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy, Office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs, Office of Evangelization, Office of Clergy, and Office of Consecrated Life (*Ibid.*).

[544] BIRA IV/12, no. 50, in FAPA I, 333.

its histories and cultures, religions and religious traditions, and especially its "poor masses" in every country»[545].

In speaking of the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly of 2000, where the Asian Churches adopted «eight movements that as a whole constitute an Asian vision of the renewed Church», Phan argues that although the influence of Vatican II on the Asian Churches can be easily discerned in these «eight movements», «[i]n many ways they [Asian Churches] have moved beyond it, precisely because they want to be not simply churches *in* Asia but churches *of* Asia, that is, truly and authentically local communities, radically committed to making the reign of God present in Asia through the triple dialogue»[546]. And for this to happen, Asian Churches have to heed the constant call «to take seriously and earnestly what Asia truly is…. to take seriously the different worlds of Asia», which means that in the context of the world today «the Church must confront the fast-changing cultures, dynamically changing cultures that define the worlds of Asia today»[547]. This is because «it is in and through these Asian realities that the saving mission of Jesus must be incarnated…. The world of Asia is not just a stage. It is a constitutive part of the incarnation of the mission of Jesus right now»[548]. Indeed, the Asian Churches have «received» Vatican II by taking Asia seriously—its peoples, especially the poor, its cultures, and its religions, appropriating the unique realities and situations of the continent as their *locus theologicus*.

Although the 1977 «Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church» refers principally, as the theme suggests, to Church ministries, what the document argues about ministries, however, can also be applied in a broader manner to include the local Churches' overall mission in Asia and what that mission entails for these Churches. The Colloquium argues that, as the experiences of the apostolic Churches show, the demand to be faithful to the basic ministerial structure given to the Church by Christ himself «does

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[545] C. G. Arevalo, «…The Time of the Heirs», xix-xx.

[546] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 39-40.

[547] L-A. Tagle, «The Challenges of Mission in Asia», 215.216.

[548] L-A. Tagle, «The Challenges of Mission in Asia», 216.

not militate against a variety of organizational structures»; on the contrary, it calls for «creativity» and «resourcefulness» in responding to the local needs and contexts of the people[549]. This implies that the Asian Churches «can no longer be satisfied with maintaining imported models inadequate for the fulfillment of their mission», but must «devise new structures ordained to meeting their own situation in Asia today in all its newness»[550]. Indeed, because

> each local Church should embody into the context the task entrusted to her by the servant Lord, she has to discover time and again what ministries and what ministerial structures she requires in order to fulfill her mission to offer to a human society the salvation brought about by Jesus Christ and to enable the members of that society to become what God intends them to be[551].

And in order for the local Church to grow in full maturity and responsibility for its own life and mission, as it responds faithfully to the call of the Lord vis-à-vis the situations of Asia, it must be given «the legitimate autonomy which her natural and harmonious growth demands»[552].

Indeed, among the essential characteristics of truly authentic and evangelizing Churches mentioned by the Second Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate in 1980 is the exercise of «legitimate autonomy» by the local Churches: «they must have the legitimate autonomy that will enable them to express their life of faith and worship within their specific human context»[553]. What this means for the First Bishops' Institute for Social Action in 1974 is clear: «[I]t means taking the unfamiliar course of looking for guidelines of policy and action not to ready-made theological, legal and sociological systems developed principally in the West, but to a discernment of the historical process taking place among our own people»[554]. For the

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[549] FABC, no. 28, in FAPA I, 73.

[550] FABC, no. 28, in FAPA I, 73.

[551] FABC, no. 25, in FAPA I, 72.

[552] FABC, no. 25, in FAPA I, 72.

[553] BIMA II, no. 3, in FAPA I, 98.

[554] BISA I, no. 6, in FAPA I, 200.

Third Bishops' Institute for Social Action held in 1975, «in order to have a greater involvement of the whole community in the process of building God's kingdom on earth, the local church must take its share and responsibility in the decision-making concerning the services it needs, and the nature of the Church's presence among its people»[555]. And if Christianity cannot build genuine local Churches in Asia unless it takes seriously the challenge of the other religions and engages in dialogue with them, for the FABC-TAC document, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», «[t]his can happen only if the Asian local Churches feel responsible for themselves and their mission, with freedom to dare and to experiment, to create and to learn from mistakes»[556]. Without mentioning the expression, «legitimate autonomy», the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly (FABC V) of 1990 clearly alludes to its necessity when it argues that «[i]t is the local Churches and communities which can discern and work out… the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of the Kingdom realized in their own place and time»[557].

This idea of the Asian Churches exercising «legitimate autonomy» individually and collectively, in the fulfillment of their evangelizing mission within their particular contexts, finds support from Pope Francis. When speaking of the Church's mission in his *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope argues that while «all of us are called to obey [the Lord's] call to go forth from our comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of God», «*each Christian and every community [however] must discern the path that the Lord points out*» (EG 20; emphasis mine). Earlier in the Exhortation, Pope Francis spells out the implications of the duty of every local Church to «discern» the most effective and appropriate ways of carrying out its mission in its territory:

> Countless issues involving evangelization today might be discussed here, but I have chosen not to explore these many questions which call for further reflection and study. Nor do I believe that the papal

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[555] BISA III, no. 8, in FAPA I, 209.

[556] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 7.2, p. 24.

[557] FABC V, no. 3.3.1, in FAPA I, 281.

> magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. *It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory*. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound "decentralization" (EG 16; emphasis mine).

Indeed, ecclesial «context» is not just the place or the location in which the Church exists; it is rather an essential component that conditions and determines the Church's understanding of itself and its manner of being and doing. In Asia, the situations and realities of the people—their varied cultures, their diverse religions, and their wretched condition of poverty—constitute the background and context of the proclamation of the Gospel, of the localization of the Churches and the incipient realization of the Kingdom of God. Hence, to understand how the Asian Churches have «received» Vatican II requires knowledge of the context and milieu in which these Churches exist and of the problems and challenges they try to address theologically and pastorally[558]. This massive continent and its «teeming millions» is «the context of God's creative, incarnational and redemptive action, the theater in which the drama of Asia's salvation is enacted»[559]. It is within this context that for the Asian Churches «to become truly *of* Asia, Asian Christians must be engaged, relentlessly and wholeheartedly, in this triple "dialogue of life and heart" and in this way fulfill their inalienable right and duty of proclaiming Jesus to their fellow Asians»[560].

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[558] P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 296.

[559] FABC V, no. 1.5, in FAPA I, 275.

[560] P. C. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 223.

3.3 Karl Rahner's Influence in the Asian Theological Horizon as Seen in Three Essential Aspects of the FABC's Theology of Religions

3.3.1 *Preliminary Remarks on Rahner's Possible Influence on the FABC Documents*

Although Karl Rahner allotted the 1965-published Volume VI of his *Theological Investigations* specifically to his thoughts and insights on the Second Vatican Council, as the title of the volume, «Concerning Vatican Council II», suggests, in truth he had continually written and published essays until his death on the Council, on the meaning and continuing significance of many of its documents for the post-conciliar Church. If his pre-conciliar writings had a major impact on Vatican II's theology of religions, this section deals with the question of whether his pre-conciliar and post-conciliar works also had an influence—albeit implicitly—on the Asian Churches as they grappled theologically with their ecclesial questions and tasks in the religiously pluralistic context of Asia.

In his book, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, Herbert Vorgrimler suggests an idea that may prove relevant in trying to decipher Rahner's implicit influence in some of the FABC's scattered theological statements and expressions on the question of Christianity and other religions. Vorgrimler observes that in the German-speaking world and in other foreign countries, central statements of Rahner's foundational theology became so widespread and established among Catholics and non-Catholic Christians that many people did not realize how much in these basic theological insights they owed to Rahner[561]. In his long years of teaching and writing, Rahner produced copious commentaries on various themes in theology and spirituality such as God, salvation, and grace, and a great deal of sub-topics that came under them in the course of his theological investigations. Scattered throughout his numerous essays are both long and often convoluted sentences and short and lapidary statements that have been recognized as seminal insights in the development and evolution of some of the

[561] H. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 109; cf. A. Pierce, «Karl Rahner: Theologian of Dialogue and Ecumenism», 172-173.

most significant areas in post-conciliar Catholic theology. Without trying to exhaust the depth and breadth of Rahner's theology and its influence on contemporary theology, Vorgrimler writes:

> That there is more talk of uncreated grace which is God himself in his communication of himself than of created grace; that the universal will of God for salvation is taken with radical seriousness and that therefore children, pagans, atheists and others who die unbaptized are no longer thought to be destined to eternal punishment; that nature and grace are no longer torn apart and thought of in a two-storey scheme; that sacraments can be understood as realizations, actualizations of the church in particular central events of Christian existence: such views and similar ones which go back to Rahner are so widespread today that one can perhaps even speak of growing assent to him[562].

Speaking about the extrinsicist theology of grace which Rahner demolished in his pre-conciliar writings on grace, particularly on the relationship between nature and grace, Eamonn Conway, likewise, argues that «[t]hose who have not been formed in the world of manual or neo-Scholastic theology might not realise how much is owed to Rahner's work, work which was always as courageous as it was ground-breaking»[563].

Dermot Lane, in his book, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, is more extensive in detailing Rahner's influence on the contemporary theological horizon in relation to the question of the theology of religions. First of all, when Rahner wrote his article, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation» in 1975, his concern was primarily the question of the possibility of salvation,

[562] H. Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, 109-110; emphasis mine. Even a very important FABC document, «Methodology: Asian Christian Theology», published in 2000, employs some of Rahner's technical concepts like «divine self-communication», «pre-apprehension», «unthematized», «ineffable God», etc. In two places, the document remarks: «This reality is but the presence of God in us which is not yet specified clearly and thematically. It is a kind of pre-apprehension of the divine in us without our being conscious of it» (FABC-OTC, in FAPA III, 409); «But the latter is truly a source of knowledge, a kind of pre-apprehension of reality that is still as yet unthematised» (FABC-OTC, in FAPA III, 413).

[563] E. Conway, «"So as not to Despise God's Grace"», 116.

and not the nature and character, the shape and structure, of salvation which, according to Lane, are matters in question for the contemporary state of interreligious dialogue[564]. And while Rahner contributed creative and original insights to the theology of religions through his 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», which enabled the conciliar Church to take a positive view of non-Christian religions, he did not spell out the details of such a theology in that article[565]. Nevertheless, if there was one theologian during the Council and in the post-conciliar period who was much more open to dialogue than others and who in fact contributed much to the advancement of the theology of religions in the Catholic Church, it was Karl Rahner. *Nostra Aetate*, the one document of Vatican II that truly turned the Catholic Church towards other religions in the spirit of dialogue and engagement, would never have been possible had it not been for Rahner and his inclusivist theology, which has been the theology of the Catholic Church since the Council[566]. While the Rahnerian conviction—that non-Christian religions do contain «supernatural, grace-filled elements» and may therefore be regarded as «positively included in God's plan of salvation»[567]—seems obvious today, or may have been the official teaching of the Church since the publication of the 1991 Church document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, «it was far from obvious within Catholic theology prior to the Vatican II», when Rahner first introduced it in his writings[568].

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[564] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 155.

[565] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 152.

[566] J. L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*, 24.

[567] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 121.125.

[568] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 143. Lane reiterates this point: «While some of this material may sound obvious today in the second decade of the twenty-first century, we must remember that this vision of other religions was articulated by Rahner over fifty years ago, just before the Second Vatican Council. If anything, this article [his 1962 article] highlights the influence of Rahner at Vatican II, especially in regard to other religions» (*Ibid*., 144). Some pages later, Lane affirms again the importance of Rahner's 1962 essay: «To fully appreciate the significance of this 1961 lecture, we need to remember it was given over fifty years ago, just before Vatican II, at a time when the Church saw itself as an entity over and against the world» (*Ibid*., 152).

Obviously, it was impossible for Rahner, who died in 1984, to have anticipated the complex socio-economic, religious, theological, cultural, philosophical, and scientific developments which theologians of the twenty-first century have to contend with, or to have come up with a comprehensive theology of religions that would foresee and address all the contemporary problems and questions in the area of interreligious dialogue. When Rahner started formulating his thoughts on Christianity's relations with other religions, the contemporary issues and problems besetting the field of theology of religions were not yet available to him for theological consideration, and it was impossible for him to foresee the dramatic changes in the religious landscape of the world decades after his death. Hence, as Francis Clooney rightly observes: «It would be unfair... to expect that sixty or more years ago a leading German theologian would *also* be an expert in religions»[569]. No one can and should ask Rahner «for an expertise that lies beyond him»[570].

That his theology was limited never bothered Rahner because he believed not only that all theologies have inherent limitations but also that it is precisely the theologian's awareness and recognition of his limitations that prepares him for new insights into God and his ways in the world. Yet, what Rahner contributed to the opening of the Church to other religions in the conciliar years was already phenomenal, considering both the long-standing history of the Church's negative outlook towards the «religious others» and the fact that Rahner talked about the positive significance of other religions in God's plan of salvation at a time when the Church was grappling *merely* with the question of whether the Protestant Churches were mediations of grace or not in the conciliar debates that eventually led to the emergence of *Unitatis Redintegratio*[571].

In his openness towards non-Christians and their respective religious traditions in his writings, Rahner anticipated many of the questions that were to preoccupy the ongoing discourses on the

[569] F. X. Clooney, «Rahner beyond Rahner», 6.

[570] P. G. Crowley, «Encountering the Religious Other», 574.

[571] Cf. D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 152.

theology of religions in the post-conciliar period and into the new millennium. His theological treatment of other religions catalyzed the Catholic Church to make a number of significant shifts that are now taken for granted because they have been part of the abiding elements of Catholic theology since Vatican II. These shifts were the shift from an exclusivist to an inclusivist theology of salvation; the shift from over a millennium of Augustinian pessimism to the fresh optimism of the Second Vatican Council concerning salvation; and the shift from a negative, hostile treatment of other religious traditions, which characterized Catholic theology before Vatican II, to a positive, optimistic approach to such traditions which was made possible by Rahner's universalist, transcendental theology and his emphasis on the universal experience of God[572].

If Vatican II theology did not materialize out of nowhere, but was influenced by the confluence of ideas of the major theologians of the period whose pre-conciliar writings became the basis for the theology of the Council, so also the FABC's theology of religions did not just drop from the sky but was shaped by Vatican II, by the collegial reflections of Asian bishops, and by the writings of theologians of religions within and outside Asia who continued to reflect particularly on the questions that the Council had left open—on the salvific role and status of other religions.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, in spite of what Vatican II positively said about the «religious others» and their religious traditions, certain ambiguities accompanied some of the texts of the Council particularly on the question of the other religions. For Todd Johanson, two areas where such conciliar texts are ambiguous, thereby becoming points of contention among post-conciliar theologians, and where Rahner engaged positively in trying to move the discussion forward are «the question of whether other religious traditions themselves are salvifically mediating, and the closely related question of exactly how and to what degree they contain revelation»[573]. Rahner came up with a theology of religions holding that non-Christian religions are salvific in themselves,

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[572] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 149.

[573] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 285.

albeit salvific always in reference to Christ, the universal Savior; hence, members of other religions are saved not *despite of* but precisely *through* their religious traditions. Likewise, he argued that other religions contain real revelation as a result of God's gracious self-communication to the human race and as a work of the Spirit whose universal presence and action makes possible the ubiquity of saving grace in the world and its various religions. Indeed, we can relate Vorgrimler's and Lane's observations to the post-conciliar Asian Church's theologizing and deduce that the FABC, in some of its fundamental thoughts and reflections on religions, may have unwittingly espoused some of Rahner's theology of religions' foundational insights without realizing, due to their pervasiveness in contemporary Asian Catholic theology, that they owed these insights to Rahner. The succeeding discussion will look into this matter more closely.

3.3.2 *Three Essential Elements of Rahner's Theology of Religions in Some Selected Post-Conciliar Essays*

As there are no FABC documents written even just partly on Rahner's or anyone else's theology, we need to locate Rahner's influence in the scattered documents and statements of the FABC and its institutes and offices[574]. And because our aim here is to discern «traces» of Rahner's thoughts in the FABC writings, we will explore some of his post-conciliar works and relate them to three of the FABC's basic elements in its theology of religions—the other religions as «ways» of salvation for their members, the presence of Jesus Christ in these religions through the Holy Spirit, and religious pluralism as possessing positive meaning in God's overall plan of salvation.

3.3.2.1 The Salvific Character of Other Religions in Rahner's Post-Conciliar Writings

In his post-conciliar reflections on the salvific value of the other religions, Rahner develops the foundational insights he has advanced

[574] A preliminary remark is in order here. In the post-conciliar period, Rahner explores the question of the saving mediation of non-Christian religions not only in the three essays that will be discussed below but also in other essays that deal with his theology of religions. However, in the interest of space, I have decided to limit the investigation of this matter to these three articles which were his earliest post-conciliar reflections on this particular subject.

in his 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions» examined in Chapter 2; hence, in exploring this particular theme, one must consider what Rahner has already said in this pre-conciliar essay. In his article, «Church, Churches and Religions», published in Volume X of his *Theological Investigations*, which includes «writings of 1965-67», Rahner reflects on the possibility that in themselves and in principle the other religions are positively willed by God as legitimate ways of salvation for their adherents, based on the social nature of human beings and the historical character of religions. After saying that God's will to save all people demands that every person must be given some positive means of salvation so that he may obtain supernatural salvation, Rahner argues:

> Yet the nature of man as a historical and social being was such that a way of salvation of this kind could not be followed in the concrete altogether in emancipation from the social and historical context of human life. Man will not work out his salvation simply by acts of religion which are purely interior. He can only do so through the sort of religion which must, of its nature, find concrete expression in the social and institutional life of the community[575].

For Rahner, because the «supernatural existential» is present in every human being always and everywhere, and because the history of salvation and revelation and the history of the human spirit are co-extensive with each other, therefore the religions which exist outside Christianity and the Old Testament can never be considered merely as the result of human speculation or hubris. This is because «the "supernatural existential", the dynamic impulse present in man by the power of grace and impelling him towards the triune God, is at work in these religions and plays a decisive part in determining the forms in which these religions are objectively expressed»[576]. Hence, despite the fact that these religions continue to be a mixture of truth and error, of goodness and aberration, they persist in being instruments through which God's grace is constantly at work, offering to the human recipient the ultimate possibility of activating in some way the supernatural orientation towards salvation offered to him by God in grace.

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[575] K. Rahner, «Church, Churches and Religions», 46.

[576] K. Rahner, «Church, Churches and Religions», 46.

In his 1974 article, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions»[577], Rahner contends that when a non-Christian arrives at salvation through faith, hope and love, his religion cannot be considered as having played no part, or only a negative one, in his attainment of justification and salvation; otherwise, the supernatural event of his salvation would be seen in «completely non-social and unhistorical terms… [which]… fundamentally contradicts the historical and social character of Christianity itself»[578]. In accounting for the existence of divine revelation in a non-Christian who has not been reached by the Christian message, Rahner rules out the presence of «private revelations» and «extraordinary visions» [especially on one's deathbed] as «arbitrary and improbable postulates» which are inconsistent and contradictory to «the basic character of the Christian revelation and the nature of man»[579]. For him, «even in his most personal history man always remains a social being, whose innermost decisions are mediated through the specific form of his social and historical life. They do not take place in some special reserve, cut off from the rest from the very outset»[580]. If non-Christian religions are not salvific in themselves for their members, and «if one simply imagines the world without all these religions, there is no way of saying at all where God and his history of salvation and revelation can be found in the world»[581].

[577] Cf. K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 39-50. Rahner has incorporated this essay in Part IV of his book, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, under the chapter title, «Jesus Christ in Non-Christian Religions» (ID., *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 311-321).

[578] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 41-42.

[579] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 42.

[580] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 42.

[581] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 42. In his 1976 *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner alludes to the salvific significance of the other religions on account of the ubiquity of God's saving grace: «Because of God's universal salvific will, a Christian has no right to limit the actual event of salvation to the explicit history of salvation in the Old and New Testaments.... The Old Testament as a scripture giving witness to God's salvific activity is aware of such salvific activity of God outside the history of the old covenant, and is aware of a real covenant between God and the whole human race. The Old Testament covenant is only a special instance of the former which has reached a special level in the historical consciousness of Israel» (K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 147-148).

In his essay, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation»[582], which was originally a lecture given in Rome in 1975, Rahner reflects on Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* 16, *Ad Gentes* 7, and *Gaudium et Spes* 22 which assert that even a person who does not have any contact with Christianity, even an atheist, can be without fault and be reached «in ways known to God» by the saving grace of God, can possess a redeeming *faith* and thus arrive at salvation. As a result, it is obvious for Rahner that the effects of this interior possession of the genuine content of salvation, which summons a human response of faith, must be found in the religions themselves in which their members concretely live out their relationship to God.

Rahner examines the matter more deeply in this essay and arrives at the conclusion that non-Christian religions are ways of salvation for their members by looking at a theory of the relationship between grace and humankind—a theory that looks at «grace» more as «habitual» than «actual». By «habitual grace», Rahner does not mean the «state of grace in which grace is accepted by man's free consent», but rather «grace seen as present from the outset, as offered to freedom»[583]. In spite of the supernatural and unmerited character of this grace,

> it can certainly be seen as a permanent existential of man, of mankind and its history, always and everywhere present, as permanently present possibility of a salvific relationship of freedom to God, as innermost entelechy of the history of the individual and of mankind as a whole, in which the unmerited gracious self-communication of God to the world is the ultimate finality and dynamism of the world and world history, whether the human freedom of any particular individual accepts this innermost entelechy or closes itself up against it[584].

In other words, we exist in a world in which God's efficaciously saving grace is always and everywhere offered to every human being, not only prior to his exercise of freedom but also even after his rejection

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[582] Cf. K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 288-295.

[583] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 291.

[584] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 291.

of it in freedom, bestowing on every person the possibility of a salvific relationship with God. For Rahner, the ubiquity of grace in the world and its history, where «grace» is «understood as 'habitual' by the very nature of grace as supernatural finality of the transcendentality of mind-in-world», is «always also the most fundamental event of revelation, since it opens up this transcendentality towards the immediacy of God, whether this is made explicit and objectified or not»[585]. Consequently, «the history of supernatural revelation and the history of supernatural salvation are necessarily co-extensive and co-existent»[586]. In other words, because the gracious, supernatural orientation of humanity towards transcendence is itself a form of revelation, humanity, revelation and salvation are inextricably interconnected[587]. Indeed, what we generally refer to as history of revelation and history of faith is «therefore the history of the acceptance and objectification of this innermost deification of the world offered to freedom, which is also an offer of salvation and revelation and a permanent existential of humanity and its history»[588].

Hence, for Rahner, if, as Vatican II affirms, an opportunity of supernatural salvation and the occasion of a genuine faith in revelation are offered always and everywhere to all human beings, and if revelation is not possible without faith and must be offered at all times and in all places, then such revelation and faith take place concretely and on the whole only by the mediation of the categorical, institutional and verbal realities known as non-Christian religions. This is so because «[i]n man, his transcendental, mental and supernatural relationship to God is always mediated by categorical realities of his life, and in the last resort the most sublime and formless mysticism is no exception to this»[589]. For Rahner, God works and intervenes graciously in these religions as religions and not just in their individual members apart from religions. In their institutional

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[585] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 291-292.

[586] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 292.

[587] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 146.

[588] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 292.

[589] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 293-294.

and theoretical objectifications, non-Christian religions «can be categorical mediations of genuine salvific acts, both because they always retain some truth... and also because even false and debased religious objectivity can be a way of mediating a genuine and grace-given transcendentality of man»; hence, «a positive salvific function cannot be *a priori* and entirely denied» of them[590]. Speaking about mysticism, Rahner adds that «it is not *a priori* forbidden to discover genuine supernatural mysticism in the 'mysticism' of religions of higher cultures, even when this extra-Christian 'mysticism' is not itself by any means thematicized in an explicitly religious form»[591]. Rahner ends this essay saying that God's grace is at all times and in all places at work for human salvation, that it is present outside the boundaries of Christianity and is operative, albeit imperfectly, in non-Christian religions, «making them ways of salvation by which human beings approach God and his Christ»[592]. This article is indeed a bold contribution to the field of theology of religions, an essay that «boldly opens a door» for theologians to inquire more deeply into the salvific status of non-Christian religions[593]. And when we look at this article in comparison with his 1962 and 1974 essays on Jesus Christ, Christianity and non-Christian religions, we find that in this article

> [t]he statements are clearer about other religions as possible mediations of salvation, having a positive role in the history of salvation, and being 'ways of the salvation', even though Rahner is careful to point out that this salvific role of the non-Christian religions is incomplete and rudimentary and significantly different to the salvation offered in Christ[594].

We can sum up Rahner's insights in the above discussion in this way: If Christian theology holds that Christians, as social and historical beings, must work out their salvation in the concrete, historical religion of Christianity, the same applies for the members of other religions.

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[590] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 294.295.

[591] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 295.

[592] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 295.

[593] F. X. Clooney, «Rahner beyond Rahner», 8.14.

[594] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 154-155.

Hence, if Christians need visible means in Christianity in order to experience God and his saving grace—means that are embodied in the sacraments and the sacramentals—so do the adherents of other religious traditions. They need palpable and tangible means in the world—means that are concretized in the creeds, cults and codes of behavior of their religions—in order to experience God's grace and respond to it, and these mediations may be considered salvific in themselves, albeit always in relation to Christ[595]. Consequently, if the various religious traditions of the world are concrete mediations of transcendental grace and revelation in history and are thus means of encountering divine grace in the world, it follows that they must remain, in God's providential design, legitimate ways of salvation for their members, means of salvation that can never be construed, however, as independent of or apart from Christ, the unique and universal source of salvation.

3.3.2.2 The Presence of Jesus Christ in the Other Religions Through the Holy Spirit

For Rahner, divine revelation, which is God's absolute and radical self-communication to humanity, as well as our human response to it in faith, do not always occur in purely religious acts and instances but also in secular activities and mundane occasions—in human affairs that do not necessarily fall within the scope of the spiritual and the otherworldly but make up the basic material of the ordinary routine of our everyday life. The possibility of accepting or rejecting God's free, unmerited and forgiving self-offer in grace takes place truly, but implicitly and anonymously, in many instances, in the daily struggle to surrender to the mystery of human existence in all its hidden, indeterminable, and unforeseeable moments. Acceptance of God's

[595] Paul Knitter argues that, for Rahner, one of the foremost and most effective «realms» where God's saving grace can assume tangible presence in human history are the religions of the world. This is because «it is precisely in the religions that humans carry on their search for deeper meaning, their efforts to reach out through ritual and symbol to that which is more. If we believe that God acts and breathes throughout human history, and if we believe that that breath has to take visible, material shape then the religions are the first areas we should investigate for clues of that divine breath or Spirit» (P. F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 71).

self-communication in grace «does not take place solely in a secret inwardness of conscience, in meta-historical religious subjectivity, but in the concrete fulfillment of an earthly task, of active love of others, even of collective love of others»[596]. For Rahner, «even everyday existence lived in the quiet honesty of patiently doing one's duty can also be a form of 'anonymous' Christian living»[597], for «the "occurrence" of grace is just as hidden as the material character of its acceptance»[598].

Rahner insists that the act of faith, which is always and everywhere possible—meaning, that it is exercised even outside and beyond Christian experience among non-Christian believers—possesses a Christological character. For a person to attain salvation, he must possess faith not only in God but also in Christ[599]. «Human salvation depends on the Logos and all salvation is related to it»[600]. While Rahner's theology of religions, encapsulated in this theory of the «anonymous Christian», affirms that there are people outside Christianity who are justified by God's grace, his theology «does not involve the belief that anyone can attain to justification and final salvation even without faith in a strictly theological sense merely because he does not act against his moral conscience»[601], or that «they are acceptable in God's sight even without any true faith (together with hope and love) as it were in virtue of a merely natural morality which they possess, whereas the Christians and only they achieve their justification through a faith in salvation»[602]. For Rahner, «genuine faith in revelation is necessary for salvation»[603], for faith is

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[596] K. Rahner, «Church and World», 348.

[597] K. Rahner, «Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today», 8.

[598] K. Rahner, «Church and World», 348.

[599] K. Rahner, «Anonymous Christians», 390.

[600] K. Rahner, «The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation», 205.

[601] K. Rahner, «Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'», 285.

[602] K. Rahner, «Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'», 291.

[603] K. Rahner, «Anonymous and Explicit Faith», 53.

> not merely a positive commandment from which one could be dispensed under certain conditions… [but] … is in itself necessary and therefore demanded absolutely, not merely as a commandment but as the only possible means, not as a condition alone but as an avoidable way of access, for man's salvation is nothing less than the fulfillment and definitive coming to maturity of precisely *this* beginning, for which therefore nothing else can substitute[604].

As to the question of how it is conceivable that justified pagans can possess faith, the kind of faith that is necessary for salvation, when they have not accepted the Christian message and therefore do not possess explicit faith in Christ, Rahner's answer is that

> [t]here can exist an 'anonymous faith' which carries with it an intrinsic dynamism and therefore an obligation to find full realization in explicit faith, but which is nonetheless sufficient for salvation even if man does not achieve this fulfillment during his lifetime, as long as he is not to blame for this[605].

It is a kind of faith that

> on the one hand is necessary and effective for salvation (under the general conditions which are required for justification and final salvation, i.e. hope and love of God and neighbour) and on the other occurs without an explicit and conscious relationship (i.e. conceptual and verbal and thus objectively constituted) to the revelation of Jesus Christ contained in the Old and/or New Testament and without any explicit reference to God through an objective idea of God[606].

If non-Christians are saved, and if they are saved only through faith in Jesus Christ, then Christ is present and operative in non-Christians and their religious traditions. And for Rahner, Christ is present in them *through* the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, which makes saving faith among non-Christians possible. In his 1974 essay, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», Rahner has a lengthy discussion on the Holy Spirit in relation to Christ, or on Christ in relation to the Spirit. The fundamental question that

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[604] K. Rahner, «Anonymous Christians», 390-391.

[605] K. Rahner, «Anonymous and Explicit Faith», 54.

[606] K. Rahner, «Anonymous and Explicit Faith», 52.

Rahner addresses in this essay is: «What do we mean precisely and specifically when we say that Jesus Christ is to be found in non-Christian religions as well?»[607]. Rahner observes that if we accept the truth of God's universal and efficacious will to save all people, we cannot help but concede a positive redeeming function to the pre-Christian religions, which gives us no prior reason to deny the non-Christian religions the same partially positive function for their members who have not been reached by the gospel. Rahner's answer to the question—and to another, more specific question of how Jesus Christ is present and efficacious in the faith of the non-Christian—is: «Christ is present and efficacious in the non-Christian believer (and therefore in the non-Christian religions) through his Spirit»[608]. Indeed, a real, intrinsic relation between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit exists everywhere and at all times, and «[n]o theologian has shown so clearly the *intrinsic* relationship between the Holy Spirit and the crucified and risen One as Karl Rahner»[609].

For Rahner, if the non-Christians can have a saving faith, and if we can hope that this faith really exists on a wide scale, such faith is made possible and sustained by the Holy Spirit's supernatural grace, the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, so that as the Spirit of the eternal Logos, he can and must, in this sense, be called the Spirit of Christ, the incarnate Word[610]. Since this Spirit at all times and in all places nourishes justifying faith, this faith is from the beginning always and everywhere a faith that exists in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who is present and efficacious in all faiths and religious traditions through the Holy Spirit, his Spirit who has been poured out on the whole world by virtue of God's gracious and efficacious will to save the whole humanity[611]. Because of the presence of Christ

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[607] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 39.

[608] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 43.

[609] H. D. Egan, «A Rahnerian Response», 62; emphasis in the original.

[610] An introduction of the Holy Spirit into the question of the theology of religions is a very important consideration, for theologians who neglect Pneumatology have less to say positively about God's salvific action outside of Christ and the Church.

[611] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 46.

in the religions of the world through the universal presence and work of the Spirit, all religious traditions, therefore, are endowed with the capacity to articulate truth about God's self-communication to human beings and societies. They inevitably possess positive, genuine revelatory value and are potentially salvific in their acceptance and communication of revealed truth mediated by the Spirit.

It is from this perspective that Rahner and those who follow him in this argument conclude that, even if the various religions of the world do not communicate equally real and genuine manifestations of divine revelation due to the presence of sin and error in them, still they have positive roles to play in the history of revelation and salvation, at least among their adherents. They are valid ways of receiving and communicating salvific revelation since Christ who is present in non-Christian religions through the Spirit is implicitly accepted by their adherents in their anonymous faith in Christ through the same Spirit[612]. «Thinking of the Spirit functioning salvifically in non-Christian religions allows us to attribute to them a positive and intrinsic value and refer to them as "ways of salvation" in a manner that detracts neither from the uniqueness and universality of Christ nor from the role of the church as universal sacrament of salvation»[613]. Indeed, on account of the saving presence of the Spirit in these religious traditions, they can no longer be considered merely as «preparations for the Gospel» but must be regarded as valid and legitimate ways of God's revelation and salvation in the world.

The aim of this examination of Rahner's insight on the relationship of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit from this essay is certainly not to come up with Rahner's pneumatology but simply to point out that Rahner, as early as 1974, had already theologized on the presence of Christ in non-Christian religions through the Spirit active and operative among them. And he has done so before the Asian bishops talked about the Spirit's presence and action among Asian religions for the first time in the Second FABC Plenary Assembly in 1978, when they reflected on the theme of

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[612] Cf. T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 291.

[613] P. C. Phan, «John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue», 255.

prayer and spirituality in the Asian context. The key thing is that Rahner's theologizing was then available to the FABC.

3.3.2.3 The Positive Meaning of Religious Pluralism in God's Universal Economy of Salvation

Perhaps, more than a distinct subject, this particular theme simply constitutes a conclusion of Rahner's pre-conciliar and post-conciliar insights on the other religions. If Asian religions are mediations of salvation for their members, and if Christ is active and at work in other religions through the Spirit, giving more credence to the argument that other religions are salvific in themselves, then the diversity of religions may be regarded as possessing a positive significance in God's economy of salvation.

In his 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», Rahner holds that «the actual religions of 'pre-Christian' humanity too must not be regarded as simply illegitimate from the very start, but must be seen as quite capable of having a positive significance»[614]. They can therefore be regarded as «lawful», provided they assume some social form and institutional existence. As such, and as we have seen in Chapter 2, they «can be regarded on the whole as a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for the attaining of salvation, a means which is therefore positively included in God's plan of salvation»[615]. Likewise, a non-Christian religion need not be «either... from God in everything it contains..., or... simply a pure human construction»; or that «a lawful religion intended by God for man as something salvific» should not «be pure and positively willed by God in all its elements»[616]. In fact, for Rahner, other religions can be salvific in themselves even if they exhibit theoretical and practical errors in their concrete structures.

Likewise, in his 1975 article, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation», Rahner concludes that «[n]on-Christian religions then, even though incomplete, rudimentary, and

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[614] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 125.

[615] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 125.

[616] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 127.129.

partially debased, can be realities *within a positive* history of salvation and revelation»[617]. In a lecture delivered in Nagpur, India in 1971, which partly comments on Rahner's theory of the «anonymous Christian», Yves Congar argues that «in so far as these religions have represented the most ordinary mediation of reference to God for whole peoples, with the culture and social life of whom they have been linked, *it is not possible that these religions should not have a place in the salvific plan of God*»[618].

3.3.3 *Three Essential Elements of the FABC's Theology of Religions as Articulated in its Various Documents*

We will now examine some of the FABC statements on Asian religions as «ways» of salvation for their adherents, on the presence and action of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the other religions, and on the diversity of religions as possessing positive significance in God's plan of salvation[619]. These theological issues may be considered as not just three major «instances» in which we can observe the Asian Churches' «going beyond» the Second Vatican Council, but as also three themes in which we can see Rahner's theological influence in the FABC writings.

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[617] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 294; emphasis in the original.

[618] Y. Congar, «Non-Christian Religions and Christianity», 140; emphasis mine.

[619] I wish to mention two observations in this footnote. First, there is no FABC document in which Asian bishops, theologians, and/or pastoral leaders discuss only a single subject matter, say, only God's universal saving will, the salvific status of Asian religions, the Church, the Kingdom of God, or proclamation and dialogue. With the exception of a long document, «The Spirit at Work in Asia Today», published by the FABC's Office of Theological Concerns in 1997, which deals *specifically* with the Holy Spirit, treatment of these different themes (including the Holy Spirit) is scattered all over the FABC documents. Hence, there is a need to ferret the consideration of these varied but interrelated topics out of the copious FABC writings. Secondly, because of the Christocentric character of Rahner's theology and that of the FABC, we can observe that their similar affirmation that other religions are salvific in themselves is always accompanied, not always expressly stated though, by another assertion—that the salvation mediated by these religions to their adherents is always in reference to Christ, a salvation that is attained always in and through Christ.

3.3.3.1 The Salvific Structures of Asian Religions

In the First FABC Plenary Assembly held in 1974, the Asian bishops came up with a statement that conveys their positive view of other religions and how these religions have been considered, for millennia, a wellspring of spiritual vigor and strength for millions of their adherents. In the assembly, the Asian bishops recognize in other religious traditions «significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation» and, in a phrase that implicitly reveals their having gone beyond the Council's «silence» regarding the question of the salvific character of other religions, they assert that «God has drawn our peoples to Himself *through* them»[620], thereby affirming the presence of salvific structures in other religions. If, in the context of Asia, salvation is God drawing the Asian peoples to Himself, and if this takes place *through* the various religions of the continent, then these religious traditions may be seen as salvific in themselves, albeit only salvific in their relation to Christ. In this assembly, the Asian bishops declare that «[d]own through the centuries the ancient religions of the orient.... [f]or us in Asia... have been the doorway to God»[621]. Towards the end of the assembly's statement, in its prayer addressed to Jesus Christ, Lord and Redeemer, who earlier the assembly has affirmed to be «for every man "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6)»[622], the Asian bishops return to this affirmation with greater vigor and conviction:

> You have been present already in their histories and traditions. In hidden ways you have led them, because for them too, you are the *Way*. In ways unknown to us you have enlightened them in their worship, their beliefs, their philosophies, since for them too, you are the *Truth*. In diverse manners you have already made yourself present in their lives, for you are their *Life*. From the very beginning you have called our peoples, and from the Cross you have drawn them to yourself[623].

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[620] FABC I, nos. 14-15, in FAPA I, 14; emphasis mine.

[621] FABC I, no. 12, in FAPA I, 22-23.

[622] FABC I, no. 7, in FAPA I, 13.

[623] FABC I, no. 46, in FAPA I, 19.

If Christ has always been present in the Asian people's histories and traditions, in their worships, beliefs and philosophies, and in their lives from the very beginning, that means that Christ is present among the Asian people through their religions, many of which predate Christianity, since religions are where God's saving grace assumes visible presence in the world in the most concrete and efficacious manner. And if, in Christ, God is present in manifold ways in their religions, it is difficult to think that God is present in them but refrains from carrying out any revelatory and salvific activity, when God's primary purpose and will in being present in these religions is to draw the Asian peoples to Himself and be saved.

In a statement that reveals a trace of Rahner's basic idea of Christ's «anonymous» presence among other religions, the International Congress on Mission held in Manila, five years later, in 1979 reflects on such «presence» of Christ in Asia and what it means for the future of mission in the continent: «It is one of the most thrilling thoughts that mission of the Church in Asia tomorrow will be, not only to bring Christ and his Church to this immense continent, but also to discover with immense joy the presence of this hidden Christ in his own home continent»[624]. For the Congress, the divine light, the light of Christ, coming into the world and illuminating every human being is reflected in the living religions of humanity, which serve as an everlasting glory to the Creator[625]. In the statement of the Fifth FABC General Assembly in 1990, it is Jesus Christ who «draws all peoples to himself through his Church, and through other ways unknown to us», who «enlightens every human being (Jn 1:9)», and who «[imprints] traces of his revelation in the world which exists in him (Col 1:16) and in the "seeds of the Word" found in cultures and in other religious traditions»[626]. For the Theological Consultation organized in 1991, «[t]he proclaiming Church encounters people among whom the rays of that Truth, which enlightens everybody coming into the world, are present. This *hidden*

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[624] International Congress on Mission, no. 13, in FAPA I, 137.

[625] International Congress on Mission, no. 13, in FAPA I, 137.

[626] FABC V, no. 3.1.1, in FAPA I, 279.

presence is the starting point for the Church's proclamation»[627]. In these statements, the Asian bishops go beyond the theological framework of Vatican II by acknowledging the revelatory and salvific character of the different religions of Asia.

Without stressing the point too much, we can say that such a stance of the FABC reflects an essential element of Rahner's foundational theology of religions as articulated in his pre-conciliar and post-conciliar essays on the subject. The «hidden presence» of Christ in other religious traditions through the «elements of truth and grace» operative in them is a theological thought that is central to, and is in fact the basis of, Rahner's theory of the «anonymous Christian»—that «Christ is already present in the religions, yet naming his presence remains an important completion»[628]. The Asian bishops' favorable assessment of other religions as significant and positive elements in God's saving design for the world through which God draws the Asian peoples to himself for thousands of years, which implies the salvific value and import of such religions, is clearly Rahnerian in substance. We can also say that the beginning of the Asian Churches' courageous standing up for their own conviction regarding the various religious traditions of the continent can be traced to the statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC in 1974.

The faith-conviction of the Asian bishops gathered for the First FABC Plenary Assembly as regards the salvific status of Asian religions was re-echoed by the FABC's institutes and offices. The First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA I) held in Thailand on October 18, 1979 not only implies that the different religions of Asia are salvific in themselves but also reflects Rahner's fundamental inclusivist insight: «But, as there is no salvation except by the saving grace of God, all salvation attained by men is the fruit of the gift of Christ. This we believe to be particularly true of the Great Religions of Asia that led countless people to God throughout the ages»[629]. In its second colloquium held in Malaysia a month later, on November 20, 1979, BIRA II upholds the same Rahnerian affirmation «that

[627] FABC-OE, no. 51, in FAPA I, 346; emphasis mine.

[628] F. X. Clooney, «Rahner beyond Rahner», 10.

[629] BIRA I, no. 7, in FAPA I, 110.

God's saving will is at work, in many different ways, in all religions…, that the Spirit of Christ is active outside the bounds of the visible Church… [and that]… God's saving grace is not limited to members of the Church, but is offered to every person»[630]. Commenting on this statement, FABC Papers 131 affirms: «The Church believes that all are offered salvation in Jesus Christ, and this universal salvific will of God brings the affirmation of God's activity in other living faiths…. The Church will become more aware of the fullness of Christ's salvific work in its contact with people of other faiths»[631].

In the Eleventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/11) held in 1988, the assembly, having observed the growing desire among Asians for greater human dignity, brotherhood, equality, democracy, fraternal dialogue, and legitimate autonomy, argues that «[i]n all these aspirations, movements and initiatives, we discern the hand of God who has always guided the destinies of our peoples in the past»; «[t]hey are for us tangible signs of his continued presence among us»[632]. In the last of the BIRA IV series, in BIRA IV/12, the assembly affirms openly the presence of the Word in the religious traditions of humanity when it says: «Our response to the Word in the Spirit should be open to the presence of the Word in all creation and particularly in the different cultural and religious traditions»[633]. It is for this reason that mission, for the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1990, includes «being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word»[634]. For the «Message» of the Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly in 2012, the new evangelization called forth by the Churches of Asia is «characterized by humble sensitivity to the *hidden presence of God* in the struggles of

[630] BIRA II, no. 12, in FAPA I, 115.

[631] FABC PAPERS 131, «A Glimpse at Dialogue in Asia», 17; FABC-OEIA, no. 8, in FAPA I, 166.

[632] BIRA IV/11, nos. 4, 5, in FAPA I, 318-319.

[633] BIRA IV/12, no. 37, in FAPA I, 331.

[634] FABC V, no. 3.1.2, in FAPA I, 280.

the poor, in the riches of people's cultures, *in the varieties of religious traditions*, and in the depths of every human heart»[635].

The International Congress on Mission held in Manila in 1979, which we have cited above, contains more relevant insights on the subject of the salvific value and import of other religions. In the First Consensus Paper of the Workshops of the Congress, the delegates affirm that of special relevance to the local Churches' mission in Asia is the «new theological understanding of the role that "the living faiths of mankind" today play in the work of salvation», and that in and through these religions «we must understand the saving activity of God» in the world[636]. In the Fourth Consensus Paper, the participants contend that the vast majority of Asians find life's meaning and discover humanity's true face in the experience of their own religions; that their adherents who genuinely search for God experience him profoundly in and through their religious traditions. Hence, «[i]t would be a mockery of God's providence and of His will to save all the peoples of the earth, were one to suppose that one-half of the world's population... only await conversion to Christianity... in order to be saved»[637]. For the Congress, it would be a terrible missiological blunder if the local Churches approach their evangelizing mission in Asia from the lofty and patronizing attitude of self-contained benefactors who are responding merely to the spiritual needs and poverty of the Asian people, as if before the faith arrived these people were bereft of an experience of the Divine[638]. Such a call has also been expressed explicitly by the Second Formation Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs held in 1999 when it affirms: «Our faith in Jesus

[635] FABC X, no. 5, in FAPA V, 44-45; emphasis mine.

[636] International Congress on Mission, no. 12, in FAPA I, 137.

[637] International Congress on Mission, no. 2, in FAPA I, 144.

[638] International Congress on Mission, no. 2, in FAPA I, 144. The universal experience of God has a profound implication for the missionary task of the Church, and the idea that God is there before Christian missionaries arrive in the place is articulated beautifully by the Anglican bishop, Kenneth Cragg, when he said: «Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to TAKE OFF OUR SHOES for the place we are approaching is HOLY. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More seriously still, we may forget that GOD WAS THERE BEFORE OUR ARRIVAL» (Cited by S. Carzedda, «Mission: Dialogue and Liberation», 291; capitals in the original).

as the Christ does not require the expulsion of savior figures of others religions, nor does it deny the salvific value of other religions»[639]. And if the only genuine response to the reality of the Kingdom of God is «conversion», and if «[t]he conversion of one's heart to God on the basis of the Good News of Jesus is always a conversion to the Reign of God that Jesus envisioned», such kind of conversion, nevertheless, «may not always be a conversion to join the Christian community»[640].

Indeed, Asian bishops and theologians are convinced that Jesus Christ mediates universal salvation, but that saving mediation does not require *explicit* faith in him and membership in the Catholic Church through baptism[641]. Even the Church document, *Dominus Iesus*, affirms the viability of this reality when, quoting *Redemptoris Missio*, 10, it declares: «For those who are not formally and visibly members of the Church, "salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church, but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation"» (DI 20). In fact, after citing 1Tim 2:4 which speaks of God's will to save everyone through knowledge of the truth, the Declaration argues that «[t]hose who obey the promptings of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation» (DI 20). For the FABC-Office of Evangelization, without becoming full members of the Church through faith and baptism, «[m]embers of other religious traditions already in some way share with us in the mystery of salvation»[642]. The Second Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate, organized in

[639] FIRA II, no. 3.4, in FAPA III, 128.

[640] FIRA II, no. 3.6, in FAPA III, 129.

[641] Cf. FIRA II, no. 3.6, in FAPA III, 129. However, while affirming the salvific value and import of the other religions, for BIRA IV/10, «we need to avoid the impression that all religions are equal» (BIRA IV/10, no. 10, in FAPA I, 314). Likewise, we should refrain from saying that «all religions are the same», for such a «simplistic» assertion «does not promote honest dialogue» (BIRA V/3, no. 7, in FAPA II, 158). Hence, it is necessary for the local Churches to assume a posture of critical discernment as they engage in dialogue with other religions, to discern the manifestations of the presence of the Spirit in these religions, since some elements which foster «anti-Kingdom» values may be present in their systems and structures.

[642] FABC-OE, no. 50, in FAPA I, 346.

India in 1980, affirms clearly that «[w]hile the Church is the visible sign of the presence of Jesus Christ and his Spirit in the world, we believe that the same mystery is also present beyond the boundaries of the Church community and that our non-Christian brethren in ways unknown to us also relate to the mystery of the Church»[643].

Indeed, among Asian bishops and theologians[644] today there is a widespread conviction, which can be traced to Rahner's pre-conciliar and post-conciliar foundational insights, that adherents of other religions are saved, not in spite of, but in and through their respective religions. If Vatican II has argued that salvation is available to every human being, although in ways known only to God, for Asian bishops and theologians it is in and through the religious traditions of the world that God's saving grace reaches adherents of other faiths. Likewise, Asian bishops and theologians feel affirmed and supported by the pronouncement of Pope John Paul II on the Holy Spirit's presence and activity in other religious traditions. In *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Pope speaks of Christians as bringing to interreligious dialogue «the firm belief that the fullness of salvation comes from Christ alone and that the Church community to which they belong is the *ordinary means* of salvation» (EA 31). According to Michael Amaladoss, «[John Paul II's] repeated assertion that the Church is the ordinary way of salvation seems to acknowledge, at least implicitly, other religions as *extraordinary* ways» of salvation[645]. Amaladoss reiterates this suspicion in another essay. After observing that for the International Theological Commission, the question of the salvific character of other religions is «a point that remains open»[646], he argues:

> John Paul II, in his encyclical *The Mission of the Redeemer*, while acknowledging that "the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ," goes on to affirm that "the Church

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[643] BIMA II, no. 14, in FAPA I, 101.

[644] Cf. M. Amaladoss, «Mission in Asia», 222-235 and P. C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, xxiii.

[645] M. Amaladoss, «Mission in Asia», 226.

[646] International Theological Commission, «Christianity and the World Religions», no. 81, p. 173.

> is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation" (55). If we put this together with his acceptance that "the Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures, and religions" (28), then we can make a good case that the other religions are extraordinary means of salvation and that, while the means that they possess may be partial (according to this view), the salvation that they facilitate can only be full, because one cannot be saved partially[647].

3.3.3.2 The Salvific Presence of Jesus Christ in the Other Religions Through the Holy Spirit

For the FABC, the Holy Spirit who calls the Asian Churches to dialogue with members of other religions is the Spirit of Jesus Christ through whom the risen Lord is universally present and active, another aspect in which we see Rahner's enduring insight evoked. This dialogue is rooted in the conviction that Christ is savingly present and at work in the life and traditions of peoples of other faiths through his Spirit. In Christ, God reveals himself as the creative and transforming Spirit who brings about a new humanity and a new creation[648]. Christ, «[t]he Risen Lord… lives and works through the Holy Spirit in history»[649]. In separate paragraphs of the document, «Discerning the Spirit at Work In and Beyond the Church in Asia», the participants affirm the intrinsic relation between Christ and the Spirit:

> We affirm any effort towards an experience of immediate access to the Spirit has to be seen in relation to Jesus Christ to whom the Spirit bears witness. What is done in the name of the Holy Spirit must be in keeping with the life, teachings and mission of Jesus Christ…. What the Spirit does, and continues to do, is inseparable from what Christ said and did…. Any discernment of the Holy Spirit, furthermore, stands in relation to the Church's memory and interpretation of the reality of Jesus Christ. The Church's accumulated wisdom and insights into the Christ event.... are definitive reference points for

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[647] M. Amaladoss, «The Mystery of Christ and Other Religions», 328.

[648] BIRA IV/3, no. 2, in FAPA I, 258; FABC-OE, no. 40, in FAPA I, 344; FIRA II, no. 3.3.iv, in FAPA III, 127.

[649] FABC-OEIA, no. 7, in FAPA I, 166.

> testing the authenticity of contemporary encounters with the Holy Spirit[650].

And if «dialogue is the work of the Spirit», «[d]ialogue… demands a total Christ-like self-emptying so that, led by the Spirit, we may be more effective instruments in building up God's Kingdom»[651]. Alluding to the words of Jesus in John's Gospel, also cited by the Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly, that «the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you» (Jn 14:26), Martin Forward asserts that the Holy Spirit is indeed «intimately linked to the ministry of Jesus (John 14:26), who, in other words, is the locus of its deepest meaning»[652].

Taking its inspiration from Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, the 1991 Theological Consultation asserts not only that in Asia the different religious traditions «command our respect because of the spiritual and human values enshrined in them», but also that such values «are *expressions of the presence of God's Word and of the universal action of his Spirit in them*»[653], thus affirming that the various religions of the world are diverse manifestations of the presence of the *Logos* and the Spirit in history. In the same Consultation, the participants, speaking about interreligious dialogue, argue that «dialogue is founded on the fact that Christ, the new Adam, is at work through his Spirit in all human persons to bring about a new humanity» (DP 15)»[654]. For the International Congress on Mission, Christ, in whom everyone is saved, is present in other religions through his Spirit, and it is the Spirit of the Lord who «calls each people and each culture to its own fresh and creative response to the Gospel»[655]. This intrinsic relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit is affirmed also by

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[650] BIRA IV/3, nos. 11, 13, in FAPA I, 260.

[651] BIRA IV/7, nos. 13, 16, in FAPA I, 310.311.

[652] M. Forward, «The Reconciling Spirit in the Context of Religious Pluralism», 278; Cf. FABC X, no. 56, in FAPA V, 80.

[653] FABC-OE, no. 43, in FAPA I, 344; emphasis mine.

[654] FABC-OE, no. 40, in FAPA I, 344.

[655] International Congress on Mission, no. 15, in FAPA I, 130.

the First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate in 1988. In the Conclusion of the document, the participants declare that «the Risen Lord and His Spirit are at work in us and the world of Asia, assisting us to bear witness to God's Kingdom of peace and justice, love and fellowship»[656]. In «The Spirit at Work in Asia Today», the document affirms that «[t]he same God entered the history of the various peoples through the Spirit and his Word in mysterious ways known only to Him, and therefore the Sacred Scriptures of the other religions are also reflections of the presence and activity of the Spirit in the non-Christian religious traditions»[657]. It is because of the Asian Churches' conviction of the presence of Christ and of his Spirit in the other religious traditions that the Asian bishops have argued not only for the importance and necessity of interreligious dialogue in Asia but also for the recognition of the role and status of other religions in the salvation of their members. Such a conviction re-echoes Rahner's argument that Jesus Christ is savingly present and efficacious in non-Christian religions and that he is present in these religions through his Spirit—an argument that Rahner developed in his 1974 essay, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions».

The first time the Asian bishops spoke about the Holy Spirit in relation to other religions was during the Second FABC Plenary Assembly held in Calcutta in 1978, which focused on «Prayer—the Life of the Church of Asia». In this assembly, the bishops assert that «[s]ustained and reflective dialogue with them [adherents of other Asian religions] in prayer... will reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvelous variety of ways. These are different perhaps from our own, but through them we too may hear His voice, calling us to lift our hearts to the Father»[658]. This important passage, whose last sentence alludes to *Nostra Aetate*'s recognition in non-Christian religions of «precepts and doctrines which... [differ]... in many ways from her own teaching» (NA 2), affirms not just the presence of the Holy Spirit in other religious traditions, but also that

[656] BIMA I, in FAPA I, 294.

[657] FABC-OTC, no. 3.5, in FAPA III, 288.

[658] FABC II, no. 35, in FAPA I, 35.

through the «marvelous variety of ways» by which «religious others» express themselves to God in prayer we too may hear the divine voice summoning us to pray to the Father. Referring to this insight, the 1997 document, «The Spirit at Work in Asia Today», affirms that «in the deeper meanings and intentions of people of other faiths, none the less when expressed in religious forms alien to our own, we are to recognize "the voice of the Spirit bearing witness to the marvelous variety of God's Self-revelation to man, and able to influence the way we lift up our hearts to the Lord"»[659]. That we can learn something from other religions, especially in the aspect of expressing ourselves to God in prayer, is a re-echo of what the previous FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974 tries to convey when it insists that

> [o]nly in dialogue with these religions can we discover in them the seeds of the Word of God (*Ad Gentes*, c 1, 9)…. It will reveal to us also many riches of our own faith which we perhaps would not have perceived…. Finally, this dialogue will teach us what our faith in Christ leads us to receive from these religious traditions, and what must be purified in them, healed and made whole, in the light of God's Word[660].

For the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/2) held in 1985, dialogue with other Asian religions is «based on the firm belief that the Holy Spirit is operative in other religions as well»[661]. This affirmation of the presence of the Spirit in other religions was re-echoed by BIRA IV/3 convened in 1986, which dealt precisely with the theme, «Discerning the Spirit at Work in and Beyond the Church in Asia». This assembly proclaims that in the context of the vast and complex realities of Asia, home to diverse religious traditions that exercise such a strong and powerful influence on the immense multitude of people, «the Church is called by the Spirit of Christ to enter into dialogue with the followers of other Asian faiths and movements»[662]. It is the same

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[659] FABC-OTC, no. 4.2.2.3, in FAPA III, 307.

[660] FABC I, nos. 16-17, in FAPA I, 14-15.

[661] BIRA IV/2, no. 8.5, in FAPA I, 253

[662] BIRA IV/3, no. 2, in FAPA I, 258.

Spirit who, according to John Paul II's 1986 Encyclical on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, is present and active «also "outside the visible body of the Church"» (DV 53). The assembly likewise calls for the Asian Churches «to develop a deeper understanding of the Spirit of God»—«the same Spirit, who has been active in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus and in the Church, who was active amongst all peoples before the Incarnation and is active amongst the nations, religions and peoples of Asia today»[663]. For the assembly, because people encounter the Holy Spirit within their particular circumstances, which are pluralistic as regards religions, cultures and worldviews, the presence and activity of the Spirit within and outside the Asian Churches not only may be perceived in various ways but also calls for a stance of «*receptive pluralism*»—«[t]hat is, the many ways of responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit must be continually in conversation with one another»[664].

After affirming the biblical conviction that God wills all human beings to be saved, and, in calling them to communion with him, gives them the grace and means of salvation, the participants of BIRA IV/7, convened in 1988, declare that «[t]he great religions of Asia with their respective creeds, cults and codes reveal to us diverse ways of responding to God whose Spirit is active in all peoples and cultures»[665]. This statement, which speaks of various religions as means of God's salvific work in a pluralistic world, consists of a couple of significant assertions: that God is present and active «in all peoples and cultures» [which certainly include religions] through his Spirit, and that Asian religions are simply different «ways»—embodied in creeds, cults, and codes—by which human beings respond to God and his offer of salvation to humankind. In addition, the presence of divine revelation is implied in the second assertion, for how can human beings ever respond to God if God has not, in some way, revealed himself to them in their religions? In BIRA IV/12, the document affirms that «God's Spirit is at work in all religious

[663] BIRA IV/3, no. 6, in FAPA I, 259.

[664] BIRA IV/3, no. 16, in FAPA I, 261.

[665] BIRA IV/7, no. 12, in FAPA I, 310.

traditions, moving the faithful believers of each tradition to a greater commitment to truth and more authentic communion within and beyond their own tradition»[666]. In one of the clearest affirmations of the FABC on the saving presence of the Spirit in other religions, the document, «Methodology: Asian Christian Theology», argues: «[T]he Spirit is at work outside the visible Christian community and its work is mediated through these various [religious] traditions»[667]. The «Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia» in 1983 specifically affirms that

> [i]n the mysterious and providential plan of God Islam possesses a salvific and liberating purpose…. [O]ur belief in the universal salvific will of God leads us to affirm the initiative of God active in other living faiths. Thus the genuine beliefs and practices of Muslims form the vehicles of God's favor to them and constitute the basis of their human communion and action[668].

Indeed, the other religious traditions are means through which their adherents experience and encounter God and his Spirit in their lives.

3.3.3.3 The Plurality of Religions as Having a Positive Meaning in God's Overall Plan of Salvation

In this theology of religions that has reconsidered the meaning and value, the function and task, of non-Christian religions within God's plan of salvation, some Asian theologians «have argued that these religions may be said to be ways of salvation and that religious pluralism is part of God's providential plan»[669]. If other religions are salvific in themselves, are means of salvation for their members, are means by which «God's other children» are saved, therefore, they are—as Rahner has argued in his 1962 and 1975 essays—positively willed by God, positively included in God's all-embracing plan of salvation.

We see this conclusion of Rahner appropriated clearly and explicitly by the FABC in many instances in its various documents. Since the

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[666] BIRA IV/12, no. 7, in FAPA I, 326.

[667] FABC-OTC, FAPA III, 330-331.

[668] FABC-OEIA, no. 8, in FAPA I, 166.

[669] P. C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, xxiii.

First FABC Plenary Assembly of 1974, the Asian bishops have argued that the different religions of the continent have been for millennia the instruments and structures by which Asian peoples convey their religious life, reach God, and attain salvation. And if, for this assembly, evangelization is the carrying out of the Church's duty to proclaim in words and deeds Christ and his Gospel, for the 2000 «Consultation on "Evangelization and Inculturation"», evangelization, which is «the realization of God's design for a new humanity and a new heaven and a new earth (cf. Rev. 21:1)», «cannot be fully realized unless we open ourselves up to the presence of the same plan operating in all religions and cultural traditions»[670]. This is because, as *Gaudium et Spes* declares, «the ultimate vocation of humanity is in fact one and divine» (GS 22). In fact, the call for the local Churches of Asia to evangelize the continent through dialogue must be understood in the context of a paradigm shift based primarily on the discovery that «all believers form a community, with one common origin, one common destiny and one common mission to transform the world»[671]. With the adherents of other religions and all people of goodwill, we form one community, we share the same destiny, and we travel together on a common pilgrimage towards the same Kingdom of God. Pope John Paul II reflects on this idea in his Christmas Address to the Roman Curia in 1986, in his effort to explain and reflect further on the meaning of the World Day of Prayer for Peace that was held in Assisi in October that year:

> [T]here is only one divine plan for every human being who comes into this world (cf. Jn 1:9), one single origin and goal, whatever may be the colour of his skin, the historical and geographical framework within which he happens to live and act, or the culture in which he grows up and expresses himself. The differences are a less important element, when confronted with the unity which is radical, fundamental and decisive[672].

For the FABC, there is only one God whose way is dialogue, and who has been dialoguing with the whole of humanity from the very beginning,

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[670] FABC, in FAPA III, 217.

[671] FABC, in FAPA III, 216.

[672] John Paul II, «Pope's Christmas Address to the Roman Curia», 56.

making the history of humanity the history of revelation. It is God's ongoing dialogue with humanity, his speaking and continuing to speak with all peoples in various ways as a dialogical God, that constitutes the basis of all our demands to dialogue with adherents of other religions and with people of goodwill[673].

Indeed, there is only one saving plan for the entire human race, and this one, single salvific design explains the presence of God's redemptive grace in all religions, cultures, movements, histories and struggles of peoples[674]. The Asian bishops' and theologians' positive appreciation of the other religions is rooted in the faith-conviction that «God's plan of salvation for humanity is one and reaches out to all peoples», and that this divine plan «is the Kingdom of God through which he seeks to reconcile all things with himself in Jesus Christ»[675]. Since God wills all human beings to be saved and to participate fully in his divine life, he bestows on all persons sufficient means of salvation and of sharing in his life[676]. «Asia's many venerable religions may [therefore] be seen within God's universal design of salvation—that all would be saved (1 Tm. 2:4)»[677]. And the demand to dialogue with members of these religions comes from «an increasing awareness of the positive role of other religions in God's plan of salvation»[678], and «[the] crucial role… [they]… play in God's great enterprise to bring peace, communion and a more humane way of life to all peoples of Asia, indeed to the whole human family»[679]. For Michael Amaladoss, «[a]ll religions believe that there is only one God and that this God has a plan that embraces the whole universe»[680].

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673 FIRA IV, no. 16, in FAPA III, 143; FIRA I, no. 2.3, in FAPA III, 120.

674 FABC-OTC, no. 3.4, in FAPA III, 364.

675 FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 2.3, p. 13.

676 BIRA I, no. 6, in FAPA I, 110; cf. BIRA IV/7, no. 12, in FAPA I, 310.

677 Asian Mission Congress, in FAPA IV, 276.

678 BIRA III, no. 2, in FAPA I, 119.

679 BIRA IV/12, no. 7, in FAPA I, 326.

680 M. Amaladoss, «Dialogue Between Religions in Asia Today», 55.

The Second Formation for Inter-Religious Affairs adds: «We acknowledge that human persons and communities participate in the one universal plan of God in diverse ways»[681]. And quoting BIRA II's insight that «God's saving will is at work, in many different ways, in all religions»[682], FIRA II concludes: «The diversity of the religions, we are convinced, belongs to God's plan of salvation»[683]. In other words, the plurality of religions in the world is something that is positively willed by God. Likewise, in a prayer found at the beginning of Volume II of *For All the Peoples of Asia*, which the document, «Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life», uses to conclude its reflection, the prayer affirms that the «[l]oving and life-giving God... enriched us with astonishing variety of cultures, ways of living, believing and worshipping», diversities which the document considers Gods' «gifts»[684]. If the variety of «ways of living, believing and worshipping» refers to the different religions, then the various religions in Asia are willed by God and possess a positive significance in God's plan of salvation since they are viewed as God's gifts, as coming from God himself, and therefore as having divine origin.

3.4 **Divergences Between Karl Rahner and Vatican II *and* the FABC**[685]

3.4.1 *In Terms of Approach to Doing Theology*

The publication of Paul VI's first Encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, in 1964 was certainly significant in the conciliar and post-conciliar reflection on and exploration of dialogue. At the time when this Encyclical was promulgated the conciliar documents that were to deal with the subject of the other religions were still being deliberated on in

[681] FIRA II, no. 3.1, in FAPA III, 126-127.

[682] BIRA II, no. 12, in FAPA I, 115.

[683] FIRA II, no. 3.1, in FAPA III, 127.

[684] FABC-TAC, in FAPA II, xi; FABC-TAC, no. 61, in FAPA II, 228.

[685] Speaking of theological divergencies between Rahner and the FABC *and* Vatican II, sub-sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3 above, on the essential elements of Rahner's and the FABC's theology of religions, may be considered areas where Rahner and the FABC have expressly gone beyond the Council.

the Council. This Encyclical marked the entry of «dialogue» (both as a word and as a theological concept) not only in the Church's official documents but also in the Church's consciousness as it contemplated the world in the spirit of openness and engagement[686]. The Pope summed up all the dynamism of the Church toward the world in «dialogue»: «To this internal drive of charity which seeks expression in the external gift of charity, we will apply the word "dialogue." The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make» (ES 64-65). With the Catholic Church at the center, Paul VI outlined four «concentric circles» which delineated four distinct spheres at which the Church must engage in dialogue. Beginning from the farthest sphere and moving towards the closest, the four circles were: humanity and the world, the different religious traditions of the world, the other Christian churches and communities, and finally, the Church herself (cf. ES 96-113)[687]. The Pope, in this Encyclical, came up with an exhortation on dialogue without the Catholic Church having any prior knowledge and experience of dialogue, particularly with the various religious traditions, to ground its theological treatment of this issue.

Likewise, as regards the question of the non-Christian religions, the primary goal of Vatican II, as we have mentioned in Chapter 1, was to promote dialogue and collaboration between the Catholic Church and these religious traditions. For this purpose, the Council came up with exhortations for the Church and for Christians to enter into dialogue and collaboration with the adherents of other religions (NA 2, AG 11, and GS 92). The Council, however, put forward such exhortations with the Church not having yet a certain degree of previous knowledge and understanding of non-Christian religions and their members as they know and understand themselves, and

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[686] J. Dupuis, «Interreligious Dialogue in the Church's Evangelizing Mission», 240.

[687] J. Dupuis, «A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*», 125.

«without the church's *yet* having the experience and the fruit of dialogue»[688].

Influenced theologically by Rahner, the FABC has repeatedly argued since the beginning that other religions are «ways» of salvation for their adherents and has consistently acknowledged the role of these religions in the salvation of their members. However, even if Rahner and the FABC each insist on the salvific value and import of the other religions, there is a considerable difference in terms of how both have arrived at the same conclusion, which reveals the FABC's basic and distinctly contextualized approach to doing theology as seen in the documents of its assemblies and institutes, and in the writings of some Asian theologians.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, Rahner, in an *a priori* way, has affirmed that if non-Christians are saved, their salvation takes place through the very human, social, and symbolic mediations that are available to them concretely within their own religions. He has approached the question of the theology of religions as a dogmatic theologian from an *a priori* perspective whose «sources of faith» vis-à-vis the other religions «have developed without any direct contact with most of the non-Christian religions»[689]. However, he has also appealed for collaboration with historians and phenomenologists of religions for theological insights from the perspective of the *a posteriori* findings of the history and phenomenology of religions[690]. He has admitted that unlike him (a dogmatic theologian) who has «to think *a priori* here», the religious historian's «task is to discover Christ as far as possible *a posteriori* in the non-Christian religions»[691]. And Rahner's *a priori*

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[688] T. F. Stransky, «The Church and Other Religions», 156; emphasis in the original.

[689] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 39.

[690] Cf. K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 295.

[691] K. Rahner, «Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions», 39-40. Speaking about non-Christian religions in his 1962 essay, Rahner says: «[W]e are not concerned here with an *a-posteriori* history of religions. Consequently, we also cannot describe empirically what should not exist and what is opposed to God's will in these non-Christian religions, nor can we represent these things in their many forms and degrees» (K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 122).

argument in arriving at his conclusion on the salvific nature of other religions has been corroborated *a posteriori* by the Asian bishops and theologians who consider the other religions as salvific in themselves, as salvific for their members, albeit always in relation to Christ.

Hence, one exceptional feature in the FABC's theologizing is its contextual and *a posteriori* approach in dealing with the question of the salvific significance of other religions in God's overall plan of salvation, an approach that commences from the Asian Churches' daily experience of and actual encounter with the followers of other religions. The FABC's theologizing begins with the pragmatic consideration of the concrete realities of the people, striving to look into the realities of their existence, their life situations, as the *locus* of doing theology[692]. The Asian bishops, as early as in their First FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974, have acknowledged the enormous influence of the different religious traditions of Asia in the histories, cultures and ways of life of the Asian peoples; hence, they have included these religions in their task of theologizing. In this sense, the FABC's theology of religions may be said to be a result of the Asian Churches' attempt to make sense of the Christian faith within the religiously pluralistic context of Asia. Hence, after saying that «the work of theology in Asia as a service to life.... has to reflect systematically on themes that are important to the common journey of life with other peoples in Asia», the 1994 document, «Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life», argues that «theology has to start from below, from the underside of history, from the perspective of those who struggle for life, love, justice, and freedom», and that «[t]he life-long experiences of living the Christian

[692] What Pope Francis said to the Superiors General of Religious Men gathered in Rome in 2013 captures the FABC's meaning of its a *posteriori* method in doing theology: «This is really very important to me: the need to become acquainted with reality by experience, to spend time walking on the periphery in order really to become acquainted with the reality and life-experiences of people. If this does not happen we then run the risk of being abstract ideologists or fundamentalists, which is not healthy» (Pope Francis, «"Wake Up the World!" Conversation with Pope Francis About the Religious Life», downloaded from https://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/PopeFrancis/Wake_up_the_world-2.pdf on January 25, 2020).

faith by the various churches in their Asian context are *the starting points*»[693].

For the Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly, this «experiential and contextualized method of theological reflection», which is «at the service of mission and pastoral ministry», while relying first on «Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scriptures which form one sacred deposit of the Word of God that is interpreted authentically by the Church's magisterium», nevertheless «takes in Asian realities as resources insofar as God's presence and action and the work of the Spirit are discerned there»[694]. In its 2000 document, entitled «Methodology: Asian Christian Theology», the FABC-Office of Theological Concerns articulates the kind of methodology it has been using since 1970 and which it wants to employ as its permanent methodology in doing theology. It declares:

> To theologize in Asia, to give reasons, to explain and to be critically conscious of what it means to be a Christian is not an exercise of translating the experiences of past generations (be they Western or Eastern) into some modern Asian jargon, but rather an attempt to express from the depths of the Asian psyche the ineffable experience of living faith in Jesus Christ. It is the result of a genuine incarnation of the mystery of Christ in the flesh and blood of Asian peoples[695].

For the FABC, knowing the other religions and their adherents is important not only for understanding them as they are in themselves, but also for understanding the Churches of Asia. The Asian Churches have been actively involved in dialogue with the «religious others»

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[693] FABC-TAC, nos. 48-49, in FAPA II, 226; emphasis mine.

[694] FABC X, no. 12, in FAPA V, 55-56.

[695] FABC-OTC, in FAPA III, 330. BISA VII (1986) enunciates the «Pastoral Cycle» (later renamed as «Pastoral Spiral») which, as an elaboration of the classic «see-judge-act methodology», consists of four stages: exposure-immersion which «follows the basic principle of the Incarnation»; social analysis which endeavors to «evaluate the social, economic, political, cultural and religious systems in society» and to discern both their positive and negative impact on the people; contemplation which attempts to «discover God's presence and activity within social reality»; and pastoral planning which «seeks to translate the previous three stages into actual, realizable plans» (BISA VII, nos. 8-12, in FAPA I, 231-232; cf. FABC X, no. 12, in FAPA V, 55).

and it is from such an involvement that they have derived and continuously developed their theology of religions. Thus, if their theology is a product of a prior experience of the other religions, then it can be said that one cannot understand the Churches of Asia and their interreligious theology without understanding the «religious others» involved in the dialogue, without understanding their interlocutors and their religious worldview in dialogue. This is because interreligious dialogue «is based on the assumption that it is not only important for me to know the other, … I [also] need the other to know myself truly»[696].

Indeed, it is important that «theologizing» about other religions be done only *after* a praxis of dialogue with them and a serious consideration of the particularities of their traditions, a methodology that emphasizes «an inductive and intuitive approach to reality» and recognizes «the primacy of experience holistically considered»[697]. Jacques Dupuis, who lived in India for thirty-six years and was FABC's theological consultant for many years, underlines the importance of the «priority» of praxis over doctrine in dialogue: «In the context of the plurality of religious traditions, the praxis of interreligious dialogue among different traditions is required as a 'first act' of the process; theological reflection on the relationship between these traditions will follow as the 'second act'»[698]. For Dupuis, «where the relationship between the Christian mystery and the religious traditions of humanity is concerned, priority belongs to the praxis of interreligious dialogue as an obligatory foundation for a theological discourse. The a priori operation... must be replaced by an a posteriori procedure»[699]. He insists on the «priority» of the «act» of dialogue over «theological reflection» in another place:

> With regard to the theology of religions, the "first act" of doing theology must be a serious practice of interreligious dialogue and taking seriously the religious experience met personally in the lives of

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[696] S. Carzedda, «Mission: Dialogue and Liberation», 292.

[697] FABC-OTC, no. 2, in FAPA IV, 287.

[698] J. Dupuis, «One God, One Christ, Convergent Ways», 211.

[699] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 17.

> the "others" with whom one comes in contact through interreligious dialogue. That encounter, if true and authentic, cannot fail to raise serious questions for a Christian believer. These are indeed the questions—not abstract but concrete—that demand of the theology of religions a detailed response based on a sincere reinterpretation of the revealed datum[700].

Even the document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, published by the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue in 1991, affirms equally that «[a] just appraisal of other religions normally presupposes close contact with them» (DP 3).

Thus, although it is possible to come up with a positive assessment of the role and place of the other religions in God's universal saving plan in an *a priori* way, as Rahner has done, the Asian bishops do not begin their reflection from an *a priori* approach but from *a posteriori* method, a method that takes into consideration the context and experience of doing theology. The Asian bishops have arrived at the conclusion that other religions are salvific in themselves *through* the *a posteriori* approach, by looking at the lives of holy people in other religions and by discerning the presence of Kingdom-values in their lives and in their religious traditions. The Asian Catholics' profound experiences of goodness, truth, wisdom and holiness among the members of other religions compel them to confront with utter seriousness the question of the salvific character of other religious traditions. For Felix Wilfred, the Asian bishops' positive theological appreciation of other religions, articulated as early as in their First FABC Plenary Assembly of 1974, is «not a conclusion drawn from some theological argumentation, but an attitude and conviction born out of a direct, experiential encounter with men and women who are followers of other religions»[701].

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[700] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 8.

[701] F. Wilfred, «The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)», xxv. Articulated almost in the same manner, Georg Evers affirms: «This positive appreciation of the religious heritage of Asian peoples is not a conclusion arrived at by theological reflection and debate, but an attitude and conviction born out of direct and existential living contact with the followers of these religions» (G. Evers, «The Specific Contribution of Asian Theologians», 76).

The significance of this *a posteriori* approach as a necessary condition for doing theology in the Asian context is expressed clearly by Michael Amaladoss' emphasis on «experience» in arriving implicitly at the conclusion that other religious traditions possess salvific structures: «*Experientially*, there has been a growing realization in Asia that the vast majority of its people have access to salvation in and through their own religions»[702]. For the FABC's «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue»:

> This appreciation is based on the fruits of the Spirit perceived in the lives of the other religions' believers: a sense of the sacred, a commitment to the pursuit of fullness, a thirst for self-realization, a taste for prayer and commitment, a desire for renunciation, a struggle for justice, an urge to basic human goodness, an involvement in service, a total surrender of the self to God, and an attachment to the transcendent in their symbols, rituals and life itself, though human weakness and sin are not absent[703].

For the same document, it is in fact this «experience of other religions [that] has led the Church in Asia to this appreciation of their role in the divine economy of salvation»[704].

Indeed, given the multi-religious context of Asia and the Asian Churches' minority status, religious pluralism, instead of being a theological question to be argued and debated by theologians of religions, is a lived reality for the Churches of Asia. For Georg Evers, «[t]his constitutes the specific character of the approach to dialogue by Christians in Asia and by the FABC and distinguishes it from the theological discussion within the theological tradition of Europe or other Churches»[705]. The Asian Churches are conscious that within the universal Church, they have the unique task, incumbent upon them on account of the religious milieux they are in, to reflect on their situations and provide theological answers to the questions and challenges posed to them and their mission by the great religious

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[702] M. Amaladoss, «Mission in Asia», 225; emphasis in the original.

[703] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 2.2, p. 13.

[704] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 2.2, p. 13.

[705] G. Evers, «The Specific Contribution of Asian Theologians», 76.

traditions of the continent. Part of the theological riches that the FABC has accumulated all these years since the Asian Bishops' Meeting in Manila in 1970 has been its corpus of theological responses to these questions, responses that are truly their own—truly Asian—which have resulted from their lived encounter with Asian religions and their adherents as well as from their reflections on their mission in such immensely multi-religious contexts[706].

3.4.2 *In Terms of Approach to «Naming» the «Religious Others»*

Another distinctive area where the FABC has clearly gone beyond Vatican II and Rahner is in the aspect of «naming» the «religious others». The way the Asian bishops «address» the followers of other religious traditions provides a striking contrast between themselves, on the one hand, and Vatican II and Rahner, on the other hand. Whereas the Council's terminology—as clearly reflected in its chief document on religions—defines the adherents of other religions «with reference to Christianity, as *non*-Christians, the bishops prefer to refer to them as «brothers and sisters of other faiths»[707]. In Vatican II, the sincere adherents of other religious traditions are defined through Christianity. *Nostra Aetate*'s official title is «Declaration on the Relation of the Church to *Non-Christian Religions*». Rahner's famous 1962 essay, published before the opening of the Council in the same year, bears the title, «Christianity and the *Non-Christian Religions*» (1962). Rahner's other representative essays convey a disposition typical of his ecclesiastical period of trying to define the other religions (and by extension, the members of these religions) negatively, as *non-Christian*: «Jesus Christ in the *Non-Christian Religions*» (1974) and «On the Importance of the *Non-Christian Religions* for Salvation» (1975)[708].

In Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* and in Rahner's essays, religions are defined not for what they are in themselves, in their essential and

[706] G. Evers, «The Specific Contribution of Asian Theologians», 76-77.

[707] F. Wilfred, «The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)», xxv.

[708] In evaluating Vatican II and Rahner on the question of the «others» and their religious traditions, one has to consider the fact that they «did not yet have the sensitivity that postconciliar theology has fortunately developed toward the "others" and their traditions» (J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 66).

irreducible *otherness*, but for what they are not from the point of view of and in relation to Christianity. It is, therefore, «a purely negative definition, and one which is entirely derived from us, Christians—a rather self-centered term»[709]. For «[i]n these self-referential constructions of otherness, the other is not allowed to be distinctive, but is named with reference to one's own categories and judged on the basis of one's own self-identity»[710]. Hence, even if the use of the term «non-Christian» is unavoidable as a sociological category, this expression «sounds patronizing and disrespectful, from the religious point of view, to the people of other faiths, as though their religions can only be defined in relation to Christianity and not on their own terms»[711]. In this distorted understanding of the «religious other», «the "other" is only understood in terms of oneself, as different from and inferior to oneself, oneself being the norm by which the other is evaluated», rather than «seeing the other as *other* and not as a mirror of oneself»[712].

It is for this reason that Jacques Dupuis has normally avoided the use of the term «non-Christians» in his pioneering book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*: «For it has the disadvantage

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[709] N. Guillemette, *The Law of the Spirit*, 154.

[710] J. H. Fletcher, «Rahner and Religious Diversity», 246.

[711] P. C. Phan, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism*, 99.

[712] P. C. Phan, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism*, 99.109. In the same book, Phan provides a critique of the prefix «non» in the term *non-Christian* present in the official title of the Vatican II document on the other religions: «Those of us, church officials as well as theologians, who work all our lives exclusively in majority-Christian milieus, might miss the offensive tone in the title of *NA: Declaration on the Church's Relations to Non-Christian Religions*.... The use of "non" as prefix to refer to others different from oneself is perhaps an unavoidable anthropological and sociological shorthand to distinguish "us" from "them." But the negative naming of the "other" loses its innocence as an identity marker when it is used by a group that has consistently claimed to be superior to all others in all aspects of life. The "non," when applied to others, implies the absence, or at least an imperfect presence, of all the things that make this group the norm and standard of perfection for all others.... These "others" therefore need to be brought into the fold by means of the *mission civilisatrice*, often by conquest and subjugation. Such negative designation of the "other" is by no means a neutral nomenclature but is part and parcel of the imperial politics of difference and power» (*Ibid*., 109).

of defining the others by what they are not—namely Christians; what is even more serious, it defines them with reference to what we are ourselves, thus placing the Christian community at the center of theological discourse as an obligatory point of reference»[713]. The decision to avoid the use of this term was occasioned by Dupuis' observation that «[a] certain traditional type of theological vocabulary perpetuates expressions which no longer correspond to present theological understanding»[714]. In their 1992 document, «Working Together for Harmony in God's World», the Asian bishops refer to it as «signs of weakness in our daily expressions of the mystery of life»: «Our language, our vocabulary, our tone of expression at times betray non-comprehension and discord»[715]. Hence, in his other book, *Christianity and the Religions*, Dupuis asserts that «[o] penness to positive relations of encounter... requires from us—albeit not exclusively—that memory and language be purified», that «the "purification of theological language"... must go along with the "purification of memory"»[716]. Part of this purification of theological language is coming up with and employing a theologically appropriate way of naming and addressing the «religious others» in a language that is devoid of arrogance and superiority.

For Felix Wilfred, this negative definition of the «religious others» arises because the Western theology of religions manifests «an epistemology of differentiation and opposition», in which «Christian identity is… defined in terms of negation to the other of what it alone is»[717]. In Asia, on the contrary, «the Asian way of thinking is *yin-yang*, where things which appear contrary as opposites are seen as complementary—*contraria sunt complementa*»[718]. For the participants of the Eleventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue held in 1988, one has to reject the «attitude of exclusivity»,

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[713] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 330.

[714] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 330.

[715] BIRA V/1, in FAPA II, 145.

[716] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 7.195.

[717] F. Wilfred, «Some Tentative Reflections on Language», 48.

[718] F. Wilfred, «Sunset in the East?», 10.

which is the unwillingness to «open oneself and see the beauty and truth in the other», to embrace «complementarity which exists between peoples, cultures, faiths, ideologies, world-visions, etc.», and, in order to promote harmony, to «cultivate an all-embracing complementary way of thinking[,]... something very characteristic of Asian traditions which consider the various dimensions of reality not as contradictory, but as complementary (*yinyang*)»[719]. *Ecclesia in Asia* similarly argues that the local Churches' growing sense of «being Asian» «is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony», and that through «this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul» (EA 6). The document, «Methodology: Asian Christian Theology», expounds this point when it says:

> The Asian way is one of integration and inclusion. Rather than saying "A is true, so B must be false", the Asian tends to say "A is true, and B is also true in some sense." This is not to say that truth is relative. There is but one Truth; but Truth is a Mystery which we approach reverently while we try to seek to understand its various aspects and dimensions[720].

In India, particularly, «knowledge of the other takes place by reaching out to the other and not through the negation of the other»[721]. As Asians, «[r]espect for the other as other and the acceptance of the other as other will help us grow as brothers and sisters»[722].

Indeed, while Rahner and Vatican II address the «religious others» as *non-Christians*, the Asian bishops, theologians and pastoral workers, on the other hand, employ a respectful, intimate, and

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[719] BIRA IV/11, no. 20, in FAPA I, 233.

[720] FABC-OTC, in FAPA III, 331.

[721] F. Wilfred, «Some Tentative Reflections on Language», 48.

[722] BIRA V/1, in FAPA II, 145.

inclusive language in addressing them[723]: The «religious others» are never labeled as «non-Christians» but are addressed as «our peoples»[724], «our fellow Asians»[725], «our brothers and sisters»[726], «our sisters and brothers in Asia»[727], «our Asian sisters and brothers»[728], «sisters and brothers in [God's] one Asian family»[729], «our sisters and brothers of other faiths»[730], «our sisters and brothers of other religions»[731], «sisters and brothers of other religious traditions»[732], «our brothers and sisters of other great religions»[733], «our neighbors of other faiths»[734], «neighbors of other religious traditions»[735], «our fellow pilgrims»[736],

[723] The list of the FABC expressions (and their sources) in «naming» the «religious others» in Asia may be excessive, but the purpose of this is to show that there is a remarkable degree of consistency in the FABC's gracious and reverential mode of addressing the members of other religions in its many and varied documents. In fact, the title of the theme of one of the series of BIRA IV meetings, BIRA IV/6 (1986), conveys in itself the Asian Churches' cordial and respectful way of speaking about the followers of other faiths: «Living and Working Together with Sisters and Brothers of Other Faiths in Asia» (BIRA IV/6, nos. 1-10, in FAPA I, 303-305). And the reason for the FABC's warm and affectionate manner of addressing the adherents of other religions is its desire to be truly and theologically appropriate in «naming» them.

[724] FABC I, no. 46, in FAPA I, 19; FABC-TAC, no. 61, in FAPA II, 228.

[725] Asian Bishops' Meeting, no. 24, in FAPA I, 6.

[726] BIMA I, no. 10, in FAPA I, 94.

[727] FABC-TAC, no. 4.11.3, in FAPA II, 285; BILA I, no. 15, in FAPA III, 69; FABC-OE, nos. 4, 6, in FAPA IV, 250.251.

[728] FABC V, no. 1.7, in FAPA I, 275; FABC VII, in FAPA III, 12; BIRA IV/3, no. 17, in FAPA I, 261; BIMA I, no. 2, in FAPA I, 291.

[729] FABC-TAC, no. 61, in FAPA II, 228.

[730] FABC V, no. 2.3.9, in FAPA I, 279; BIRA IV/11, nos. 1, 11, in FAPA I, 317.320; BIRA IV/12, no. 50, in FAPA I, 333; BILA I, no. 14, in FAPA III, 69; FIRA I, no. 2.11, in FAPA III, 121; FABC-OTC, no. 3.2.2, in FAPA III, 358.

[731] FIRA II, nos. 3.2, 3.4, in FAPA III, 127.128; BIRA IV/12, no. 2, in FAPA I, 325; FEISA I, no. 7.2.4, in FAPA II, 60.

[732] BIRA IV/6, no. 6, in FAPA I, 304.

[733] Asian Bishops' Meeting, no. 12, in FAPA I, 9.

[734] FIRA III, no. 5.3, in FAPA III, 137; FABC-OTC, nos. 5.3, 5.4, in FAPA III, 320.322.

[735] BIRA IV/6, no. 6, in FAPA I, 304.

[736] BIRA IV/4, no. 2, in FAPA I, 300.

«our fellow pilgrims on the way»[737], «fellow pilgrim[s] on the path to God»[738], and «fellow wayfarers to God's Reign»[739]. According to the Asian bishops, the demand of universal Christian love should make us «always look at people *without labeling or categorizing them*»[740], especially as *inferiors* relative to the *superiority* that only Christians allegedly possess.

3.5 **Conclusion**

This chapter examined «traces» of Rahner's influence on the Asian theology of religions as observed in the documents of the FABC, particularly in three major aspects which essentially constitute the FABC's theology of religions: the salvific character of other Asian religions, the presence of Christ and his Spirit in these religions, and the positive meaning of these religions in God's plan of salvation. First, we analyzed some of Rahner's important essays on non-Christian religions and their adherents that deal with these three thematic issues; and secondly, we surveyed the various writings of the FABC that are concerned with these questions. Because of God's universal salvific will which embraces the whole of humanity, divine revelation can be discerned in other religious traditions. In fact, only in the context of God's universal saving will can the existence of God's salvific manifestations in other religions be affirmed. It is then the challenge of the Asian Churches, through interreligious dialogue, to discover such manifestations of the Divine among different religions in the light of Christian faith.

While Rahner and the FABC agree with each other that other religions are salvific in themselves, they have nevertheless arrived at this conclusion via different approaches: Rahner has come up with this deduction in an *a priori* manner, while the FABC has reached this judgment in an *a posteriori* way. Another relevant distinction between Rahner (and Vatican II), on the one hand, and the FABC, on the

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[737] BIRA IV/6, no. 6, in FAPA I, 304; cf. FIRA IV, no. 8, in FAPA III, 141.

[738] FABC-OEIA, no. 15, in FAPA I, 168.

[739] FABC-TAC, no. 4.11.6, in FAPA II, 285.

[740] BISA II, no. 11, in FAPA I, 205; emphasis mine.

other hand, is in terms of how they address the members of other religions. While Rahner and the Council define the other religions and their adherents *negatively*, from the perspective of Christianity, as *non-Christians*, the Asian bishops, theologians, and pastoral leaders address them in an intimate, inclusive and reverential manner as «brothers and sisters of other faiths». Chapter 5 will deepen more their sense of reverence towards these religions and their adherents in their conviction that all Asians—Christians, members of other faiths, and people of goodwill—journey together towards the same Kingdom of God, and that Asian Churches journey with them not so much as equals but as servants, servants of Asian people and their religious traditions.

CHAPTER IV

Examining *Ecclesia in Asia* and *Dominus Iesus* and Their Implications for the Asian Churches and Theology of Religions

4.1 **Introduction**

By way of introduction, let us briefly recall the work of the first three chapters, zeroing in on the very ticklish issue of the salvific value of non-Christian religions, which is one of the most fundamental questions of the post-conciliar Catholic theology of religions. As a whole, in terms of the question of whether other religions are «ways» of salvation for their adherents or not, the first three chapters have gone from the Second Vatican Council's «silence» (Chapter 1), to Karl Rahner's *a priori* argument that they can be considered «ways» of salvation for their members (Chapter 2), to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' (FABC) *a posteriori* conclusion that other Asian religions—which have been, for millions of Asians, the wellspring of their spirituality for millennia—must also be salvific (Chapter 3). For both Rahner and the FABC, the other religions are nevertheless salvific always in relation and in reference to Christ.

While Vatican II uttered many positive things about non-Christians and their religions for the first time in the Catholic Church's long conciliar history, the Council was «silent» in terms of ascribing a salvific import to the structural elements of religions. With Rahner's influence, the Council incorporated some of Rahner's fundamental

insights on religions, but desisted from embracing his conclusion on their salvific character. Rahner arrived at the conclusion that non-Christian religions are salvific in themselves *a priori*, deductively, as a dogmatic theologian, and his insights are based fundamentally on God's universal saving will and on the socio-historical character of human person's relationship with God. The FABC, which came along in the 1970s, subscribed to Vatican II and Rahner. Rahner influenced Vatican II and was in turn influenced by the Council in his post-conciliar writings on religions; Rahner and the Council both influenced the FABC. In Chapter 3, we have seen a kind of trajectory in Catholic theology in terms of evolution and positive valuation of non-Christian religions as structures of salvation.

While influenced by Vatican II documents that deal with the question of the religions, the FABC has gone beyond the Council in terms of the question of the salvific character of the other religions in its assertions that their structures are salvific. Rahner enabled Asian bishops and theologians to reach that conclusion because in his pre- and post-conciliar writings on the theology of religions he prepared the groundwork and pushed the theological investigations on religions in that direction. However, unlike Rahner's deductive, *a priori* approach, the Asian bishops have arrived at this conclusion inductively, *a posteriori*, through their concrete experience of the goodness, wisdom and holiness found in other religions and in their adherents. In doing so, the FABC has brought something new to the theological reflections on religions. In its *a posteriori* approach to doing theology, rooted in its personal experience of living in the midst of the other religions and in its deeply existential awareness of its own minority status in such a religiously pluralistic context, the FABC has moved beyond the cautious position of Vatican II and the deductive approach of Rahner. As a consequence of their see-judge-act methodology[741], the Asian Churches have evolved ecclesially with a totally different dialogical praxis in relation to the brothers and sisters of other faiths.

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[741] FABC X, no. 12, in FAPA V, 55.

However, in spite of the considerable development in the Catholic Church's attitude towards the other religions and their adherents, and in spite of the abundant post-conciliar reflections on Christianity, the Church, and other religions in the situations of heightened cultural and religious pluralism in Asia, much work still needs to be done not only in terms of the full import and reception of the Council's and post-conciliar documents on these issues but also in terms of the continuing significance and implications of the theology of religions in the continent. At present, the state of the theology of religions shows us that «it is a discipline in search of itself, preoccupied with questions about its very foundations, its *terminus a quo*»[742], that «the quest for an adequate theology of religions is at an *impasse*»[743]. Consequently, the theology of religions has become a major focus in contemporary theology.

In its simplest definition, an *impasse* is defined as «a difficult situation in which no progress can be made because the people involved cannot agree what to do»[744]. This chapter, which is divided into two major sections, aims to explore some areas and aspects in *Ecclesia in Asia* and in *Dominus Iesus* that have partly contributed to the emergence of the situation of *impasse* in the theology of religions, particularly in the Asian context. The first section looks into the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation and examines both the absence of an explicit recognition of the salvific value of other religions as well as the exclusion of some major concerns and issues bought by the Asian bishops to the 1998 Synod of Bishops for Asia for consideration. The second section looks at the CDF's Declaration and considers particularly three ticklish issues in the document: the question of Jesus Christ as the fullness of God's revelation; its sharp distinction between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions», which means the absence of the salvific import of other religions; and its criticism of the emphasis on the Kingdom of God perspective in the Asian theology of religions as reflected in the FABC documents. While

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[742] T. Merrigan, «Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue», 161.

[743] J. L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*, 8; emphasis mine.

[744] Downloaded from https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/impasse on October 5, 2017.

the lack of agreement between the Roman Magisterium and the Asian bishops on the question of the salvific character of other religions may be considered the major cause of *impasse* in Asia, disagreements on other important theological issues have also contributed to the existence of *impasse* in the post-conciliar theology of religions in the continent.

4.2 The «Unfinished» Character of *Ecclesia in Asia* Vis-à-vis the Asian Churches' Theology of Religions

4.2.1 *Introduction*

The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, convoked by Pope John Paul II in 1998 in Rome, was one of the five continental Synods summoned by the Holy Father «so that Bishops could address the question of evangelization according to the particular situation and needs of each continent» (EA 2) as the whole Catholic Church prepared for the Great Jubilee at the turn of the third millennium. In this Synod, considered, «[i]n addition to the FABC», as «perhaps the major landmark in the history of Asian Catholicism's reception of Vatican II»[745], and universally hailed in fact as having «marked the coming of age of the Asian Churches»[746], the Churches of Asia were recognized as having «made great contributions in the field of a theology of religions for the whole Church»[747]. The Pope himself acknowledged quite profusely in the Introduction of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* (cf. EA 2, 3, and 4), not just the Asian Churches' labors for the growth of «the Asian roots of Christianity» (EA 4) in the continent, but also their indispensable contribution to universal reflection on the question of the theology of religions.

While it is true that *Ecclesia in Asia*, the same as the rest of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations of other continents, is addressed by the Holy Father to the whole Church, it is nevertheless primarily directed to Asian Churches whose concrete situations, theological questions, and pastoral needs the Synod must have reflected upon. *Ecclesia in Asia* is *for* and should be *about* the Churches of Asia. As «the Magna Carta for

[745] P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 306.

[746] P. C. Phan, *The Asian Synod*, «Preface», xi.

[747] G. Evers, «The Specific Contribution of Asian Theologians», 80.

the evangelization of Asia in the Third Millennium»[748], it is an Apostolic Exhortation that was supposed to have dealt with the situations of Asia and how the Churches of Asia could and must respond to the missiological issues and pastoral challenges of the continent. In fact, in *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Pope declares that the actual convocation of the Asian Synod was an «encounter in dialogue of the Bishops and the Successor of Peter» (EA 3), and that through the document, he wishes «to share with the Church in Asia and throughout the world the fruits of the Special Assembly» (EA 4). And after acknowledging that the Asian situations were «examined in detail during the Synod by those who have daily contact with the extremely diversified realities of such an immense continent», which can only refer to the Asian bishops and theologians present in the Synod, the Pope asserts that the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation itself «is, in synthesis, the result of the Synod Fathers' reflections» (EA 5). Indeed, the basis and point of departure of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation should primarily be the work and reflections of the Asian bishops who participated in the Synod.

Yet, among some theologians, there is a sense that *Ecclesia in Asia* is an «unfinished» business because of their observation that the «voice» that we find in the document corresponds only to the «voice» of the Pope but not also to the «voices» of the Asian bishop-participants and the questions, issues and concerns that they brought to the Asian Synod[749]. In his Preface to *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, a volume that also includes some essays written by Asian theologians, Peter Phan observes: «Several of these theologians have pointed out that the voices of the Asian bishops who spoke at the synod and their concerns are not the same as those of the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* that purports [precisely] "to share with the Church in Asia and throughout the world the fruits of the Special Assembly" (no. 4)»[750].

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[748] Cited by E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 243.

[749] P. C. Phan, *The Asian Synod*, «Preface», x. Cf. J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 256-271; E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 242-255; P. C. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 215-232.

[750] P. C. Phan, *The Asian Synod*, «Preface», x.

For Edmund Chia, that the Synod for Asia truly became an «encounter in dialogue» between the Asian bishops and the Pope and that therefore the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, can be considered «fruits» of such a fraternal dialogue is only «from the Pope's point of view»[751]. In other words, the Asian bishops who constituted the other end of that dialogue do not share the Pope's sentiment. John Prior, the liaison with the English-speaking press covering the Synod for Asia, in an article whose very title itself suggests that the Synod for Asia was an «unfinished encounter» between the Pope and the Asian bishops, concludes that *Ecclesia in Asia* is «a papal document», meaning, that it is «the Pope's response to the voice of the Asian Bishops»—which constitutes just «one side of the synodal encounter»[752]—rather than, as Chia expects, «the voice of the Pope in *dialogue* with the voice of the bishops of Asia»[753]. Michael Amaladoss observes similarly that *Ecclesia in Asia* is «a document for Asia... [and]... not an Asian document. It is not the voice of Asia... [for]... [t]he tone and style are very un-Asian»[754].

This section will inquire whether this observation is correct and has a basis by examining *Ecclesia in Asia* and the FABC in relation to the question of how the Asian Churches should carry out their evangelizing mission in Asia. We will look especially at the character and tone of *Ecclesia in Asia* as well as the «differences» between this Post-Synodal Exhortation and the Final Statement of the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly, which, by being convoked on January 3-12, 2000 less than two months after the promulgation of *Ecclesia in Asia* on November 6, 1999, «can be regarded as the first Asian Churches' response to *Ecclesia in Asia*»[755]. Considering that the FABC has consistently held the other religions as salvific in themselves since the beginning, we will also briefly examine the absence of a recognition of the salvific meaning and significance of other religions

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751 E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 244.

752 J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 257.258.

753 E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 244; emphasis mine.

754 M. Amaladoss, «*Ecclesia in Asia* Affirms Tradition», 3.

755 E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 248.

in the document. Moreover, we will consider another «absence» in the document and its implications in the Asian Churches' theologizing and carrying out of their mission, a reference to a very important Proposition in the *Propositiones*—Proposition 4—which speaks of the diversity of ecclesial contexts in Asia. And finally, we will take into account the reality that in Asian Christianity, the question is never about the «who» and the «what» but always about the «how» of the local Churches' evangelizing mission in the continent.

4.2.2 *The Character and Tone of* Ecclesia in Asia*: Interpreting the Document's «Voice» Contextually*

First, we examine the «sources» of *Ecclesia in Asia* by looking at the «footnotes» of the document. By providing references, «footnotes» are extremely important not only because they show *who* and *what* ideas influence the author in the formation of his insights and in the development of his discourse but also because of the support they normally provide to claims and assertions made by the author in the text. In his brief discussion of the «sources» of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, John Prior, in his article, «Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of *Ecclesia in Asia*», observes that out of 240 footnotes, «[s]ome 145 of them, or 60.4%, refer to documents from the Synod of Asia» which include the *Lineamenta* (cited three times), the *Instrumentum Laboris* (cited twice), the *Nuntius* (cited once), the *Relatio Ante Disceptationem* (cited seven times), the *Relatio Post Disceptationem* (cited thirteen times), and the *Propositiones* (cited 119 times, or 49.6% of all the footnotes)[756]. For Prior, all these citations came from synodal documents which «were all drawn up by committees appointed by the Vatican»[757]. John Paul II, according to Prior, «quotes himself 68 times», from his various Encyclicals, Apostolic Exhortations, Apostolic Letters, and Papal Addresses, which constitute 28.3% of the document's footnotes[758]. The rest of the 11.3% footnotes came from other sources: Paul VI (cited five times), Leo XIII (cited once), St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* (cited once), St. John Chrysostom's *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* (cited once), the

[756] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 256.

[757] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 256.

[758] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 256.

Roman Missal (cited twice), the Catechism of the Catholic Church (cited twice), the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (cited once), and the Second Vatican Council (cited fifteen times).

It is true that the Pope initially acknowledges the work and contribution of the FABC in the document when he affirms in the Introduction that «[e]arlier meetings of Asian Bishops had contributed to preparing the Synod and making possible an atmosphere of intense ecclesial and fraternal communion... [particularly]... the past Plenary Assemblies and Seminars sponsored by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and its offices» (EA 3). Yet, in truth,

> [i]n *Ecclesia in Asia* there is not a single direct reference to any intervention by an individual bishop, nor to interventions by bishops in the name of their conferences. *There are no direct references to regional episcopal bodies such as the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)* or the Council of Oriental Catholic Patriarchs (CPCO)[759].

While it is true that the *Propositiones* were quoted 119 times (49.6%), Prior and Chia suggest that this document cannot be considered the «voice» of the Asian bishops because as a document that «needed to be kept secret», there is no way to verify «the disparity between the draft proposals from the bishops' groups and the resultant recommendations» made by a committee appointed by the Vatican[760]. Prior explains:

> While the *Lineamenta*, *Instrumentum Laboris* and *Nuntius* have been circulated in ecclesial circles, the major source—the *Elenchus Finalis Propositionum*—is *sub secreto*. Only participating bishops received a copy which they duly voted on, recommendation by recommendation. The booklet was then handed back to the Synodical Secretariat. Nobody outside Rome has a way of checking this source[761].

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[759] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 257; emphasis mine.

[760] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 257; E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 244.

[761] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 256-257.

For Prior, to be able to hear the «voices» of the Asian bishop-participants, one must go back to the 191 interventions made during the first seven days of the Asian Synod. And out of these 191 interventions, 76.3 %[762] of them can be clustered around four main themes: the need for Asian Churches to engage in dialogue with other religious traditions (22.5%); the need for Churches in the continent to become authentically Asian through their ongoing dialogue with various cultures (21.4%); the need for Asian Churches to dialogue with the poor in the context of the continent's massive poverty (17.2%); and the need for the Asian Churches to become truly Churches of the laity (15.2%)[763]. The first three themes have to do with the triple dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor, which have been the predominant concerns of the Asian bishops and theologians since the First FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974. Together with the Asian Church's desire to be a Church of the laity, these three interrelated ecclesiological concerns have been the FABC's preoccupations for the last 30 years. Yet, even the effort to return to the Asian bishops' interventions during the first week of the Synod is not an easy task because «[p]articipating bishops received only a brief summary of their interventions, not the complete text», which, like the *Propositiones*, is «the property of the Synodical secretariat»[764]. And even if one could go back to these interventions, the fact is that, as shown in the «footnotes» of *Ecclesia in Asia*, the interventions of the Asian bishops, *together* with those of

[762] To understand why the Asian bishops' interventions constituted only 76.3% of the total number of interventions, we must remember that the interventions during these first seven days of the Synod came not only from the bishops of Asia but also from curial officials and auditors (Cf. L-A. Tagle, «The Synod for Asia as Event», 368). This means that the interventions of the curial officials and auditors comprised 23.70% of the total interventions in the Synod. The «report» that highlighted the concerns raised by the bishops, curial officials and the auditors was called the *Relatio Post Disceptationem*.

[763] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 258-259. For Chia, among these major concerns of the Asian Churches, «the interreligious dialogue agenda», viewed «as part and parcel of the Asian reality», «kept surfacing at practically every level of the synod... and was the most talked about issue on the agenda of the Synod for Asia», tackled in 43 of 191 interventions at the start of the Synod (E. Chia, «The "Absence of Jesus"», 895).

[764] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 257.

curial officials and of the auditors, which eventually became the *Relatio Post Disceptationem*, were cited *only* thirteen times by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation.

Indeed, it is a tragedy for a papal document that purports to offer a manual for the Churches' evangelization in Asia not to have incorporated the insights and ideas of the FABC, considering that the Asian bishops had not brought anything new to the Asian Synod's discussions and deliberations which they had not previously reflected upon, in varying degrees and circumstances, for the last 30 years. *Ecclesia in Asia* has not utilized what should have been the main source of its theological reflections and insights in a document that proposes to help Asian Churches enter into a new millennium of their evangelizing presence in the continent—the collective reflections of Asian bishops, priests, religious, lay, and theologians in the FABC documents.

For Luis Antonio Tagle[765], when examining what the Asian bishops in the Synod of Bishops for Asia had brought to the attention of the universal Church gathered in the Synod, we can say that compared with the FABC's previous statements and considerations since its inception in 1972 there was nothing new in what the Asian bishops individually and collectively articulated during the Synod. Tagle identifies the fifteen points of agreement out of the total fifty-nine (or sixty-one) points the Synod for Asia submitted to Pope John Paul II [as basic materials for what eventually emerged as *Ecclesia in Asia*], which included, among others, «the universal acceptance of the FABC intuitions and programs, especially the triple dialogue with cultures, other religions and the poor» and «the FABC focus on a "New Way of Being Church" as "Communion of Communities"»[766]. Tagle then asserts that «[t]here's nothing new here» when the propositions are

[765] Luis Antonio Tagle, elevated into the rank of a cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI on October 24, 2012, was appointed Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples by Pope Francis on December 8, 2019. Prior to his appointment, Tagle served as Bishop of Imus from 2001 to 2011 and as Archbishop of Manila from 2011 to 2019. At the time of the Asian Synod in 1998, Tagle was one of the theological consultants of the FABC.

[766] L-A. Tagle, «The Synod for Asia as Event», 370.

seen in comparison with the FABC teachings through the years, «except maybe the reaffirmation of these things»[767]. Peter Phan, alluding to Tagles's comment, articulates the same observation. To the question that he himself asks and answers—«Has the Exhortation said anything new and important for the Churches of Asia that either had not been said before by these Churches themselves or could not have been said except thanks to the work of the Synod itself?»—«the answer is frankly no»[768]. For Phan, among the seven thematic sections that *Ecclesia in Asia* comprises, except for the first section that deals with the Asian context, «what the Exhortation says on the other six themes has already been said, powerfully and in great detail, by the various documents of the FABC»[769].

Yet, for Tagle, if the Synod of Bishops was truly an event, it was because of «the birth of something new» in the Synod: «these concerns were elevated from the level of the FABC and the National Episcopal Conference to that of the Universal Church»[770]. Tagle adds that «[i]f they become part of the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, they will not only be addressed to the Church of Asia but the Universal Church»[771]. In commenting on Tagle's observation, Phan observes that the new thing about the Synod for Asia was not what the Asian bishops said but *how* they said it and that they said it to the whole Church gathered at the Synod:

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[767] L-A. Tagle, «The Synod for Asia as Event», 371.

[768] P. C. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 217.

[769] P. C. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 217. Speaking about the *Elenchus Finalis Propositionem* of the 1998 Synod of Bishops for Asia which «were accepted by the bishops with virtual unanimity», John Prior remarks: «Most could have been written 30 years ago» (J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 257). Prior's observation suggests that most of what the Asian bishops tackled in the synod were not really novel ideas but had been part of the Asian theology of religions for decades as reflected in the documents of the FABC and in the writings of Asian theologians.

[770] L-A Tagle, «The Synod for Asia as Event», 371.

[771] L-A Tagle, «The Synod for Asia as Event», 371; ID., «The Challenges of Mission in Asia», 219-220; cf. P. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 217.

> What they said had been said, at length and with power and depth, for almost thirty years, ever since the founding of the FABC in 1972, in its numerous plenary assemblies and in the documents of its several institutes. But at the Synod, they said it again, *to the whole Church*, and with surpassing *boldness* and refreshing *candor*, with what the New Testament calls *parrhésia*[772].

If *Ecclesia in Asia* does not live up to its intended image as an «encounter in dialogue» between the Pope and the Asian bishops because it is largely the «Pope's voice» and not really a «dialogue», how then do we discover the voice of the bishops «at the other end of the line», at the other «end of the telephone conversation», to use Prior's expressions[773]? According to Prior, «[f]or the voice of the Asian Bishops we have to look elsewhere»[774]. For Edmund Chia, «in order to listen to the other end of the conversation», we need to turn to «none other than Asia itself», listening not only to «the voice of the bishops of Asia but also [to] the voice of theologians and others who work and live in Asia»[775]. This means re-visiting the Asian Churches' thoughts and insights as contained in the FABC documents and in the reflections of Asian bishops and theologians who theologized within the context of Asia for the last thirty years.

For Chia, in our quest for this Asian «voice», we need to listen specifically to the voice of the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly held less than two years after the Asian Synod and less than two months after the New Delhi proclamation of *Ecclesia in Asia*. Its Final Statement is considered «the actual voice of the bishops of Asia and not one which went through the filter of the Pope, as is *Ecclesia in Asia*», where «one gets to hear the other side of the telephone line»[776]. Taking both *Ecclesia in Asia* and FABC VII's Assembly Statement together will facilitate our deeper understanding of the «encounter in dialogue» between the Pope and the Asian bishops that was supposed

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[772] P. C. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 217.

[773] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 258.

[774] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 258.

[775] E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 245.

[776] E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 249.248-251.

to have taken place during the Synod[777], or, to put a completion to what Chia calls an «unfinished business»[778], or to what Prior labels as an «unfinished encounter»[779].

> Reading *Ecclesia in Asia* is a little like hearing one end of a telephone conversation. It is certainly worth listening to, but so too is the voice at the other end of the line! Only when these two voices are brought together can we have an "encounter in dialogue".... Thus, it is important not to read *Ecclesia in Asia* in isolation, but as part of an ongoing conversation[780].

Indeed, because *Ecclesia in Asia* provides us with the voice of the Pope while the FABC and the Synod's interventions offer us the voices of the bishops of Asia, these two voices need to be unified in order to achieve a true and genuine «encounter in dialogue» between the Pope and the Asian bishops[781].

Looking at the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly, we observe that while its Final Statement quotes *Ecclesia in Asia* about fifteen times, «it also quotes quite lavishly from other FABC documents, which *Ecclesia in Asia* does not», making the Assembly Statement «certainly more Asian than is *Ecclesia in Asia*», and it «is [thus] more representative of Asian views»[782]. Yet, as we have seen above, the thoughts of the Asian bishops both in the Synod for Asia and in FABC VII have been their ideas for the last thirty years, although these insights have gone through a process of maturation in substance and expression and in understanding and emphasis, as the bishops «keep searching for the deeper challenges of renewal—its meaning and scope in our life and mission in Asia»[783]. The statement of the Asian bishops' assembly was significant not so much for the fresh and original themes it tackled,

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[777] E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 249.

[778] E. Chia, «The "Absence of Jesus"», 892.

[779] Cf. J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 256-271. The expression is derived from the title of Prior's article itself.

[780] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 258.

[781] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 266.

[782] E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 249.

[783] FABC VII, in FAPA III, 4.

which were minimal, but for the strong resolve of the Asian bishops to continue on the ecclesial path the FABC had been taking for many years[784].

As a matter of fact, for FABC VII, the eight movements that constitute an Asian vision of a renewed Church have been «a concerted series of movements towards a renewed Church... [in]... [t]he thirty-year history of the FABC»[785]. That these eight movements have been «the vision of a renewed Church that the FABC has developed over the past thirty years», a vision which the bishops of Asia claim to be «still valid today», is evident when we look at where the earliest articulations of these movements originated—from the previous assemblies of the Asian bishops for the past thirty years since their first historic meeting in Manila, Philippines in 1970[786]. Even just a cursory inspection of these eight movements reveals right away the assembly's sense of continuity with, and its indebtedness to, those assemblies that came before it. Indeed, while «[t]he Asian bishops cited *Ecclesia in Asia* in their final draft document», they did so «but only when it suited their purposes»[787].

4.2.3 *The Absence of An Explicit Recognition of the Salvific Character of Other Religions in* Ecclesia in Asia

Secondly, we look very briefly at the bizzare absence of an explicit affirmation of the salvific meaning and significance of other religions in *Ecclesia in Asia* in spite of the vigorous insistence by the Asian bishops and theologians in the 1998 Synod for Asia that the other religions are ways of salvation for their members. According to Peter Phan, «[w]ith regard to interreligious dialogue, many Asian episcopal conferences call for not only a respectful dialogue with non-Christians, but also an explicit recognition of the salvific value of non-Christian religions, not as independent from or parallel to

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[784] T. C. Fox, «True to their Mission, Polite toward Rome», 288.

[785] FABC VII, in FAPA III, 3.

[786] FABC VII, in FAPA III, 3.4.

[787] T. C. Fox, «True to their Mission, Polite toward Rome», 287.

Christ, but in relation to him»[788]. On the part of the Indian bishops, they argue that the preaching of the living memory of Christ to the Asian peoples must be in ways that are respectful of their histories and traditions. This suggests that while «[t]he language of the Church's proclamation must be clear… it may not be such that it seems to deny the authentic action of God in other cultures and religions», and that while «Christ is indeed the source and cause of all salvation for all peoples… this fact does not exclude the possibility of God mysteriously employing other cooperating channels, as John Paul II allows»[789], referring to *Redemptoris Missio*, 5. Hence, while they affirm the uniqueness and universality of Christ's saving mediation, understood in terms of Christ as the sacrament, as «the definitive symbol of God's salvation for all humanity», such a Christian conviction «does not mean that there cannot be other symbols, valid in their own ways, which the Christian sees as related to the definitive symbol, Jesus Christ»[790]. They conclude: «[F]or hundreds of millions of our fellow human beings, salvation is seen as being channeled to them not in spite of but through and in their various sociocultural and religious traditions. We cannot, therefore, deny a priori a salvific role for these non-Christian religions»[791]. Likewise, after arguing for the need to examine and re-assess the significance and role of traditional religions in Korea, the Korean bishops affirm that «[t]hey [their religions] too play a part in the salvific economy of God», an «understanding [that] is essential for the inculturation of the Gospel»[792]. For the Filipino bishops,

> [t]he "revelatory" nature of the great ancient religions in Asia and its impact on the Church's proclamation of the truth of Jesus should be further explored in an open and humble way. While firmly and courageously confessing the truth, any treatment of the uniqueness

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[788] P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 17.

[789] Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 21.

[790] Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 22.

[791] Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 22.

[792] P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 32.

> of Jesus should avoid any triumphalism and superior attitude vis-à-vis the other great religions of Asia[793].

Even if the Asian Churches' call for this unequivocal acknowledgment of the salvific status of the other Asian religions was made in 1998 as they commented on and responded to the *Lineamenta* of the Synod, it must be noted, as Luis Antonio Tagle argues, that it was not the first time that the Asian bishops and theologians had put forward this argument. It had been a consistent assertion of the Asian Churches in the FABC Assemblies, conferences and workshops since 1974, as we have seen in Chapter 3[794]. If Vatican II has argued that salvation is available to every human being, although in ways known only to God, for Asian bishops and theologians it is in and through the religious traditions of the world that God's saving grace reaches adherents of other faiths. Ruben C. Mendoza, in his article, «Religious Pluralism and Turn to the Spirit», sums up the FABC's reasoning in this way:

> The FABC firmly believes in the universal salvific will of God, a grace that is freely offered to every person, including peoples of other faiths. At the same time, it recognizes the existential reality that many peoples of other faiths who come into contact with Jesus Christ and the Church in Asia do not become Christians but remain in their own traditions to which they adhere devoutly. For the FABC this situation is not merely a sociological reality but is indicative of God's plan for these believers, a reflection of the mysterious and unfathomable grace of salvation. While the FABC does not specify the means that God gives to every person for her or his redemption, it seems that a concrete way in which other believers do participate in God's life is through their own religious traditions. In other words, other religious traditions have salvific value[795].

Yet, *Ecclesia in Asia* does not include any statement that recognizes *explicitly* the role of other religions in the salvation of their members. In his article, «Vatican II and the Postconciliar Magisterium on the Salvation of the Adherents of Other Religions», Francis Sullivan

[793] P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 40.

[794] L-A. Tagle, «The Synod for Asia as Event», 370-371.

[795] R. C. Mendoza, «Religious Pluralism and Turn to the Spirit», 26

mentions a statement from the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation which for him may imply a recognition of the salvific value of other religions when juxtaposed with John Paul II's other writings on the Holy Spirit's presence and activity in the other religions. *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 15, reads:

> Following the lead of the Second Vatican Council, the Synod Fathers drew attention to the multiple and diversified action of the Holy Spirit who continually sows the seeds of truth among all peoples, their religions, cultures and philosophies. This means that these religions, cultures and philosophies are capable of helping people, individually and collectively, to work against evil and to serve life and everything that is good (EA 15).

If one acknowledges that non-Christian religions, owing to the presence of the «seeds of truth» sown in them by the Holy Spirit, are «capable of helping people… to work against evil and to serve life and everything that is good», for Sullivan, «could one not also recognize that those religions are capable of helping people respond positively to the grace of Christ which the Spirit is offering to them?»[796]. According to Sullivan, «[t]he Pope does not draw this conclusion, but it does seem to follow from what he has said about the work of the Spirit in those religions»[797].

Indeed, in spite of the Asian bishops' and theologians' calling for the explicit recognition of the salvific value of non-Christian religions in Asia, *Ecclesia in Asia* does not take up the issue and is silent about it. As we will see in Chapter 6, such a non-recognition of the saving import of other religions contributes to the derailment of interreligious dialogue in Asia because of its tremendous impact on the character and structure of «dialogue» between Christians and adherents of other religions[798]. Hence, the document may be said to contribute to the situation of *impasse* in Asia.

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[796] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 85.

[797] F. A. Sullivan, «Vatican II and Postconciliar Magisterium», 85.

[798] Cf. A. Mong, *Dialogue Derailed: Joseph Ratzinger's War Against Pluralist Theology*; F. Wilfred, «Dialogue Gasping for Breath?», 449-466.

4.2.4 *The Absence of Reference to «Proposition 4» on the Diversity of Asian Ecclesial Contexts in* Ecclesia in Asia

Thirdly, we explore one very important recommendation which the Asian bishops submitted to Pope John Paul II as part of the *Propositiones* but which the post-synodal drafting committee appointed by the Holy Father and/or the Pope himself did not incorporate in the final document. For the Asian bishops, it is a very important Synodal Proposition because it seriously speaks of and genuinely considers the varied and diverse contexts and situations of the Churches of Asia. Proposition 4—the proposition in question—argues:

> There is a rich variety of Churches by reason of origin, rite, and establishment. The communion of the Church in Asia is a unity in diversity. All these Churches live under different cultural, social, religious, and political contexts with all their related problems, difficulties, restrictions, and even persecution. They are faced with different situations in their life and witness[799].

By establishing the contexts and ecclesial realities of Asia, this Proposition acknowledges that the Asian Churches are indeed as varied and diverse as the immense world of Asia itself «by reason of origin, rite and establishment». In fact, the term «Asia» is «only a geographical notion», since «there is little in common among the nations within it to give it a defined profile and identity»[800]. This is the reason why we cannot speak of *Church of Asia* (or Asian Church) but of *Churches of Asia* (or Asian Churches). What the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation fails to recognize and tries to «bury» in the grave of oblivion, the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly, held less than two months after the promulgation of *Ecclesia in Asia*, affirms and «resuscitates» in its document: «The local churches in Asia present a splendid variety in their origin, historical, socio-political and cultural situations, ecclesial identity and growth. Obviously, the pastoral challenges facing the Church in Asia are equally diverse»[801].

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[799] Synod of Bishops for Asia, «The Synod's Propositions», 142.

[800] S. W. Ariarajah, «Changing Paradigms of Asian Christian Attitude», 347.

[801] FABC VII, in FAPA III, 8.

In Asia, owing to its immensely complex socio-cultural, economic, political, and religious situations characterized by overwhelming diversities and pluralisms, it is extremely difficult to come up with accurate observations that are true and applicable to all, if not to many, Asian countries[802]. Thus, for Adolfo Nicolas, in an article published in 2005 entitled «Christianity in Crisis»,

> [i]t is not possible to speak of Asia with only one word. We have half of humanity in this vast Continent that people call Asia. Whenever we try to address Asian realities, we are confronted with a plurality of traditions, races, cultures, languages and religiosity that makes it impossible to say anything at all, without doing injustice to its richness and diversity[803].

Because the Asian Churches live under extremely divergent circumstances with all their attendant theological issues and concerns, and are confronted with distinct pastoral problems and challenges in their life and mission, Proposition 4 argues that «[o]pportunities for and methods of evangelization vary from country to country. Hence no uniform pattern of proclamation, inculturation, or dialogue is applicable to all the Churches in Asia»[804].

However, in spite of the obviousness of what Proposition 4 holds—which is simply «the pluriform nature of Asian Churches»—it is sadly, according to John Prior, «one of the eight recommendations nowhere referred to in *Ecclesia in Asia*»[805]. The acceptance of this bewildering diversity of contexts and situations confronting the various Churches of Asia logically demands the acceptance of distinct manners of evangelization, of doing theology, and of proclaiming Christ in Asia. On the part of the Indian bishops, they assert, as early as in their response to the *Lineamenta*, that «[a] common methodology and faith expression for preaching the Gospel to the Asian people

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[802] FABC-OE, no. 2, in FAPA I, 335.

[803] A. Nicolas, «Christianity in Crisis», 64.

[804] Synod of Bishops for Asia, «The Synod's Propositions», 142.

[805] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 260. The footnotes of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, reveal that the other seven Propositions not included in the document are Propositions 2, 7, 9, 10, 26, 37, and 46.

cannot be formulated. Rather, each Asian country should develop by careful discernment its own methodologies according to its pastoral needs»[806]. And if we stretch the implications of this argument, the conclusion is that the way Christ is preached in Europe, in Africa or in Latin America will be different from the way Christ is preached not only in Asia as a whole but also in its many diverse places, countries and regions. As Proposition 7, another important proposition not included in the final document, admits, the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the only Savior of the world presents problems and difficulties in the context of Asia's plurality of religions, since their adherents also believe in the revelatory and salvific character of their own religions. Hence, this proposition encourages Asian theologians «to pursue their work of developing an inculturated theology that responds to Asian realities» which is «to be carried out with courage, in faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Church's tradition, in sincere adherence to the Magisterium»[807].

Indeed, if the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation does not recognize this multi-contextual character of the Churches of Asia, no wonder it insists on a kind and method of proclamation that seems almost the same throughout the world, and it seems almost the same everywhere because such a method of doing theology does not take into consideration the context of theologizing, of doing theology. It is oblivious to the truth that if «[t]heology is unavoidably contextual», and if «the context is not simply the venue in which theology is done but provides resources for theology as well as the lens through which the Christian doctrines are interpreted»[808], then *Ecclesia in Asia* must have employed the different sociopolitical, cultural, and religious contexts of Asia as sources of new and fresh theological insights for the Churches

[806] Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 22.

[807] Synod of Bishops for Asia, «The Synod's Propositions», 143.142-143.

[808] P. C. Phan, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism*, 101.

of Asia[809]. It is only when we take into consideration these various contexts in our mission of evangelization that we can build authentic local Churches in Asia. The context and the methodology adopted in doing theology certainly make all the difference, and the theme of evangelization in Asia will continue to be treated and understood differently depending on one's point of departure and one's frame of reference[810]. The document, «Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church», is right in warning us, then, that if the Churches of Asia do not discover their own identity and do not become Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living and communicating their experience of Christ to others, they will have no future[811].

4.2.5 *The Question of Asian Churches: Not the «Who» But the «How» in Their Evangelizing Mission in the Continent*

Fourthly, we delve deeper into the implications of the Asian bishops' recognition of the importance of context in doing theology and how they depart from Rome on the question of the «how» of the local Churches' evangelizing mission in Asia.

Let us develop this argument little by little. As regards the Christological content of *Ecclesia in Asia*, we need to recall the words of John Paul II that while «[t]he Synod was an occasion to recognize the ancient religious traditions and civilization, the profound philosophies and the wisdom which have made Asia what it is today» (EA, 4), the Pope nevertheless hoped that the Synod might, quoting his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (no. 30), «illustrate and explain

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[809] Michael Amaladoss, in his article in The *Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, affirms this when, referring specifically to the question of the theology of religions, he writes: «Asian theology, like all theology, is contextual.... Asian theology is... contextual in the sense that it has Asian resources. Traditionally, the sources for Christian theology were limited to the Christian scriptures and tradition. But today the presence and action of the Spirit of God is recognized and accepted also in other peoples and their histories, cultures, and religions. So these too can be resources for theological reflection, of course, in dialogue with the primary sources of the Christian tradition» (M. Amaladoss, «Asian Theological Trends», 106-107).

[810] E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 245.

[811] FABC, no. 14, in FAPA I, 70.

more fully the truth that Christ is the one Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great religions» (EA 2).

We can see this very clearly in Chapter 2 of *Ecclesia in Asia*, a chapter that is devoted to meditation on «Jesus the Savior: A Gift to Asia». The chapter commences with the declaration that «Jesus Christ, true God and true man», is «the one and only Savior of all peoples» (EA 10). Michael Amaladoss considers this faith-affirmation «a summary of the document's image of Jesus», «a very clear statement of the Vatican's view on Jesus as the unique and therefore the universal mediator of salvation for all human beings»[812]. Everything that the exhortation says about Jesus revolves around and roots itself faithfully in this central affirmation of faith: «In "the fullness of time" (*Gal* 4:4), he sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Savior, who took flesh as an Asian!» (EA 1); «"Behold the Savior of the World is born to us", born in Asia!» (EA 2); «the Synod was an ardent affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ the Savior» (EA 4); «The Jesus whom we proclaim as the only Savior walked the earth as the God-Man» (EA 11). For the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, «[s]alvation can be found in the person of the Son of God made man and the mission entrusted to him alone as the Son, a mission of service and love for the life of all» (EA 13). Pope John Paul II, therefore, does not mince his words when, in a section specifically dealing with «the uniqueness and universality of salvation in Jesus», he boldly concludes Chapter 2's meditation on Jesus Christ as Savior in this way:

> We believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is the one Savior because he alone—the Son—accomplished the Father's universal plan of salvation. As the definitive manifestation of the mystery of the Father's love for all, Jesus is indeed unique, and "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" (EA 14).

For the Holy Father, the proclamation of Jesus Christ as such is «the Church's unique contribution to the peoples of the continent» (EA

[812] M. Amaladoss, «The Image of Jesus», 233.234.

10); it is, in fact, «the greatest gift which the Church can offer to Asia» (EA 10), «the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia» (20)[813]. It is a gift received from God and a gift that must be shared with others: «Sharing the truth of Jesus Christ with others is the solemn duty of all who have received the gift of faith» (EA 10).

Because of John Paul II's manifestly strong Christological convictions in *Ecclesia in Asia*, we therefore find in the document expressions addressed to Asian Catholics like: «preaching... the saving Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority» (EA 2); «proclaim with vigor in word and deed that *Jesus Christ is the Savior*» (EA 9); «[t]he disciples of Jesus in Asia must... be unstinting in their efforts to fulfill the mission they have received from the Lord... [and must share]... with the multitude of Asia's peoples the immense gift which she herself has received—the love of Jesus the Savior» (EA 50). For the Apostolic Exhortation, the crucial issue in the «new evangelization» of the Asian continent, and that which constitutes the greatest concern of the Churches of Asia at the turn of the new millennium, is the proclamation of Jesus Christ. It is a concern that necessitates not just «an explicit, complete proclamation of Christ» but also «a correct formulation of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior»[814]. The Holy Father opens *Ecclesia in Asia* with a fervent hope that—quoting his address delivered at the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly in Manila, Philippines in 1995—«just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent» (EA 1).

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[813] This has been Vatican's insistence as early as in the *Lineamenta*, for the upcoming Synod for Asia to focus on the proclamation of Jesus, Savior of the world, as the Church's gift to the peoples of Asia. In fact, for Edmund Chia, the *Lineamenta* even suggested in an entire chapter entitled «"Jesus Christ: God's Good News of Salvation to all" that Jesus Christ is "The Church's Gift to Asia" (Chap. IV), *as if the Church possessed Jesus or as if Jesus was given by some agent outside Asia to Asia*» (E. Chia, «The "Absence of Jesus"», 895; emphasis mine).

[814] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 259.

And, if *Ecclesia in Asia* is a manual for evangelization in Asia, the Pope looks at the Church's evangelizing mission in Asia as «a providential opportunity for the Church in Asia... to make a renewed commitment to the mission of making Jesus Christ better known to all» (EA 2), «the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ» (EA 2), the full illustration and explanation of «the truth that Christ is the one Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world» (EA 2). Indeed, the Apostolic Exhortation «is a strong affirmation of the need for a new drive for evangelizing Asia and expresses a fervent hope that Asia will turn to Christ in the third millennium»[815]. For *Ecclesia in Asia*, this thrust of the «new evangelization», in the «the earth's largest continent… [which]… is home to nearly two-thirds of the world's population» (EA 6), is imperative. This is not only because «after two millennia, a major part of the human family does not acknowledge Christ» (EA 29), but also and particularly because Jesus Christ, «the Savior of the world, born in Asia, has until now remained largely unknown to the people of the continent» (EA 2). Indeed, as a result of a Synod that has for its purpose the rekindling of evangelization in Asia, «*Ecclesia in Asia* [simply] repeated his [Pope John Paul II's] directive that Asian bishops evangelize primarily by proclaiming Christ as the unique savior of the world»[816].

Peter Phan observes that during the preparatory phase of the Synod, at no time were the Asian bishops ever consulted about the theme—«Jesus Christ the Savior and his Mission of Love and Service in Asia»—which, for Cardinal Jan Schotte, the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, was supposed to highlight «the centrality of the Person of Christ, his mission as Mediator and One and Only Savior in God's Eternal Plan of Salvation», thereby making «the Church in Asia and all Her members... better prepared to fulfill Christ's Evangelizing Mission of love and service in Asia»[817]. Yet, for Phan, «[t]his imposition of Christology with its claim of Jesus

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[815] M. Amaladoss, «*Ecclesia in Asia* Affirms Tradition», 3.

[816] T. C. Fox, «True to their Mission, Polite toward Rome», 286.

[817] Cited by P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 41.

as the "mediator and one and only savior" on the Asian Synod's agenda and conceiving it as the panacea for what may ail the Asian churches constitute, to judge from all the documents of the FABC, a massive misdiagnosis of the situation of Asian Christianity»[818]. On his part, Amaladoss expects that after having correctly said that «[t]he Synod Fathers noted that proclaiming Jesus as the only Savior can present particular difficulties in their cultures, given that many Asian religions teach divine self-manifestations as mediating salvation» (EA 10), *Ecclesia in Asia* «would take into account this reality and would reflect on its own faith affirmation in this new context»[819]. Instead, in the Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Asia, «what we have is *an affirmation of faith that could have been made anywhere in the world at any time*, not only in what it says positively about Jesus and his significance, but also in what it says about other religions»[820]. For the Indian bishops, in their response to the *Lineamenta*, it is actually «[a] deficiency of our present Christology… that it sometimes uses exclusive language, which deals with only one part of the great mystery of Christ—as though valid for all times and places»[821]. For Amaladoss, in another article, this problem arises because Western theology «ignores its own contextual sources as irrelevant», because it claims that it is «independent of all context and so universally valid», and because «even when the Western theologians acknowledge that there is a context for their reflections, they claim it to be universal»[822].

Thomas Fox, who was present at the Seventh FABC General Assembly, expressed a similar sentiment: «Privately many bishops here expressed frustration with Rome's seeming inability to understand their "Asian" mindset and the circumstances in which their churches operate»[823]. In another article, Fox narrates that after addressing the participants at the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly on the first day of

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[818] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 41.

[819] M. Amaladoss, «The Image of Jesus», 235.

[820] M. Amaladoss, «The Image of Jesus», 235; emphasis mine.

[821] Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 21.

[822] M. Amaladoss, «The Mystery of Christ and Other Religions», 327.

[823] T. C. Fox, «True to their Mission, Polite toward Rome», 286.

the gathering, Cardinal Josef Tomko—Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Rome's representative in the Asian bishops' assembly—was asked by the bishops what he meant by «weak Christology» when he said (presumably in his address) that they should not allow such a Christology in Asia. In the words of Fox, Tomko «replied [that] a weak Christology would be one that portrayed Jesus as simply a wise person or prophet—but not the Son of God». When «[h]e was pressed to say if he had encountered such a Christology in their midst... [h]e replied he had not»[824]. The Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly introduces its Final Statement with the Asian bishops' «dream of sharing our faith in Jesus... in Jesus through whom God saves»; it concludes with a quotation from *Ecclesia in Asia* expressing the same faith: «[T]he Church in Asia joyfully makes her pilgrim way into the Third Millennium. Her only joy is that which comes from sharing with the multitude of Asia's peoples the immense gift which she herself has received—the love of Jesus the Savior» (EA 50)[825].

Likewise, for Fox, such an approach to evangelization, with an over-emphasis on the proclamation of Jesus Christ without much consideration of the unique contexts and the difficult situations of the Asian Churches in the continent, is exactly what the Asian bishops were hesitant to embrace. While the bishops of Asia «did not openly reject the pope's exhortation», they nonetheless expressed «the need to evangelize by witnessing to the gospels and by entering into dialogue with followers of the other Asian religions»[826]. John Paul II himself admits that the proclamation of Jesus in the Asian context is «fraught with philosophical, cultural and theological difficulties, especially in light of the beliefs of Asia's great religions, deeply intertwined with cultural values and specific world views», problems that are compounded by the fact that «Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia», regarded in fact as «a Western rather than an Asian figure» (EA 20). The Pope, therefore, proposes in the presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Savior a *gradual* «pedagogy»

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[824] T. C. Fox, «True to their Mission, Polite toward Rome», 289.

[825] FABC VII, in FAPA III, 2.15.

[826] T. C. Fox, «True to their Mission, Polite toward Rome», 286.

which introduces non-Christians to the full appropriation of his mystery, the use of different approaches in the initial and continuing proclamation of Jesus to religious others, and the use of narrative methods to complement ontological categories employed in the proclamation (EA 20).

This proposal of the Pope must have been the result of the insights of the «smaller discussion groups» into which the Asian bishops were divided after their initial speeches in the first week of the Asian Synod. Gerard O'Connell, who collated the insights of the small groups in his brief article, observed that some synodal bishops felt that «to present Jesus as the only savior "immediately"… "would not be prudent"», and that «the uniqueness of Jesus, though theologically correct, may not be the best place to start»; they suggested that Jesus «should be presented [first] as a perfect human being» who is «"not distant" from Asian realities»[827]. For the Asian bishops—something that they asserted so strongly in their responses to the *Lineamenta*—«dialogue with other religions comes first and that it is the means to effective proclamation»[828]. In fact, for the Japanese bishops, «[i]f we stress too much that "Jesus Christ is the One and Only Saviour," we can have no dialogue, common living, or solidarity with other religions»[829]. Indeed, if we start our evangelization saying that only Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, and that others will not achieve salvation unless they become members of his Church, they will immediately close their doors to us and we will not be able to enter into any conversation with them.

In the First Consensus Paper of the 1979 International Congress on Mission, entitled, «Towards a Theology of Mission for Asia Today», the participants declared that «[t]he primary task of the Church is to present effectively through personal witness, life style, concern for others, commitment, joyful hope, the meaning of human existence as revealed in Jesus Christ»[830]. Only when Asian Churches go through a serious process

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[827] G. O'Connell, «Doing It the Asian Way», 647.

[828] Cited by E. Chia, «The "Absence of Jesus"», 896.

[829] Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 30.

[830] International Congress on Mission, no. 15, in FAPA I, 138.

of renewal, proclaiming Jesus through life-witness, radical service to the poor, and living a life characterized by the primacy of God, can they become authentically Church and genuinely Asian—something that «comes out clearly in the work of the FABC over the past 30 years and is vindicated by the many synodical interventions»[831]. The Asian bishops, in FABC VII, «acknowledge that we have, in many ways, fallen short of our vocation to the mission of love and service»[832]. They also declare that in the process of renewal—which involves all the Church's sectors, and which is «God's gift as well as our own task»—«[w]hat counts inestimably more is our ecclesial identity and the quality of our witness as servants and disciples of Jesus and the Kingdom of God for the peoples of Asia»[833]. In fact, «[w]e could easily trace the source of many conversions to the living witness of genuine Christians, be they clerical or lay»[834]. For the bishops, «[w]e will be credible witnesses to our Asian sisters and brothers only if they sense that we have experienced the Ultimate»[835]. Our brothers and sisters of other faiths «will recognize the Gospel that we announce when they see in our life the transparency of the message of Jesus and the inspiring and healing figure of men and women immersed in God»[836]. In their most unambiguous pronouncement on the preeminence of the component of witnessing as a mode of proclaiming Christ to Asians, the Asian bishops affirm: «The most effective means of evangelization and service in the name of Christ has always been and continues to be the witness of life», which «has to become the way of the Gospel for persons, institutions and the whole Church community»[837].

According to Edmund Chia, it is, therefore, in the manner of articulating the Asian vision of Christianity, and not in its content,

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831 J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 261-262.

832 FABC VII, in FAPA III, 5.

833 FABC VII, in FAPA III, 5.

834 FABC VII, in FAPA III, 12.

835 FABC VII, in FAPA III, 12.

836 FABC VII, in FAPA III, 13.

837 FABC VII, in FAPA III, 12-13.

that the Asian Churches depart from Rome[838]. Cardinal Paul Shan, bishop of Kaohsiung, Taiwan, expressed it more concretely: «[T]he big question presently confronting us, given the religious and cultural context of Asia, is not why we should proclaim the Good News of Christ's Salvation but HOW»[839]. For Chia, «it is important to bear in mind that it is not so much the *who* or the *why* of mission that is in dispute as is the *how* of mission or the methodology for theological reflection»[840]. John Paul II admits this when, after saying that «[t]here can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord», he asserts: «The great question now facing the Church in Asia is *how* to share with our Asian brothers and sisters what we treasure as the gift containing all gifts, namely, the Good News of Jesus Christ» (EA 19; emphasis in the original).

In fact, as early as 1978, the First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate held in the Philippines argued that, given «the legacy of millions still to be introduced to Christ», it «sought in faith for new ways of communicating the Good News»[841]. In a 1988 All-Asian Conference on Evangelization held in South Korea, the participants strove «to search for fresh ways to announce and share the Good News of God's Kingdom in Jesus Christ with our Asian brothers and sisters»[842]. Like the rest of the universal Church, the *who* and the *what* to proclaim to Asians has always been a «constant» for the Asian Churches—it is Jesus Christ and his Gospel. It is on the *how*, the manner of proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia, that they differ because

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[838] E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 242. A clarification is in order here. By «content» (a word that appears in Chia's statement referred to in this sentence), Chia *specifically* refers to the «who» and the «what» of evangelization—meaning, Jesus Christ and the Gospel, as we see in the ensuing discussion. This needs to be clarified because, as we have seen beginning in Chapter 3, the Asian vision of Christianity *does* depart from Rome in content as regards its position that other religions are ways of salvation for their members.

[839] Cited by E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 242; word in capitals in the original.

[840] E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 243; emphasis in the original.

[841] BIMA I, no. 4, in FAPA I, 94.

[842] BIMA I, no. 2, in FAPA I, 291.

of the unique situations of religious pluralism in the continent. Asia requires a different way of doing theology because of its unique multi-religious context, a way of theologizing that inevitably gives birth to a distinct, contextualized theology. Indeed, as John Prior, who covered the Synod for Asia for the English-speaking press, observed:

> Looking again at the 191 interventions, and remembering the informal conversations during the Synodal coffee breaks, I can say with absolute certainty that not a single Asian bishop would disagree with the *who* of mission, with the subject of proclamation. The faith we live is Christic, the ongoing practice of the Asian Churches is a faithful following of the Incarnate Word; on this the integrity of our mission is founded. The key issue that the bishops grapple with is the *how* of mission[843].

Indeed, for Prior, the Pope's *Ecclesia in Asia* and the Asian bishops' synodal interventions constitute «two different voices coming from two different worlds»—one voice is doctrinal, insisting on the *who* and *what* of mission; the other one is pastoral-practical, reiterating the *how* and *when* of mission, always taking into serious consideration the unique milieux of Asia[844]. The bishops' interventions demonstrate not only their *a posteriori* approach to doing theology but also the very source of such theologizing—their deep knowledge of the social, cultural, economic, political and religious contexts of Asia, as well as their profound awareness of their complex ecclesial situations in the vast Asian continent. Indeed, an integral source of their doing theology is their knowledge and awareness of the immense and mind-boggling diversities of the continent in which the Asian Churches find themselves.

Somewhat related to this fundamental difference between the Pope's *Ecclesia in Asia* and the Asian bishops' interventions both in the Asian Synod and in the FABC assemblies is the question of the «foreignness» of Christianity and the Churches in Asia. In the Apostolic Exhortation, the Pope «sees the crux of the matter as doctrinal (Christocentrism)», whereas, for the Asian bishops, the problem is not with Jesus Christ «but

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[843] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 259.

[844] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 260.260-261.

the presence of a foreign Church burdened by a colonial past»[845]. *Ecclesia in Asia* should have explored the reasons why Jesus, born in Asia, «has until now remained largely unknown to the people of the continent» (EA 2)—reasons such as «the absence of an appropriate adaptation to local cultures, and perhaps above all a lack of preparedness to encounter the great religions of Asia» (EA 9). However, the document simply calls for «a renewed commitment to the mission of making Jesus Christ better known to all» (EA 2), as though the only or major reason why Christianity failed in taking roots on Asian soil in the previous centuries was due to the dearth of Christian commitment to proclaiming Christ to the peoples of Asia. As regards the second reason, the Indian bishops admit that «a basic reason behind the failure of Christian mission efforts in the East [is that] the spiritual and mystical elements of Asian religions have been practically ignored»[846].

At the beginning, *Ecclesia in Asia* shows positive signs that it will consider this matter by reflecting on the Christian faith «in relation to the context in which it has to be proclaimed and professed in Asia today» (EA 4), and by insisting that the Church's evangelizing mission in Asia is conditioned not only by the Asian Church's understanding of itself as Christ's community of disciples gathered around its pastors, but also by «the social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia» (EA 5). Indeed, in coming up with this document, the Synod of Bishops for Asia should have allowed more voice and participation to «those who [really] have daily contact with the extremely diversified realities of such an immense continent» (EA 5); its Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation should have reflected faithfully their deepest questions, issues and concerns. Yet, *Ecclesia in Asia* fails miserably in the most elementary requirement for coming up with an accurate discernment of one of the ills that afflicts Asian Christianity—its lack of Asianness. For while it is correct in perceiving that «despite her centuries-long presence and her many apostolic endeavors, the Church in many places *was* still considered as foreign to Asia and indeed *was* often associated in people's minds with the

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[845] J. M. Prior, «Unfinished Encounter», 261.

[846] Cited at P. C. Phan, «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 19.

colonial powers» (EA 9; emphasis mine), the Apostolic Exhortation, as Phan sadly observes, «uses the past tense and fails to recognize that the foreignness of Christianity in Asia and the perception of its association with colonialism are *present* realities, and this not simply "in many places" but in all parts of Asia»[847]. This lack of Asianness is one of the bitter ironies of Asian Christianity: Christianity was born in Asia, moved westward until it arrived in Europe, and returned to its birthplace as a foreign religion, imported to Asia by its Western colonizers[848].

Indeed, even if Christianity was born in Asia, for Felix Wilfred, «foreignness is one thing which characterizes all the local Churches in Asia», and this is not due simply to the fact that Christianity was introduced to Asia from outside, nor it is because Christianity professes a different faith.

> The main reason why Christianity has been viewed as alien is because the local Churches in the countries of Asia have, by and large, kept themselves aloof from the mainstream of the life of the people, their history, struggles and dreams. They have failed to identify themselves with the people, even though in terms of charity many praiseworthy services have been rendered [849].

For the 1991 FABC-Office of Evangelization document, the Church, as a social institution, is seen as a foreign entity in its colonial beginnings while other religions are deeply rooted in Asian cultures and traditions. And this is because

> [t]he Church remains foreign in its lifestyle, in its institutional structure, in its worship, in its western-trained leadership and its theology. Christian rituals remain formal, neither spontaneous nor particularly Asian. There is a gap between leaders and ordinary believers in the Church: *a fortiori* with members of other faiths. The Church has created a powerful priestly class with little lay participation. Seminary formation often alienates the seminarian

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[847] P. C. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 218.

[848] P. C. Phan, «A Prophetic Church in the Service of the Reign of God», 193.194.

[849] F. Wilfred, «The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)», xxiv.

from the people. Biblical, systematic and historical theology as taught are often unpastoral and unAsian»[850].

4.2.6 *Conclusion*

The Synod of Bishops was established by Pope Paul VI on September 15, 1965 as the Second Vatican Council was drawing to a close as an instrument of collegiality. «The Synod, which the pope reserves the right to convoke, intends to foster a close collaboration between the bishops and the pope. It is, however, advisory and not deliberative»[851]. Canon 343 clearly states: «The function of the synod of Bishops is to discuss the matters proposed to it and set forth recommendations. It is not its function to settle matters or to draw up decrees, unless the Roman Pontiff has given it deliberative powers in certain cases; in this event, it rests with the Roman Pontiff to ratify the decisions of the synod»[852].

That the Pope, from a canonical point of view, ends up not incorporating in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation all or many of the propositions submitted to him by a Synod is still within the purview of his papal authority. In fact, while apostolic exhortations are supposed to incorporate the synods' «propositions», the documents that ensue from continental synods are not the work of the synodal participants themselves but of a post-synodal committee appointed by the Pope, and there is a suspicion that the results of the synods

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[850] FABC-OE, no. 13, in FAPA I, 337.

[851] P. C. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 215.

[852] The Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland, *The Code of Canon Law*, 59.

are filtered to an officially acceptable level[853]. The question, however, is: Why, *if* this happens, bother convoking a Synod if the Pope, at the end of a synodal process, chooses not to listen to the voices of his brother-bishops who are more knowledgeable about the context and situations of the Churches in a particular continent than he and those whom he delegates to draft the conclusions of a Synod?[854]. This section has examined more closely some aspects of Pope John Paul II's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, and some important theological considerations that seem absent from the document.

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[853] P. C. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 216. In another article, Phan narrates this anecdote: «At the end of the 1998 Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia… one frustrated participant complained that many of the issues and proposals broached by the Asian bishops in the discussion groups at the synod had not been incorporated into the final summary and that their ideas had been "filtered" by the Roma Curia» (P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 28). In his observation that this filtering seemed to be a common practice by the Roman Curia, Phan, in endnote 6 of the same article, cites Brazil's Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns' own words on the matter: «In 1983 and for the next eight years, I was the secretary of the Synod of Bishops in Rome. It was my responsibility to write down the conclusions of one synod and to draft the documents in preparation for the next synod. Nothing of what we prepared was ever taken into consideration. Very competent people carried out the whole process, but the texts were never used. At that time, the pope, or whoever he delegated, drafted the conclusions of the synod. The conclusions were formulated in such a way that they no longer reflected what had been said in the discussions» (Cited by P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 49).

[854] Francis Sullivan, in his book, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, has an interesting observation regarding the 1975 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi, which was the fruit of the 1974 Synod of Bishops on Evangelization. Sullivan observes that as regards the theme of evangelization, the Apostolic Exhortation «seems rather to express the personal thought of Paul VI than to represent the views which the bishops had expressed at the synod». In other words, some bishops, particularly those from Asia, «had expressed a much more positive judgment about the non-Christian religions than one finds in the papal document» (F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 186).

4.3 *Dominus Iesus* and Its Reception in the Contemporary Theology of Religions

4.3.1 *Introduction*

On September 5, 2000, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), issued the Declaration, *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*[855], a document that examines the unique and universal character of Jesus Christ in relation to theological positions that the CDF considers incompatible with Sacred Scripture and the Catholic faith. It proposes to «recall to Bishops, theologians, and all the Catholic faithful, certain indispensable elements of Christian doctrine» (DI 3) which, according to the document, are being endangered by «relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also *de iure* (or "in principle")» (DI 4). It intends «to set forth again the doctrine of the Catholic faith in these areas... [and]... to reiterate certain truths that are part of the Church's faith» (DI 3). In DI 4, the Declaration mentions those endangered «elements» and «truths»:

> the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the nature of Christian faith as compared with that of belief in other religions, the inspired nature of the books of the Sacred Scripture, the personal unity between the Eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth, the unity of the economy of the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit, the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal salvific mediation of the Church, the inseparability—while recognizing the distinction—of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the Church, and the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church (DI 4).

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[855] CDF, *Dominus Iesus*, 3-23. For a critical evaluation of *Dominus Iesus*, see S. J. Pope – C. Hefling, eds., *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*. For Francis Sullivan, «a document such as this cannot be immune from respectful critique on the part of Catholic theologians. They have an indispensable critical role to play, not only with regard to what other theologians are saying but also with regard to statements issued with ordinary, non-definitive teaching authority» (F. A. Sullivan, «Introduction and Theological Issues», 48).

Although *Dominus Iesus* consists of six sections, it can be divided, for purposes of investigation, into two main, albeit unequal, parts: the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions in Sections I, II, III, V, and VI, *and* the relationship between the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches in Section IV. Hence, the major part of the Declaration deals with issues and questions surrounding the theology of religions and the praxis of interreligious dialogue. A couple of things must be said about the scope of this section. First, because this section does not concern itself with ecumenical issues and problems but deals primarily with issues and problems in the field of the theology of religions, I will only deal with the first part, which means the sections pertaining to the relationship between Christianity and the other religions. Even then, when we look at the substance of these five sections of *Dominus Iesus*, we get the impression that the investigation not only of these five sections taken as a whole but also even of each of these sections can already be material for an entire dissertation. Hence, and this is the second point, there is a need to delimit not only the sections but also even the questions and issues within the sections themselves that should be included in this segment. This delimitation is called for not only because it is impossible to examine the five sections in a limited space, but also because the doctrinal and theological concerns of other sections may be beyond the immediate scope of this chapter.

This being said, I intend to examine only three major questions and issues of the Declaration in this section. The first is the theme of Section I, on «the fullness and definitiveness of the revelation of Jesus Christ». The reason for examining this theme is that it constitutes the «heart» of *Dominus Iesus*, and therefore an accurate understanding of this matter is of paramount importance in the discussion of this section. The second is the specific question in Section 1 about the distinction between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions», and since this distinction deals with the issue of whether or not other religions are salvific in themselves, this question is also related to other sections of the Declaration which deny, in one way or another, that the other religions are «revealed religions» and therefore salvific. The reason for probing this sharp distinction between «faith» and «belief» in the Declaration is that «its refusal to acknowledge the

existence of true theological faith (as opposed to "belief") in these other religions», constitutes, according to Richard McBrien, «the most serious problem with *Dominus Iesus*'s approach to other religions»[856]. For Jacques Dupuis, this distinction is perhaps «the most regrettable» and «the most derogatory» statement made by *Dominus Iesus* because it is «offensive to the religious life of the members of other religions»[857]. And as we have seen in Chapter 3 and will see in Chapter 5, it is one issue on which the Asian bishops and theologians depart from *Dominus Iesus*. The third is the document's criticism of the Asian Churches' over-emphasis on regno-centrism in the Asian theology of religions. And the reason for examining this criticism is that the Kingdom of God perspective constitutes one of the fundamental elements and unflagging concerns of the FABC's theology of religions.

4.3.2 *A Brief Summary and Some Preliminary Remarks and Observations of* **Dominus Iesus**

4.3.2.1 A Brief Summary of Three Sections of *Dominus Iesus*

Let us briefly, and partially, summarize the three sections covered by the investigation of this part of the chapter.

«Against the theory of the limited, incomplete or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ», about which Section I—dealing with «The Fullness and Definitiveness of the Revelation of Jesus Christ» (DI 5-8)—endeavors to clarify, *Dominus Iesus* «reiterates the teaching of the Catholic faith regarding the full and complete revelation of the salvific mystery of God in Jesus Christ»[858]. The reason for such an affirmation is the faith in Jesus Christ as «true God and true man», whose «words and deeds manifest the totality and definitiveness of the revelation of the mystery of God, even if the depth of that mystery remains in itself transcendent and inexhaustible»[859]. Likewise, this section argues for a sharp distinction between «theological faith»,

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[856] R. P. McBrien, «*Dominus Iesus*: An Ecclesiological Critique», downloaded from https://sedosmission.org/old/eng/McBrien.htm on October 15, 2017.

[857] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 36.62.37.

[858] CDF, «Synthesis of the Declaration of *Dominus Iesus*», 221.

[859] CDF, «Synthesis of the Declaration of *Dominus Iesus*», 221.

described as «adherence to the truth revealed by the one and triune God», and «belief in the other religions», portrayed as «religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God, who reveals himself»[860]. In Section V, dealing with «The Church: Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Christ» (DI 18-19), while «the kingdom of God is not identified with the church in her visible and social reality», the Declaration insists that «the intimate connection between Christ, the kingdom and the church cannot be denied or emptied in any way»[861]. For Avery Dulles, this section, which is «directed at theologians who wish not to be "Christocentric" or "ecclesiocentric" but "regnocentric"», is a salutary reminder «that the kingdom of God cannot be separated from Christ or the Church»[862]. And Section VI—«The Church and the Other Religions in Relation to Salvation» (DI 20-22)—argues that on account of what has been affirmed about the unique mediation of Christ and the role of the Church as the «universal sacrament of salvation», it would be contrary to the Christian faith, therefore, «to consider the Church as *one way* of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the Church toward the eschatological kingdom of God» (DI 21). Hence, while *Dominus Iesus* «acknowledges the workings of grace and the presence of elements coming from God in non-Christian religions», it nonetheless «denies that they are "revealed religions," offering ways of salvation "complementary to Christianity"»[863].

4.3.2.2 Some Preliminary Remarks and Observations of *Dominus Iesus*

First, Church documents, in general, are issued in order to address some concrete problems and issues in the Church, whether theological or pastoral, or both. In the case of *Dominus Iesus*, its objective, as we have seen in the introduction of this section, is to combat what the

[860] CDF, «Synthesis of the Declaration of *Dominus Iesus*», 221.

[861] CDF, «Synthesis of the Declaration of *Dominus Iesus*», 222.

[862] A. Dulles, «*Dominus Iesus*: A Catholic Response», 6.

[863] A. Dulles, «*Dominus Iesus*: A Catholic Response», 6.

CDF perceived as the Christological and ecclesiological relativism infecting the ideas of some theologians of the Catholic Church (cf. DI 4), «to correct the problems it believes flow from relativism that regards all religious positions as equally valuable and legitimate»[864]. Yet, when these documents call attention to some theologians whom the Church perceives as deviating from Catholic orthodoxy, these theologians are always unnamed; and *Dominus Iesus* is no exception. «The Declaration», observes Jacques Dupuis, «abstains from mentioning the names of any theologians who hold the opinions it means to condemn»[865].

However, some theologians have expressed their opinion that *Dominus Iesus* was written «in response to the work of Asian bishops [and theologians] who have been struggling with issues of pluralism and fidelity in largely non-Christian contexts»[866], in response to the Asian Churches' various initiatives undertaken in their desire to implement and be faithful to their unique vision of Christianity in Asia. For Edmund Chia, the Declaration does not conceal its prime targets when it speaks against the danger of relativism—not the Westerners but «the fledging theologians of the East, the seminal thinkers of Asia in general and of India in particular»; in effect, *Dominus Iesus* is «a document meant for the Church in the "East" (= Asia)»[867]. Indeed, if *Dominus Iesus* «has become very much associated with Asia... as if it were a document written specifically for the Church in Asia», it is because, if the main thesis of the document is that the spirit of «relativism» is not only dangerous but has also become prevalent, Joseph Ratzinger «specifically identifies Asia as the hotbed for these relativistic theories»[868].

There is, likewise, an observation that Jacques Dupuis is among the Asian theologians targeted by *Dominus Iesus*[869]. And such an

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[864] S. J. Pope – C. Hefling, *Sic et Non*, «Preface», ix.

[865] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 30.

[866] S. J. Pope – C. Hefling, *Sic et Non*, «Preface», ix; cf. P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 54.

[867] E. Chia, «FABC's "Response" to *Dominus Jesus*», 232.

[868] E. Chia, «The Asian Church in Dialogue», 50.51-52.

[869] C. Geffré, «The Crisis of Christian Identity», 26.

observation is not without any basis especially when we look at the «timing» of Dupuis' receipt of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Notification* for his controversial book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, and the promulgation of *Dominus Iesus* by the same Vatican Congregation. We may recall that a year after Dupuis received the *Notification* in 2001, and just over five months after he published its shorter version in Italian (entitled *Christianity and the Religions* in the English translation) on March 31, 2000, the same Congregation that opened an inquiry into his 1997 pioneering work issued *Dominus Iesus*, a document that thus came in the midst of controversies taking place between Dupuis and the CDF. There are two «moments» which Dupuis recounts in his 2012 article, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus* and My Perspective on It», which bolster the suspicion that indeed the document must have been written, partly or entirely, in response to the controversies reputedly contained in his book:

> On 4 September 2000, I was summoned to the CDF together with my Fr. General [Kolvenbach] and Professor Gerald O'Collins of the Gregorian University who would act as my advocate, for an official meeting with Cardinal Ratzinger, his Secretary Archbishop Bertone and Fr. Angelo Amato of the Salesian University, consultor of the Congregation. Incidentally, this was the first time I ever met the Cardinal and his secretary. During this meeting I was expected to sign a fifteen-page draft of a *Notification* about my book, which was foreseen for publication in *L'Osservatore Romano* on September 7th, that is two days after the publication of the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, which took place on the 5th[870].

In other words, *Dominus Iesus* was promulgated the day after Dupuis was summoned to the CDF's office for his disputed book. Towards the end of this September 4, 2000 meeting, Dupuis recalled how Cardinal Ratzinger asked him the question: «Would you be willing to declare that your book must be understood in the light

[870] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 27-28. In this article, Dupuis discusses some «allegations» of *Dominus Iesus* «which, partly though not exclusively, seem to be made against my text» (J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 30).

of the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*?»[871]. And with even just a cursory inspection of the CDF *Notification*'s «five areas of concern» and *Dominus Iesus*' five sections (excluding Section IV on ecumenism) dealing with the Church's relation with non-Christian religions, we can already see «resemblances» and «similarities» between the *Notification* and *Dominus Iesus*[872]. The most explicit proof, however, of the connection between these two documents is found in Footnote # 1 of the *Notification* itself:

> Because of the tendencies in some circles, which have become increasingly evident in the thinking of the Christian faithful, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the Declaration "*Dominus Iesus*" on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church… in order to protect essential truths of the Christian faith. The *Notification* draws from the principles expressed in *Dominus Iesus* its evaluation of Father Dupuis' book[873].

Secondly, while *Dominus Iesus* defers to Vatican II sixty times through its citations of conciliar documents, the Declaration, according to Philip Kennedy, ignored what may be considered «the council's most revolutionary statement concerning divine salvation»—*Lumen Gentium* 16[874]. It quotes LG 15 and 17, but perplexingly ignores LG 16 which declares that those who are inculpably ignorant of Christ's gospel and his Church, but nonetheless seek God with a sincere heart, and aided by divine grace, try to fulfill God's will in their life as they glimpse it in their conscience, may also attain eternal salvation. In LG 16 we find the essence of this conciliar document's

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[871] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 71.

[872] Compare CDF, «Notification: Father Dupuis' "Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism"», 605-608, and CDF, *Dominus Iesus*, 3-23. Dupuis and some of his writings will figure prominently in this section, not only because Dupuis himself feels «targeted» by *Dominus Iesus* and thus has to respond to the CDF's allegations, which he did in his 2012 article, but also because he, among the current theologians of religions, had written more abundantly on the salvific value and import of other religions, a central question in the contemporary theology of religions which the Declaration repudiates.

[873] CDF, «Notification: Father Dupuis' "Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism"», 607.

[874] P. Kennedy, «Rome & Relativism: '*Dominus Iesus*' & the CDF», 15.

teaching on the possibility of salvation outside the Catholic Church. Kennedy concludes: «Its authors, no doubt, have no intention of insisting that salvation is entirely unavailable outside the church, but *Lumen gentium* 16 is too historically momentous to be passed over in silence»[875]. Indeed, if some theologians are guilty of «an exaggerated application of certain statements of the Second Vatican Council concerning the action of God outside the Church and in other religions»—in other words, of «selective reading» of the Council[876]—the CDF is also guilty of a «great omission» when it interestingly fails to quote this very important conciliar passage.

Thirdly, it is true that the question of the Church is not as central in *Dominus Iesus* as the place and role of Jesus Christ in the universal history of salvation; however, the question of the Church enters into the conversation and controversy itself because the Declaration's ecclesiological teaching engenders some legitimate questions. For instance, in response to «the most taxing of all theological questions: How and where might human beings chance upon a saving God in their world?», the document's emphatic answer, in its most simplified, paraphrased form, is: «God is best encountered in the Catholic church founded by Jesus Christ»[877]. While we find no problem with this argument from a Catholic point of view, the subtitle of the Declaration, «On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church», nevertheless, gives rise quite noticeably to a notion about the uniqueness and universality of the Church in God's saving design for the world. It seems to put Jesus Christ *and* the Church on an equal status with each other, or lump them together on one and the same level of significance, in terms of uniqueness and salvific universality. This tendency is also present in *Ecclesia in Asia* which speaks about «the universal saving significance of the mystery of Jesus and his Church» (EA 20), yet it is more pronounced in *Dominus Iesus* in its clearly labeled subtitle.

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[875] P. Kennedy, «Rome & Relativism: '*Dominus Iesus*' & the CDF», 15.

[876] W. Newton, «*Dominus Iesus*, a decade later», 14.

[877] P. Kennedy, «Rome & Relativism: '*Dominus Iesus*' & the CDF», 14.

In an article that he published in 1995, which was, therefore, written years prior to *Dominus Iesus*, but which can shed light on our current discussion, Dupuis argues that no matter how Christian theology may conceive the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church, they cannot be placed on an equal footing, on one and the same level of significance and necessity[878]. After all, from the biblical point of view, only Jesus Christ is «the way, and the truth, and the life» (Jn 14:6); only he is the «one mediator between God and humankind» (1Tim 2:5); only through him can salvation be found, for «there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved» (Acts 4:12). In his 1997 book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Dupuis insists:

> Whatever role may have to be attributed to the Church in the order of salvation, it can never be placed on a par with that of Jesus Christ; nor can the same necessity ever be attributed to it.... The Church, as a derived mystery and utterly relative to the mystery of Christ, cannot be the yardstick by which the salvation of others is measured[879].

Dupuis returns to this argument in his 2012 article, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus* and My Perspective on It». He observes that in the very title of the document itself, «[t]he mystery of Jesus Christ and that of the Church seem regrettably placed on one and the same level of unicity and universality in the mystery of divine salvation, apparently forgetting that the Church is a derived, related mystery, which finds its significance exclusively in the mystery of Jesus Christ»[880]. It is through this failure to maintain a distance between Christ and the Church that we end up attributing to the Church what must only be attributed to Christ.

In his book, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, Peter Phan insists on the fundamental theological distinction between Jesus and the Church which, when obscured, necessarily leads to idolatry. In the gospels, Jesus is presented as messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, and the incarnate Logos, among others. In relation to Jesus, however, the

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[878] J. Dupuis, «Religious Plurality and the Christological Debate», 329.

[879] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 186.

[880] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 32.

Church is presented in the gospels as the bride to the bridegroom, the body to the head, the branches to the vine, the flock to the shepherd, and the people to their leader. While these images suggest an intimate relationship between Jesus and the Church, even an ontological unity between them, in the New Testaments writings Jesus and the Church have never been identified with each other. Similarly, Vatican II is careful about making any identification between Christ and the Church. In relation to Christ, *Lumen Gentium*, for example, speaks of the Church as «sacrament»—«a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and unity among all men» (LG 1), «a visible sign of this saving unity» (LG 9), and «the universal sacrament of salvation» (LG 48). The Church may be «on earth, the seed and the beginning of... the Kingdom of Christ and of God» (LG 5), but it cannot be identified with the Kingdom of God or with Christ himself. Because of this, Christians believe in and worship Jesus, but they do not, cannot, and must not believe in and worship the Church; otherwise, they commit idolatry[881].

4.3.3 *The Fullness of God's Revelation in Jesus Christ Understood Not as «Quantitative» But as «Qualitative» Fullness*

Although in the subtitle of *Dominus Iesus*, both Jesus Christ and the Church are referred to in terms of their unicity and salvific universality, «the heart of the declaration is not the statements on the unique character of the Catholic Church but on *the unique character of Jesus Christ*»[882]. The CDF's preoccupation with protecting and safeguarding the definitive article of the Christian faith constitutes, for Robert Imbelli, the «heart» of the Declaration and «forms the context in which to understand *Dominus Iesus*»[883]. This Catholic Church's profession of faith in Jesus Christ, God's Incarnate Word, as the unique and universal Savior is «the article of faith upon which

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[881] P. C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 93.

[882] W. Newton, «*Dominus Iesus*: ten years on», downloaded from https://www.academia.edu/3818129/Dominus_Iesus_Ten_Years_On on September 30, 2017.

[883] R. P. Imbelli, «Rome & Relativism: '*Dominus Iesus*' & the CDF», 13.

the church itself stands or falls», and therefore an «article of faith» which, for Imbelli, «can no longer be taken for granted»[884].

Of 102 footnotes, *Dominus Iesus* cites Vatican II documents sixty times[885]. Out of sixty footnotes from conciliar documents, seven citations came from *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, the only conciliar document cited by the Declaration in its discussion of Section I, on «the fullness and definitiveness of the revelation of Jesus Christ». Indeed, if the Declaration intends «to recapitulate the church's faith in the uniqueness and universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God»[886], *Dei Verbum*, with its strong Christocentrism, is the most appropriate Vatican II document to refer to, for it is *the* conciliar document that speaks of Jesus Christ as the fullness and climax of God's revelation.

Because mostly the Declaration simply reiterates not just traditional Catholic doctrine but also the faith-affirmations among Christian churches and ecclesial communities on Jesus Christ, for Richard McBrien,

> [t]hose of us in the mainstream of the Catholic theological tradition can also readily *affirm, with Dominus Jesus* (not to mention the New Testament itself), that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life—the one Redeemer and mediator between God and humankind—and that the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are one and the same»[887].

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[884] R. P. Imbelli, «Rome & Relativism: '*Dominus Iesus*' & the CDF», 13.

[885] In his article, Philip Kennedy argues that *Dominus Iesus* «defers to the council a full forty-five times» (P. Kennedy, «Rome & Relativism: '*Dominus Iesus*' & the CDF», 15). In footnote 20 of his article, Matthew Dunn comments: «By my own count, though, his [Kennedy's] tally is off: The Declaration in fact references the Council's documents *fifty-nine* times» (M. W. I. Dunn, «The CDF's Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 52). Certainly, Dunn's count is far more accurate than that of Kennedy; although, on my part, as far as the footnotes of *Dominus Iesus* that *mention* Vatican II documents are concerned, I find sixty footnotes all in all.

[886] R. P. Imbelli, «Rome & Relativism: '*Dominus Iesus*' & the CDF», 13.

[887] R. P. McBrien, «*Dominus Iesus*: An Ecclesiological Critique», downloaded from https://sedosmission.org/old/eng/McBrien.htm on October 15, 2017.

Indeed, in many instances, «*Dominus Iesus* simply repeats various aspects of this core Christian message that Christ is Lord and universal Savior and therefore says nothing new»[888]. It simply reaffirms «[t]he definitive character of God's revelation in Christ» which, for Avery Dulles, «should be evident to anyone who accepts the Scriptures and the Creeds»[889]. That the Declaration insists anew and in a more forceful manner on the absolute significance of the Christ-event for universal salvation is not therefore, for Imbelli, a withdrawal from interreligious dialogue and tolerance but simply a re-echoing of what *Lumen Gentium* itself professes: that «Christ is the light of nations» (LG 1)[890]. Thus, while Vatican II recognizes that God's saving grace is present and operative beyond the confines of the Catholic Church, such a recognition never lessens the missionary task of the Church to preach the gospel everywhere.

In his 48-page article, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus* and My Perspective on It», Jacques Dupuis reflects amply on the Declaration. In his reflection in Section I on the divine revelation in Jesus Christ, Dupuis argues that however one articulates the character of the revelation of Christ, one must not forget «the gap that remains between the historical divine revelation which took place in Jesus Christ and God's final revelation at the *eschaton*»[891]. In expressing this warning, Dupuis cites his book, *Christianity and the Religions*, the shorter version of his 1997 book, *Towards A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, which was the subject of the CDF's 2001 *Notification* for alleged doctrinal errors and ambiguities. It is, therefore, important to go back to this book, and to his other pertinent writings, for a fuller understanding of his insight in his article.

In *Christianity and the Religions*, Dupuis raises a question about the meaning of Jesus Christ as the fullness of God's revelation, affirmed by *Dei Verbum* which states that Jesus Christ «completes and perfects» divine revelation (DV 4) and that he «is himself both

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[888] S. J. Pope – C. Hefling, eds., *Sic et Non*, «Preface», ix.

[889] A. Dulles, «*Dominus Iesus*, A Catholic Response», 5.

[890] R. P. Imbelli, «Rome & Relativism: '*Dominus Iesus*' & the CDF», 14.

[891] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 32; emphasis in the original.

the mediator and the sum total of revelation» (DV 7). In addressing this question, Dupuis makes a fine distinction between «the written word of the New Testament» which constitutes «the official record and interpretation, the authentic memorial, of that revelation», and the Christ-event which is «the very person of Jesus Christ, his deeds and his words, his life, his death, and his resurrection—in a word, the total Jesus Christ event itself»[892]. For Dupuis, only the latter constitutes the fullness of revelation, for in Jesus Christ God has uttered to the world his decisive word.

Indeed, Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's revelation. Yet, this fullness of divine revelation which is personally attributed to Christ must «not... be understood quantitatively—as though after Christ everything related to the divine mystery were already known and there were nothing further to learn—but qualitatively»[893]. Dupuis calls this fullness of God's revelation in Christ a «qualitative» fullness «in order to stress its transcendent and unique character as originating from him, who is God's Son made man; for that reason that fullness is unsurpassed and unsurpassable in history»[894]. However, it is not a «quantitative» fullness because it «does not imply that it comprehends and exhausts the entire mystery of God, which remains hidden to be fully manifested at the *eschaton*»[895].

> However complete the historical revelation in Jesus Christ may be, it belongs to the "already," not to the "not yet." While it is decisive as God's full historical manifestation, it is not definitive—the term is not used by *Dei Verbum*—as will be God's final manifestation at the end time in the *eschaton*; it is complete, then, but not fully achieved[896].

In his article, Dupuis cites both *Dei Verbum* 4 and *Redemptoris Missio* 5 in arguing for the non-definitive character of God's revelation in Christ. For Dupuis, DV 4 speaks clearly of a distinction between the «already» and the «not yet» when it affirms that while God's

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[892] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 129.

[893] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 129.

[894] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 32.

[895] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 32; emphasis in the original.

[896] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 32.

self-revelation was completed in Jesus Christ, «through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth», and therefore «we now await no further new public revelation», we cannot disregard an aspect of God's revelation which will be disclosed only in «the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ» in the *eschaton*. Likewise, speaking of John Paul II's Encyclical (RM 5), Dupuis remarks:

> [T]hat in Jesus Christ God "has made himself known in the fullest possible way" possible in history, is of course true. That "he has revealed to mankind who he is," or that he has "made his name known" does not, however, imply that the fullness of his mystery has already been manifested, for while divine revelation through the mystery of the Incarnation is unsurpassable in character as a historical revelation, it has its own innate limitations which will be overcome only at the *eschaton*[897].

If revelation achieves its fullness, pinnacle and culmination in Jesus Christ, it is because of Jesus' «personal identity as Son of God», and as such «no revelation of the mystery of God can match the depths of what occurred when the divine Son incarnate lived in a human key, in a human consciousness, his own identity as the Son of God»[898]. According to Dupuis, Jesus was humanly aware of being

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[897] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 33; emphasis in the original.

[898] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 129.130. Elsewhere in the same book, Dupuis argues that for the Christian tradition «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» (*Ibid.*, 89). In his article, «One God, One Christ, Convergent Ways», Dupuis argues that «the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ has to be based on his personal identity as Son of God. Nothing else could be an adequate theological basis for his status» (J. Dupuis, «One God, One Christ, Convergent Ways», 214). In a much-quoted article in this sub-section, Dupuis deepens a little bit this point. For him, because of Jesus' personal identity as the Son of God, the unquestionably finite, particular, and historical character of his humanity «need not imperil his unique quality in conveying divine revelation and salvation»; it is what provides «the ontological foundation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in revelation and salvation» (J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 39).

the Son of God and lived his personal relationship with the Father in his human consciousness, which entailed an immediate knowledge of God whom he called *Abba*. His revelation of God had its origin in this unique, unsurpassed and unsurpassable human experience. For Dupuis, God's revelation has attained a qualitatively different and unique character in Jesus Christ because Jesus, as the Word of God made flesh, «experiences in his human consciousness the mystery of divine life in which he participates personally»; Jesus «is himself the Son of God who expresses himself and affirms his divine origin in human terms»[899]. God's revelation in him «is central and normative for Christian faith, in the sense that no one is in a position to communicate the mystery of God to human beings with a depth equal to that with which the very Son made human did so. Jesus speaks the word because he *is* the Word»[900].

However, for Dupuis, this revelation—our knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus Christ—is not absolute but necessarily limited, since «[t]he human consciousness of Jesus, while it is that of the Son, is still a human consciousness and hence limited», which «could not be otherwise given the mystery of the incarnation»[901]. He continues:

> No human consciousness, not even that of the Son-of-God-made-human, could "comprehend," that is, contain and exhaust, the divine mystery in its totality. No expression of the mystery in human words, not even those that sprang from the unique experience of the Son in his humanity, could exhaust the mystery in its entirety: that can be done only by the intra-divine consciousness, shared by the three persons in the mystery of the Trinity[902].

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[899] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 130.

[900] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 130.

[901] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 130. Gerald O'Collins, in an article devoted to Dupuis' contribution to interreligious dialogue, re-echoes the latter's position on this question: «Our present knowledge of God as revealed to us in Christ is limited and neither "absolute" nor "definitive."... [I]t is more accurate to call revelation completed in Jesus Christ "decisive" rather than "definitive"... [since this term]... would easily suggest (wrongly) that there is nothing more to come» (G. O'Collins, «Jacques Dupuis' Contributions», 391-392).

[902] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 130.

Jesus' human knowledge and consciousness, while it is the personal knowledge and consciousness of the Logos, «is and remains authentically and specifically human, and it cannot, through a mistaken notion of the *communicatio idiomatum*, entail a direct communication of the divine knowledge to the human»[903]. This is in consonance with the two-nature Christological definition of Chalcedon: because the divine and human natures are not separate, the human knowledge of Jesus is the knowledge of the Logos, since there is only one Person in Jesus; yet, because the two natures do not comingle with each other, the knowledge of the divine nature is not immediately communicated to the human nature. Hence, as human, Jesus did not know everything; he was in fact ignorant of many things[904]. God's mystery and his plan of salvation are not fully revealed in the Christ-event as Jesus himself admitted his ignorance of the day of the End (cf. Mark 13:32; Matthew 24:36)[905].

In his article, «Spirit, Basis for Interreligious Dialogue», Dupuis deepens more his treatment of this matter and its implications for the theology of religions and the praxis of interreligious dialogue. According to Dupuis, «[t]he historical particularity of Jesus puts limits on the Christ event», a limitation that is «necessarily part of the

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[903] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 130.

[904] Karl Rahner, following Thomas Aquinas, argues that «Jesus Christ in his human reality shares our relation to God's incomprehensibility.... Consequently, as man, he also stands in that position of the creature where it must freely decide whether it freely accepts the absolute mystery with the adoration of loving ecstasy, or wills to be atheist» (K. Rahner, «Mystery», 134). Edward Schillebeeckx, likewise, observes that «Jesus not only reveals God but also conceals him, since he appeared among us in non-godlike, creaturely humanity. As man he is historical, contingent being, who in no way can represent the full riches of God» (E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in Our Western Culture*, 2).

[905] For Dupuis, this and the Council's confession of its ignorance of the way God's saving grace in Christ works among people who are not Christians and therefore do not belong to the Church (cf. GS 22; AG 7) should make us cautious in affirming the fullness of Christ's revelation, without any nuances and distinctions, as the knowledge both of the day of the End and of how God saves «others» in Christ is clearly «not included in Jesus' revelation of God's plan of salvation, even while it affects the overwhelming majority of humankind» (J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 35).

incarnational economy willed by God»[906]. For Dupuis, the human consciousness of Jesus as God's Son could not—on account of such consciousness being human—exhaust the mystery of God, and the Christ-event does not exhaust the salvific power of God. The reason given by Dupuis for this argument is that God, as ultimate source of both revelation and salvation, remains beyond the human Jesus who, in his humanity, has become the human transposition, the channel, the efficacious sign, or the sacrament of God's saving will and mystery in the world. Therefore, «[d]espite Jesus' personal identity as Son of God in his human existence, there is still a distance between God the Father, the ultimate source, and the human icon of God. Jesus is not a substitute for God [the Father]»[907].

Indeed, the «fullness» of God's revelation in Jesus Christ must be construed as a qualitative rather than a quantitative fullness. While divine revelation is already «full» in Christ and in him has achieved a singular intensity, it remains «limited» and «unfinished» and will remain so until its complete manifestation in the *eschaton.* There is always what Dupuis calls the «remainder» or the «eschatological proviso» in every statement pertaining to the fullness of revelation in Christ[908]. As *Dei Verbum*, cited again by Dupuis, teaches: «as the centuries go by, the church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her» (DV 8) in the *eschaton*. He also quotes Pope John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio*, which affirms that «every truth attained [by the Church through revelation]

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[906] J. Dupuis, «The Spirit, Basis for Interreligious Dialogue», 29.

[907] J. Dupuis, «The Spirit, Basis for Interreligious Dialogue», 29. In the book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Dupuis points out the limitations of the Incarnation as a medium for God's self-revelation when he expresses the same insight most clearly: «The historical particularity of Jesus imposes upon the Christ-event irremediable limitations. This is necessarily part of the incarnational economy willed by God. Just as the human consciousness of Jesus as Son could not, by nature, exhaust the mystery of God, and therefore left his revelation of God incomplete, in like manner neither does or can the Christ-event exhaust God's saving power. God remains beyond the man Jesus as the ultimate source of both revelation and salvation» (J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 298; cf. ID., «One God, One Christ, Convergent Ways», 215).

[908] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 131-132.

is but a step towards that fullness of truth which will appear with the final Revelation of God» (FR 2). For Dupuis, while no revelation, prior to and after the Christ-event, can ever equal or surpass the revelation given in Jesus Christ, such a qualitative fullness of revelation in the incarnate Son of God does not constitute a hindrance to the prolongation of divine revelation in the other religions. «As long as the unsurpassable fullness of the revelation that has taken place in Jesus Christ is kept in mind, it can be said that God continues to speak to our world today»[909].

In *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, Dermot Lane argues that even if «the revelation of God in Christ is unique, unsurpassable and unrepeatable... there is also an important sense in which the Christ-event remains incomplete and unfinished from an eschatological point of view»[910]. In the history of Christian theology, the over-emphasis of the Christ-event in teaching and praxis spawned «[i]nflated Christological and ecclesial claims», which «in the past inhibited authentic dialogue between Christianity and other religions»[911] to the detriment of the relationship between Christianity and other religious traditions. According to Lane, «[i]t is only when we have grasped the unfinished and incomplete character of revelation that we will begin to appreciate the real urgency of interreligious dialogue in a global world, divided by political conflicts which are all too often related to the major religions»[912].

For Lane, one of the most prominent features of the self-understanding of the early Church was «the acute awareness that there was something still outstanding in the experience of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus», or the recognition of «[t]he unfinished work and incomplete character of the Christ-event», which is conveyed in various ways «in the earliest Christologies of the New Testament»[913]. His brief survey yields the following insights:

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[909] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 132.

[910] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 161.

[911] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 161.

[912] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 161.

[913] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 161.

(1) One of the clearest articulations of this incompleteness of the Christ-event is found in the prayer of the early Christians, *Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus* (1Cor 16:22), which expresses the early Church's expectation of «the imminent return of Christ to complete what Jesus as the Christ had inaugurated»[914].

(2) The unfinished character of the Christ-event is also seen in some of the Pauline Christologies which reveal an underlying tension in Paul's theology between the «already» and the «not yet»—between «what already exists in Christ and what is yet to come, ... between being 'in Christ' and 'becoming in Christ', between the present and the future»[915]. Indeed, while we have to insist on Christ as «'the fullness of time' (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10), 'the new Creation' (2 Cor 5:17), and 'the revelation of the mystery... kept secret... for... ages but now disclosed' (Rom 16:25-26)», there is still something incomplete and unfinished in the Christ-event articulated by Paul in the language which describes Christ as «'the first fruits' (1 Cor 15:20), 'the beginning of the end' and 'the first born among many' (Rom 8:29; Col 1:18)»[916].

(3) Likewise, a similar tension between the «already» and the «not yet» can be seen in the Johannine Christology «which balances a strong realized eschatology alongside a futurist eschatology», and which means that «[w]hile the language of Revelation in the New Testament recognizes that a breakthrough occurred in Christ, it also looks forward to the future»[917].

(4) Further evidence of this awareness of the incomplete nature of the Christ-event can be seen «in the doctrine of the second coming of Christ/*Parousia* which not only pervades the New Testament but also the early creeds and liturgical celebrations»[918].

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[914] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 161-162; cf. ID., «Pneumatology in the Service of Ecumenism», 157.

[915] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 162; cf. ID., «Pneumatology in the Service of Ecumenism», 157.

[916] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 162.

[917] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 162.

[918] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 162.

In spite of the existence in the New Testament of both dimensions of the «already» and the «not yet» and of the «realized eschatology» and the «futurist eschatology», as well as of the *Maranatha* prayer, with all their obvious implications about the *still* outstanding character of the Christ-event, «[f]or too long, elements of the already, of newness, and of the break-through associated with the Christ-event have been allowed to dominate the self-understanding of Christianity in theory and in praxis»[919]. For Lane, this imbalance, which is one of the reasons for the current state of Christological *impasse*, «must be redressed without in any way diminishing the uniqueness and the universal significance of the Christ-event»[920].

Claude Geffré also reflects on the broad theme of the fullness of God's revelation in Christ in some of his writings. On the question of the limitations of divine revelation found in the New Testament, he affirms the faith of the Church that the incarnate *Logos* constitutes God's ultimate communication to humanity.

> But the revelation contained in the New Testament, to which Jesus bears witness, is a limited revelation that does not claim to exhaust the fullness of truth that is in God. If this were otherwise, it would be failing to take Jesus' full humanity seriously and falling into a form of Docetism. The New Testament bears witness not to the Word in his eternity but to the Word in his historical contingency[921].

On the question of the meaning of Christ's «fullness» of divine revelation, Geffré makes a distinction between its «qualitative» and «quantitative» meanings:

> By appealing to the distinction between *qualitative* and *quantitative*, we could say that the revelation to which Jesus bears witness is incomparable by very reason of the closeness of his understanding with the Father. But from the quantitative point of view, Jesus' message is indeed the Word of God in the state of a human contingent discourse[922].

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[919] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 162.

[920] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 162.

[921] C. Geffré, «The Crisis of Christian Identity», 18.

[922] C. Geffré, «The Crisis of Christian Identity», 18; emphasis in the original.

In another place, he reiterates the «qualitative» sense of the «fullness» of divine revelation in Christ: «Revelation as the coming of the Word of God in Jesus Christ is the fullness of revelation, but it is a qualitative, not a quantitative fullness. As the coming of the Word of God in Jesus Christ, revelation is definitive and unsurpassable. But its content of truth is necessarily historic and therefore limited»[923].

For Geffré, Christianity's recognition of its own limitations in terms of understanding and communicating the fullness of what has been revealed provides an extremely valuable «hermeneutic key» in trying to understand how Christianity can become involved in dialogue with other religions without undermining its own identity. «It does not mean that Christianity has to abandon its claim to be a witness to the ultimate revelation but rather that it has to show that it carries its own principles of self-limitation within itself»[924]. If Christianity can engage in interreligious dialogue with others, «it is because it bears in itself its own principles of limitation»[925]. Such a limitation can be attested to by the fact that «[a]fter twenty centuries, no Christianity in history can claim to incarnate the essence of Christianity as a religion of the complete and definitive revelation of the mystery of God»[926].

4.3.4 *The Problematic of the «Drastic Distinction» Between «Theological Faith» and «Belief in the Other Religions» in* **Dominus Iesus**

The discussion above brings us to another controversial point in Section I of *Dominus Iesus*, the distinction between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions», since this distinction implies the absence of salvific character in the other religions.

In *Dominus Iesus* 7, the Declaration makes a distinction between «theological faith» defined as «the acceptance in grace of revealed truth», and «belief in the other religions» described as «that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of

[923] C. Geffré, «The Christological Paradox», 170.

[924] C. Geffré, «The Christological Paradox», 167.

[925] C. Geffré, «From the Theology of Religious Pluralism», 53.

[926] C. Geffré, «From the Theology of Religious Pluralism», 54.

wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute». One of the arguments that *Dominus Iesus* introduces and which has sparked off controversies since its publication is the sharp distinction it has drawn between these two. The drastic distinction between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions» was occasioned by the Declaration's observation that in present-day theological reflection «theological faith... is often identified with belief in other religions», which is «religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself» (DI 7). By emphasizing that the distinction between the two «must be firmly held» and must be «always borne in mind» (DI 7), the implication for the document is clear. Because theological faith is «the acceptance of the truth revealed by the One and Triune God» (DI 7), therefore «only in Judeo-Christian tradition», which firmly professes faith in God, «can one find *divine revelation* without which theological faith is impossible»[927]. And if revelation and faith can be found *only* in Judeo-Christian tradition, therefore *only* in this religious tradition can salvation be found.

Simply put: For the Declaration, «while faith is a divine supernatural gift, "belief" is a natural achievement of humanity. The tragic point, however, is that according to *Dominus Iesus*, divine faith is apparently proper to Christianity, while "in the other religions" only belief is to be found»[928]. In other words, the other religions are devoid of any salvific value since they only possess «belief» that cannot save and not «faith» that does. In relation to this issue, Jacques Dupuis raises a question which, for me, sums up the whole argument in this sharp distinction between «faith» and «belief»: «Does the nature of "Christian faith" need to exclude the existence elsewhere of any divine faith, whereby the other religions are reduced to holding "beliefs" of mere human origin, unable to carry saving faith?»[929]. In other words, does affirming Christian faith necessarily imply denying

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[927] H. D. Egan, «A Rahnerian Response», 60.

[928] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 37.

[929] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 31.

the existence of comparable authenticity in other religions? For *Dominus Iesus*, this seems to be case, as the distinction «betrays an exclusive understanding of divine revelation and of theological faith, as if they were to be found only in the Christian tradition»[930].

Several points can be raised about the Declaration's stark distinction between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions» and its implications for the theology of religions.

Firstly, *Dominus Iesus*' distinction does not seem compatible with at least a couple of its important passages, as well as the Church's previous documents cited in these two passages—all of which affirm that non-Christians can be saved in their own religious traditions, saved, however, in relation to Christ and the Spirit[931]. In DI 2, the document quotes *Dialogue and Proclamation* 29 which asserts that «all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit» (DI 2). Now, if adherents of other religions can be saved, they must possess some kind of faith, which even in its rudimentary form can already be salvific, since without faith it is impossible to be saved. In DI 21, which partly quotes *Redemptoris Missio* 29, the Declaration argues that «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"» (DI 21). It is hard to maintain *Dominus Iesus*' distinction between «faith» and «belief» and its implication when DI 21 explicitly argues that other religions contain divine elements, and that those elements are divine precisely because they originate from God and are components of what the Spirit gives birth to not only in human hearts but also in people's histories, cultures and religions. Similarly, while DI 8 agrees with *Redemptoris Missio* 55 that God, who desires the salvation of everyone in Christ, «does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression», for the Declaration this divine presence may

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[930] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 38.

[931] Cf. H. D. Egan, «A Rahnerian Response», 61.

not imply a divine revelation, which makes Dupuis remark: «That God could be thus present in so many ways and yet abstain from all revelatory activity would seem a very strange position to hold»[932].

Secondly, *Dominus Iesus*' distinction between faith and belief is also difficult to reconcile with Vatican II's *Ad Gentes* 7, which affirms that God, in ways that do not undermine the Church's «sacred right to evangelize», can lead adherents of non-Christian religions to «that faith without which it is impossible to please him». This conciliar passage asserts that in order for God to save non-Christians, he leads them to a saving faith; the initiative and effort of leading «religious others» to a saving faith is God's. For Richard McBrien, «[f]aith and "Christian" faith are not coextensive. If one truly believes in God, who is the one and only object of faith, it is because that person has somehow received the gift *of* faith from God, even if it should have no explicit reference to Jesus Christ»[933]. For Dupuis, «[t]here is no biblical justification for refusing to extend the existence of divine faith to the members of the other religions», as Chapter 11 of the *Letter to the Hebrews* itself «testifies that from the beginning of human history God's self-manifestation has met with the response of divine faith»[934]. And if this distinction were to be drawn to its logical conclusion, «we would be back to a rigid interpretation of the axiom "Outside the Church there is no salvation," since, according to St. Paul and the Letter to the Hebrews, divine faith is a universal requisite for salvation»[935].

Let us look at the above argument more closely. If God wills everyone to be saved, and if faith is necessary for salvation, and if for saving faith to exist revelation must previously exist because faith is the human correlate of divine revelation, then revelation must exist, and must in fact be universal. If non-Christians can have faith in God, can arrive at the possession of a saving faith in God, it is only because God has first revealed himself to them, which means that there is a

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[932] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 38.

[933] R. P. McBrien, «*Dominus Iesus*: An Ecclesiological Critique», downloaded from https://sedosmission.org/old/eng/McBrien.htm on October 15, 2017.

[934] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 37.

[935] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 37-38.

prior presence of revelation among such people who are able to arrive at faith that saves. In «faith», they have «responded» to God's self-revelation, although their response may be «clothed» in *non-Christian* terms or may be pre-thematic or un-thematic, borrowing Rahner's language. If Vatican II itself affirms that salvation can be found outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, then it means that revelation and saving faith exist and are operative beyond the Church, in the other religions. And for the Council, non-Christians do not have to be conscious of the revealing presence and saving activity of Christ in their lives in order for such presence and activity to bear their intended fruits and effects. In fact, in LG 16, GS 22, and AG 7, three of the most quoted passages of Vatican II that pronounce the possibility of salvation of non-Christians, the Council clearly affirms that adherents of other religions may be saved despite their lack of explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and his Gospel. How can the Declaration maintain, then, that what exists in non-Christian religions is only «belief» and not «faith» and yet believe with Vatican II that non-Christians are saved, when in the absence of faith it is impossible for anyone to be saved? Religions, therefore, are not just a «human treasury of wisdom and religions aspirations», or «religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself» (DI 7). They are not just human strivings for the divine or a human search for God. In themselves they already contain divine revelation and saving faith, and may therefore be regarded as a divine initiative: God searching for, and reaching out to, the human.

In the presence then of revelation and saving faith in non-Christian religions, *Dominus Iesus*' sharp distinction between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions» disintegrates. «If people of other religious traditions are already acting upon a "relationship to God and the Absolute," it seems difficult to separate their belief entirely from the consent to God's truth that constitutes faith»[936]. If in the Declaration, «*belief* and *believe* are used at least 25 times to refer to what Christians do», Francis Clooney inquires: «If *belief* has multiple meanings, is it possible to stipulate that *faith,* by contrast, has only a

[936] F. X. Clooney, «*Dominus Iesus* and the New Millennium», 17.

single meaning?»[937] Avery Dulles insists, in his article «*Dominus Iesus*, A Catholic Response», that the problem with *Dominus Iesus*' sharp distinction between faith and belief is that it has not considered the complexities of Vatican II's documents—that conciliar documents pertaining to religions do not always conform to fulfillment theology and its clear distinction between nature and grace, between the natural and supernatural orders[938]. In Dulles' own words:

> Somewhat problematical is the distinction between "theological faith" in Christianity and "belief" (*credulitas*) in other religions. Vatican II taught that God makes it possible for persons ignorant of the gospel to attain "that faith without which it is impossible to please him" (AG 7, quoting Heb 11:6). John Paul II frequently attributes implicit faith to persons seeking the truth[939].

Thirdly, *Dominus Iesus*' sharp distinction between faith and belief is, moreover, hard to maintain when we look at Judaism, Christianity and Islam as three Abrahamic religions by definition. Despite the essential differences in the Christian Trinitarian view of God and the strictly monotheistic understandings of Judaism and Islam, the faith of both Jews and Muslims, and not just that of Christians, is also properly theological because, being a belief in the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, their faith is also addressed to God[940]. If Christianity shares with Judaism and Islam «divine, theological faith in the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob—who, it must be added, is in fact none other than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ», it is hard to reconcile the assertion that «while our Christian faith in the God who revealed himself to Abraham and declared his name to Moses is theological faith, the same when professed by Jews [and Muslims] is only a human belief»[941].

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[937] F. X. Clooney, «*Dominus Iesus* and the New Millennium», 17.

[938] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 233.

[939] A. Dulles, «*Dominus Iesus*, A Catholic Response», 5.

[940] P. Kennedy, «Rome & Relativism: '*Dominus Iesus*' & the CDF», 15.

[941] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 62.37.

To understand what other Church documents have to say about a series of controversies triggered by *Dominus Iesus*, let us examine three of Pope John Paul II's Encyclicals and some of his «Addresses», the 1991 Church document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, and the International Theological Commission's 1997 document, «Christianity and the World Religions», on the question of «God's salvific plan and the ways in which it is accomplished» (DI 21) in the world and in other religions.

Let us begin our investigation with an observation, that it is true that

> [t]he Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, at the Audience of June 16, 2000, granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger], with sure knowledge and by his apostolic authority, ratified and confirmed this Declaration [*Dominus Iesus*], adopted in Plenary Session and ordered its publication[942].

It is equally true, however, that *Dominus Iesus* contains very little of John Paul II's lasting and remarkable contribution in the field of the theology of religions—his pneumatology, the place and role of the Holy Spirit in other religious traditions—a contribution which, according to James Fredericks, «goes beyond the teaching of Vatican II»[943]. For Dupuis, «the singular contribution of Pope John Paul II to a "theology of religions" consists in the emphasis with which he affirms the operative presence of the Spirit of God in the religious

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[942] Cited from *Dominus Iesus* itself, at the end of the Declaration (CDF, *Dominus Iesus*, 23).

[943] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 233. While it is said that Ratzinger did not write the document, it does not mean that it does not reflect his thought. For Ambrose Mong, *Dominus Iesus* reflects and expresses clearly Ratzinger's opinion on the theology of religious pluralism (Cf. A. Mong, *Are Non-Christians Saved?*, 27). For Eugene Gorski, «[t]here is hardly any doubt that Ratzinger had more a part in its composition than anyone else, and that its integral content represents his own theological thought»; that «[t]he thinking of Joseph Ratzinger on the theology of religious pluralism is surely found expressed in *Dominus Iesus*» (E. F. Gorski, *Theology of Religions*, 290.291).

life of non-Christians and the religious traditions to which they belong»[944].

Since the first year of his pontificate, John Paul II has contributed to the discourse on the theology of religions, specifically on the question of religious diversity, by turning to and developing a theology of the Holy Spirit[945]. Since the publication of his 1979 Encyclical Letter, *Redemptor Hominis* (RH), one can see a development in his thought toward a more substantial appreciation first of non-Christians and then subsequently of other religious traditions themselves[946]. In the Encyclical, the Pope affirms that the «firm belief» of the followers of other religions is an «effect» of the presence of the Spirit at work beyond the borders of the Church, in the non-Christian religions (RH 6). Aside from the fact that it is hard to maintain here a sharp distinction between «faith» and «belief» as the Pope himself attributes

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[944] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 173. For Peter Phan, «[c]learly, *Dominus Iesus*'s absolute contrast between "belief" in non-Christian religions and "faith" in Christianity reflects Jean Daniélou's "fulfillment theology" and contradicts John Paul'as pneumatological theology of religion» (P. C. Phan, «John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue», 253). We may recall that in his book, *The Salvation of the Nations*, Daniélou argues that there exists a «portion of truth» in every religious tradition, and that while «[p]aganism does not enjoy the immense benefits of Revelation in its search for truth», non-Christian religion contains a certain natural knowledge of God (J. Daniélou, *The Salvation of the Nations*, 6.23). For Daniélou, pagan religions are human expressions of a true knowledge of God accessible by means of the proper employment of natural reason. However, this natural knowledge of God should not be confused with supernatural faith which comes about only from God's active involvement in the unfolding history of salvation in the world; thus, a radical distinction is made between natural knowledge of God and supernatural, saving faith (J. Daniélou, *The Salvation of the Nations*, 8).

[945] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 233-236; J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 173-179. I am partly indebted to these two sources for summary discussions of Pope John Paul II's basic pneumatological theology of religions in my attempt to give nuances to *Dominus Iesus*' distinction between faith and belief from the perspective of the Pope's theology of the Holy Spirit based primarily, but not exclusively, on his three Encyclical Letters.

[946] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 233-234.

to «belief» an «effect» of the Spirit's presence, he also does not seem to embrace this distinction precisely by referring to «belief» as coming from the Spirit. Likewise, in this Encyclical, the Pope speaks about the unifying element among religions: that religions are simply «so many reflections of the one truth», or many different routes to «a single goal»:

> The Fathers of the Church rightly saw in the various religions as it were so many reflections of the one truth, "seeds of the Word"—attesting that, though the routes taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life (RH 11).

On February 21, 1981, in his «Message to the People of Asia» delivered in Manila during his first visit to the Philippines, Pope John Paul II linked all authentic prayer to the presence of the Holy Spirit. This theme bore fruit and was developed in the World Day of Prayer for Peace on October 27, 1986 when leaders and representatives of world religions gathered in Assisi prayed separately together for peace in accordance with their own respective religious identities and traditions. On December 22, 1986, before the members of the Roman Curia, John Paul II emphasized the fundamental unity of the whole of humanity through the work of the Holy Spirit and affirmed that the gathering in Assisi in prayer manifests the fact that all those who pray «are included in the great and unique design of God»[947]. He offered the reason for the Assisi Prayer Meeting, saying:

> Every authentic prayer is under the influence of the Spirit "who intercedes insistently for us... because we do not even know how to pray as we ought," but he prays in us "with unutterable groanings" and "the One who searches hearts knows what are the desires of the Spirit" (cf. Rom 8:26-27). We can indeed maintain that every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person[948].

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[947] John Paul II, «Pope's Christmas Address to the Roman Curia», 57.

[948] John Paul II, «Pope's Christmas Address to the Roman Curia», 60-61.54-62.

For Peter Phan, «John Paul's affirmation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every praying human being was a rather uncontroversial extension of Vatican II's teaching on the possibility of salvation for non-Christians»[949]. For Marcello Zago, the chief organizer of the Assisi event, «[a]t Assisi, the welcome given to the religious representatives and people being present at the prayer offered by the various religions were in some way a recognition of these religions and of prayer in particular, a recognition that these religions and prayer not only have a social role but are also effective before God»[950].

Dupuis concludes that in the Pope's first Encyclical Letter, a «teaching is gradually emerging: the Holy Spirit is present and active in the world, in the members of other religions, and in the religious traditions themselves»[951]. Likewise, for Dupuis, in John Paul II's discourse before the Roman Curia explaining the Assisi event—an event that had a lasting impact on the Holy Father and the subsequent development of his theology of the Holy Spirit—«the pope spoke more clearly than any of the council documents: on the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the religious life of the members of other religious traditions»[952].

In his 1986 Encyclical Letter wholly devoted to the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (DV), John Paul II teaches that in order to fully appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit in the world and in history, which cannot be confined just to the 2000–year history of Christianity, we must «go further back, to embrace the whole of the action of the Holy Spirit even before Christ—from the beginning, throughout the world, and especially in the economy of the Old Testament» (DV 53). We must «go further afield» as well, «knowing that "the wind [referring to the Holy Spirit] blows where he wills», which means that the Spirit is present and active also «outside the visible Body of the Church» (DV 53). Certainly, the Pope's insights in

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[949] P. Phan, «John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue», 250.

[950] M. Zago, «Day of Prayer for Peace», 150.

[951] J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 175.

[952] J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 175.

this Encyclical—on the Holy Spirit in relation to other religions and their adherents—influenced in no small part the convocation and the shape of the Assisi Prayer Meeting which was held in the same year.

John Paul II's theology of religions in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit was further elaborated in his 1990 Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM). In RM 28, the Pope sums up the salient features of his theology of the Holy Spirit. While the Spirit reveals himself in a special way in the Catholic Church, his presence and working are nonetheless universal, bound neither by space nor time. He is at work and operative in the heart of every individual, through the «seeds of the Word» present in human initiatives and in humanity's endeavors to achieve truth, goodness and God. The Spirit, cited in GS 22, offers to all the possibility of being saved—by being associated, in a way known to God, with the paschal mystery. He is the source of every human person's existential and religious quest, which proceeds from the structure of his being. His presence and activity affect not just individuals but also societies and histories, peoples, cultures and religions. In RM 29, the Holy Father reflected on the meanings and the implications of these truths for the Church and for Christians. Since the Spirit «blows where he wills», (cf. John 3:8), «was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified», and «has filled the world», we must then «broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place». Likewise, after saying that «[t]he Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: "Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man"», the Pope argues that «[e]xcluding any mistaken interpretation, the interreligious meeting held in Assisi was meant to confirm my conviction that "every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart"». Moreover, the Pope affirms that the *loci* of the Spirit's presence and activity are not just the human hearts, but also the histories of peoples, their cultures and religions.

In these two paragraphs, it is clear that John Paul II went beyond the theological positions of Vatican II in explicitly affirming the

universal presence and active role of the Holy Spirit not only in the hearts of individuals but also in the social and structural elements of cultures and religions. This recognition of the Holy Spirit's presence in the world and in history is a significant development in Catholic theology of religions that has given rise to further developments in the Church's attempt to grapple with the question.

However, in spite of the significance and the novelty of some of the thoughts and approaches of John Paul II on religious diversity, particularly of his unique pneumatological contribution to the Church's magisterium on the theology of religions, «*Dominus Iesus* has surprisingly little to say about the pope's theology of the Holy Spirit»[953]. Fredericks makes the following comments: While it is true that the Declaration devotes its second chapter to the role played by the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation in the world and in history, and even cites the work of John Paul II, the most significant aspect of his theological contribution in the field—his theology of the Holy Spirit—is «merely acknowledged en route to underscoring that the saving work of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from that of Christ»[954]. The document, therefore, may be said to have hardly done justice to the significance of the Pope's contribution to the Church's understanding of other religious traditions[955].

Likewise, the Declaration's playing down of John Paul II's theology of the Holy Spirit can also be observed in *Dominus Iesus* 21. While *Dominus Iesus* recognizes Vatican II's teaching that «the various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God», and, citing the Pope's *Redemptoris Missio*, notes that these elements are part of what «the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, cultures, and religions» (RM 29), still

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[953] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 236.

[954] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 236.

[955] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 237.

the document immediately qualifies the Pope's teaching[956]. For the Declaration, although «some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel, in that they are occasions or pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prompted to be open to the action of God», they do not contain «a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments» (DI 21). Whether one can attribute to these «prayers» and «rituals» an *ex opere operato* saving efficacy is another question; yet, if they are part of the «religious elements» which the previous sentence of the Declaration affirms as «[coming] from God» (DI 21), how can they be considered as not containing a «divine origin»? For Dupuis, in the judgment of *Dominus Iesus* 21, these elements are not channels of grace for the adherents of other religions, but merely «pedagogical helps» that prompt the human heart to open itself to the action of grace; «they may help to create in the person the dispositions necessary for the reception of divine grace, but can contribute nothing to its working»[957]. For Fredericks, «[t]he declaration's cautiousness regarding "prayers and rituals" in other religious traditions is especially curious given the centrality that John Paul II has placed on prayer with the other religious believers as an expression of the universal unity of the human race in the Holy Spirit»[958]. Indeed, when seen from the perspective of John Paul II's central teaching in his theology of the Holy Spirit, on the presence and efficacy of the Holy Spirit in the adherents of other religions, DI 21 «leaves a distorted impression of the pope's views of the presence and efficacy of the Holy Spirit in the religious lives of those who follow other religious paths»[959].

Two things must be borne in mind when evaluating John Paul II's Encyclical Letters in relation to the question of the salvific value of non-Christian religions.

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[956] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 237.

[957] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 64.

[958] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 237.

[959] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 237.

First, in commenting on *Redemptor Hominis*' famous statement in no. 14 concerning the redemption of every human being by Christ and every human person's unity with Christ, Gerald Anderson argues that «[i]t is... not entirely clear to what extent the pope is speaking only about the redemption of individuals who are not members of the visible church, and to what extent his teaching implies salvific values in other faiths to which those individuals may belong»[960]. For Fredericks, John Paul II, in his elaboration of his theology of the Holy Spirit in his writings, never insinuates that the other religious traditions are salvific in their own right, or that the Church can ever be fully distinguished from Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Pope rather speaks of «participated forms of mediation» (a phrase he borrows from *Lumen Gentium* 62, which refers to the Blessed Virgin Mary) in referring to the other religions in the light of Christ and the Church—that the other religions simply participate in the salvific mystery of Christ which is fully present in the Catholic Church[961].

Similarly, Dupuis, in assessing the meaning and implication of *Redemptoris Missio* in relation to the same question, affirms that «if the question is asked whether the recognition of the active presence of the Spirit of God not only in the members of other religious traditions but in the traditions themselves influences positively the encyclical's approach to the significance and saving value of those traditions, *the answer is altogether inconclusive*»[962]. The Encyclical affirms that salvation in Christ is accessible to members of other religious traditions «by virtue of a grace which... enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation» (RM 10), and while it emphasizes «Christ's one, universal mediation», the document also acknowledges the possibility of «participated forms of mediation» in the order of salvation (RM 5). Nevertheless, «[i]t is not clear whether among the "participated mediations"

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[960] G. H. Anderson, «Response by Gerald H. Anderson», 112.

[961] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 236.

[962] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 177; emphasis mine.

contemplated in this text are included, for the benefit of members of the other religions, the traditions to which they belong»[963].

However, and this is the second point, Phan ventures to say that «John Paul's pneumatology offers a theological basis for an affirmation of the positive role of non-Christian religions that does not contradict Vatican II but represents an—albeit small but nonetheless significant—step beyond the Council»[964]. While Dupuis is more circumspect in ascribing a positive meaning to the text on «participated mediations» in relation to the salvific value of other religions, Phan is less cautious in saying that

> [t]aking a step beyond Vatican II, John Paul extended this notion of participation or sharing to non-Christian religions and recognized in them "participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees," though "they acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his" (RM 5)[965].

Commenting on this particular point of the Encyclical, Francis Sullivan remarks:

> While we do not know whether John Paul II would think of including the non-Christian religions, or at least elements of their spirituality, among such "participated forms of mediation," which he recognizes to be of different kinds and degrees, *at least it is clear that he acknowledges the existence and saving function of such other mediations*, provided that they are not understood as parallel or complementary to the unique mediation of Christ[966].

The recognition that non-Christian religions exercise a role of mediation in the divine plan of salvation is, for Sullivan, «a key element in the thinking of many Catholic theologians since Vatican II»[967].

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[963] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 177.

[964] P. C. Phan, «John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue», 251.

[965] P. C. Phan, «John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue», 251.

[966] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 194; emphasis mine.

[967] F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, 197-198.

For Dupuis, the closest to an affirmation of a positive role and saving significance to religions in a Church document is a document entitled *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (DP)[968], jointly published on May 19, 1991 by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Towards the end of its long section on «A Christian Approach to Religious Traditions» (nos. 14-32), the document, whose important paragraph «goes beyond whatever Church documents have stated before regarding the role played by religious traditions in the salvation in Jesus Christ of their followers»[969], argues:

> From this mystery of unity it follows that all men and women who are saved, share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit. Christians know this through their faith, while others remain unaware that Jesus Christ is the source of their salvation. The mystery of salvation reaches out to them, in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ. Concretely, *it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions* and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their Saviour (DP 29; emphasis mine).

In this statement, «a door seems to be opened here, for the first time, for the recognition on the part of the Church authority of a "participated mediation" of religious traditions in the salvation of their members», and an apparently definite «moving from the "fulfillment theory" to that of an active presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ in the traditions themselves», espoused by Rahner and other inclusivists[970].

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[968] In Footnote 47 of his article, Phan has an interesting remark on this document in relation to Dupuis. He writes: «It is to be noted that even though the text was first formulated in a Roman document, it is rooted in the Asian experience of being church, since the ghost author of this document was Jacques Dupuis, one of the main theologians of the FABC, who drafted it out of his decades-long work in India» (P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 53).

[969] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 178.

[970] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 178-179.

Pope John Paul II's approach to the question of the other religions in relation to the Holy Spirit is more positively reflected in the International Theological Commission's 1997 document, «Christianity and the World Religions», in which the Pope's pneumatological teachings vis-à-vis the other religions are aptly outlined at the beginning of Part III of the document. After saying, in no. 81, that «[w]hether the religions as such can have salvific value is a point that remains open», the document, however, concludes in no. 84, with insights that are of critical importance in further assessing *Dominus Iesus*' sharp distinction between faith and belief:

> Given this explicit recognition of the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the religions, one cannot exclude the possibility that they exercise as such a certain salvific function, that is, despite their ambiguity, they help men achieve their ultimate end. In the religions is explicitly thematized the relationship of man with the Absolute, his transcendental dimension. It would be difficult to think that what the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of men taken as individuals would have salvific value and not think that what the Holy Spirit works in the religions and cultures would not have such value. *The recent magisterium does not seem to authorize such a drastic distinction* (emphasis mine)[971].

This expression—«drastic distinction»—in the quotation above which can be employed to describe the «divergence» between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions» which *Dominus Iesus* insists «must be firmly held» and «always borne in mind» but which «[t]he recent magisterium does not seem to authorize» is «precisely what goes to the heart of the controversy over *Dominus Iesus*: how wide is the distinction between nature and grace, the natural order and the supernatural, the beliefs of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, and the faith of Christians?»[972].

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[971] International Theological Commission, «Christianity and the World Religions», nos. 81, 84, pp. 173-174.

[972] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 238. This pronouncement of the 1997 International Theological Commission document has clear affinities with Rahner's insights on the social nature of man and the historical character of religion, which affirm that, in the absence of any existential and spiritual contact with the message of Christianity, if God's saving grace reaches the religious individuals belonging to other religions, such grace reaches them through the religious elements of their own religions.

And if the expression, «recent magisterium», undoubtedly refers to Pope John Paul II as Dupuis asserts, although it can also refer to other Church documents such as *Dialogue and Proclamation*, *Dominus Iesus*, at least in relation to some of the Pope's writings, «seems to undermine what the Pope has repeatedly suggested in recent years»[973].

We go back to the same debate that had preoccupied the decades following the Second Vatican Council, represented by the differing theologies of Daniélou and Rahner, a debate that had not been authoritatively settled in Vatican II, resulting in a kind of «flip-flopping» in some post-conciliar documents dealing with the very question of the salvific value of other religions. It is interesting to note, though, before we conclude this section, that according to the 1984 document, *Dialogue and Mission*, Christ «the Redeemer [is] present with grace in every human encounter» (DM 23). For Eugene Fisher, reminiscent of Rahner's thought, «[t]he gap between the natural and supernatural orders evinced in earlier teachings is bridged with the awareness that God's grace is "present… in every human encounter" (no. 23), so a way is opened for seeing other religions as salvific in their own right (though not necessarily *extra Christum*)[974].

4.3.5 Dominus Iesus *and the Regno-centric Theology of Religions*

4.3.5.1 Neither Separation Nor Identification Between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God *and* the Church

Dominus Iesus' Section V deals with the theme, «The Church: Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Christ»[975], which, for Francis Sullivan, is practically identical with the theme of Chapter II of Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*, «namely, that while the kingdom

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[973] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 65.

[974] E. J. Fisher, «Interpreting *Nostra Aetate*», 160.

[975] Jacques Dupuis observes that the way the theme of *Dominus Iesus*' Section V is worded and arranged «suggests that the Reign of God is to be understood in relation to the Church which provides its foundation and *raison-d'être*», when «[t]he truth is… that the Church finds its *raison-d'être* in the Reign of God and must be understood in relation to it: the Church is for the Kingdom, at its service, not the Kingdom for the Church» (J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 56).

of God, kingdom of Christ, and the church are distinct realities, they are inseparable from one another»[976]. Sullivan is right in his observation, for indeed the main concern of DI 18 is to stress the point that while there can be various theological explanations of the relationships among these three terms, «none of these possible explanations can deny or empty in any way the intimate connection between Christ, the kingdom, and the Church» (DI 18). Quoting RM 18, the Declaration argues:

> If the kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the kingdom of God which he revealed…. Likewise, one may not separate the kingdom from the Church. It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered toward the kingdom of God, of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both (DI 18).

Redemptoris Missio provides explanations for the relationships between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God and between the Kingdom of God and the Church, which are not mentioned by *Dominus Iesus*. For the Encyclical, the Kingdom of God cannot be detached from Christ, since

> Christ not only proclaimed the kingdom, but in him the kingdom itself became present and was fulfilled. This happened not only through his words and his deeds: "Above all,...the kingdom is made manifest in the very person of Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, who came 'to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10:45)." The kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a program subject to free interpretation, but it is before all else *a person* with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of the invisible God (RM 18).

In like manner, the Kingdom of God cannot be separated from the Church, since

> Christ endowed the Church, his body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells in her, enlivens her with his gifts and charisms, sanctifies, guides and constantly renews her. The result is a unique and special relationship which, while not

[976] F. A. Sullivan, «Introduction and Ecclesiological Issues», 51.

> excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role; hence the Church's special connection with the kingdom of God and of Christ, which she has "the mission of announcing and inaugurating among all peoples" (RM 18).

As regards the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, the gospels, according to Dupuis, are abundantly clear that the Kingdom of God, and not the Church, is the decisive point of reference for Jesus, the paramount concern in his preaching and ministry. Jesus' mission consists in proclaiming the «good news» of God's Kingdom (Mark 1:15), and the post-Easter Church has no other mission than that of proclaiming the same «good news» to everyone (Mark 16:15)[977]. Likewise, Aloysius Pieris has an interesting observation about the Church and the Kingdom of God in relation to Jesus based on the Synoptic Gospels. For Pieris, the Kingdom of God is mentioned 104 times in the Synoptics, while the «Church» is mentioned only twice (and also in Matthew). His conclusion is that in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus never preached a Church; he preached the Kingdom of God on account of which he gathered a community around him which eventually became a Church that has witnessed since then to his Resurrection[978]. He further concludes that

> [t]he church, therefore, cannot and should not preach itself, it must preach the Reign of God, not only as that which has come in Jesus, but as that which the church is only in *germine* ("in seed form") as Vatican II puts it. The church is not the realized Reign of God (= Christ = salvation in its final form) but only its sacramental expression. This is why Vatican II would have the church constantly reform itself, it has to grow continually into God's Reign. It must continually test itself against the ideal: the realized Reign of God, which it will be only at the end-time. It must ever tend towards that goal[979].

Indeed, while arguing for the inseparable relationship between Christ and the Kingdom of God, the Declaration acknowledges the

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[977] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 56; ID., «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», 121.

[978] A. Pieris, «The Roman Catholic Perception», 226.

[979] A. Pieris, «The Roman Catholic Perception», 226.

distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Church, «that the kingdom of God—even if considered in its historical phase—is not identified with the Church in her visible and social reality» (DI 19). In fact, and again citing RM 18, the Declaration affirms the presence of «the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries» (DI 19)[980]. While one should appreciate *Dominus Iesus* in making this distinction, one may observe that it is not a generous distinction compared to the one made by RM 20, which the Declaration surprisingly does not cite, thereby demonstrating its «selective reading» of the Encyclical.

Redemptoris Missio 20, which is entirely devoted to the theme, «The Church at the Service of the Kingdom», conveys an important distinction between the Church and the Kingdom of God:

> It is true that the inchoate reality of the kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live "gospel values" and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8). But it must immediately be added that this temporal dimension of the kingdom remains incomplete unless it is related to the kingdom of Christ present in the Church and straining towards eschatological fullness.

In Section V, *Dominus Iesus* cites *Redemptoris Missio* thrice: no. 18 (twice) and no. 17 (once). Yet, it does not mention RM 20 «where the Pope affirms in unmistakable terms the equally important distinction between the Kingdom of God present in history and the Church»[981]. Dupuis, therefore, remarks: «One would have wished *Dominus Iesus* to quote this

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[980] At least three points are clear about the Church in *Redemptoris Missio* 18: first, the Church is not an end unto herself because she is ordered towards the Kingdom of God; secondly, while Christ is inseparable from the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom is not identified with the Church; and thirdly, the saving grace of Christ and the Spirit operates outside the Church. Indeed, while there is no separation between Christ and the Kingdom of God *and* the Church, there is also no identification between them.

[981] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 57. Dupuis opines that the reason why the Declaration does not take so much interest in this «distinction» is that its main objective is to insist on the «intimate connection» between the Church and the Kingdom of God (*Ibid.*).

text of Pope John Paul II, which, besides stating that the "others" too belong to the Kingdom of God, opens the way for a broader view of the Church's function in relation to the Kingdom of God»[982]. In addition, *Redemptoris Missio*, in the same number, explains the task of the Church in connection with the Kingdom of God in its eschatological dimension: «The Church is the sacrament of salvation for all mankind, and her activity is not limited only to those who accept her message. She is a dynamic force in mankind's journey toward the eschatological kingdom, and is the sign and promoter of gospel values» (RM 20).

The importance of all these cited texts from *Redemptoris Missio* 20 in our discussion can be seen in their explicit pronouncements. They assert that while the Kingdom of God in its historical dimension is present and at work in a privileged way in the Church, it is nonetheless beyond the confines of the Church and is present and operative everywhere among individuals and peoples who live «gospel values». They also affirm that the Kingdom of God in its historical reality is oriented towards its eschatological fullness, and that the Church is at the service of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, «while maintaining the unity, a distinction is made between, on the one hand, the Reign in time and its eschatological dimension, and on the other hand, between the Reign and the church»[983]. Dupuis concludes that *Redemptoris Missio* is

> the first document of the Roman magisterium to distinguish clearly, while keeping them united, between the Church and the Reign of God in their pilgrimage through history: the Reign present in the world is a reality which is broader than the Church; it extends beyond its boundaries and includes—even if the modalities may differ—not only the members of the Church but also the "others"[984].

4.3.5.2 The «Reign of God» Model: An Alternative Between Christocentrism and Theocentrism

In trying to understand the «Reign of God» model as constituting an «alternative» between «Christocentrism» and «theocentrism»,

[982] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 58.

[983] J. Dupuis, «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», 119.

[984] J. Dupuis, «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», 120.

first we have to say something quite briefly about the three basic typological responses to the «Christological question» within which we find these two positions and how all these responses emerged in the theology of religions.

In his 1996 article, «Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today», then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, contends that if «[i]n the '80s, the theology of liberation in its radical forms seemed to be the most urgent challenge for the faith of the church», towards the end of the '90s, «[r]elativism has... become the central problem for the faith at the present time»[985]. Although the pluralist theology of religion had been developing increasingly on the theological horizon since the '50s, «only now [in the late '90s] has it come to the center of the Christian conscience»[986]. Daniel Patrick Huang, in his 1997 essay, «Christ, the One Savior of the World: Reflections on Our Emerging Christological Question», argues that Ratzinger «has... correctly identified the area in which our new challenge lies», which Huang has identified as «our emerging Christological problematic at the end of the '90s», and that Ratzinger is «essentially correct» in his identification of the problem[987]. When we transpose Ratzinger's assertion into Christological language, what this means is that «[t]he new challenge for Christology for the '90s is no longer liberation, but religious pluralism», and that «the new frontier for Christology, the next phase of our Christological process» in the '90s, «will involve struggling with questions concerning Jesus Christ and the world religions»[988]. Peter Phan provides a succinct description of «religious pluralism»: «By "religious pluralism" is meant not simply the fact that there are *de facto* different religions in the world but the philosophical and theological claim that these religions constitute, each in its own way, valid paths

[985] J. Ratzinger, «Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today», 309.311.

[986] J. Ratzinger, «Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today», 311.

[987] D-P. Huang, «Christ, the One Savior of the World», 189.

[988] D-P. Huang, «Christ, the One Savior of the World», 190.

to God and therefore are divinely-willed "ways of salvation"»[989]. For Dupuis, «the Christological problem that is at the heart of a theology of religions [is]: Is Jesus Christ the one and universal Savior?»[990]. Huang elaborates the «Christological question» as follows:

> How can Jesus be called the one, universal savior, the only mediator, when Christians are, in fact, a minority, especially in Asia? Does it still make sense to be Christocentric—to affirm Jesus Christ as the center of God's plan of salvation—when most people in the world, especially in Asia, do not know Christ?[991]

Christian theologians have often answered these questions by formulating a specifically Christian theology of religions, which has come to be the name for that discipline of theological studies which intends to provide some meaning and structure to Christian reflection on the theological implications of living in a religiously plural world and on the relationship of Christianity to other religions. It is that area of Christian studies which «attempts to account theologically for the meaning and value of other religions»[992] and offers «a Christian interpretation of the role played by non-Christian religions in the drama of salvation»[993]. In Christian theology of religions, some theologians have proposed a threefold classification of perspectives vis-à-vis this «Christological question»: «ecclesiocentrism», «Christocentrism», and «theocentrism»—three basic positions which respectively correspond to «exclusivism», «inclusivism», and «pluralism»[994]. Depending on how one interprets

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[989] P. C. Phan, «Foreword» to *Dialogue Derailed*, ix.

[990] J. Dupuis, «Religious Plurality and the Christological Debate», 329.

[991] D-P. Huang, «Christ, the One Savior of the World», 190.

[992] V-M. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 20.

[993] J. L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*, 13.6.

[994] Some theologians, however, have come up with a fourfold classification of positions in their attempt to address the «Christological question»: Christ *against* the religions, Christ *above* the religions, Christ *within* the religions, and Christ *together* with the religions. The first refers to exclusivism; the second represents the theory of «fulfillment»; the third deals with inclusivism; and the fourth speaks of pluralism (Cf. P. F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 25; D-P. Huang, «Christ, the One Savior of the World», 196-205).

1Tim 2:4-5—which speaks both of God's universal saving will and of the uniqueness of Christ's saving mediatorship—«[h]ow one puts these two affirmations together and accounts for the built-in tension between them largely determines one's theology of religions»[995]. In other words, either exclusivism or pluralism emerges when one of these two equally binding biblical convictions is more emphasized than the other, or inclusivism when an attempt is made to hold together these two principles in tension[996].

The first theological position, known as «ecclesiocentrism» or «exclusivism», denies any value to non-Christian religions, for these are viewed simply as «unmitigated darkness, sheer sinful idolatry, incapable of saving anyone who belongs to them»[997]. It looks at «all other religions as false, being either failed human efforts to reach God or inspired by the devil and his demons»[998]. Since all salvation is Christic, and Christ can be encountered, known and worshipped only in the Catholic Church, salvation is therefore «exclusive» to Catholics since «outside the Church there is no salvation». If exclusivists engage in dialogue and conversation with non-Christians, «this dialogue is understood as an often necessary instrument in working for the conversion of these people» because for them «[h]ere on earth, within history as we know it, God wills that all Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, primal religious believers, and yes, Jews, become Christians»[999].

Aside from the fact that Vatican II has definitively put an end to exclusivism, we can mention another reason why, especially in the broader context of religious plurality and interreligious dialogue in Asia, exclusivism offers very little if anything that might contribute to

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[995] V-M. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 26-27.

[996] Cf. J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 192.

[997] D-P. Huang, «Christ, the One Savior of the World», 197. Speaking of Karl Barth who, among the Protestant theologians, is the leading apologist of «exclusivism», Dupuis narrates that «upon being asked how he could know and state with such certainty that the other religions were nothing but an idolatrous human pretension of self-justification, Karl Barth answered with unswerving arrogance: I know it a priori» (J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 8).

[998] A. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 48.

[999] P. F. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 27.

the progress not only of our understanding of dialogue but also of our knowledge of God revealed in the *other*. If God, in his freedom, chooses to reveal himself to human beings through other spiritual symbols and human mediations that are not exclusively *Christian*, and if exclusivism «excuses Christians from the need to learn *about* their non-Christian neighbors» because God communicates himself *only* to Christians and speaks *only* a *Christian* language, then exclusivism «should be judged a missed opportunity for Christians» because «it... lures Christians away from the opportunity to learn from non-Christians» even about God[1000].

The second response to the «Christological question» is called «Christocentrism» or «inclusivism». Proponents of this position vary in their theological explanations of how Christ is present in the religions, yet «all are united in their affirmation that the grace of Christ can be savingly, if imperfectly… present in the religions, although the fullness of that saving presence is found in the explicit religion of Christ alone»[1001]—Christianity. In this position, religions are viewed as «ways» of salvation, but never on an equal footing with Christianity. Hence, «[t]he members of these traditions are saved by Christ not in spite of their religious allegiance and sincere practice of their tradition, but through that allegiance and practice»[1002]. Only in this position do we find the twofold, inseparable New Testament assertion reflected in 1Tim 2:4-5—on God's universal salvific will and the unique saving mediatorship of Christ—harmoniously maintained.

The problem with this Christian theology of religions is that the relationship between Christianity and other religious traditions can be known *a priori* and irrespective of and without any consideration of what believers themselves say about their own religions. In the words of Alan Race, «[t]he issue has been pre-judged, and this line of approach represents a refusal to take seriously the other faiths on their own terms»[1003]. At the end of his book's chapter on inclusivism, Race concludes:

[1000] J. L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*, 22.

[1001] D-P. Huang, «Christ, the One Savior of the World», 199.

[1002] J. Dupuis, *Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 129.

[1003] A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 56.

> The major issue which these theories face is the way in which they pre-judge the issue of religious truth. In an age that values the historical and empirical, to say that one religion contains the fullest expression of religious truth and value, without any recourse to the empirical data of the other religions themselves, is tantamount to an unjustified theological imperialism[1004].

The third typological approach is known as «theocentrism» or «pluralism». The aim of this position is «to bring about a Copernican revolution in Christology and theology»[1005]—the abandonment not only of the centrality of the Church in the theological discourse but also of the centrality of the mystery of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation. In this theocentric model, «God and God alone stands at the center»[1006]. In the words of John Hick, the most prominent advocate of this position: «[W]e have to realize that the universe of faiths centres upon God, and not upon Christianity or upon any other religion. He is the sun, the originative source of light and life, whom all religions reflect in their own different ways»[1007]. In this Copernican revolution in Christology in which one «affirm[s] that there may be other saviors and revealers besides Jesus Christ and equal to Jesus Christ»[1008], Christianity is rendered simply as «one of the great world faiths, one of the streams of religious life through which human beings can be savingly related to that ultimate reality Christians know as the heavenly Father»[1009].

For Dermot Lane, all versions of pluralism put forward a meta-theory of religion, one which «presumes a God's eye view of all religions, a superior, detached and independent perception of what takes place beyond the particularities of various historical traditions»[1010]. Yet, for Peter Phan, «there is no acultural and atemporal ground upon which to

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[1004] A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 68.

[1005] D-P. Huang, «Christ, the One Savior of the World», 201.

[1006] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 186.

[1007] J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 52.

[1008] P. F. Knitter, «Hans Küng's Theological Rubicon», 225.

[1009] J. Hick, «The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity», 22.

[1010] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 109.

stand to render a verdict on the alleged universal validity and absolute normativeness of such a metanarrative[,]... no Archimedean point from which to survey the whole of history»[1011]. Likewise, pluralists summon participants in interreligious dialogue to cross a «theological rubicon» and to enter into dialogue on what they often refer to as «a level playing field»; yet, «[t]he invitation to dialogue on 'a level playing field' is hardly an invitation to dialogue but rather the imposition of one particular view of religion—a view which seems to ignore the history, theology and sociology of religions»[1012]. In terms of «religious ends», pluralism is not pluralist enough because it fails to see the particularities of the different religions and value their concretely diverse religious goals[1013]. In the last analysis, radical pluralism «reduces all religions to some nondescript, lowest common denominator or universal essence which has no direct relationship to the particularities of historical religions»[1014].

This brief survey of the various positions has shown that, while the tripartite classification has contributed to the sharpening of focus of the debate for the past decades, even these neatly-packaged typologies have outlived their usefulness and that there is a growing consensus among theologians to move beyond these typological approaches to salvation. For Lane, these models «advance only marginally the dialogue between religions because they have created premature parameters among participants in the debate», parameters which «each in their own way, have claimed too much»[1015]. Some degree of flexibility and fluidity among the three approaches is proposed since «[a]ll three contain grains of truth and not a little distortion of each other»[1016]. For Michael Barnes, this «threefold paradigm» basically «remains... a simplification of a highly complex issue, 'forcing diverse materials into easily controlled locations'»[1017]. Hence, for James Fredericks, «[c]urrently, the quest for an adequate theology of religions

[1011] P. C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, xx.

[1012] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 109.

[1013] Cf. S. M. Heim, *Salvations*.

[1014] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 109.

[1015] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 107.

[1016] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 111.

[1017] M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 8.

is at an impasse», and it is so because «the proponents of the pluralistic approach have been very successful in exposing the inadequacies of the more traditional views of Christianity in relation to other religions, but, at the same time, their critics have also been successful in exposing the inadequacies of the pluralists»[1018]. Perhaps, Harold Netland sums up the problems not just of the threefold classification but also of various theologians of religions being placed into this scheme of neat classification:

> I am increasingly unhappy with this taxonomy as it tends to obscure subtle, but significant, differences among positions and thinkers.... We should not think of these as three clear-cut categories so much as three points on a broader continuum of perspectives, with both continuities and discontinuities on various issues across the paradigms, depending upon the particular consideration. Within each paradigm there is considerable diversity on subsidiary issues, and we must recognize that, as the discussions become increasingly sophisticated and nuanced, it is often quite difficult to locate particular thinkers in terms of the three categories[1019].

If the current theology of religions is at an *impasse* partly because of the inadequacies of each of the theological positions proposed, what «solution» is being offered so that we may move forward in the situation of *impasse*? Let us go back to our discussion of *Dominus Iesus*. The reason for insisting on the inseparability of Jesus Christ, the Church, and the Kingdom of God on the part of John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* and the CDF's *Dominus Iesus*, according to Sullivan, is the tendency among some theologians to advance a «regnocentric» theory of the divine economy of salvation, which separates the Kingdom of God from Christ and from the Church. Such a «regno-centric» theory «is one version of a "theocentric" concept of salvation, in which God's plan of salvation and his kingdom embrace the whole world, but the role of Christ and the church are limited to the salvation of Christians»[1020]. Thus, as a warning to Catholic theologians about the excesses of this «kingdom-

[1018] J. L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*, 8.

[1019] H. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, 47.

[1020] F. A. Sullivan, «Introduction and Ecclesiological Issues», 51.

centered» theology of religions (cf. DI 19), *Dominus Iesus* «raises warning-flags in regard to a major theme in the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and the work of prominent theologians reflecting in an Asian context such as Michael Amaladoss, L. D'Sousa, and Jacques Dupuis»[1021]. According to John L. Allen, in his article, «Perils of Pluralism», cited by Aloysius Pieris, as early as in his March 1993 speech delivered in Hong Kong, China, Joseph Ratzinger already «warn[ed] the Asian theologians about the danger of emphasizing the centrality of the Reign of God in contrast with Christ and the Church»[1022].

In reflecting on the relationship between Christ, the Church and the Kingdom of God, *Dominus Iesus* quotes *Redemptoris Missio* 17 amply and warns about «one-sided accentuations», which include «conceptions which deliberately emphasize the kingdom and which describe themselves as "kingdom-centered." They stress the image of a Church which is not concerned about herself, but which is totally concerned with bearing witness to and serving the kingdom» (DI 19). *Redemptoris Missio* recognizes their positive aspects, such as «promoting such "values of the kingdom" as peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood, etc.» and «fostering dialogue between peoples, cultures and religions, so that through a mutual enrichment they might help the world to be renewed and to journey ever closer toward the kingdom» (RM 17). However, the Encyclical also warns that «these conceptions often reveal negative aspects as well», such as their «silence» about Christ: «the kingdom of which they speak is "theocentrically" based, since, according to them, Christ cannot be understood by those who lack Christian faith, whereas different peoples, cultures and religions are capable of finding common ground in the one divine reality, by whatever name it is called» (RM 17).

Dupuis agrees that the Kingdom-centered conceptions identified in RM 17-18 and cited in DI 19—such as «their horizontal view of the Kingdom, their reductionism with regard to the mystery of Jesus

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[1021] J. L. Fredericks, «The Catholic Church and the Other Religious Paths», 243.

[1022] A. Pieris, «The Roman Catholic Perception», 212.

Christ, and their forgetfulness of the role of the Church in relation to the Kingdom»—are «contrary to Catholic faith because they deny the unicity of the relationship which Christ and the Church have with the Kingdom of God» (DI 19)[1023]. Nevertheless, he does not agree that «any Regnocentric or Kingdom-centered perspective on the Church's mission necessarily implies "one-sided accentuations" and needs therefore to be rejected as contrary to the faith»[1024].

> It must on the contrary be affirmed that a theologically well-founded and correctly argued regnocentric perspective is capable of opening new and broader horizons for the mission of the Church in relation to the Kingdom of God universally present in the world; such broader horizons must be encouraged and deserve to be further explored[1025].

As we will see in the next chapter, the FABC's emphasis on the Kingdom of God perspective offers, borrowing the words of a Filipino missiologist, Edgar Javier, SVD, «a language that speaks of our common journey to God which consists of many paths»[1026].

In arguing for the possibility of considering non-Christian religions as «ways» or «means» of God's revealing and saving action towards their adherents, Dupuis, in *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, inquires: «Does not, perhaps, the story of each people contain traces of God's loving deeds on its behalf, constituting it as one of God's peoples and enlivening it with God's own life?»[1027]. Dupuis contends that the Asian bishops must have been thinking along these lines when, in the Final Statement of the First FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974, they viewed the great Asian religions as «significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation» and asked rhetorically: «How then [could] we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples through them?»[1028]. Likewise, Dupuis quotes at length a 1987 statement of the FABC's Theological Advisory Commission which provides a

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[1023] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 59.

[1024] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 59.

[1025] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 59.

[1026] E. G. Javier, «Religious Pluriformity in God's Global Community», 21.

[1027] J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 220.

[1028] Cited by J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 220.

basis for the FABC's positive recognition of the place and role of the other religions in God's overall plan of salvation. The document says:

> Its experience of the other religions has led the Church in Asia to this positive appreciation of their role in the divine economy of salvation. This appreciation is based on the fruits of the Spirit perceived in the lives of the other religions' believers: a sense of the sacred, a commitment to the pursuit of fullness, a thirst for self-realization, a taste for prayer and commitment, a desire for renunciation, a struggle for justice, an urge to basic human goodness, an involvement in service, a total surrender of the self to God, and an attachment to the transcendent in their symbols, rituals and life itself, though human weakness and sin are not absent…. This positive appreciation is further rooted in the conviction of faith that God's plan of salvation for humanity is one and reaches out to all peoples: it is the Kingdom of God through which he seeks to reconcile all things with himself in Jesus Christ»[1029].

In his article, «Religious Plurality and the Christological Debate», Dupuis argues that a choice between the two models of salvation—«Christocentrism» and «theocentrism»—is a false dilemma. For him, what is at stake in the Christological debate in the context of religious pluralism is the traditional Christocentrism which is at the heart of Christian theology. As we have seen above, theologians who adopt the pluralist perspective insist that a Christocentric outlook is no longer untenable in the present circumstances of religious pluralism and dialogue; as such, it has to be substituted by a theocentric position. For Dupuis, this presupposition, however, calls for some clarification, and he raises the question of whether «Christocentrism» and «theocentrism» are actually two distinct theological models mutually opposed to each other[1030].

According to Dupuis, the Christocentrism of traditional Christianity is never in conflict with theocentrism. The reason is that

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[1029] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», nos. 2.2-2.3, p. 13; cited by J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 220.

[1030] J. Dupuis, «Religious Plurality and the Christological Debate», 332. Dupuis' insights from this article cited in this paragraph and in the next are also found in J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 191.

> Christocentrism never puts Jesus in the place of God; it merely affirms that God has placed him at the center of his saving plan for humankind, not as the end but as the way, not as the goal of every human quest for God but as the universal mediator of God's saving action towards people. Christian theology [therefore] is not faced with the dilemma of being either Christocentric or theocentric: it is theocentric by being Christocentric and vice-versa[1031].

For Dupuis, Jesus is the medium of encounter between God and humanity. Jesus definitely belongs to the domain of signs and symbols; yet in him who has been constituted the Christ by God who raised him from the dead (cf. Acts 2:32), God's saving grace reaches out to people in various ways: explicit and manifest to some, while implicit and mysterious to others[1032]. Hans Küng, who was challenged by Paul Knitter «to step across the Rubicon»[1033] during a conference on the project of a universal theology of religion attended by leading theologians from various religions, associates himself with the same theological position that «Christocentrism» and «theocentrism» are never at odds with one another, asserting that «Christocentrism without theocentrism is valueless, for Jesus is the Word and … the Wisdom of God»[1034]. Likewise, for J. H. Wong, «[i]f God's salvific love finds its sacramental sign in the Christ event in which this love is fully given and manifested in the world, then the theocentric and Christocentric views actually become one in Christian theology»[1035].

In another book entitled *Who Do You Say I Am?*, Dupuis similarly reiterates this crucial point. For him,

> [t]o say that Christ is at the centre of the divine plan for humanity is not to consider him as the goal and end toward which the religious life of human beings and the religious traditions of humanity tend. God (the Father) remains the goal and end. Jesus never replaces God. Jesus Christ is at the centre of the mystery as obligatory Mediator, constituted

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[1031] J. Dupuis, «Religious Plurality and the Christological Debate», 332.

[1032] J. Dupuis, «Religious Plurality and the Christological Debate», 332.

[1033] P. F. Knitter, «Hans Küng's Theological Rubicon», 229.

[1034] H. Küng, «Christianity and World Religions», 208.

[1035] J. H. Wong, «Anonymous Christians», 622.

> by God and no one else, as the way leading to God. Jesus Christ is at the centre because God, not human beings or Christianity, has placed him there. It follows that, in Christian theology, Christocentrism and theocentrism cannot be mutually opposed as different perspectives between which a choice must be made. Christian theology is theocentric *qua* christocentric, and vice versa[1036].

This also seems to be the point of John Paul II when, in *Redemptoris Missio*, he says: «Christ's one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey to God, is *the way established by God himself*, a fact of which Christ is aware» (RM 5; emphasis mine). In his article on *Dominus Iesus*, Dupuis insists that «[t]he primary cause of salvation remains the Father: the title "Savior" is attributed primarily to him (1 Tim 2:4; 4:10)», and that «Jesus Christ bears the title conjointly, but in a derivative way»[1037]. In 1Tim 2:4-5, salvation has its origin in God the Father, and Jesus Christ serves as «Mediator» between God and humanity, as bearer of salvation that finds its origin in God.

Dupuis shows further that the choice between «Christocentrism» and «theocentrism» is a false dilemma in his proposal of the «Reign of God» model[1038] as an alternative model. In this new perspective, the center of the theology of religions would no longer be the Christ-event but the Reign of God which builds itself up through history and is destined to reach its fulfillment in the end-time. «The focus of this new perspective would no longer be on the past but on the future: God and his reign are the goal of history towards which all religions, Christianity included, tend together as to their common destiny»[1039]. For Dupuis, the Reign of God model is a new version of the theocentric model, which has the merit of exhibiting that the adherents of other religions are already members of the Reign of God in history and that together with Christians they are ordained to converge in God at the eschatological time.

However, while being a new version of the theocentric model, this does not constitute a paradigm shift from the Christocentric perspective,

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[1036] J. Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am?*, 162.

[1037] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 49.

[1038] J. Dupuis, «Religious Plurality and the Christological Debate», 332-33.

[1039] J. Dupuis, «Religious Plurality and the Christological Debate», 332.

for the very reason that the Reign of God, as traditional Christian theology teaches, has dawned in and irrupted into history in the very life, person and ministry of Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, it is through the joint action and mission of the risen Christ and his Spirit that the believers of other religious traditions become part of the Reign of God present in history. Hence, the eschatological Reign to which the members of other faiths are summoned together is at once God's reign and that of the Lord Jesus. For Dupuis, this only goes to show «once again, [that] Christocentrism and theocentrism seem to go hand and hand as two aspects of the same reality: they do not constitute distinct paradigms»[1040]. In fact, in the context of religious pluralism and the praxis of interreligious dialogue, the Reign of God paradigm even has the advantage of showing how Christians and the adherents of various religions are co-pilgrims in history, journeying together towards the eschatological fullness of God's reign[1041].

In his 1994 article, «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», Dupuis insists that the «Kingdom-centered» paradigm which he espouses does not mean that the «Christocentric» perspective can be discarded, for «[f]ar from being mutually exclusive, the "kingdom-centered" and the "christocentric" perspectives are necessarily interconnected»[1042]. Hence, any proclamation of the Kingdom of God which disregards the Christological dimension cannot be considered Christian. Proclaiming the Kingdom of God without proclaiming Christ is tantamount to dispossessing the Kingdom of its most concrete element. For Dupuis, «[t]he Reign of God without Christ is not the Reign of God of the New Testament», in the same way that «Jesus without the Reign of God would not be the Jesus of history to which the gospel tradition… bears witness»[1043]. To conclude: «In the final analysis then, a theology of religions following the "kingdom-centered" paradigm cannot bypass or avoid the christocentric perspective»[1044].

[1040] J. Dupuis, «Religious Plurality and the Christological Debate», 333; Cf. ID., *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 195.

[1041] The insights in this paragraph and in the previous one are also found in J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 194-195.

[1042] J. Dupuis, «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», 127.

[1043] J. Dupuis, «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», 127.

[1044] J. Dupuis, «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», 127; cf. ID., *Christianity and the Religions*, 201-202.

4.3.6 *Conclusion*

This section opens with some remarks and observations about *Dominus Iesus*: that it may have been issued in response to the writings of Asian bishops and theologians, particularly Dupuis, who theologize on issues of fidelity and pluralism in relation to their commitment of carrying out a unique vision of Christianity in Asia; that it bafflingly disregards *Lumen Gentium* 16 in which the clearest expression of the conciliar teaching on the possibility of salvation outside the Church is found; and that in spite of the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church, they cannot be placed on an equal footing in terms of unicity and salvific universality, as the subtitle of the Declaration seems to suggest. Then, it explores the fullness of divine revelation in Jesus Christ which must be understood not as a «quantitative» but as a «qualitative» fullness. It means that in spite of the qualitatively different and unique character of God's revelation in Christ owing to his identity as the Son of God, it is still limited and unfinished because Jesus' consciousness and words, as a consequence of the Incarnation, cannot «exhaust» the Divine Mystery, something that will remain until the completion of divine revelation in the *eschaton*. Furthermore, it tackles the «drastic distinction» made by *Dominus Iesus* between «faith» and «belief» and indicates that most of the post-conciliar documents of the Church are not in accord with such a «distinction» because of its outright conclusion that in themselves other religions are totally devoid of any salvific value and import. Lastly, it explores the intimate relationship and the obvious distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Church in response to the Declaration's criticism of Asian theology's over-emphasis on the regno-centric theology of religions, as well as Dupuis' «Reign of God» model as an alternative between Christocentrism and theocentrism.

4.4 **Conclusion**

While the question of the status of non-Christian religions has been an ecclesial issue since the beginning of Christianity, it was Vatican II that grappled with this problem in a rich, complex and positive manner for the first time in the long history of the Church. Since then the question of the relationship between Jesus Christ and

the Church *and* the other religions and their adherents has been at the forefront of post-conciliar Catholic theology. The Council summoned the Catholic Church to engage in interreligious dialogue with other religions, and the first-hand experiences particularly of Asian Christians of the goodness, wisdom and holiness of the adherents of other religions compelled the Asian Churches to re-think their attitudes and mentalities towards the «religious others» and to reflect seriously on the question of the salvific status of their religions. The process of re-evaluating the roots of Christian outlooks and viewpoints towards the others led them to the doctrinal foundations of Christian theology and praxis and to the re-assessment of their Christian self-understanding, of the understanding of Jesus Christ, his person and his work, vis-à-vis the question of the salvation of the vast majority of the Asian population.

This chapter is, to borrow the words of Michael Barnes, «intended as an exercise in Christian theology, an attempt to understand the phenomenon of religious pluralism»[1045] and initially to respond to it within the horizon of Christian faith as «received» and lived in Asia among the Asian Churches. If Christian theology of religions «informs» the shape, structure and content of the praxis of interreligious dialogue in Asia, then what the Church documents say about Jesus Christ, Christianity, the Church and the other religions have an impact on the way dialogue is pursued and carried out in Asia. Asian bishops and theologians, though, strongly propose the priority of praxis over doctrine on dialogue and have been generally concerned more about orthopraxis than about orthodoxy in their dealings with other religions. In the case of the Asian theology of religions, a certain level of *impasse* has come about partly because of the issuance of some magisterial documents on questions related to the «neuralgic» issues of how to proclaim Jesus Christ as the unique Savior of the world within the multi-religious context of Asia.

The nature of the *impasse* in the Asian theology of religions has to do basically with the question of whether or not the other religious traditions are salvific in themselves. In spite of what the Asian bishops

[1045] M. Barnes, *Christian Identity & Religious Pluralism*, 4.

and theologians have been saying all along about the salvific value of these religions, both *Ecclesia in Asia* and *Dominus Iesus* do not consider them as salvific in themselves, and, therefore, in a way «derail» the FABC's long-standing regard of other religions as possessing salvific meaning and significance, albeit salvific always in relation to Christ, the universal Savior[1046]. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation partly contributes to the situation of *impasse* by what it fails to affirm in terms of the salvific character of the other religions, while the Declaration partly contributes to the state of *impasse* by what it affirms about the non-salvific import of the other religions in the «sharp distinction» that it makes between «faith» and «belief».

Some theologians observe that the theological positions brought by the Asian bishops to the Synod of Bishops for Asia have been diluted in the final document of *Ecclesia in Asia*, which claims to be the «magna carta» of evangelization in Asia in the third millennium. Hence, this Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation may therefore be considered a missed opportunity in providing genuine insights and reflections to the Asian Churches that have always struggled with the question of how to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in matrices and languages that are culturally and religiously more appropriate vis-à-vis the glaring multi-religious context of Asia. Likewise, among the issues raised by some theologians against *Dominus Iesus* is that the issuance of warnings especially to the Asian Churches in this document was done without any consultation and dialogue with bishops and theologians of the continent, particularly with those with whom the Magisterium disagreed.

[1046] Ambrose Mong published a book in 2015 whose title alone already indicates the «derailment» of interreligious dialogue in Asia due to Joseph Ratzinger's opposition to the Asian Churches' adoption of a different approach in their theological formulations and pastoral strategies in relation to the glaring situations of religious pluralism in the continent (Cf. A. Mong, *Dialogue Derailed: Joseph Ratzinger's War Against Pluralist Theology*). See also F. Wilfred, «Dialogue Gasping for Breath?», 449-466.

CHAPTER V

Exploring the Essential Elements of the FABC's Theology of Religions in the Asian Churches' «Response» to the Situation of «Impasse» in the Continent

5.1 **Introduction**

Chapter 4 has examined the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's Declaration, *Dominus Iesus*, as well as their implications for the Asian Churches' theology of religions. We noted that the choice of these magisterial documents for an in-depth investigation was obvious. *Ecclesia in Asia* is considered a magna carta of the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission in the continent in the third millennium. As a document resulting from the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia in 1998, which John Paul II described as the result of a dialogical encounter between the Pope and the Asian bishops, it was deemed important to see whether and to what extent the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation has faithfully integrated the two important «voices» involved in the dialogue, as well as the questions, concerns and issues of both «interlocutors». In the case of *Dominus Iesus*, although this Declaration is a document addressed to the universal Church to combat what the CDF perceived as the Christological and ecclesiological relativism infecting some sectors of the Catholic Church, in a sense it may be regarded as a document

that is particularly aimed at Asia, at the Asian Churches, at their bishops and theologians, precisely because of the perception that Asia is the hotbed of some relativistic tendencies in the Church.

While the non-recognition of the salvific meaning of other religions in *Ecclesia in Asia* and in *Dominus Iesus* may have been considered in Chapter 4 as the major cause of *impasse* in the Asian theology of religions, it is not, however, the only factor that contributes to the situation of *impasse* in Asia, and Chapter 4 has already attempted to address the other contributing factors that surfaced in the examination of the two magisterial documents. Nevertheless, the more comprehensive treatment of these issues and concerns within the Asian context appears only in Chapter 5, which deals with the FABC's theology of religions, issues and concerns that basically revolve around the place of dialogue and proclamation in the one evangelizing mission of the Churches of Asia and the question of the relationship between Christ, the Church and the Kingdom of God in the Asian theology of religions. As we have seen in Chapter 4, the reason for *Redemptoris Missio*'s and *Dominus Iesus*' insistence of the inseparability of Christ and of the Church from the Kingdom of God is the alleged tendency especially among Asian bishops and theologians to advance a «regnocentric» approach to mission, which, according to these documents, detaches the Kingdom of God from Christ and from the Church.

Chapter 5, with two lengthy sections, explores some of the most important elements of the FABC's theology of religions, and how the Asian Churches, through the FABC, have responded to the internal and external problems and challenges of their evangelizing mission in Asia. The first section examines the question of the relationship between dialogue and proclamation in the FABC documents. It initially looks at dialogue as the all-embracing modality of the local Churches' mission of evangelization, which in the unique context of the continent means triple dialogue with its diverse cultures, ancient religions, and harsh poverty. Then, it examines the «neuralgic» issues of the relationship between these two inseparable elements of the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission. In addition, it inquires into the role of the silent witness of Christian life and the legitimate place

of «conversion» both in interreligious dialogue and in proclamation. The second section deals with the FABC's theology of religions vis-à-vis the relationship of Jesus Christ and the Church with the Kingdom of God. It begins with a discussion of a shift of question in the Asian theology of religions and the concept of «kenotic ecclesiology» in which Asian Churches are seen as at the service of the Kingdom of God. Then, it scrutinizes the inseparability of the Kingdom of God from Jesus Christ and from the Church and how some of the earliest documents of the FABC, including its 1991 document issued by the Office of Evangelization, are in agreement with John Paul II's 1990 *Redemptoris Missio* on this particular theme, discussed at length in Chapter 2 of the Encyclical. The section ends with the examination of the role and identity of the Asian Churches in relation to other religions vis-à-vis the Kingdom of God. By drawing out from the rich FABC documents some of the most significant elements of the Asian theology of religions, this chapter is able to mine a kind of response on the part of the Asian Churches to the situation of *impasse* in the theology of religions in the continent.

5.2 **Proclamation and Dialogue in the FABC Documents**

In this section, we will try to examine the various documents of the FABC in relation to the ticklish issues of the relationship between proclamation and interreligious dialogue as two inseparable elements of the one evangelizing mission of the local Churches of Asia, and how the FABC has faithfully maintained the primacy and centrality of proclamation while equally insisting on the urgency and obligation on the part of the Asian Churches to engage in dialogue with the other religions.

A couple of preliminary remarks are in order here. First, when reading the different documents of the FABC not only on the question of the relationship between dialogue and proclamation within the local Churches' overall evangelizing mission, but also, as we will see in the second section, on the question of the Kingdom of God in relation to Christ and the Church, we have to consider an important observation made by Jacques Dupuis in his article, «FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission in Asia». Towards the

end of the article, he writes: «There are, no doubt, between the ones and the other, distinct shades of meaning and different emphases, as indeed similar differences exist between the various FABC documents themselves, not all of which have the same focus or the same authority»[1047]. As we will observe below in our exploration of the different FABC documents, statements issued by the Bishops' Institutes for Missionary Apostolate (BIMAs) or by the Bishops' Institutes for Interreligious Affairs (BIRAs), for example, may contain affirmations both of proclamation and interreligious dialogue as two inseparable elements of the one evangelizing mission of the local Churches of Asia. However, because each of these Institutes has its own particular thrust—proclamation for BIMA and interreligious dialogue for BIRA—one of these elements may be given more weight and attention than the other. This means that even if the other element is scarcely mentioned or not mentioned at all in the document, it does not mean that it is not important in the overall evangelizing mission of the local Churches. Likewise, statements pertaining to proclamation produced by the BIMA documents have «more authority» than those issued by the BISA meetings, and vice versa. And lastly, among the FABC documents, the reflections of the bishops of Asia in their plenary assemblies are more authoritative than the documents developed by the various FABC Institutes and Offices, the Asian bishops' Plenary Assembly being «the supreme body of the FABC»[1048].

Secondly, in an important Theological Consultation organized by the FABC-Office of Evangelization in Thailand in 1991, whose document appears twice in the first two volumes of *For All The Peoples of Asia* (FAPA)[1049], we find, in the Conclusion of the document,

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[1047] J. Dupuis, «FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission», 468.

[1048] Downloaded from http://www.fabc.org/about.html on December 5, 2019.

[1049] In *For All the Peoples of Asia* (FAPA), volume I, the title of this document is «Conclusions of the Theological Consultation» (cf. FABC-OE, nos. 1-54, in FAPA I, 335-347). In *For All the Peoples of Asia*, volume II, its title is «Church Issues in Asia in the Context of Evangelization, Dialogue and Proclamation» (cf. FABC-OE, nos. 1-54, in FAPA II, 193-205). This dissertation makes use of the document in FAPA I as it is the first that appears in the two volumes.

insights that can be taken as the FABC's guiding principles as it navigates through the rough terrain of the theology of religions and the praxis of interreligious dialogue in Asia not only in this particular Consultation but also in other assemblies and meetings. The Conclusion goes back to the purpose of the Theological Consultation, which is twofold: to reflect on the theological issues raised by the very context and situation of Asia itself where the local Churches are a religious minority, and to clarify the question of the centrality of Jesus Christ in the context of evangelization, dialogue and proclamation[1050]. In the process of clarification, the Consultation speaks of the need to develop further the relationship between dialogue and proclamation, and «to indicate the relationship which obtains between those two forms of expressions of the one evangelizing mission of our Churches»[1051].

In the Conclusion of the document, the Consultation indirectly provides a couple of guiding principles. The first principle speaks of a sense of tentativeness in the Consultation's findings, of an attitude of being open to further discoveries and surprises: «We do not claim to have fully succeeded. Our response remains tentative and open. In this reflection it has become clear that there are more questions than answers»[1052]. While some conciliar and post-conciliar documents, such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes*, *Nostra Aetate*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *Dialogue and Mission*, and *Dialogue and Proclamation*, have contributed to and have been in fact «prophetic attempt[s] at formulating the crucial problem of the relationship between dialogue and proclamation», for the Consultation, «they are not the last word», «[t]hey are open to new horizons», and they «remain to be more fully investigated»[1053]. One may recall here the similar words of Jacques Dupuis towards the end of his book, *Christianity and the Religions*, when he speaks about what Vatican II has achieved in terms of this question: «Like all councils in the life of the church, Vatican

[1050] FABC-OE, nos. 1, 52, in FAPA I, 335.346.

[1051] FABC-OE, no. 38, in FAPA I, 344.

[1052] FABC-OE, no. 52, in FAPA I, 346.

[1053] FABC-OE, no. 52, in FAPA I, 346.

II does not represent a last word but rather a first word; it points the direction in which to walk in order to reach a broader understanding of God's design for humankind, which will always remain beyond our complete comprehension»[1054]. Indeed, there are no definitive answers to all the questions raised and still being raised in the field of the theology of religions. And this is because, if God is the formal «object» of theology, for the FABC-Office of Theological Concerns' document, «Methodology: Asian Christian Theology», «the object of our search remains forever a mystery»[1055].

The second principle affirms the primacy of praxis over theology, the priority of «act» over theological formulation on dialogue: «doing the truth comes before the formulation of doctrine», «deeds speak louder than words», and «to dialogue» is more important «than to write about it»[1056]. This means that «the Churches in Asia should not await a satisfactory theological answer before going further in the *praxis* of dialogue and proclamation»; for «[i]t is [in fact] in the systematic reflection on sustained praxis that we shall discover what God is saying to the Churches»[1057]. In other words, we do not have to wait until our questions are clarified completely, or at least sufficiently, until doctrines become crystal-clear, before we engage in dialogue with others. For this document, in fact, clarification comes in the process of engagement in dialogue; it comes about as a result of the praxis of dialogue. It is for this reason that there is continued «progress» in interreligious dialogue in Asia because the local Churches, their bishops, theologians and pastoral leaders do not allow the *impasse* in the theology of religions to hamper the fulfillment of their mission of evangelization in the continent.

5.2.1 *Dialogue as the Basic and Overarching Modality of the Local Churches' Evangelizing Mission in Asia*

For Felix Wilfred, in his Preface to Volume I of *For All the Peoples of Asia*, «[i]f we were to summarize the orientation of the

[1054] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 259.

[1055] FABC-OTC, in FAPA III, 331.

[1056] FABC-OE, nos. 53, 54, in FAPA I, 347.

[1057] FABC-OE, no. 53, in FAPA I, 347.

FABC in one word, it is *dialogue*. It is around this focal point that the FABC's understanding of the Church and its mission revolves»[1058]. Because Asia is characterized by the glaring presence of diverse cultures, of various religious traditions, and of teeming millions of poor people, «dialogue», for Wilfred, following the Asian bishops' intuition, means dialogue with this threefold interrelated sphere. The significance of Wilfred's assertion can be seen when we look at the place and significance of dialogue in the overall evangelizing mission of the Churches of Asia. In Asia, «dialogue» is the one unifying thrust and concept that brings together and links intrinsically the Asian Churches' major theological and ecclesiological themes—proclamation, evangelization, mission, local Church, «a new way of being Church», and the Kingdom of God.

For the FABC, the ultimate goal of all evangelization, which was the prominent theme of the First FABC Plenary Assembly (FABC I) in 1974, is the establishment of the Kingdom of God[1059]. For the Asian bishops, «[t]he purpose of the Church's proclaiming the message of Christ—which is its central mission—is to call man to the values of the Kingdom of God»[1060]. FABC I asserts that the «acting subject» of the task of evangelization, which must be carried out in three «dialogue-tasks», is the local Church. For the Twelfth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/12) held in 1991, «[t]his dialogical model is in fact a new way of being Church» in Asia[1061]; it has become almost synonymous with «a new way of being Church». In the collective reflection of the Indian bishops, not only is this «dialogical model» the «new Asian way of being Church»; «it [also] appears to us as God's will for Christian communities in Asia today»[1062].

[1058] F. Wilfred, «The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)», xxiv-xxv.

[1059] BIMA I, no. 5, in FAPA I, 292.

[1060] BIRA II, no. 13, in FAPA I, 115; cf. International Congress on Mission, no. 1, in FAPA I, 135.

[1061] BIRA IV/12, no. 48, in FAPA I, 332.

[1062] P. C. Phan, «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 21.

Indeed, for the Asian Churches, dialogue is not just one among the many activities and undertakings that the Churches perform; rather, it is

> the basic and overarching *modality* in which the church's entire mission with all its manifold and complex activities—witness, proclamation, conversion and baptism, building up local churches, forming basic ecclesial communities, catechesis, worship, incarnating the Gospel in people's cultures, promoting social justice and peace, interfaith dialogue, theologizing, to name a few—are carried out[1063].

It is the mode in which the Asian Churches' ecclesial life is lived, and their evangelizing mission in the continent accomplished, «a hallmark of all forms of ministry and service in Asia»[1064]. For the bishops of Asia, «it is this dialogue initiated and guided by the Spirit that shapes our identity—our being and our mission»[1065].

In an article entitled «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences to the *Lineamenta*», Peter Phan identifies the inculturation of the Gospel and of the Christian faith in Asia as «the central and neuralgic issue» surrounding the upcoming 1998 Synod of Bishops for Asia. He spells out this burning «issue» as the presentation of Jesus Christ and the Church with an authentic «Asian face»[1066] and the credible proclamation of the truth about Christ as the unique Savior of the world in the Asian context of widespread poverty, of diverse cultures, and of clashing religious beliefs. For him, the Asian Churches have

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[1063] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 38.

[1064] FABC X, no. 5, in FAPA X, 44.44-45.

[1065] FABC-OE, in FAPA III, 215; F. Wilfred, «The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)», xxiv-xxv.

[1066] We may recall here Pope Francis' homily in Bangkok, Thailand last Nov. 21 during his Apostolic Journey to Thailand and Japan from Nov. 19-26, 2019. In his homily, he stressed the «Thai face» of Christianity, saying that if the missionaries had not gone to Thailand and encountered Thai people, Christianity would have lacked the Thai face. In his own words, he said to Thai people: «Without that encounter, Christianity would have lacked your face» (Pope Francis, «Homily of His Holiness», National Stadium [Bangkok], November 21, 2019, downloaded from http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20191121_messa-thailandia-omelia.html on December 10, 2019).

always responded to this uniquely Asian concern through dialogue—dialogue with cultures, dialogue with religions, and dialogue with the poor[1067]. In another article, Phan observes:

> Ever since its first plenary assembly in Taipei, Taiwan, 1974, the FABC has repeatedly insisted that the primary task of the Asian Churches is the proclamation of the Gospel. But it has also maintained no less frequently that the way to fulfill this task in Asia is by way of dialogue, indeed a triple dialogue, with Asian cultures, Asian religions, and the Asians themselves, especially the poor[1068].

In the context of Asia, the mission of the local Churches, which is evangelization, is seen as sharing their faith in Jesus Christ with the Asian people through the three «dialogue-tasks», which, since 1974, has been considered the overarching framework for reflection on the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission.

This «triple dialogue» originally made its debut in the First FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974 in which the Asian bishops argued that the local Churches' mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ and of incarnating the values of the Kingdom of God in Asia—of evangelization in the context of modern Asia—must be carried out in threefold «dialogue». The reason is that the Asian bishops, guided by the insights and reflections of some Asian theologians, came to the conclusion that «dialogue» within the context of Asia must take into account the entire Asian situation, that «dialogue» could not just be reduced to the domain of religions or to interreligious dialogue, but must embrace as well the social conditions of the continent marked by poverty and diversity of cultures, «in brief, all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it [the local church] has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own»[1069]. Only when the Christian faith is truly rooted in the Asian soil can it become truly «Asian» and the local Church truly «Church».

[1067] P. C. Phan, «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 17; cf. ID., *In Our Own Tongues*, 13-31.

[1068] P. C. Phan, «*Ecclesia in Asia*: Challenges for Asian Christianity», 222.

[1069] FABC I, no. 12, in FAPA I, 12.

The importance of dialogue, of this triple dialogue, as the local Churches' basic thrust in their Asian life and mission, is articulated by Catalino G. Arevalo in 1990 in his Preface to Volume I of *For All the Peoples of Asia*:

> This overarching program of dialogue with the cultures (i.e., inculturation), with the religions and religious traditions (i.e., interreligious dialogue), and with our peoples, especially the poor multitudes in Asia (i.e., development/liberation) has been the thematic background of both the pastoral and missionary activity of the local churches in Asia in the past twenty years. In the 1979 International Mission Congress (Manila) it was used as the overall framework for reflection on mission and the tasks of mission in the 1980s. For the 1990s these dialogues remain the headings under which the concerns and activities of Christian mission are collocated. It is in the endeavor to bring these dialogues into life and practice, and in the ongoing reflection on the processes they have initiated, that the way of theologizing on mission must surely be constructed in the decade to come[1070].

The Asian Churches' appreciation of these three «dialogue-tasks», however, gradually grew in the course of time. The Asian bishops' understanding of «dialogue» underwent a conceptual evolution: from «dialogue» that must be conducted in three «spheres» regarded as *separate* and *unrelated* from each other, to «dialogue» that must be carried out in three *inseparable* and *interrelated* «tasks». In FABC I, the three «dialogue-tasks» were initially viewed and carried out merely as three *distinct* and *separate* ecclesial undertakings. They were considered «distinct aspects of [the local Church's] true embodiment in the concrete reality of a people, without which it cannot fulfill effectively its evangelising mission»[1071]. In the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly of 1990, the Asian bishops began to think of them no longer as three distinct activities of the Church but as a «three-pronged single approach to Christian mission in Asia»[1072]. They are no longer three discrete and separate enterprises of the local Churches but

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[1070] C. G. Arevalo, «…The Time of the Heirs», xx.

[1071] J. Dupuis, «FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission», 453-454.

[1072] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 39.

rather three interconnected and inseparable dimensions of the their one evangelizing mission in Asia. Likewise, for the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly in Thailand in 2000, «[t]hese issues are not separate topics to be discussed, but aspects of an integrated approach to our Mission of Love and Service. We need to feel and act "integrally"»[1073].

We may offer here a reason for explaining the intrinsic inseparability of the local Churches' three «dialogue-tasks» in the Asian continent. For Michael Amaladoss, «[t]he three dialogues mutually involve each other in such a way that we cannot do adequately any one of them without doing also the others»[1074]. In the context of Asia, it is impossible for the local Churches to engage in one «dialogue-task» without simultaneously, and consequently, engaging in the other two. For the FABC, «[i]n Asia, interreligious dialogue cannot be separated from intercultural dialogue and solidarity with the poor and oppressed»[1075]. The reason is that

> [s]ince the religions, as well as the Church, are set at the service of the world, interreligious dialogue cannot be confined to the religious sphere but must embrace all dimensions of life: economic, socio-political, cultural and religious. It is in their common commitment to the fuller life of the human community that they discover their complementarity and the urgency and the relevance of dialogue at all levels, socio-economic and intellectual as well as spiritual, among the common people in daily life as among scholars and people with deep religious experience[1076].

For Proposition 41 of the 1998 Synod for Asia, «[f]or effective dialogue, it is important to understand the religious tradition, cultural heritage, and socio-economic-political background. To deal with one dimension of a person and to ignore the other aspects is to blind

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[1073] FABC VII, in FAPA III, 8.

[1074] M. Amaladoss, «Mission in Asia», 228.

[1075] FIRA IV, no. 5, in FAPA III, 140.

[1076] BIRA III, no. 7, in FAPA I, 120; cited also by FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no.1.7, p. 12.

oneself to the reality of that person in whom the three dimensions are joined as one»[1077].

Likewise, the religion with which the local Church is called to dialogue is a religion practiced by a particular people who belong at the same time to one or several cultures and are economically poor. The radical novelty of this call to dialogue on the part of the Churches of Asia with the followers of other religions is that it is also and at the same time dialogue with the poor and those belonging to other cultures because the human subjects of this threefold dialogue-task are one and the same Asian people. It is, therefore, theoretically impossible to draw a demarcation line among these dialogue-tasks since the Asian Churches deal with the same people who are poor and deprived and who, at the same time, belong to the cultures and the religions of the place. Indeed, if the local Churches' «dialogue-partners» are one and the same people, then the «bottom-line» of the triple dialogue of the Asian Churches is «dialogue with… [the]… people»[1078], as «[d]ialogue is essentially between persons, not systems»[1079]. In the context of Asia, «these three dialogues must be practiced together; only then can each guarantee the authenticity and success of the others»[1080].

5.2.2 *Situating Proclamation and Interreligious Dialogue in the Evangelizing Mission of the Asian Churches*

5.2.2.1 Evangelization, Proclamation and Interreligious Dialogue: Preliminary Remarks

For Jacques Dupuis, the theological sense that the Second Vatican Council assigns to «mission» and «evangelization» is somewhat ambiguous, and in terms of meaning it has gone through an evolution and development during the Council, a process which does not end with the Council itself. Sometimes, «mission» and «evangelization» refers exclusively to the missionary proclamation of the gospel; at other

[1077] Synod of Bishops for Asia, «The Synod's Propositions», 158.

[1078] FABC I, no. 19, in FAPA I, 15.

[1079] FABC-OEIA, no. 15, in FAPA I, 168.

[1080] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 39.

times, they extend more broadly to the entire missionary activity of the Church[1081]. Indeed, in the Council's documents, «evangelization» remains identified with the proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him and the invitation which the Church extends to non-Christians so that they may become his disciples in the Church (cf. LG 17; AG 6)[1082]. As regards interreligious dialogue, even though Vatican II acknowledges that the Church, on account of her mission, «stands in a privileged posture for dialogue», for Dupuis, the significance of interreligious dialogue in the Church's mission and evangelization remains unarticulated, which accounts for the reason why «the question that Vatican II had left unanswered surfaced often in postconciliar discussions»[1083]. It is a concept that does not appear in any of the documents of the Council. For Dupuis, a broader meaning of the Church's evangelizing mission, which, together with the proclamation of the Gospel, includes other elements such as human promotion and liberation and interreligious dialogue, is a post-conciliar development[1084].

For the document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, «*[e]vangelizing mission*, or more simply *evangelization*, refers to the mission of the Church in its totality» (DP 8). It is everything the Church does in order to build the Kingdom of God in the world and in human history. In Pope Paul VI's 1975 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, evangelization, which is considered «[the Church's] deepest identity», her reason for being (EN 14), is understood in general to mean «bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new» (EN 18). Hence, through evangelization, the Church «seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete

[1081] J. Dupuis, «Interreligious Dialogue in the Church's Evangelizing Mission», 243.

[1082] J. Dupuis, «A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*», 124.

[1083] J. Dupuis, «Interreligious Dialogue in the Church's Evangelizing Mission», 243.

[1084] J. Dupuis, «A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*», 124.

milieu which are theirs» (EN 18). In the document, evangelization has both a broad and a narrow sense. Because the Church undertakes her evangelizing mission through various ways, we can therefore speak of a broad meaning of evangelization. Yet, evangelization is also understood more specifically to mean the «clear and unambiguous proclamation of the Lord Jesus», which «occupies such an important place in evangelization that it has often become synonymous with it… [although]… it is only one aspect of evangelization» (EN 22). Indeed, Jesus Christ and his Gospel can be brought to the different areas of society and of humanity by the many different ways the Church carries out her mission of salvation in the world.

In the Church document, *The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* (DM), the Church's evangelizing mission is seen as a «single but complex and articulated reality», which is accomplished in various ways such as through presence and witness, commitment to social development and human liberation, liturgical life, prayer and contemplation, interreligious dialogue, and finally, proclamation and catechesis (cf. DM 13). The document views proclamation and dialogue, each in its own place, as component elements and authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the Church; together with the other elements, both of them are oriented towards the communication of God's saving design for humanity. In this document, the various elements of the Church's evangelizing mission are carried out for themselves and not, with the exception of proclamation, for the purpose of converting people to Christ and his Gospel. Speaking specifically of interreligious dialogue, John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* affirms: «Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity» (RM 56). Both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness must be maintained (RM 55).

In the document, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP), the mission of the Church, which is evangelization, is said to have two inseparable components: interreligious dialogue and proclamation.

> Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable: true interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved; proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the Gospel spirit of dialogue. The two activities remain distinct but, as experience shows, one and the same local Church, one and the same person, can be diversely engaged in both (DP 77).

In this document, proclamation, considered as «the foundation, centre, and summit of evangelization», is described as «the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church» (DP 10). Dialogue, on the other hand, has three senses, with the «third sense» being the only meaning given to interreligious dialogue:

> Firstly, at the purely human level, it means reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion. Secondly, dialogue can be taken as an attitude of respect and friendship, which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting the evangelizing mission of the Church. This can appropriately be called "the spirit of dialogue." Thirdly, in the context of religious plurality, dialogue means "all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment" (DM, 3), in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions. It is in this third sense that the term dialogue... [is used]… for one of the integral elements of the Church's evangelizing mission (DP 9).

The question, among others, which has preoccupied the local Churches of Asia due to the multi-religious context of the continent is the relationship between the two in the one evangelizing mission of the Church: If both proclamation and dialogue are inseparable elements of the Church's one evangelizing mission, how do they go together? The «Conclusions of the Theological Consultation»,

organized by the FABC-Office of Evangelization in 1991, specifies the question:

> If interreligious dialogue is by itself an expression of the Church's evangelizing mission, why does announcing Jesus Christ and inviting people to become his disciples in the Church remain urgent? If people can be saved through Jesus Christ outside the Church, what motivation remains for proclaiming the Good News?[1085]

The next two sub-sections will deal with these questions in depth, beginning with the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the primary and central element of the local Churches' evangelizing mission in Asia, and then with interreligious dialogue as an integral dimension of the same mission of evangelization.

5.2.2.2 The Proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Primary Element of the Asian Churches' Evangelizing Mission in the FABC Documents

Since the foundation of the FABC in 1972, and even as early as the Asian Bishops' Meeting (ABM) in Manila in 1970, Asian bishops, theologians and pastoral leaders—grounded in their deep conviction of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ as Savior of the world—have never wavered in the primary task they have accorded the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel in Asia. In their various assemblies and conferences, they have articulated repeatedly the centrality and universality of Jesus and the salvation he has brought to humanity. For the All-Asian Conference on Evangelization held in Suwon, South Korea in 1988—which the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly in 1990 cites partly—«[t]he proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and primary element of evangelization without which all other elements will lose their cohesion and validity»[1086]. In fact, FABC Papers No. 64, published in 1992, and entitled «A Persistent Vision: The Primacy of Proclamation in the FABC Statements», really insists on the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus and his Gospel in the

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[1085] FABC-OE, no. 27, in FAPA I, 341.

[1086] BIMA I, no. 6, in FAPA I, 292; cf. FABC V, no. 4.1, in FAPA I, 281-282; cited also by C. G. Arevalo, «…The Time of the Heirs», xxi.

Churches' evangelizing mission in Asia[1087]. In the Final Statement of the Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly held in Vietnam in 2012, the Asian bishops insist that «the proclamation of Jesus as the Lord and Savior of the world remains as the very heart of evangelization—a faith conviction that the Church in Asia firmly holds as non-negotiable», that «no evangelization can be authentic without proclaiming Jesus»[1088]. Towards the end of the Assembly Statement, they declare: «[W]e firmly commit ourselves and our resources to the Church's mission of New Evangelization—to proclaim Jesus as the Lord and Savior and to tell his story to the peoples of Asia with 'new ardor, new methods and new expressions'—in triple dialogue»[1089].

Catalino G. Arevalo, FABC's theological *peritus* from 1970 to 1995, argues that if it is true that a few Asian theologians have advanced a full-scale pluralistic theology of religions whose key-point is «parity» among the various religions of the world, «still the Asian Roman Catholic bishops in their statements on mission and interreligious dialogue have been consistent in holding on to the "traditional" view on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the one mediator of God's salvation in history»[1090]. Peter Phan, likewise, contends that in the Asian bishops' responses to the *Lineamenta* for the 1998 Synod of Bishops for Asia vis-à-vis the Christological questions, «it is clear that the uniqueness and universality of Jesus as the Savior was never placed in question»[1091]. Indeed, while evangelization is a «complex reality» which encompasses many essential elements such as witnessing to the Gospel, working for the values of God's Kingdom, struggling for justice and peace, dialogue, mutual sharing and enrichment with other Christians and adherents of all religions, «there can never be true evangelization without the proclamation of Jesus Christ»[1092]. It is a resounding echo

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[1087] FABC Papers 64, «A Persistent Vision: The Primacy of Proclamation in the FABC Statements», 1-39.

[1088] FABC X, nos. 6, 53, in FAPA V, 52.78.

[1089] FABC X, in FAPA V, 85.

[1090] C. G. Arevalo, «…The Time of the Heirs», xxi.

[1091] P. C. Phan, «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 17.

[1092] BIMA I, no. 5, in FAPA I, 292.

of what *Evangelii Nuntiandi* asserts: «There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed» (EN 22), for the proclamation of Jesus Christ is «the foundation, center, and at the same time, summit» of the evangelizing mission of the Church (EN 27), she who «exists in order to evangelize» (EN 14).

For the First FABC Plenary Assembly of 1974, the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel is, in the context of Asia, «a task which today assumes an *urgency*, a *necessity* and *magnitude* unmatched in the history of our Faith in this part of the world»[1093]. And the reasons for this are twofold. The first is rooted in the obedience to the «great commission» of the Risen Christ to go to the whole world to proclaim the Good News and «make disciples of all the nations» (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; cf. Luke 24:46-48). Indeed, the need «to proclaim the name of Jesus and to invite people to become his disciples in the Church» is not a new missiological task rediscovered only recently, but has been, since the Church's birth in history, her «sacred and major duty which the Church cannot neglect» (DP 76). And the second is grounded in the faith-conviction in Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of the world, in the centrality and decisiveness of Jesus Christ in God's overall plan of salvation for humankind. That is why, in spite of more than five hundred years of intense missionary undertaking in Asia, still the period of mission as proclaiming the Good News of Christ to those who do not know him in order to invite them to the Church is not over[1094]. In fact, for the 1992 Asian Congress on Evangelization held in Manila, Philippines, «[m]ission is only beginning in this great continent which is home to two-thirds of humankind and the birthplace of the Savior and his Church»; thus, «[w]e stand at the dawn of a missionary age»[1095].

As regards the first reason, obviously, in spite of the fact that Jesus Christ was Asian and Christianity was born and had its beginnings in Asia, and that «it was in fact in Asia that God revealed and fulfilled

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[1093] FABC I, no. 8, in FAPA I, 13; emphasis mine.

[1094] Cf. P. C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, xxiii.

[1095] FABC-OE, in FAPA IV, 278.

his saving purpose from the beginning» (EA, 1; cf. EA, 4), Christians in Asia today consist only of about three percent of the whole Asian population of nearly 3.5 billion people[1096].

> We live in the midst of millions of people belonging to the great religious traditions born in our subcontinent, to whom the name of Jesus their Savior has not been proclaimed. Among them large numbers are also found who, while being attracted by the Person of Jesus and his message, are unable to recognize him in his Church, and for various reasons prevented from explicit belonging to the faith-community of the Church[1097].

Indeed, «after two millennia, a major part of the human family still does not acknowledge Christ» especially in Asia (EA, 29; cf. EA, 2). It is this sobering reality of the numerical insignificance of the presence of Christianity in the vast continent of Asia, «[a] smallness [that] is truly humbling»[1098], that must have prompted Pope Francis, in his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, to say that «[t]he immense numbers of people who have not received the Gospel of Jesus Christ *cannot leave us indifferent*» (EG 246; emphasis mine).

Concerning the second reason, in response to the question of how Asian Churches should understand «the centrality and decisiveness of Jesus Christ in the context of religious pluralism», the 1991 Theological Consultation argues:

> Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, is the center of our Christian faith. In him, God's age-long self-manifestation through human history has come to a climax. In Jesus, God has personally entered human history and has become a member of the human race. This total identification with us of the Son of God is ordained to sharing with us his Sonship of the Father. Jesus accomplished this mission throughout his earthly life, and singularly through the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The paschal mystery in which the Christ-event culminates thus ushers in the renewal of creation and

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[1096] FABC X, no. 5, in FAPA V, 51.

[1097] BIMA II, no. 14, in FAPA I, 100.

[1098] FABC-OE, no. 6, in FAPA IV, 251.

> marks the decisive step in the establishment by God of his kingdom on earth[1099].

For the Second and Fourth Formation Institutes for Interreligious Affairs, the Incarnation of the Logos in Jesus Christ represents the radical self-insertion and the decisive and definitive entry of the Divine into the world and into human history; it is therefore through the Christ-event that Christians have access to God's presence in history[1100]. For FABC VII, it is in Jesus Christ that we encounter «God's own Son [who] has realized for us the dream and vision of full life (Jn. 10:10)»[1101].

The Asian Churches have come to the conviction that, for us, Christians, «our way to participation in God's enterprise is Jesus» whose «mission was to share the Good News of God's dream for the world»[1102], and that the center of our Christian faith, which is the only reason why the Church exists, is «Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world»[1103]. The Church's identity and mission, her reason for being, is «to speak of Jesus to others, share him with others, love and serve others the way he did»; it is «the ultimate reason for all our pastoral activity», «a faith imperative», something that we do «in season and out of season as God wills»[1104]. It is no wonder then that the FABC's astonishingly rich story over the years is about the «singular mystery» and «memory» of «the person named Jesus who is for us the Way, the Truth and the Life»[1105]. And the renewal of our sense of mission, particularly called forth by the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly, can only mean, first and foremost, «renewal of our faith that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to be the savior of all»[1106].

[1099] FABC-OE, nos. 27, 28, in FAPA I, 341.

[1100] FIRA II, no. 3.3.i, in FAPA III, 127; FIRA IV, no. 16, in FAPA III, 143.

[1101] FABC VII, in FAPA III, 1.

[1102] BIRA IV/12, nos. 7, 9, in FAPA I, 326.

[1103] BIMA II, no. 2, in FAPA I, 97.

[1104] FABC-OE, no. 4, in FAPA IV, 250.

[1105] FABC VI, no. 4, in FAPA II, 3.

[1106] FABC V, no. 3.1.1, in FAPA I, 279.

For the Asian Churches, proclaiming to people of other faiths and sharing with them «the boundless riches of Christ» (Eph 3:8), «through whom God saves»[1107], is therefore «our specific contribution to the peoples of Asia, in response to their providential yearnings and aspirations»[1108]. Because the fullness of life «can be realized "only in and through Christ and his Gospel"», our unique contribution to Asia and its peoples, according to the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly of 1995, is «the vision of Jesus Christ»[1109]. Hence, to the question about our Christian contribution to the Asian people's collective struggle for the fullness of life, «our answer is brief, but profoundly committed. Our answer is Jesus and his Gospel of Life»[1110].

Indeed, Christian proclamation is rooted in our faith that Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Lord and Savior of the world, «is for all human beings the only Way that leads to the Father and fulfills the longings and aspirations of the human heart»[1111]. It is borne out of the conviction that «the Asian peoples' providential hunger for a more profound human dignity, liberation from all oppressive structures, peace, reconciliation, and the fullness of salvation... find their fulfillment in Christ, the Saviour of humanity»[1112]. Our mission, then, is «to proclaim him as the Son of God, the unique Savior of the world, the One who beyond human dreams fulfills the deepest yearnings of the Asian heart[,]... convinced that the Good News of Jesus that we bear is our most precious Gift to Asia»[1113]. The Asian Churches' response to the missionary mandate received from the Risen Christ himself—«to make known... [his]... person and the message... to those who do not know him»[1114]—is grounded in the Christian experience of faith, hope and love that «what our [Asian]

[1107] FABC VII, in FAPA III, 2.

[1108] BIMA I, no.1, in FAPA I, 293.

[1109] FABC VI, no. 3, in FAPA II, 2.

[1110] FABC VI, no. 14.7, in FAPA II, 10.

[1111] FABC-OE, in FAPA IV, 277.

[1112] BIMA I, no, 3, in FAPA I, 291.

[1113] FABC-OE, no. 4, in FAPA IV, 250.

[1114] FABC III, no. 9.9, in FAPA I, 58.

people are seeking they will find in Jesus and His Gospel»[1115]. If faith in Jesus is both a gift received and a gift to be shared, sharing the truth of Jesus Christ with the Asian people is both the greatest gift that the Churches can offer to Asia and the most solemn duty of the Asian Churches that have received this gift of faith (EA 10). Our proclamation of Jesus to others, though, must be characterized by humility because, as messengers of the Gospel, we are dealing with a gift that we have received «as a free gift (*Ep* 3:2)», without any merit of our own, and because we «do not always fully live up to its demands» (DP 70).

And if indeed—and here we go into a much deeper motivation for proclaiming Jesus Christ to others—«the Church is in love with her Lord she will feel the urge of sharing with them what she alone can offer: the Good News that the human face of God and his gift of salvation is found in Jesus of Nazareth. "Here we are at the heart of the mystery of love" (DP 83)»[1116]. The Asian Congress on Evangelization, held in Manila in 1992, reiterates this reason for proclaiming Christ in Asia:

> [W]e cannot be satisfied merely with silent and wordless deeds. Our very love for Christ and for our brothers and sisters in Asia impels us to tell his story and the great things he has done for us. "Because we believe, therefore we speak" (2 Cor. 4:13). We know that our evangelization is incomplete until we proclaim Christ as the offer to God's grace inviting people to freely believe in him. And we cannot rest until he is proclaimed to all our Asian brothers and sisters, because every person and every nation needs the Lord Jesus Christ who alone can bring us to the fullness of humanity, human community and harmony with all creation[1117].

Indeed, Jesus Christ and his Gospel are not something that we can keep to ourselves, hide or monopolize (cf. RM 11). «[W]e cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard» (Acts 4:20), for «woe betide me if I do not proclaim the gospel» (1Cor 9:16). For

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[1115] International Congress on Mission, no. 9, in FAPA I, 129.

[1116] FABC-OE, no. 50, in FAPA I, 346.

[1117] FABC-OE, in FAPA IV, 277-278.

the Asian bishops gathered for the First FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974:

> It is our belief that only in and through Christ and His Gospel, and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that these quests can come to realization. For Christ alone, we believe, is for every man "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6), "who enlightens every man who comes into the world" (Jn 1:9). We believe that it is in Him and in His good news that our peoples will finally find the full meaning we all seek, the liberation we strive after, the brotherhood and peace which is the desire of all our hearts[1118].

And what the Church «alone can offer» to adherents of other religions, which provides theological reasons for the necessity and urgency of the Church to proclaim Christ to others, is given further by the Theological Consultation organized by the FABC-Office of Evangelization in 1991:

> The Holy Spirit, in ways known to God, gives to all human persons the opportunity of coming in contact with the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, and thus to obtain salvation (cf. GS 22). The Church, as the visible sign and sacrament of the mystery of salvation, is in a unique position to offer them the opportunity of sharing in this mystery in a full human way. She alone can convey to them the explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ, their savior and Lord, and invite them to celebrate in joy and thanksgiving the mystery of his passover at her eucharistic table. Only in the life of the Church is found the full visibility of the mystery of salvation. Only there do the children of God come to the full realization of what it means to share in the Sonship of the Son. Thereby, the Church's proclamation meets the deepest longings and aspirations of the human heart for liberation and wholeness of life. There, the seeds of the Word contained in the religious traditions of the world, grow to maturity and come to fulfillment. In this manner the Church shares with others "the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation" (RM 18) which she has received from her Lord and Master[1119].

[1118] FABC I, no. 7, in FAPA I, 13; cf. FABC-OE, in FAPA IV, 278.

[1119] FABC-OE, no. 49, in FAPA I, 346.

Hence, notwithstanding the significance the First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA I) has accorded interreligious dialogue, this meeting has nevertheless embraced «with a sense of urgency the task of making Christ known, loved and followed by the vast multitude of our brothers and sisters»,

> the urgent task of proclaiming the Good News to the peoples of Asia,... the mission entrusted to us by the Lord to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19) and to bring all men to the saving knowledge of the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (Jn 17:3), incorporating them into the community of believers[1120].

Likewise, in spite of the importance of interreligious dialogue in the Asian context, BIMA III rededicates itself to «the immense challenge of *proclaiming the Name and the Good News of Jesus* to our brothers and sisters in this part of the world»[1121]. In fact, «[t]hough mission is for all, since God "wills all men to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4), it must be directed, first of all, to those who do not yet believe in Jesus»; hence, «[*t*]*he necessity of first proclamation has lost none of its urgency in Asia*, where Christians constitute a very small minority»[1122]. In «A Syllabus of "Mission Concerns"», BIMA III stresses «the urgency, within the total mission of the churches in Asia, of proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, without intending to diminish the value of other vital aspects of the Church's evangelizing task»[1123]. This is because, for the All-Asian Conference on Evangelization held in South Korea in 1988, which produced a document entitled «Evangelization in Asia Today», «[t]he proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and the primary element of evangelization without which all other elements will lose their cohesion and validity»[1124]. Hence, the Conference insists that

> the primary task of the Church is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, calling to personal faith in Him, inviting to membership

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[1120] BIMA I, nos. 2, 19, in FAPA I, 93.96.

[1121] BIMA III, no. 4, in FAPA I, 104; emphasis in the original.

[1122] BIMA III, no. 9, in FAPA I, 104; emphasis in the original.

[1123] BIMA III, no. 1, in FAPA I, 106.

[1124] BIMA I, nos. 6, in FAPA I, 292.

> in the Church those whom God has chosen, and celebrating salvation through Christ in our belonging to His Church. Every other task of the Church flows from and is related to this proclamation and its acceptance in faith[1125].

Likewise, the Fourth Workshop of the International Congress on Mission held in Manila, Philippines in 1979 asserts that the purpose of the Church's evangelizing mission is «to proclaim salvation to the whole man and to all men», which means «to convert people to authentic human values and to deepen and fulfill these values in Christ so that the people who are evangelized may come to form the community which is His Church»[1126] For the document, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», this «call to discipleship to Jesus in the Church» in proclamation «is not proselytism but a mystery of the call of the Spirit and the free response of the person»[1127].

Hence, while we believe that in the praxis of dialogue within the context of religious pluralism, «[i]t is the Spirit who decides whether or not one must proclaim... who [in fact] decides when, where and how one must proclaim as exemplified in the Acts of the Apostles»[1128], the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly in 1990, nevertheless, declares that «we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to *proclaim* explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence. We shall proclaim the Gospel in the manner of the Lord Jesus»[1129]. Indeed, the call to proclaim comes from our deep, personal and marvelous experience of God's love and goodness in our life, of the wondrous deeds God has done for us in Jesus Christ, which should naturally generate in

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[1125] BIMA I, nos. 7, in FAPA I, 292.

[1126] International Congress on Mission, no. 3, in FAPA I, 144.

[1127] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.6, p. 22.

[1128] BIRA IV/7, no. 13, in FAPA I, 310.

[1129] FABC V, no. 4.3, in FAPA I, 282; cf. FABC VIII, no. 97, in FAPA IV, 36. Hence, even if it accords a primary place to the silent witness of Christian life, for the document, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, such a wordless witness will always remain insufficient, «because even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified… and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus» (EN 22).

us an intense and overwhelming desire to share that experience with others. It is borne out of a strong feeling that we have something uniquely beautiful to share with the world, the «good tidings» of our own Christian experience, that can give meaning to people's life or answer their life's deepest questions and aspirations. If our experience of God's love in Christ is indeed genuine, the desire that others may also be captivated by the beauty of that love will always be in our hearts and will urge us to share the wonder of that love with others. For *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, «[h]ere lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn» (EN 24).

And when we look especially at Pope John Paul II's Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, we can see that both the Encyclical and the early and repeated pronouncements of the FABC are in agreement not only on the necessity of what the Asian Churches have since referred to as the «threefold dialogue-task» but also on the urgency of the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel in the context of Asia. The Encyclical considers the inculturation of the Christian message, which has «marked the Church's pilgrimage throughout her history», as something that is «particularly urgent» today (RM 52). It acknowledges interreligious dialogue as «a part of the Church's evangelizing mission», and «is one of its expressions» (RM 55). It also looks at liberation and promotion of human development as «closely connected» to the proclamation of the Gospel (RM 59). However, «[a]ll forms of missionary activity are directed to... proclamation, which reveals and gives access to the mystery hidden for ages and made known in Christ (cf. Eph 3:3-9; Col 1:25-29), the mystery which lies at the heart of the Church's mission and life, as the hinge on which all evangelization turns» (RM 44). For the Encyclical, the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel always occupies a «permanent priority» in the Church's evangelizing mission, has a «central and irreplaceable role» in it, and is «the foundation, center and at the same time the summit» of the dynamism of evangelization (RM 44).

Indeed, while the FABC has persistently called on the local Churches of Asia to engage in dialogue with adherents of other religions, it has also consistently referred to proclamation as the primary element of evangelization, in the absence of which the Asian Churches' engagement in triple dialogue loses its cohesion and meaning. And a year after the publication of *Redemptoris Missio*, the FABC, in its 1991 Theological Consultation, has referred to the Encyclical in its reflections on the relation between dialogue and proclamation and has shown that in spite of the presence of this broader perspective in the Asian theological horizon, the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel has been repeatedly affirmed as the central element of the Churches' evangelizing mission in Asia. In his 1992 article, «FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission in Asia», Jacques Dupuis observes that the official documents of the FABC over the last twenty years are «in substantial agreement with the papal encyclical»[1130] in their reflections on the primacy and centrality of proclamation in the Asian Churches' one evangelizing mission in the continent. For Dupuis, while the FABC documents have consistently affirmed the necessity and urgency for the Churches of Asia to engage in the three «dialogue-tasks», they have done so «without prejudice to the irreplaceable role of proclamation in the Church's evangelising mission»[1131]. That the FABC has unwaveringly placed a premium on the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel in Asia in spite of its insistence on the threefold dialogue-task beyond the documents explored in this section, a lone quotation from a 2001 FABC document suffices to show: «In carrying out this triple dialogue with religions, cultures, and the poor, the Churches in Asia do not ignore proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, but seek to find effective and culturally acceptable ways of announcing Gospel values and teaching»[1132].

[1130] J. Dupuis, «FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission», 468.

[1131] J. Dupuis, «FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission», 468.

[1132] FIRA IV, no. 7, in FAPA III, 141.

5.2.2.3 The Place of Interreligious Dialogue in the Evangelizing Mission of the Asian Churches in the FABC Documents

As the previous discussion has shown, there is no dearth of references and insights in the abundant documents of the FABC to the significance of Jesus Christ in the life and mission of the Asian Churches, in the world, and in other religious traditions, upon which the proclamation of Jesus, considered the principal element of the Churches' evangelizing mission in Asia, is based. In theology and praxis, most of the difficulties and problems that Christians encounter in trying to understand the twofold, inseparable mission of the Church arise not from this divine mandate of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel but from the second element of the Church's evangelizing mission—interreligious dialogue. As Jacques Dupuis inquires: «If the goal of the dialogue is not to proclaim Jesus Christ explicitly and to invite others to become his disciples in the Church, then to what goal does that dialogue tend?»[1133]. Why is there a necessity and obligation to dialogue with members of other religions in Asia?

Let me make an important clarification here at the start of this sub-section. For the First FABC Plenary Assembly of 1974, evangelization is the building up of a truly local Church through a threefold dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor. This spelt-out dialogic mode of ecclesial existence has led to the emergence of inculturation, interreligious dialogue and promotion of human development as three major contemporary ways of theologizing on mission. By arguing that proclamation and dialogue are two inseparable elements of the one evangelizing mission of the Church, the FABC, particularly in its document, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», does not consider proclamation as another dimension of evangelization added to these three aspects, but as «the aspect of witness that is an integral element of all the three dimensions of evangelization»[1134]. Hence, in exploring the relationship between proclamation and dialogue in this sub-section, we are, in the words

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[1133] J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 230.

[1134] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.4, p. 22.

of the document, «limiting ourselves to the internal articulation of the dialectical aspects of one dimension of evangelization, namely interreligious dialogue»[1135].

As we have seen in Chapter 4, for the Asian Churches, given the obvious context of religious pluralism in a continent where the Catholic Church comprises merely less than three percent of the entire population, the paramount question in their evangelizing mission is the «how» of the proclamation, how to proclaim Christ as the unique and universal Savior of the world. In fact, the 1998 Synod of Bishops for Asia was not just «*an ardent affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ the Savior*», but also an occasion «to reflect on it in relation to the context in which it has to be proclaimed and professed today» (EA, 4). Michael Amaladoss has an interesting insight on what, in part, constitutes this «context» of Christian proclamation in the circumstances of religious pluralism in Asia. After saying that «[m]ost Indian theologians affirm that all salvation, however understood, is from God in and through Christ», and that «[i]f this is not affirmed then we can stop the discussion right here, because there is nothing to explain or understand», he observes right away that «[t]he awareness that the believers of other religions make similar affirmations [that their religions are also salvific] and that they should not be dismissed out of hand forms an element of our context»[1136]. In other words, «[t]he affirmation that all salvation is from God in and through Christ encounters in India (Asia) another affirmation which says that other religions also facilitate salvation or the divine-human encounter»[1137]. Because of this, Amaladoss, in another article, contends that while «[w]e feel that we are sent as witnesses on a mission…, we must not be astonished to find that others too may claim such a mission»[1138]. Hence, for *Dialogue and Proclamation*, «[i]t should not be surprising, but quite normal, that the followers of other religions should also desire sincerely to share their faith» (DP 83).

[1135] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.4, p. 22.

[1136] M. Amaladoss, «The Mystery of Christ and Other Religions», 328.

[1137] M. Amaladoss, «The Mystery of Christ and Other Religions», 328.

[1138] M. Amaladoss, «The Pluralism of Religions», 289.

In Asia, the local Churches' response to their question about the manner of proclaiming Jesus and his Gospel in the context of extreme religious diversity has been dialogue; the local Churches proclaim Jesus Christ to their fellow Asians in a «dialogical manner»[1139]. In his «closing remarks» at the proclamation of *Ecclesia in Asia* in New Delhi, India in 2000, considered as «the first Asian response to the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation»[1140], Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja affirmed that while «it is true that there is no authentic evangelization without announcing Jesus Christ, Saviour of the whole human race... for Asia, there will be no complete evangelization unless there is dialogue with other religions and cultures»[1141]. Indeed, while the Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly of 2012 maintained that proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of the world remains a non-negotiable element of the local Churches' evangelizing mission in Asia, which provides both «a renewed justification for mission as an imperative from the Lord Jesus and as the inevitable consequence of the gift of faith», still the assembly has re-affirmed «dialogue as the mode of mission in Asia»[1142].

That dialogue—interreligious dialogue—was the response of the Asian Churches to the crucial question of the «how» of proclamation has always been the case since the Asian Bishops' Meeting in Manila in 1970. As early as in that historic meeting, the Asian bishops already acknowledged the increasing importance of «dialogue with our fellow Asians whose commitment is to other faiths»[1143]. In that meeting, they pledged themselves to an open, sincere, and ongoing dialogue with adherents of other Asian religions in their desire to learn from one another, to enrich themselves spiritually, and to find ways of working more effectively in the common mission of total human development[1144].

[1139] FABC-OE, no. 51, in FAPA I, 346.

[1140] E. Chia, «Of Fork and Spoon», 246.

[1141] J. Darmaatmadja, «A New Way of Being Church in Asia», 891.

[1142] FABC X, no. 6, in FAPA V, 52.

[1143] Asian Bishops' Meeting, no. 24, in FAPA I, 6.

[1144] Asian Bishops' Meeting, no. 12, in FAPA I, 9.

The motivation and impetus to enter into dialogue with followers of other Asian religions—which started to be enunciated in Pope Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam* and in Vatican II's documents—has been well received by the Catholic Churches in Asia. Since the foundation of the FABC in 1972, it has been particularly from the collective reflections and insights of the Asian Churches in general, as articulated in the FABC documents, that the universal Church has grown in its understanding of dialogue. In his Introduction to the book, *Being Church in Asia*, Catalino G. Arevalo recalls that in the 1982 Third FABC Plenary Assembly held in Bangkok, Archbishop Simon Lourdusamy, the then-Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, «noted that the FABC texts had a real influence in the thinking of *other* episcopal conferences, and that they were a useful and even valued contribution to the ongoing reflection on evangelization and mission in the world-wide Church»[1145]. The Final Statement of the Asian bishops gathered in that assembly acknowledged it: «We have also been enabled by our joint reflection and discernment, by pastoral options and policies we have together taken, to contribute to the ongoing reflection and discernment of churches in other continents and to the thinking and policies of the central administrative offices of the Church»[1146]. Indeed, «the collective awareness of the importance of dialogue and the direction and commitment to dialogue on the part of the FABC has contributed to the Church as a whole and its understanding of dialogue»[1147]. It was, in fact, in response to the problem of interreligious dialogue, in their commitment to and praxis of dialogue with members of other religions that, as we have seen above, the Asian Churches were recognized, in the Asian Synod held in Rome in 1998, as having «made great contributions in the field of a theology of religions for the whole Church»[1148].

Indeed, if there is one theme in the conciliar document, *Nostra Aetate*, «the Magna Carta of interreligious dialogue for our times»

[1145] C. G. Arevalo, «General Introduction», 5; emphasis in the original.

[1146] FABC III, no. 3.4, in FAPA I, 54.

[1147] FABC Papers NO. 131, «A Glimpse at Dialogue in Asia», 4.

[1148] G. Evers, «The Specific Contribution of Asian Theologians», 80.

(EA, 31), that the Asian bishops have taken very seriously through the years—and which they have repeatedly addressed and affirmed—in their attempt to formulate a theology of religions within the context of Asia, it is the necessity of interreligious dialogue, of dialogue with other religions. Practically, all the Final Statements of the Ten FABC Plenary Assemblies (1974-2012) include references to this genuine task of the Asian Churches which occupies a central place among the challenges facing the local Churches of Asia[1149]. While «[c]ontact, dialogue and cooperation with followers of other religions is a task which the Second Vatican Council bequeathed to the whole Church as a duty and a challenge» (EA, 31), interreligious dialogue is a uniquely Asian concern because of the conspicuous presence of various religious traditions in the continent. Such a multi-religious context subsequently bestows on the Asian Churches a distinct pastoral duty of working out and of eventually sharing their own peculiar contribution with the «world Church». As an ecclesial challenge that is unique to Asian Churches, it is indeed a task that these Churches have to face not only for their own growth but also for the growth of the universal Church.

Motivations for interreligious dialogue are scattered in many documents of the FABC and, because these documents are dealing with the same task, some of these motivations overlap with one another. For the FABC, to be able to understand the relationship between proclamation and dialogue, especially the place of interreligious dialogue in the Asian Churches' overall evangelizing mission, we have to look at dialogue, together with proclamation, within the horizon of the one salvific plan of God for the entire world. The document, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», by the then Theological Advisory Commission of the FABC (which is now the Office for Theological Concerns) is explicit on this:

> The one divine plan of salvation for all peoples embraces the whole universe. The mission of the Church has to be understood within the context of this plan. The Church does not monopolize God's action in the universe. While it is aware of a special mission from

[1149] G. Evers, «The Specific Contribution of Asian Theologians», 79-80.

> God in the world, it has to be attentive to God's action in the world, as manifested also in the other religions. This twofold awareness constitutes the two poles of the Church's evangelizing action in relation to other religions. While proclamation is the expression of its awareness of being in mission, dialogue is the expression of its awareness of God's presence and action outside its boundaries. The action of the Church finds itself in a field of forces controlled by two poles of divine activity. Proclamation is the affirmation of and witness to God's action in oneself. Dialogue is the openness and attention to the mystery of God's action in the other believer. It is a perspective of faith that we cannot speak of the one without the other[1150].

For the document, the demand to engage in dialogue with the members of other religions arises from a Christian's deep and strong religious conviction that there is only one God and one saving design for the whole of humanity, and this salvific plan which embraces the entire world and all its peoples and religions is rooted in God's universal saving will for all. Therefore, God, in a hidden, unknown and mysterious way, is present, active and at work in the life and religious traditions of other believers, and dialogue with them can serve to enrich us with the knowledge and awareness of how God works in their religious life and traditions. Interreligious dialogue is born out of a deep conviction, rooted in God's overall plan of salvation for the whole of humankind, that Christians also encounter Jesus Christ «outside the gate», so to speak, beyond the confines and borders of Christianity and the Church. It is in fact this «hidden but active presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ in the other religious traditions… [that constitutes]… the theological foundation of the practice of interreligious dialogue»[1151]. Jesus Christ and his Spirit are present and operative in other religions and interreligious dialogue is grounded in this firm religious belief. The document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, thus, asserts that while maintaining the firm conviction that in Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and men (1Tim 2:4), the fullness of revelation has been given to the Church, Christians must remember that God has also revealed

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[1150] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.5, p. 22.

[1151] Cited by J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 225.

himself in some way to the adherents of other religions (DP 48). Addressing an implicit question as to why Christians and others need to «walk together toward the truth» (DM 13) if the Church has already received the «fullness of truth» in Christ, the document argues:

> The fullness of truth received in Jesus Christ does not give individual Christians the guarantee that they have grasped the truth fully…. While keeping their identity intact, Christians must be prepared to learn and receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions (DP 49).

In other documents which provide the motivations for interreligious dialogue, we see this insight on God's all-embracing design of salvation for the whole world—and what Christians can learn from and about a God who reveals himself in the «religious others»—appear again and again. For the 1979 International Congress on Mission, dialogue has two sets of goals: the first appeals to people of various religious traditions and ideologies, and the second appeals principally to Christians. As regards the first goal, interreligious dialogue can help the world attain peace, harmony and integral development since with the rediscovery of their deep spiritual dimensions in life people engaged in dialogue are not just enriched by the values and morals they discover among religious traditions and humanistic ideologies but are also challenged to live them both in their private and public life. Regarding the second goal, their faith in a God who is present and operative through the Spirit in the entire creation impels Christians to enter into dialogue with adherents of other religions and discover God's transforming love not only for themselves but also for all people of different religions and of goodwill. Their engagement in interreligious dialogue is in imitation of a God who has been dialoguing with the whole human race from the very beginning, and of Jesus who is the center of this dialogue between God and humanity[1152]. This second goal affirms God's presence and activity in the whole of creation, and our engagement

[1152] International Congress on Mission, no. 2, in FAPA I, 141-142.

in dialogue with others allows us to discover God's saving action not only for ourselves but also for all people.

Likewise, the 1991 Theological Consultation, organized by the FABC-Office of Evangelization, provides a twofold motivation for dialogue: anthropological and theological. From an anthropological point of view, it is in response to the pluralistic socio-political, cultural and religious context of Asia that the Church is summoned to be committed to dialogue. «The Church, being committed to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God should acknowledge the same Kingdom at work in socio-political situations and in cultural and religious traditions and enter into dialogue with them»[1153]. From a theological perspective, it is in response and faithfulness to the divine initiative—of God entering into dialogue with the whole of humanity and offering men and women salvation—that the Church should be committed to dialogue. «[T]his dialogue is founded on the fact that Christ, the new Adam, is at work through his Spirit in all human persons to bring about a new humanity (DP 15)»[1154]. For the 1998 First Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs, the basis for all our engagements in dialogue is God himself, in imitation of a God who is dialogical, a God whose way is dialogue. This God has spoken and continues to speak and manifest himself in a variety of ways in the world, in time and in history, in humanity's struggles, yearnings, hopes and dreams, through a «journey of dialogue... [which]... at its very core, entails perceiving and honouring the divine Spirit at work in all peoples, cultures and religions.... the divine Spirit [who] blows wherever it wills»[1155].

Implicit in all the arguments above is the «heuristic» importance of dialogue for the Churches of Asia, that interreligious dialogue is «more than simply a particular problem among other theological problems, because they see in dialogue with other religions something of a heuristic principle to develop a genuinely Asian theology»[1156]. In

[1153] FABC-OE, no. 39, in FAPA I, 344.

[1154] FABC-OE, no. 40, in FAPA I, 344.

[1155] FIRA I, nos. 2.3-2.4, in FAPA III, 120.

[1156] G. Evers, «The Specific Contribution of Asian Theologians», 67-68.

the First FABC Plenary Assembly of 1974, the Asian bishops spelled out the «why» of interreligious dialogue and what Christians could learn and achieve from their dialogue with members of other Asian religions:

> Only in dialogue with these religions can we discover in them the seeds of the Word of God (*Ad Gentes*, c. 1, 9). This dialogue will allow us to touch the expression and the reality of our people's deepest selves, and enable us to find authentic ways of living and expressing our own Christian faith. It will reveal to us also many riches of our own faith which we perhaps would not have perceived.... Finally, this dialogue will teach us what our faith in Christ leads us to receive from these religious traditions, and what must be purified in them, healed and made whole, in the light of God's Word[1157].

The «Briefer Statement of the Assembly» paraphrases this point, saying: «In dialogue with these religions, we will find ways of expressing our own Christian faith…. The great religious traditions can shed light on the truths of the Gospel. They can help us understand the riches of our own faith»[1158].

Indeed, because of the Asian Churches' belief in the universal saving will and love of God for all people, we believe that the God who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ has also revealed himself to our brothers and sisters of other faiths. And if God has revealed himself in the «other», that means that there is something in the «other» that we can learn about God and his mysterious ways in the world. However,

> [a]lthough Christ, for a Christian, is the greatest revelation of God's love, this does not mean that a Christian has the deepest experience of that love and the strongest response. Although the sign of God's love to a non-Christian might not be the strongest from the point of view of a Christian, still, the non-Christian might have grasped more of God's love and might have answered it in a more radical way.

[1157] FABC I, nos. 16-17, in FAPA I, 14-15.

[1158] FABC I, nos. 13-14, in FAPA I, 23; FABC I, nos. 16-17, in FAPA I, 14-15. In an alternative intercultural approach, «dialogue and collaboration with persons of other religious traditions are imperatives to learning how our Christian faith in Asia is to be expressed» (FIRA V, no. 14, in FAPA IV, 200).

> One must distinguish between Christ as objective revelation and the human experience of God's revelation and the human response to it[1159].

In dialogue, part of the surprises that Christians can experience, according to the 1992 Asian Congress on Evangelization, is the realization and the discovery of «how close to God [the members of other religions] often are and how much we can learn from them», for «[o]ften they already share the values of Christ that we strive to bear witness to»[1160]. The local Churches of Asia must engage in dialogue with other religions because God has already been revealing and communicating himself to their adherents long before Christian missionaries came on the scene. And by being attentive to the voice of God in the «religious others» and by discerning the Spirit of God speaking to the different Christian communities in and through the «others», the local Churches of Asia open themselves up to the unfolding of God's saving plan for the world and for the whole of creation[1161].

It is true that «dialogue… does not constitute the whole mission of the Church», for «it cannot simply replace proclamation but remains oriented towards proclamation in so far as the dynamic process of the Church's evangelizing mission reaches in it its climax and fullness» (DP 82; cf. RM 55)[1162]. However, while proclamation remains the culmination of evangelization, interreligious dialogue is itself evangelization whether or not it climaxes in proclamation; it is already a form and an expression of evangelization in its own right. It should, then, be given the status of being good in itself, as an expression of the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission in the continent. For Dupuis,

> [i]n fact, it is mutual evangelization in the sense that, through the dialogue, the Christian partner and the other evangelize each other, under the impulse and movement of the Spirit of God. This is because the partners, together, live—consciously on the one side,

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[1159] E. Mantovani, «The Revealing Word», 145.

[1160] FABC-OE, in FAPA IV, 277.

[1161] Cf. R. C. Mendoza, «Religious Pluralism and Turn to the Spirit», 32.

[1162] FABC-OE, no. 37, in FAPA I, 344.

> unconsciously on the other—the same mystery of Jesus Christ, which becomes active in them by the action of the Holy Spirit…. Under the influence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the partners in the interreligious dialogue are called—together and by each other—to a more profound conversion to God[1163].

For the document, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», dialogue may be considered «the meeting point of two proclamations, because the mystery which faces us is the one that is being witnessed to by the other believers»[1164].

Hence, in relation to evangelization, BIRA I speaks of dialogue as «intrinsic to the very life of the Church» and as «the essential mode of all evangelization»[1165]. BIRA III reiterates the point that «dialogue is an integral dimension of the Church's life and mission to build up a new humanity in Christ», that it is «an integral part of this mission», and that therefore «dialogue and proclamation are complementary»[1166]. According to BIRA IV/6, in the glaring context of religious pluralism in Asia, dialogue is «an urgent priority for the [Asian] Churches», which is not primarily «a matter of talking», but is, «in the first instance, an attitude, an openness to the neighbor, a sharing of spiritual resources as people stand before the great crises of life and death, as they struggle for justice and human dignity, as they yearn for peace»[1167]. Because «dialogue and mission have their own integrity and freedom» and are «distinct but not unrelated», dialogue, therefore, «is not a tool or instrument for mission and evangelization», although «it does influence the way the Church perceives and practises mission in a pluralistic world»[1168]. BIRA IV/7 affirms more the autonomy of dialogue by insisting that while «dialogue must be open to proclamation,... one does not enter into

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[1163] J. Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and the Encounter with other Religions*, 228-29.

[1164] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.7, pp. 22-23.

[1165] BIRA I, no. 8, in FAPA I, 111.

[1166] BIRA III, nos. 1, 3, 4, in FAPA I, 119.120.

[1167] BIRA IV/6, nos. 2, 3, in FAPA I, 303.

[1168] BIRA IV/6, no. 5, in FAPA I, 304.

interreligious dialogue to prepare the way for proclamation», and that «dialogue is the work of the Spirit»[1169].

In BIMA I, the participants argue that «[*r*]*eligious dialogue* is not just a substitute for or a mere preliminary to the proclamation of Christ, but should be the ideal form of evangelization», where «we seek together with our brothers and sisters that fullness of Christ which is God's plan for the whole creation… in its great and wonderful diversity»[1170]. BIMA II asserts that interreligious dialogue is «another integral part of evangelization» which must become a «primary concern» for the local Churches in Asia, «a true expression of the Church's evangelizing action in which the mystery of Jesus Christ is operative, calling us all to conversion to him who is the fullness of truth and salvation»[1171].

In interreligious dialogue, the mutual openness on the part of Christians and adherents of others faiths to the deeper truth of God who speaks to each through the «other» demands two things from both dialogue partners: being deeply and profoundly rooted in their respective faiths, and entering genuinely and reverently into the religious «universe» of the other. As regards the first, interreligious dialogue does not call for giving up, suspending, or bracketing one's faith-commitment; on the contrary, it calls for a firm and unwavering commitment to one's faith. This is because, as Cardinal Jaime Sin, then-Archbishop of Manila, in his keynote address during the Seventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/7) in 1988, affirms: «[i]n inter-religious dialogue we are dealing with ultimate commitment»: «In such dialogue the only basis on which I, as partner in dialogue, can honestly stand, is my own ultimate commitment of faith in Jesus Christ. No other position would be authentic for me, no other position would be honest»[1172]. Quoting Lesslie Newbigin, Sin writes:

[1169] BIRA IV/7, no. 13, in FAPA I, 310.

[1170] BIMA I, no. 10, in FAPA I, 94.

[1171] BIMA II, no. 14, in FAPA I, 100-101.

[1172] J. L. Sin, «Dealing With Ultimate Commitment», 70-71.

> If this argument is valid, it follows that the Christian will meet his friend and neighbor of another faith as one committed to Jesus Christ as his ultimate authority, who openly acknowledges this commitment, and seeks to understand and to enter into dialogue with his partner of other commitment on that basis[1173].

Regarding the second, dialogue requires that while adhering firmly to our own Christian faith and commitment, «we enter into the religious universe of our dialogue partner and see his or her sincere and unflinching faith-commitment»[1174]. For BIRA IV/12, «[f]eeling at home with the inner world of the other, seeing and relishing as the other feels and relishes, resonating with the awe and profound reverence with which the other experiences the sense of the divine—all this is part of preparedness for dialogue»[1175]. Indeed, engaging in dialogue with «others» is not just to learn about their religions, their creed, code and cult, their theology. Rather, it is

> to try to enter into their total world, their understanding of reality, their world-view: their total life and culture,... for a religion "is not the fabrication of priests and theologians, but the entire tradition of a people's response," shaped through their particular history, intertwined with their total culture, a cumulative unity in itself. It is this total world I must try to enter into[1176].

In trying to understand the beliefs and traditions of the «other»,

> [w]e have no right to judge the commitment of the other since faith is the expression of the encounter of the infinitely open human spirit with the unfathomable mystery of God. This is why listening attentively with our heart to the personal commitment of faith and witness of the other partner can not only facilitate dialogue, but also enrich us and make us grow in our faith, and help us to reinterpret it[1177].

[1173] Cited by J. L. Sin, «Dealing With Ultimate Commitment», 71.

[1174] BIRA IV/7, no. 11, in FAPA I, 310.

[1175] BIRA IV/12, no. 44, in FAPA I, 332.

[1176] J. L. Sin, «Dealing With Ultimate Commitment», 69.

[1177] BIRA IV/7, no. 11, in FAPA I, 310.

In genuine encounters with other believers, Christians may discover aspects of their faith that they may be unaware of, and may, in the process, be helped to live it in a fuller, more meaningful, and more faithful manner.

Indeed, even just a cursory consideration of the statements of the FABC Plenary Assemblies already reveals the paramount importance of this theme in the minds of the bishops of Asia. In fact, what the First FABC General Assembly enunciated about interreligious dialogue not only became programmatic for the Asian bishops and remained in the forefront of the FABC concerns in the subsequent decades; it also revealed how the bishops essentially view the different religions of Asia: The bishops of Asia view and accept the other religions «as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design for salvation»[1178]. The rationale for such a thematic emphasis on dialogue with other religions was re-echoed by the «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue»: «Dialogue with other religions, which are significant and positive elements in the economy of salvation, is an integral dimension of the mission of the Church, which is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus»[1179].

5.2.3 *The Role of «Silent Witness» of Christian Life and the Concept of «Conversion» in the FABC Documents*

What happens when, due to political reasons and religious situations in some or many parts of Asia, verbal proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel is not possible? How does one announce Christ and his Good News in politically dangerous and religiously pluralistic contexts of Asia? And if the «religious others» can be and are, in fact, saved in their respective religions, how does one understand the missiological concept of conversion? Is it still a theologically valid method, one that must be pursued in the praxis of dialogue? This sub-section will address these questions by examining the two related issues of «silent witness» and «conversion».

[1178] FABC I, no. 14, in FAPA I, 14.

[1179] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 2, p. 12.

5.2.3.1 The Witness of Christian Life: The Most Effective Mode of Proclaiming Jesus Christ and His Gospel in Asia

Asian bishops and theologians are profoundly aware that in Asia's multi-religious context, where Christians live among members of other religions who constitute an enormous majority, proclaiming Christ in *words* may not always be possible and suitable and may not always be the first option and the best approach[1180]. In such circumstances, the Asian Churches turn to the necessity and primacy of the silent *witness of life* to the Christian faith which, for *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, «is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one» (EN 21). One should only recall here the famous expression widely attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, which has a number of variants, but which has no published source prior to 1991: «Preach Jesus, and *if necessary* use words»[1181]. This quotation means that the proclamation of Jesus by Christians can be done even without any use of words. The participants of a 2002 symposium on «Evangelization in the Light of Ecclesia in Asia» in Thailand admit this when they affirm that

> [i]n many places in Asia we know that it is practically impossible, even forbidden, to proclaim Jesus explicitly. But we are convinced that the ways of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus are many "provided that the

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[1180] In many Asian countries, where either Islam is the state religion or governments are under communist, military or dictatorial regimes, and where basic human rights are denied and freedom of religion curtailed, the Catholic Church is not just hardly tolerated, but also even persecuted. The 2016 Eleventh FABC Plenary Assembly held in Colombo, Sri Lanka observes: «In some parts of South Asia and Southeast Asia, Christian families have fled their homes for safety, literally driven away by religious bigots and radicals. Families have been massacred. Churches have been razed to the ground. Christians live in fear, in anxiety and insecurity, under the sword of anti-Christian laws that do not welcome religious pluralism. Numerous are the cases of abducted Christian girls, forcibly converted and forced into marriage» (FABC XI, «The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy», no. 8, downloaded from http://www.fabc.org/offices/osc/docs/pdf/XI%20FABC%20PA%20Final%20Document.pdf on November 25, 2019).

[1181] Cited by C. R. Swindoll, *The Strong Family*, 9; emphasis mine.

> faith itself is respected in all its integrity in the process of appropriating and sharing it" (EA 23)[1182].

For the Filipino bishops, in Muslim areas, for example, «there is no other effective way of proposing Christ as Savior except by really living out a Christian witness of loving, serving, sharing, dialoguing, respecting—to be another Christ»[1183].

Hence, after making its own the statement of the All-Asian Conference on Evangelization held in South Korea in 1988 that «[t]he proclamation of Jesus Christ is the center and the primary element of evangelization»[1184], as quoted above, the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly held in Indonesia in 1990 spells out the distinctive Asian mode of proclamation in the present context of Asia:

> [T]he proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, *a proclamation through Christlike deeds*. For Christians in Asia, to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbors of other faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds—this is the first call to the Churches of Asia[1185].

Only when the Church «[witnesses] by its very being and deeds to the values of the Kingdom of God» will it be «credible when it proclaims with its lips that Jesus is the Savior of the world and the answer to all its longings»[1186]. The same assembly speaks of «a Church that faithfully and lovingly *witnesses* to the Risen Lord Jesus and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all»[1187]. It argues that

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[1182] FABC-OE, no. 14, in FAPA IV, 253.

[1183] Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 38.

[1184] BIMA I, no. 6, in FAPA I, 292; cited by FABC V, no. 4.1, in FAPA I, 281-282.

[1185] FABC V, no. 4.1, in FAPA I, 282.

[1186] FABC V, no. 6.6, in FAPA I, 284.

[1187] FABC V, no. 8.1.3, in FAPA I, 287-288; emphasis in the original.

> [i]f people are convinced more by witnessing than by teaching, this is most true of the peoples of Asia whose cultures hold the contemplative dimension, renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence in the highest regard. We would have a message for Asia only when our Asian sisters and brothers see in us the marks of God-realized persons[1188].

In its «Message of the Delegates», the 1979 International Congress on Mission confesses that even though many Asians have in various ways encountered Christ and the Gospel and have been attracted by them, nevertheless

> [w]ith sorrow we confess that many have not been equally drawn to the Church because so often they did not see in us, in our institutions and in our lives the image and the realization of the Good News we proclaim.... We have not spoken His Word and lived out His deeds in such a way that these are heard and seen as bearing the promises and hopes of the future of mankind[1189].

For this Congress, it is precisely this «inconsistency between word and witness» in the life of Christians that «diminishes the credibility of the message of salvation the Church proclaims in the name of Jesus»[1190].

The Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly of 2012 rightly observes that «in many places in Asia the silent witness of one's Christian life is the only way of proclaiming Jesus as the Lord and Savior», which makes profound God-experience among evangelizers «necessary and crucial»[1191]. In the context of Asia, it is precisely in the ordinariness of daily life, where interactions with and encounters among peoples of other faiths take place, that «witnessing to the Gospel»

[1188] FABC V, no. 9.2, in FAPA I, 288. The opening phrase in this quotation re-echoes Pope Paul VI's oft-cited words in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: «Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses» (EN 41)

[1189] International Congress on Mission, nos. 8-9, in FAPA I, 129.

[1190] International Congress on Mission, no. 10, in FAPA I, 146.

[1191] FABC X, no. 54, in FAPA V, 80.

becomes «foremost in the Christian mission of evangelization»[1192]. For BIMA III, while «[i]t is true that in many places Christ cannot yet be proclaimed openly by word», yet, «He can, and should be, proclaimed through other ways», one of which is «through the witness of the life of the Christian community and family, and their striving to know and live more fully the faith they profess»[1193]. For a 2002 symposium on Evangelization and *Ecclesia in Asia*, the other name for «witness of life» is «transparent discipleship», which means that «the message [of Jesus] is transparent in the messenger's life»[1194]. It refers to «the palpably God-ward life of the spiritual person that, without equivocation and conditionality, proclaims who Jesus is for the human condition», who shares with others «a profound heart-experience of who Jesus is in our personal lives», knowing that «[w]e who speak of Christ must embody in our lives the message that we proclaim»[1195]. For the Final Statement of the FABC International Theological Colloquium in 1994, «[o]nly when our words, actions, lifestyle flow from what we believe in Jesus can we invite people to "come and see". The face of Jesus will attract the people of Asia in and through the face of the Church»[1196]. BIRA IV/3 asserts that, in order for the dialogue of life to be fruitful, «we must become transparent; that is, we must be able to reveal our own faith and love in an ongoing dialogue»[1197]. Speaking of interreligious dialogue based on Jacques Dupuis' insight that «dialogue... cannot be reduced to being a means for proclamation, but must be viewed as a form of evangelization in its own right»[1198], Peter Phan holds that «[i]n certain situations it may be the only form of evangelization possible, besides personal witness to Jesus Christ as Lord in one's daily life»[1199].

[1192] FABC VIII, no. 95, in FAPA IV, 36.

[1193] BIMA III, no. 10, in FAPA I, 105.

[1194] FABC-OE, no. 17, in FAPA IV, 253.

[1195] FABC-OE, no. 17, in FAPA IV, 253-254.

[1196] FABC-TAC, no. 37, in FAPA II, 224.

[1197] BIRA IV/3, no. 8, in FAPA I, 259.

[1198] J. Dupuis, «A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*», 151.

[1199] P. C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues*, 31.

In fact, in *Ecclesia in Asia*, while John Paul II, according to Phan, «reaffirms both the necessity and primacy of proclamation», nowhere does he emphasize «the exclusive use of *words* or *doctrinal formulas* to convey the message that Jesus is the only savior of humankind»[1200]. The Pope also mentions other non-verbal «ways» and «approaches» of proclaiming the truth of the Gospel, as we see in several places in the document. In EA 23, John Paul II speaks of «Christian life as proclamation», a life «rooted in the experience of God» and marked by «prayer and contemplation», by «giving example of true communion of life and integrity of love», by «fasting and various forms of asceticism», and by «[r]enunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence». In fact, «in many places in Asia where explicit proclamation is forbidden and religious freedom is denied or systematically restricted», the Holy Father acknowledges that «*the silent witness of life* still remains the only way of proclaiming God's Kingdom» (EA 23; emphasis in the original). Quoting *Redemptoris Missio* 42, which speaks of witness as «the first form of evangelization», John Paul II admits that «in many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary» (EA 42). In EA 42, the Pope observes that «in the Asian context... people are more persuaded by holiness of life than by intellectual argument».

5.2.3.2 The Expansion of Meaning and Scope of «Conversion» in the FABC Documents

One missiological concept that has gone through an expansion of meaning and scope over the years, especially in the Asian theology of religions, is the concept of «conversion». Before the Second Vatican Council, the purpose of Christian proclamation was to «convert» non-Christians to Jesus Christ, and by logical extension, to the Catholic Church. The argument behind this mindset, as we have seen in Chapter 1 in our discussion of the *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* principle, was that unless non-Christians «convert» to Christianity and embrace the Gospel they would be damned to perdition for all eternity. However, with Vatican II's rediscovery and retrieval of God's universal and efficacious saving will for all people—that people *extra Ecclesiam* can be and are saved, in ways known to God alone—the

[1200] P. C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues*, 41; emphasis in the original.

local Churches of Asia no longer employ «conversion», understood in this narrow sense, as the main motive for the proclamation of the Gospel in Asia.

In Asian theology of religions and praxis of interreligious dialogue, conversion has assumed not only a broader meaning but also a more inclusive scope. For instance, speaking of dialogue as an integral part of the Churches' evangelizing mission, which includes, among others, dialogue and proclamation seen as complementary aspects, the Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA III) argues that «[s]incere and authentic dialogue does not have for its objective the conversion of the other», as «conversion depends solely on God's internal call and the person's free decision (cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3 and 4)»[1201]. BIRA IV/1 reiterates this argument when it says: «By itself, interreligious dialogue does not intend to convert any of the partners to the other's religion»[1202]. For the document, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», dialogue «does not aim at conversion, understood as a change of religion», but rather as «primarily a free turning of the heart to God and his kingdom in obedience to his word», which is a call addressed to all[1203]. In its document, entitled «Understanding Christian-Muslim Dialogue in South East Asia», the Fourth Faith Encounters in Social Action, held in Malaysia in 2001, similarly affirms: «Dialogue within the Church is important and it is this attitude that will lead us to respect others and to understand evangelization as a process of listening to what they are expressing in and through their lives of the goodness of the Almighty God. *It is clear that Dialogue is not for Conversion*»[1204].

The Second Formation Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs (FIRA II), held in Thailand in 1999, clarifies this point when it argues that in the process of proclaiming the Gospel, conversion, which is the

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[1201] BIRA III, nos. 2, 3, in FAPA I, 120.

[1202] BIRA IV/1, no. 11, in FAPA I, 249.

[1203] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.6, p. 22.

[1204] FEISA IV, in FAPA IV, 86. On the same page, the document laments that the immediate association of evangelization with conversion in the minds of some Christians is due to the erroneous belief that «other religions are bad or definitely inferior to ours and... must therefore be educated and converted» (*Ibid.*).

demand of the Kingdom of God, can take at least two forms. For the document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, cited by FIRA II, «conversion can be either "the humble and penitent return of the heart to God" (DP 37), or "more specifically,... a change of religious adherence, and particularly to embracing the Christian faith" (DP 11)»[1205]. However, such a conversion of one's heart to God, to Christ, and to the truth may not always be a conversion to Christianity and to the Catholic Church[1206]. BIRA II is clear about this when, after saying that «God's saving will is at work, in many different ways, in all religions» and that «God's saving grace is not limited to members of the Church, but is offered to every person», it asserts that «His [God's] grace may lead some to accept baptism and enter the Church, but it cannot be presumed that this must always be the case», for «His ways are mysterious and unfathomable, and no one can dictate the direction of His grace»[1207]. Likewise, for FIRA II, those engaged in interreligious dialogue must be «open to mutual conversion, each side aiding the other in being more faithful to the truth»[1208]. In fact, for BIRA IV/10, «the call to total conversion of heart is extended to all, irrespective of their beliefs»[1209].

5.3 **The Asian Churches in Relation to the Kingdom of God in the FABC Documents**

Among the questions raised by the third part of the «Conclusions of the Theological Consultation», organized by the Office of Evangelization of the FABC in 1991, the part which «attempt[s] to reflect theologically on the questions which arise when the Church's evangelizing mission is confronted with the Asian context» of religious pluralism, are the following: «What is the role of the Church if the Kingdom of God is present and operative beyond her boundaries? What does the mission of the Church consist in, if salvation in Jesus Christ is available to members of other religious traditions in the

[1205] FIRA II, no. 3.6, in FAPA III, 129.

[1206] FIRA II, no. 3.6, in FAPA III, 129.

[1207] BIRA II, no. 12, in FAPA I, 115; emphasis mine.

[1208] FIRA II, no. 3.6, in FAPA III, 129.

[1209] BIRA IV/10, no. 9, in FAPA I, 314.

concrete circumstances of their lives?»[1210]. In addition, how does the FABC see the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom and between the Kingdom and the Church, and thus address the issue of the thoroughgoing regnocentric dimension of its theology vis-à-vis Christ and the Church?

This section has three parts. The first part examines the reason for the FABC's unflagging concern for the Kingdom of God, which is actually the result of the Asian theology of religions' profound shift of «question» over the years, a shift of question that is indicative of the radical revision of the Asian Churches' self-understanding in relation to other religions and their adherents. The second part explores the regnocentric dimension of the FABC's theology of religions in relation to Jesus Christ and the Church and shows that in spite of the thoroughgoing concern for the Kingdom of God, regno-centrism can never be separated from Jesus Christ and from the Church. The third part deals with the place and role of the Asian Churches in relation to other religions in the multi-religious context of Asia and demonstrates how these Churches have assumed a consciously-embraced gradation of roles in connection with other religions and their followers: from being their co-pilgrims, to being their equal partners, to being their servants in a shared journey towards the Kingdom of God.

5.3.1 *The Shift of Question and the Kingdom of God in the Asian Theology of Religions*

5.3.1.1 The Shift of Question: *From* What Is Christianity's Relationship to Other Religions *To* What Is Its Place in the Pluralistic World of Asia

In Karl Rahner's 1962 essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», and in Vatican II's «Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions» (*Nostra Aetate*), the question basically has to do with Christianity's and the Church's *relation* with the other religions. In Rahner's essay, Christianity, when viewed in relation to the global map of world religions, is considered the «absolute religion», and his essay tries «to describe a few of those basic traits of a Catholic dogmatic

[1210] FABC-OE, no. 27, in FAPA I, 341.

interpretation of the non-Christian religions which may help us to come closer to a solution of the question about the Christian position in regard to the religious pluralism in the world of today»[1211]. In *Nostra Aetate*, the Church's aim is articulated clearly at the beginning of the document: «the Church examines with greater care the relation which she has to non-Christian religions» (NA 1). For Rahner, it is one of the basic insights of the Declaration, that the Church has a relationship not only with individual non-Christians but also with their religions in their concrete sociological realities and structures[1212]. According to Michael Barnes, the same may also be said, albeit implicitly, of *Lumen Gentium*: «Charged with a responsibility for the salvation of humankind, the Church is no longer set over against but *in relationship* with what may appropriately be called 'other'—the world, other Christian communities, the great world religions»[1213].

For Asian bishops and theologians, the fundamental question in the Asian theology of religions is no longer about the relationship of Christianity to other Asian religions, «but the question of the place of Christianity within the religiously pluralistic world of Asia»[1214], «the question… [of]… how the Asian Church could be at home within the diversity and plurality of the Asian milieu»[1215]. «The question has to shift», argues Felix Wilfred, «from how can Christianity relate to other religions to what is the *place* of Christianity itself in a religiously pluralistic Asian world»[1216]. In its famous document, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», the FABC-Theological Advisory Commission asserts that due to the unique contexts of Asia, considerably distinct from the situations of the last two thousand years of the Church's encounter and dialogue with various peoples, cultures and religions, «[w]e do not ask any longer about the relationship of the Church to other cultures and religions. We are

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[1211] K. Rahner, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», 117.

[1212] K. Rahner, «On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions», 289.

[1213] M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 34.

[1214] G. Evers, «The Specific Contribution of Asian Theologians», 67.

[1215] J. Y. Tan, «A New Way of Being Church in Asia», 75.

[1216] F. Wilfred, «Dialogue Gasping for Breath?», 449; emphasis in the original.

rather searching for the place and role of the Church in a religiously and culturally pluralistic world»[1217]. For Wilfred, this «shift in the location of the question»[1218], as he calls it, implies two things. First, the relationship between religions cannot be considered in the abstract or on a conceptual level but entails the context of the wider world with all its struggles, problems, hopes and expectations, what the first sentence of *Gaudium et Spes* refers to as «[t]he joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men [and women] of our time» (GS 1). In Asia, it is the world of the teeming millions of poor people who belong to diverse cultures and ancient religions, which calls for the three «dialogue-tasks» on the part of the local Churches. Second, this new location of the «question» entails that we cannot enter into dialogue with other religions if our question is Christianity-centered[1219]. The significance of this «shift» of question is that «[i]f we move from the Western location of the question, the attention will naturally centre around what Christianity can assume, adapt, etc., from other religions, which is supposed to be at once a sign of Christianity's openness and a recognition of the value of other religions»[1220]. The Indian bishops are clear on this second implication when they argue that «[r]ather than speaking, as the *Lineamenta* does, of "using" the good elements of Asian religions, we ask: "To what extent can the Church learn from and collaborate with other religions to bring about God's Kingdom and people's integral liberation»[1221].

Indeed, in their response to the unique and peculiar situations of the continent in which they live, the Asian Churches are invited to a serious and profound discernment about their presence, their role and their place in Asian societies marked by pluralism of cultures and religions[1222]. In the case of the Indian Church, Christianity, for Wilfred, does not theologize from a situation of isolation in its attempt to

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[1217] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 0.8, p. 9.

[1218] F. Wilfred, «Dialogue Gasping for Breath?», 449.

[1219] F. Wilfred, «Dialogue Gasping for Breath?», 450.

[1220] F. Wilfred, «Dialogue Gasping for Breath?», 450.

[1221] P. C. Phan, «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 20.

[1222] FABC-OE, no. 16, in FAPA I, 338.

know and understand other religions, but finds itself living alongside adherents of other faiths in a face-to-face relationship within a long history of mutuality. In this new situation, Christianity is «challenged to re-interpret and re-define its identity in an experiential and existential day to day relationship with peoples of other faiths»[1223].

5.3.1.2 «Kenotic Ecclesiology»: The Church at the Service of the Kingdom of God

In several of his writings on Asian theology of religions, Peter Phan observes that if one were to examine the relatively immense documents of the FABC and the writings of Asian theologians, one would be surprised to find a scarcity of explicit treatments of ecclesiology or the theology of the Church. «If anything, there is a conscious shying away from "churchy" themes such as papal primacy and infallibility, apostolic succession, magisterium, episcopal power, the hierarchical structure, canon law, the Roman curia, ordination of women, and the like»[1224]. While the Asian Churches consider these ecclesiological issues important, they are not accorded preeminent status in the theological conversations among Asian bishops and theologians, unlike in the West among their counterparts. For Phan, the Asian Churches' conspicuous dearth of interest in «churchy» issues, in the institutional aspects of the Church, is not the outcome of ignorance or simply dictated by practical considerations. It is rather the result of a conscious and deeply discerned effort on the part of the Asian Churches to enter into what Phan calls «ecclesiological kenosis» or «kenotic ecclesiology»[1225]—«a moving away from the church *ad intra* to the church *ad extra*, from self-preservation and self-expansion to mission and service to the world»[1226].

What does «kenotic ecclesiology» mean, and what does this ecclesiological moving away «from self-preservation and self-

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[1223] F. Wilfred, «Some Tentative Reflections», 45.44-45.

[1224] P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 307; ID., «A Prophetic Church», 192.

[1225] P. C. Phan, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism*, 132.

[1226] P. C. Phan, «A Prophetic Church», 195.194-195.

expansion to mission and service to the world» really imply in contemporary Asian Catholic theology and praxis?

We see this question addressed, explicitly or implicitly, in several documents of the FABC, in the Asian Churches' attempt to render themselves relevant and responsive to their mission in the context of the extreme poverty of the vast majority of Asians. The 1979 International Congress on Mission, for instance, insists that «[w]e must, first of all, rid ourselves more and more thoroughly of that *ecclesiocentric attitude* which puts merely institutional interests above the needs of our fellow human beings»[1227]. This is because, for the Congress, «[a]n Asian Church which is more concerned with the operation and preservation of its structures, institutions, buildings, offices and bureaucracy than with self-sacrificing love and service of the poor can never be a credible sign of Christian liberation and development»[1228]. Likewise, in the Final Statement of the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue in 1985, the assembly summons the Church to «[emerge] from self-centeredness towards a maturity that urges her to reach out to all brothers and sisters of other Christian churches, religions and peoples of good will in service and in love»[1229]. Speaking of a «liberative spirituality» for social action and involvement among the poor and by the poor of Asia, the 1986 Seventh Bishops' Institute for Social Action argues that this «spirituality must not be inward-looking but must place the Church at the service of the whole human race»[1230]. In the last in the series of BIRA IV meetings in 1991, the participants speak of the Church as a «community of dialogue» and of the «dialogical model» of the Church as in fact «a new way of being Church», a Church that is «never centered on itself but on the coming true of God's dream for the world», a Church that «seeks not to exclude others but to be truly catholic in its concerns, in its appreciation of the gifts of others, and its readiness to work with others for a world at once

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[1227] International Congress on Mission, no. 11, in FAPA I, 146.

[1228] International Congress on Mission, no. 11, in FAPA I, 146.

[1229] BIRA IV/2, no. 3, in FAPA I, 252.

[1230] BISA VII, nos. 4-5, in FAPA I, 230.

more human and more divine»[1231]. The assembly exhorts Christians to move from «a Church-centered model» to a different model, «one which is more outward-looking and dialogical», in their attempts to address more serious human problems[1232]. Furthermore, in the 1991 Theological Consultation mentioned above, the participants speak of the Church as a «servant Church»:

> In a servant Church, the structures of the Church herself are at the service of the Gospel and of the people. Church structures were developed to support the mission of the Church. The structures are for the Church, not the Church for the structures. The Gospel, not canon law, is the guide and the guard of the Church[1233].

Although Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* is addressed to the whole Church, and not to particular Churches of any continent, in this Apostolic Exhortation we can glimpse some insights that closely capture those of the FABC and thus help us deepen more our understanding of this kenotic «movement» on the part of the Asian Churches. In the Exhortation, the Holy Father argues that this ecclesial movement is «from our comfort zone... [to]... all the "peripheries" in need of the light of God», in our effort «to obey his call to go forth» (EG 20). In this movement, which Pope Francis refers to as an «ecclesial renewal» that cannot be postponed, the «Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation» (EG 27). However, that which, for me, expresses best the meaning of «kenotic ecclesiology» in the Exhortation is the Pope's description of the Church in this manner:

> I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures (EG 49).

[1231] BIRA IV/12, nos. 48-49, in FAPA I, 332-333.

[1232] BIRA IV/12, no. 53, in FAPA I, 333.

[1233] FABC-OE, no. 24, in FAPA I, 340.

In his conversation with the Union of Superiors General (USG) of Religious Men at the end of its 82nd General Assembly in 2013 in Rome, Pope Francis provides a rationale for this movement from the «center» to the «periphery»:

> I am convinced of one thing: the great changes in history were realized when reality was seen not from the center but rather from the periphery. It is a hermeneutical question: reality is understood only if it is looked at from the periphery, and not when our viewpoint is equidistant from everything[1234].

For Phan, the Asian Churches' «kenotic ecclesiology» is grounded in the conviction of Asian bishops and theologians that, at the heart of the Christian faith and mission, there lies a reality higher and broader than the Church—the Kingdom of God[1235]. In this regnocentric or Kingdom-of-God-centered ecclesiology, the Church, reminiscent of the «Copernican revolution» in the sixteenth century, moves «from the center to the periphery, from the top to the bottom», and accords to the Kingdom of God the center of the stage in the Church's life and mission[1236]. In this ecclesiology, the Church exists for the Kingdom of God, in order to serve the Kingdom of God, in order to bring about, through its institutions and ministries, the values of the Kingdom in the world. The theology behind this ecclesiological shift is not a devaluing of the role and place of the Church but a correct establishment of its ecclesial nature and purpose[1237]. Miguel Quatra explains it clearly: «In the Kingdom, in fact, the Church finds meaning and existence. The Church does not have its own reason for existing, nor does it have an autonomous intelligibility, simply because the Church is incomprehensible outside of God's universal plan of salvation»[1238].

[1234] Pope Francis, «"Wake Up the World!" Conversation with Pope Francis About the Religious Life», downloaded from https://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistryPopeFrancis/Wake_up_the_world-2.pdf on January 25, 2020.

[1235] P. C. Phan, «A Prophetic Church», 195.194-195.

[1236] P. C. Phan, «A Prophetic Church», 196.

[1237] P. C. Phan, «A Prophetic Church», 196.

[1238] M. Quatra, *At the Side of the Multitudes*, 106-107.

Indeed, instead of developing an ecclesiocentric or Church-centered ecclesiology, or of elaborating a theoretical ecclesiology, Asian bishops and theologians have fostered a regno-centric or Kingdom-of-God centered ecclesiology whose primary, if not exclusive, concern has been to articulate and implement «a new way of being Church» in Asia that is appropriate and responsive to the socio-political, economic, cultural and religious needs and contexts of the continent[1239]. While it is true that the theme of the Kingdom of God is not absent in the Second Vatican Council, especially in *Gaudium et Spes*, «nowhere in the council has it achieved the kind of theological and pastoral preeminence that it has with the FABC»[1240]. While the Western Churches have focused much of their theological attention on the institutional elements of the Church, such as the papacy or canon law, which, while legitimate, nevertheless run the risk of ecclesiastical self-absorption, no document of the FABC and of its different offices has done the same[1241].

5.3.2 *The Kingdom of God in Relation to Jesus Christ and the Church in the FABC Documents*

In no. 32 of the 1991 «Conclusions of the Theological Consultation» of the FABC-Office of Evangelization, the document cites *Redemptoris Missio* 18, something that we have already seen in the previous chapter, which states that «while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both».

Beyond any doubt, the Synoptic Gospels reveal the centrality of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' consciousness and ministry; it is for Jesus «of paramount and irreplaceable priority»[1242]. It is the core of Jesus' preaching. In Mark 1:15, Jesus proclaims: «The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news». Conversion, through repentance and faith, is the precondition for entering the Kingdom of God. Likewise, in

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[1239] P. C. Phan, «Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II», 307.

[1240] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 37.

[1241] P. C. Phan, «"Reception" or "Subversion" of Vatican II», 37.

[1242] FABC X, no. 46, in FAPA V, 75.

Luke 4:44, Jesus responds to those who want to prevent him from leaving Capernaum so that he may continue healing their sick: «I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose». In this Lucan text, Jesus came to the world precisely to proclaim the Kingdom of God. In the words of John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, «the proclamation and establishment of God's kingdom are the purposes of his [Jesus'] mission» (RM 13).

However, the Kingdom of God is not just the kernel of Jesus' preaching, healing ministry, and table-fellowship; Jesus himself, in his very person, is in fact the personification of the Kingdom of God, of the Kingdom that he proclaims through words and deeds. In Luke 4:21, he boldly tells his synagogue audience: «Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing». Jesus' proclamation of the nearness of God's Kingdom and the signs of its arrival in his person and public ministry are, in the words of the Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly of 2012, «both promise and fulfillment»: «He [Jesus] promises God's justice and truth, God's peace and love—the restoration of universal harmony long craved for by a broken world.... He begins to fulfill the promise of God's Reign through his own example, his parables and miraculous deeds»[1243]. In and through Jesus, the people feel the anticipative presence of the Kingdom of God and its in-breaking in the world and in history; in and through him, «[t]he power of the Kingdom is irrupting into our space and time, forgiving, making whole, and restoring life»[1244]. Jesus' healing ministry and exorcisms «were signs that, indeed, the power of God's reign had irrupted in his own humanity into our space and time»[1245].

The Christocentric dimension of the Kingdom of God, its relation to Christ, is brought up in several FABC documents. In BIRA IV/10 (1988), the assembly affirms the inseparable link between the Kingdom of God and Christ when it says that «the Kingdom of God is the core of Christ's proclamation», and that «[t]hrough Christ and

[1243] FABC X, no. 44, in FAPA V, 73.

[1244] FABC X, no. 45, in FAPA V, 73.

[1245] FABC-OE, no. 2, in FAPA IV, 250.

in Christ the Kingdom of God has come and is now progressing to its fulfillment»[1246]. In the words of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly (1995), «[i]n Jesus the Reign of God began»[1247]. For the participants of BIRA IV/11 (1988), Christians experience the «grand design of God for universal harmony... in the person, life and teaching of Jesus Christ» whose «proclamation of the Reign of God embodies God's plan in creation», which is «the gathering of all peoples and nations into one family as brothers and sisters under the fatherhood of God»[1248]. Thus, for the Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly (2012), «the spirituality of the new evangelizer does not separate Jesus from the Kingdom, nor detach the values of the Kingdom from the Person of Jesus. To focus on the Kingdom of God is to commit oneself to Jesus and His vision of a new humanity patterned after Him»[1249]. This is because, as Peter Phan argues, «the Kingdom of God is professed to be "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2Pt. 1:11), and to proclaim the Kingdom of God is necessarily to proclaim the Christ-event. The two proclamations, which throw light on each other, cannot be separated»[1250]. Indeed, while the Kingdom of God remains an eschatological reality which will be consummated completely and perfectly only in the end-time, in Jesus Christ, in his teaching and healing ministry, and most especially in his death and resurrection, the Kingdom of God has already become a present reality.

For the Theological Consultation, organized by the FABC-Office of Evangelization in 1991, a year after the publication of *Redemptoris Missio*, «[t]he paschal mystery in which the Christ-event culminates… ushers in the renewal of creation and marks the decisive step in the establishment by God of his Kingdom on earth»[1251]. Therefore:

> Seen in this manner, a "regnocentric" approach to mission theology does not in any way threaten the Christo-centric perspective of our

[1246] BIRA IV/10, nos. 6, 8, in FAPA I, 314.

[1247] FABC IV, no. 4.8.8, in FAPA I, 197.

[1248] BIRA IV/11, no. 9, in FAPA I, 319.

[1249] FABC X, no. 3, in FAPA V, 44.

[1250] P. C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues*, 38.

[1251] FABC-OE, no. 28, in FAPA I, 341.

> faith. On the contrary, "regno-centrism" calls for "christo-centrism", and vice versa, for it is in Jesus Christ and through the Christ-event that God has established his Kingdom upon the earth and in human history[1252].

The intimate link between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God is such that, for the Consultation, «[t]o be at the service of the Kingdom means for the Church to announce Jesus Christ»[1253].

Likewise, for *Redemptoris Missio*, as cited by the Theological Consultation, the Kingdom of God cannot be detached from the Church. The Encyclical argues that while the Church and the Kingdom of God are not identical, there exists an intrinsic relationship between them. In *Lumen Gentium* 5, alluded to by the Encyclical, Vatican II speaks of the Church as receiving «the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom». In *Gaudium et Spes* 45, the Council speaks of the Church as having just «one sole purpose—that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race may be accomplished». *Redemptoris Missio* partly alludes to the first conciliar insight, which is also referred to by the Consultation, when the Encyclical affirms that «the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered toward the kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument» (RM 18). The nature of the Church—both as «Body» of Christ endowed «with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation», and as «Temple» animated, sanctified, guided and constantly renewed by the Holy Spirit—bestows on her «a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role» (RM 18)[1254]. This explains «the Church's special connection with the kingdom of God and of Christ, which she has "the mission of announcing and inaugurating among all peoples"» (RM 18).

[1252] FABC-OE, no. 30, in FAPA I, 342.

[1253] FABC-OE, no. 33, in FAPA I, 342.

[1254] Cf. FABC-OE, no. 32, in FAPA I, 342.

The ecclesiocentric dimension of the Kingdom of God, its relation to the Church, is scattered in many documents of the FABC. BIRA IV/1 (1984) acknowledges, with good reason, the need for a «*[c]larification* of the basic concepts related to the mission of the Church, the relationship of the Church to the Kingdom, the local churches, the concept of mission and evangelization both in themselves and as applied to the concrete Asian situation»[1255]. The clarification desired by BIRA IV/1 especially in terms of the «relationship of the Church to the Kingdom» is supplied by the next BIRA meeting, BIRA IV/2 (1985), which, by reflecting on the theme, «The Church at the Service of God's Reign», already gives away the answer, clarifies «the idea of the Kingdom of God and the role of the Church in it»[1256]. In the second part of the document, the assembly explains the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God:

> the Reign of God is the very reason for the being of the Church. The Church exists in and for the Kingdom.... [T]he Church is an instrument for the actualization of the Kingdom... [which]... approaches the reality of the Kingdom... [when]... she empties herself and dies like her Master (Phil 2:7)... so that she may rise to a new life[1257].

BIRA IV/6 (1987) returns to and deepens the insights of BIRA IV/2 about the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom: «God's recreating activity is prior to and more comprehensive than the Church's mission, and it directs our attention beyond the Church to the Kingdom»[1258]. It affirms that «[i]n humanity's shared pilgrimage» with «neighbors of other religious traditions», considered as «our fellow pilgrims on the way», «the Church is called to be an effective sign and symbol of the Kingdom of God»[1259].

The Church, whose self-identity is simply to prolong Jesus' mission in the world, exists because of Jesus; it has no other mission

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[1255] BIRA IV/1, no. 9, in FAPA I, 248.

[1256] BIRA IV/2, no. 2, in FAPA I, 251.

[1257] BIRA IV/2, nos. 8.1-8.2, in FAPA I, 252.

[1258] BIRA IV/6, no. 5, in FAPA I, 304.

[1259] BIRA IV/6, no. 6, in FAPA I, 304.

apart from the mission that Jesus received from God[1260]. And if Jesus' primary mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, therefore the Church exists for the Kingdom of God. Indeed, while the Church cannot be identified with the Kingdom of God, she is related to it as its sacrament, as its instrument, and as its servant. For the 1991 Theological Consultation, which speaks of the Kingdom of God as beyond the Church, «[t]he Kingdom of God is… universally present and at work. Whenever men and women open themselves to the transcendent divine mystery which impinges upon them and go out of themselves in love and service to fellow humans, there the Reign of God is at work»[1261]. It is a re-echo of what BIRA IV affirmed in 1985: «Where God is accepted, where gospel values are lived, where man is respected… there is the Kingdom»[1262]. This means that the Kingdom of God «is a universal reality, extending far beyond the boundaries of the Church. It is the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, in which Christians and others share together. It is the fundamental "mystery of unity" which unites us more deeply than differences in religious allegiance are able to keep us apart»[1263]. In the multi-religious setting of Asia, «[t]he Church experiences its mission as an element of God's own, which is both broader and deeper»[1264].

For the Consultation, the Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God because she is the sacrament of Jesus Christ «who is the mystery of salvation, to whom she is called to bear witness and whom she is called to announce»[1265]. The document returns to *Redemptoris Missio* when it argues that for this task of proclaiming

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[1260] In relation to salvation, the document, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», issued by the FABC-Theological Advisory Commission in 1992, articulates explicitly the Church's dependence on Christ: «The Church is the sacrament of salvation. It is, however, in Christ and only in Christ, that it is a sign and instrument of salvation» (FABC-TAC, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», 111).

[1261] FABC-OE, no. 29, in FAPA I, 341.

[1262] BIRA IV, no. 2, in FAPA I, 252.

[1263] FABC-OE, no. 30, in FAPA I, 342.

[1264] M. Amaladoss, «Mission in Asia», 225-226.

[1265] FABC-OE, no. 33, in FAPA I, 342.

Christ and his Gospel, the Spirit has endowed the Church with manifold gifts and charisms, endowments which make the Kingdom of God «sacramentally present in the Church in a special manner»[1266], «the seed, sign and instrument» of the Kingdom of God to which she is ordered (RM 18). The Church, therefore, in its commitment to the Gospel of God's Kingdom, «should acknowledge the same Kingdom at work in socio-political situations and in cultural and religious traditions and enter into dialogue with them»[1267].

In the words of the FABC-Theological Advisory Commission's 1992 document, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», «[t]he Church is not an end in itself, but is a community which realizes itself in the measure that it puts itself concretely at the service of the Kingdom in different historical situations»[1268]. It is «a community of persons existing not for themselves but for a transcendent purpose; it is, to put it bluntly, a means to an end»[1269]. In this universal presence and reality of the Kingdom of God, the Church has a unique place and an indispensable role to perform. The 1987 FABC's «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue» asserts that

> the focus of the Church's mission of evangelization is building up the Kingdom of God and building up the Church to be at the service of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is therefore wider than the Church. The Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom, making it visible, ordained to it, promoting it, but not equating itself with it[1270].

The Church is built up, its structures extended and developed, its mission widened, so that it may serve the Kingdom of God more faithfully and efficaciously. In the socio-economic, cultural and religious context of Asia, the local Churches «are called to promote the Kingdom of God and to make it present in Asia»[1271].

[1266] FABC-OE, no. 33, in FAPA I, 342.

[1267] FABC-OE, no. 39, in FAPA I, 344.

[1268] FABC-TAC, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», 111.

[1269] P. C. Phan, «A Prophetic Church», 197.

[1270] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.3, p. 21.

[1271] BISCOM V, in FAPA IV, 244.

If it is true, as we have seen in the previous chapter, that *Dominus Iesus*' strong criticism against regno-centrism is addressed to Asian bishops and theologians who have espoused a regnocentric approach to Asian theology of religions, alleging that such an emphasis could empty the intimate connection between Christ, the Kingdom, and the Church (cf. DI 18), this brief but substantial survey of some of the earliest and most important reflections of the FABC on this particular theme does not substantiate such an allegation. For Asian Catholic theology there is an essential link not only between Jesus and the Church, and Jesus and the Kingdom of God, but also between the Church and the Kingdom of God. Nowhere has the FABC detached the Kingdom of God either from Christ or from the Church. In fact, in speaking about the essential relationship between the Kingdom of God and Christ and the Kingdom of God and the Church, the 1991 Theological Consultation has amply quoted John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*. Jacques Dupuis, in his 1992 article, «FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission in Asia», thus, concludes that the documents of the FABC, particularly the Theological Consultation, dealing with the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the Church, are «in substantial agreement with the papal encyclical»[1272]. In the Kingdom of God perspective, which has received increased focus and emphasis in recent years in the FABC documents, we simply find a broadening and deepening of the thrust of the FABC theology of mission[1273].

5.3.3 *The Asian Churches as Co-Pilgrims, Partners, and Servants of Asian Religions in Humanity's Common Pilgrimage Towards the Kingdom of God*

5.3.3.1 Christians, Adherents of Other Religions, and People of Goodwill Journeying Together Towards the Kingdom of God

The FABC, in its various assemblies and meetings, has responded to the question about Christianity's place and role in the religiously pluralistic world of Asia by appealing to the concept, theme and

[1272] J. Dupuis, «FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission», 468.

[1273] J. Dupuis, «FABC Focus on the Church's Evangelising Mission», 468.

image of the Kingdom of God, arguing that the Asian Churches' task in the multi-religious context of the continent is to journey together with members of other faiths and with people of goodwill in a common pilgrimage towards God's Kingdom. The image of the Church as a «pilgrim» Church is actually not new; Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, in Chapter 7, already speaks of the Church as «the pilgrim church», which is the title of the chapter. The FABC, in many of its documents, has also used this concept in referring to the Church in history. What is new in the FABC theology of religions, according to Michael Amaladoss, is «the description of other religions as co-pilgrims»[1274] in the one pilgrimage towards the Kingdom.

For the FABC, Christians, adherents of other religions, and people of goodwill are co-pilgrims and fellow wayfarers in a common journey towards the Kingdom of God. In a statement which conveys the «inclusiveness» of this pilgrimage, the First Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs in 1998 argues: «In this pilgrimage all peoples are caught up: we, Christians, as well as Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Taoists, Sikhs, etc., those who seek meaning in life, those who search for truth»[1275]. The Asia-wide Symposium on «Evangelization in the Light of Ecclesia in Asia» in 2002, likewise, asserts in a succinct way: «We are all co-pilgrims to the reign of God»[1276]. And in their «Message of X FABC Plenary Assembly» in 2012, the Asian bishops declare that «everyone in Asia is a partner and co-pilgrim in the journey to God's Reign,… [and]… the fields of mission are grounds of the mysterious presence and action of God's Spirit»[1277]. John Paul II, in his visit to India in 2000 for the promulgation of *Ecclesia in Asia*, articulates this sense of being a «fellow-traveller» in this pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God. Speaking before the representatives of different religious traditions in New Delhi's *Vigyan Bhavan*, the Pope says: «I come among you as a

[1274] M. Amaladoss, «The FABC's Theology of Religions», 61.

[1275] FIRA I, no. 2.5, in FAPA III, 120.

[1276] FABC-OE, no. 13, in FAPA IV, 252.

[1277] FABC X, no. 6, in FAPA V, 45.

pilgrim of peace and as a fellow-traveller on the road that leads to the complete fulfillment of the deepest human longings»[1278].

However, the followers of other religions carry out this spiritual journey, this «humanity's shared pilgrimage»[1279], towards God's Kingdom, not as individuals *apart from* their religions but *precisely* as members of their respective religions. As we have seen especially in Chapter 2, which deals with Rahner's theology, human beings actualize and thematize their religious life precisely *in* and *through* and not *apart from* or *outside of* the religions that are offered to them by society in the concrete circumstances of their life. Jacques Dupuis reiterates this point, saying that «the personal religious life of the followers of other traditions cannot in fact be separated from the religious tradition to which they belong and by means of which they give concrete expression to their religious life»[1280]. In this common pilgrimage, «[w]e take up this mission not alone, but with our peoples of Asia themselves, *the various faiths and cultures*, their enduring values that come from the Spirit and Word breathed and spoken from the beginning of time»[1281]. Indeed, Asian Christians share the local Churches' mission of promoting the Kingdom of God and its values not only with *adherents* of various religions but also with *religious traditions* themselves. In this shared journey towards the Kingdom, Christians are just «a little flock in Asia», are but «one community among a vast multitude journeying to full life»[1282].

For Amaladoss, this perspective, in which «[t]he Church does not see itself as the fullness of God's self-revelation…. relativizes the Church in some way and suggests that the Church is still growing towards the Kingdom and that, in the process, it can also learn from others who are marching along towards the same goal»[1283]. This

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[1278] John Paul II, «The Interreligious Meeting», 884.

[1279] BIRA IV/6, no. 6, in FAPA I, 304.

[1280] J. Dupuis, «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», 128.

[1281] FABC-TAC, no. 61, in FAPA II, 228; emphasis mine. Cf. FABC-TAC, no. 4.11.6, in FAPA II, 285.

[1282] FABC-TAC, no. 24, in FAPA II, 221.

[1283] M. Amaladoss, «The FABC's Theology of Religions», 61.

status of the Church in pilgrimage confers upon her an incomplete and relative character: «the pilgrim church, in its sacraments and institutions, which belong to this present age, carries the mark of this world which will pass, and she herself takes her place among the creatures which groan and travail yet and await the revelation of the sons of God (cf. Rom. 8:19-22)» (LG 48).

The question is: How do the different religions of the world and their adherents become part of what the FABC calls a «common pilgrimage» towards an all-embracing reality called the «Kingdom of God» when most of these «religious others» do not ever want to be identified with anything «Christian» and when they do not have this category of the Kingdom of God in their respective religions?[1284] The insights of the «Conclusions of the Theological Consultation» and of the document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, both published in 1991, provide the answer. For the Theological Consultation, there is such a thing as an implicit response to God's grace, so that «[w]henever men and women open themselves to the transcendent divine mystery which impinges upon them and go out of themselves in love and service of fellow humans, there the reign of God is at work»[1285]. For *Dialogue and Proclamation*, it is precisely when members of various religions put into practice what is good and noble in their own religions and obey the dictates of their conscience that they respond positively to God's invitation and find salvation in Jesus Christ, even if they do not acknowledge Christ as Savior the way Christians do (DP 29). It is for these reasons that adherents of other religions «become sharers

[1284] As regards the absence of this category in their religious vocabulary, «[c]ommon religious terminology must [indeed] be sought» in the course of interreligious dialogue «so that no group need feel constrained to express themselves in concepts alien to their own religious experience» (BIRA V/5, no. 11, in FAPA II, 170). In a statement that reveals the necessity and the genuine desire of the Asian Churches to look for appropriate terminologies that will regulate interreligious dialogue among believers, the Second Formation Institute for Inter-Religious Affairs argues that «in articulating our faith in Christ, we look for *words* and ways which would deeply insert us into the spiritual pilgrimage of our sisters and brothers of other religions» (FIRA II, no. 3.2, in FAPA III, 127; emphasis mine).

[1285] FABC-OE, no. 29, in FAPA I, 341.

of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ unknowingly»[1286], that they become, in Rahner's language, «anonymous Christians». Dupuis, who was the «ghost writer» of *Dialogue and Proclamation*, re-echoes this point: «While the believers of other religious faiths perceive God's call through their own tradition, and respond to it in the sincere practice of this tradition, they become in all truth—even without being formally conscious of it—active members of the Kingdom»[1287]. It is precisely in their participation in God's saving design for the whole of humanity, rooted in God's universal saving will for all, that they become members of the Kingdom of God present in history.

For the FABC, it is precisely through interreligious dialogue that Asians are called to promote the Kingdom of God and its values. In Asia, where the focus is not on the Church but on the Kingdom of God, «dialogue is seen as an element in the common pilgrimage of all the peoples towards the Kingdom»[1288]. For the Indian bishops, «[w]e as Church enter into this mystery by dialogue through sharing and listening to the Spirit in others», in such a way that «[d]ialogue… becomes an experience of God's Kingdom»[1289]. And «[t]here is perhaps nothing which provides interreligious dialogue with such a deep theological basis, and such true motivation», according to Dupuis, «as the conviction that in spite of the differences by which they are distinguished, the members of different religious traditions, co-members of the Kingdom of God in history, are travelling together towards the fullness of the Reign, towards the new humanity willed by God for the end of time»[1290].

It is within this context of the common pilgrimage towards the Kingdom that we discover the dialectical relationship, the «tension» between the «already» and the «not yet», which must remain, in the reality of the Church's evangelizing mission, between dialogue and proclamation.

[1286] FABC-OE, no. 29, in FAPA I, 341-342.

[1287] J. Dupuis, «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», 127.

[1288] M. Amaladoss, «Dialogue Between Religions in Asia Today», 52.

[1289] P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 21.

[1290] J. Dupuis, «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», 130.

Insofar as the Church remains on her pilgrimage, together with the "others," towards the fullness of the Kingdom, she engages with them in dialogue; insofar as she is the sacrament of the reality of the Kingdom already present and operative in history, she proclaims to them Jesus Christ in whom the Kingdom of God has been established[1291].

The necessity to enter into dialogue with others «flows from the nature of the Church, a community in pilgrimage journeying with peoples of other faiths towards the Kingdom that is to come», where interreligious dialogue is seen as «an ongoing process of common search for mutual understanding and trust, leading us and our fellow pilgrims towards a deeper understanding of truth—the truth about God and the human person»[1292].

However, in order that we may walk alongside each other collaboratively and peacefully as co-pilgrims in this common journey, we, Christians, «need to abandon our self-image as sole possessors

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[1291] J. Dupuis, «A Theological Commentary: *Dialogue and Proclamation*», 155. The tension between the «not yet» and the «already» as basis of the correlation and interconnectedness between dialogue and proclamation is also articulated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India in its 1989 document, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*: «There is a tension in the Church, and in every Christian, between the two activities [dialogue and proclamation]. This tension has to be lived through life itself and…. is a tension that corresponds to the tension between the two poles of the Church's existence: "not yet" and "already." Ours is a pilgrim Church, on the way to the Father and therefore imperfect; "not yet." At the same time, she is somehow an anticipation "already" now of the eschatological renewal by the power of the Spirit (LG 48). In the former aspect of her existence it is always her duty, as it is that of all other groups and of every person, to seek from within human community an understanding and the accomplishment of God's design for humanity. This is the basis of our dialogue. On the other hand, as an anticipation of the eschatological renewal of all things and as the sign of God's Kingdom, it would be the Church's duty to invite people to conversion through the proclamation of the eschatological event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a proclamation done with the authority of the Risen Lord who lives in her (Mt 28:18-20) (AG 9) (DP 36)» (CBCI-Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, 40-41).

[1292] BIRA IV/4, no. 2, in FAPA I, 300; FABC-OE, no. 47, in FAPA I, 345.

of the Kingdom»[1293]. The Church may be the instrument of the Kingdom, but «[i]t is not the only instrument of the Kingdom»; rather, «it serves and promotes the Kingdom together with all the other children of the Kingdom»[1294]. And even though the Kingdom of God is already a present reality and is «continually being realized, and made present through the Holy Spirit», its «final manifestation and full perfection» will be in the consummation of time[1295]. The abandonment of such a mentality entails that we share with believers of other faiths the riches and specific elements of Christian religion in humility, that we repudiate the attitude of exclusivity and absolutization and refrain from any divisive theological assertion, since «conflicts are more likely to arise when a group insists on being the best, for example, the best culture or the best religion»[1296]. Even if we are deeply convinced that Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior of the world, we must make our profession of faith always in humility, knowing that such a claim encounters similar claims made by other believers for their savior figures. «When various religious groups lay claim to truth, aggressive militancy and divisive proselytism follow and, in their wake, bitter religious divisions»[1297].

While we believe that in Jesus Christ God has decisively and definitively entered into the world, our faith in Christ is nevertheless not a judgment on other religious traditions and their members. Hence, «[w]hile sharing our experience of Christ with others we must be careful to avoid using exclusive language or to make normative claims»[1298]. Indeed, in our efforts to articulate and share our Christ-experience with others in this common pilgrimage towards the Kingdom, articulation and sharing that can assume verbal and symbolic forms, «we should avoid all sorts of exclusivistic claims and cultural superiority, both of which would betray the message

[1293] BIRA IV/10, no. 9, in FAPA I, 314.

[1294] FABC-TAC, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», 111.

[1295] BIRA IV/2, no. 8.1, in FAPA I, 252.

[1296] FIRA III, no. 4.4, in FAPA III, 136-137.

[1297] BIRA IV/4, no. 4, in FAPA I, 300; cf. FIRA II, no. 3.4, in FAPA III, 128; cf. FIRA III, no. 4.4, in FAPA III, 136-137.

[1298] FIRA IV, no. 16, in FAPA III, 143.

of the Divine kenosis», believing that «[o]nly an ego-emptying, and consequently powerless, Christian community has the credibility to proclaim the folly of the message of the cross»[1299]. Consequently, while exploring some theological questions and issues which remain ambiguous, such as the Church's teachings on salvation, mission, conversion, and the «truth» found in other religions, the Third Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs organized in 2000 declares: «We are inclined to place less emphasis on doctrines and theologies and more emphasis on emulating Jesus as our model of dialogue, compassion and understanding»[1300].

5.3.3.2 Asian Churches as Partners of Other Religions in the Joint Pilgrimage Towards the Kingdom of God in Mutual Sharing, Learning and Growth

Not only are our brothers and sisters of other faiths considered co-pilgrims, co-journeyers, fellow wayfarers in this common pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God; in this shared journey through interreligious dialogue, they are also regarded as «equal partners» who are in fact summoned to enrich the pilgrimage by sharing and contributing from the riches of their own values, histories and cultures[1301]. In interreligious dialogue, «[r]eligious groups must meet as *equal partners*, with no single group controlling or determining the course of the encounter»[1302]. For the Fifth FABC Plenary

[1299] FEISA I, no. 7.4.2, in FAPA II, 61.

[1300] FIRA III, no. 4.4, in FAPA III, 136.

[1301] BIRA I, no. 12, in FAPA I, 111. While this part of the section is devoted to the mutual learning and reciprocal enrichment that ensue from the dialogical encounters between Christians and adherents of other major religions, the FABC also affirms that Christians can learn from their dialogue with members of primal religions. In its 1997 document, the FABC-Office of Theological Concerns asserts: «Christians are not only called to evangelize indigenous peoples but must be evangelized by them and learn from them new insights in areas such as ecology, community life and the celebration of life's joys and tragedies. Since much of the indigenous people's world view and ethos is compatible with Christian faith, traditional beliefs, rites, myths and symbols of indigenous peoples provide material for developing indigenous theologies and liturgical ceremonies» (FABC-OTC, no. 1.4.3, in FAPA III, 261).

[1302] BIRA V/5, no. 11, in FAPA II, 170; emphasis mine.

Assembly held in 1990, Christians must collaborate and «must live in *companionship*, as true *partners* with all Asians as they pray, work, struggle and suffer for a better human life, and as they search for the meaning of human life and progress»[1303]. The participants of the 1992 Asian Congress on Evangelization confess that «God in his mercy chose us to belong to Christ not only so that we might be blessed in him but that we might reach out and share him and all his blessings with all of our brothers and sisters in Asia who journey with us as *partners* in the same human pilgrimage to the Father»[1304].

As partners in this common pilgrimage, Christians and adherents of other religions must not only teach each other but must also learn from each other. In fact, as early as in their Asian Bishops' Meeting in 1970, the bishops of Asia already pledge themselves to an open, sincere, and sustained dialogue with the adherents of other living religions of Asia, «that *we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually* and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development»[1305]. In the 1977 «Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church», the participants affirm that the Church can «enrich its own Christian identity and life by

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[1303] FABC V, no. 6.2, in FAPA I, 283; emphasis in the original.

[1304] Asian Congress on Evangelization, in FAPA IV, 277; emphasis mine.

[1305] Asian Bishops' Meeting, no. 12, in FAPA I, 9; emphasis mine. In a lecture on «Non-Christian Religions and Christianity» given at the International Theological Conference in Nagpur, India in 1971, Yves Congar, who partly comments on Karl Rahner and his theory of the «anonymous Christian», argues: «There exist everywhere values which can be integrated into Christianity.... It is a question of the capacity which Christianity holds from Christ and from the Holy Spirit of assuming the plenitude of man, who has not ceased and does not cease to discover and develop values.... *These values can enrich Christianity as it exists and advances in history*» (Y. Congar, «Non-Christian Religions and Christianity», 136-137; emphasis mine). For Congar, this is because «[t]he non-Christian religions have incorporated in the course of centuries a mass of meditation, of lights, of spiritual experience, of prayer and of fidelity.... *They have something to say to us.* Nothing prevents us from recognizing the fruit of the graces of God and of the illuminations of this Spirit in what they propose of positive and true.... *The Council recognized that the Church can receive from the world (Gaudium et Spes, n. 44). All that involves, for missionary activity, a duty of listening, of study and of dialogue in humility and patience*» (*Ibid*., 138-139; emphasis mine).

opening itself to the great religious traditions of Asia in interreligious dialogue», and point out how both Catholics and our neighbors from other faiths can «practise religion and promote moral and religious values in a way that will contribute to the total development of our peoples»[1306]. The Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs in 1979 hopes that in interreligious dialogue, both a Christian and his Muslim brother «will turn anew to God's Kingdom, *their own faiths richer by their mutual interchange, their mission to the world more fruitful by their shared insights and commitments*»[1307].

In a 1983 «Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia», after acknowledging that every Muslim is «a fellow pilgrim on the path to God», the participants affirm that the goal of interreligious dialogue is «an enrichment which enables both participants to purify and deepen their respective faith commitments and thus become open to ever more abundant movements of God's grace»[1308]. The 1985 Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue considers the «different beliefs and persuasions» of followers of other religions, in which «we find the values of the Kingdom—deep religiosity, prayer and contemplation»,

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[1306] FABC, no. 12, in FAPA I, 69.

[1307] BIRA II, no. 13, in FAPA I, 115; emphasis mine.

[1308] FABC-OE, nos. 15-16, in FAPA I, 168. For Peter Phan, «interreligious dialogue can also be a moment of mutual evangelization in the sense that not only the Christian partners in dialogue share their ideas and values with adherents of other religions but also the latter can challenge the former to purify and correct their own beliefs and values as well as enrich them with beliefs and values that may not be present in Christianity, at least not to the extent in which they are found in other religions» (P. C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues*, 31). In fact, both documents, *Dialogue and Mission and Dialogue and Proclamation*, understand interreligious dialogue as «directed at *mutual* understanding and enrichment» (DM 3; DP 9; emphasis mine). Part of this process of enrichment, according to the Indonesian bishops, is that «[f]rom [the other religions] the Church may learn how the quest for the Divine is expressed through a wealth of symbols and has its positive impact on moral behavior in daily life» (Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 26). On the part of the Japanese bishops, they lament that they «have a greater sense of the sacred, which manifests itself in symbols that Christians unconsciously tend to distrust» (Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 34).

as «sources of our own enrichment»[1309]. The Sixth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue held in 1987 affirms that the reciprocal relationship between Christians and adherents of other faiths «becomes a process of mutual learning and growth», a process of «mutual criticism and enrichment among all those who bring a religious perspective to the human quest»[1310]. And this mutual enrichment can take place only if participants in interreligious dialogue not only will witness to their faith and will «[share] insights from their faith» but also «will be attentive to the insights of sisters and brothers of other religious traditions»[1311]. It is therefore imperative that in our dialogue with our neighbors of other faiths, «[w]e turn... not only to our Christian resources, but also [to those] of other faiths, so that we might achieve mutual enrichment»[1312]. In fact, our «common journey» towards the Kingdom is «to be founded on the profound spiritual traditions of our people and deeply embedded in their cultures and ways of life»[1313]. Indeed, in interreligious dialogue, mutual enrichment takes place: Christians enrich others with the Gospel values, and find themselves enriched by the spiritual treasures of their brothers and sisters of other faiths. It is not a one-way process, but a two-way exercise, in which both partners receive and give, learn and teach, for their mutual growth.

Indeed, as the Fifth Formation Institute for Interreligious Affairs in 2004 affirms, while various religions journey together on a shared pilgrimage towards a common end goal which is the Kingdom of God, «[t]hese religions enrich the Church as much as the Church enriches them»[1314]. If it is in the response of the «religious others» to the elements of grace present and operative in their religions that they become members of the Kingdom of God and find salvation, then «[i]t follows that the religious traditions contribute, in a mysterious way,

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[1309] BIRA IV/2, no. 3, in FAPA I, 252.

[1310] BIRA IV/6, nos. 3, 6, in FAPA I, 304.

[1311] BIRA IV/6, no. 6, in FAPA I, 304.

[1312] BIRA IV/10, no. 5, in FAPA I, 314.

[1313] FABC-OHD, in FAPA IV, 82.

[1314] FIRA V, no. 9, in FAPA IV, 199.

to the building up of the Reign of God among their followers and in the world»[1315]. If interreligious dialogue is «an abiding and genuine search for goodness, beauty, and truth following the beckoning of the Spirit who leads us into all truth (Jn 16:13)», the reciprocal learning and the mutual enrichment that take place in dialogue as members of various religions journey together towards God's Kingdom can only happen «on the conviction that no one person has the monopoly of… [as just cited]… goodness, beauty, and truth… [and]… the beckoning of the Spirit who leads us into all truth (Jn 16:13)»[1316].

> While serving the peoples of Asia, the Church is aware that it does not have the monopoly of Christ's Spirit. This Spirit breathes where he wills. Thus, the Church is bidden by its Lord to be willing to collaborate with all human beings and communities for the sake of the full human development, the liberation and unity of all peoples and all nations[1317].

Indeed, in the documents of the FABC, dialogue has been «a characteristic mode of the Church's life in Asia», where «[a]ll those involved... regard each other as partners and companions.... givers and receivers, speakers and listeners, teachers and learners... [a]ll are transformed as they all discover their unique identities in their interaction with the other»[1318].

A couple of important observations can be pointed out here in relation to the discussion above. First, the FABC, in its various documents, has consistently affirmed that through interreligious dialogue both partners can enrich each other spiritually, and that the beliefs and convictions of other faiths can particularly become

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[1315] J. Dupuis, «The Church, the Reign of God, and the "Others"», 128.

[1316] BIRA IV/7, no. 14, in FAPA I, 310.

[1317] FABC-TAC, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», 127.

[1318] L-A. Tagle, «The Mission of the Church in Asia», 120. For the 1979 International Congress on Mission, «[r]eceptivity, the readiness and the humility to listen and to learn must characterize the basic attitude of the Christian missionary in Asia. Christians are there to receive as well as to teach. Mission is sharing. Mission is dialogue: a dialogue not only of ideas, words and theologies but also (and much more so) of life, experience and values» (International Congress on Mission, no. 3, in FAPA I, 144).

sources of profound religious and spiritual enrichment on the part of Christians. If this is so, that means that Christianity is not a self-contained religious narrative, totally sufficient in itself, but a narrative that grows in dialogue with other religious narratives. In dialogue with members of other faiths, Christians can grow in their knowledge of God and his will through their encounter with the «face» of God revealed in the «other», through their experience of God who also reveals himself to others outside Christianity. For Dermot Lane, this should lead us to the awareness that «Christianity was never intended to be a closed, introverted and self-sufficient, all-embracing meta-narrative»[1319], that «[t]he Christian narrative is always an unfinished narrative and will remain incomplete "until He comes again"»[1320].

The second observation has to do with the implications when Asia, with its various cultures and ancient religions, finally embraces Jesus Christ and his Gospel, and what it means for Christianity in general. The late Cardinal Jaime Sin, Archbishop of Manila, in his keynote address[1321] delivered at the Seventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue in 1988, cited Bishop Fulton Sheen who, some decades ago, reflected on the discovery of the Asian face of Christ. In the citation, Fulton Sheen observes:

> Christ is not western. He was born in the East. When finally the East does recognize Him, it will manifest a side of Him which the western world has not yet understood. There is a principle in philosophy that goes: "whatever is received is received according to the manner of the one receiving it." For example, water poured into a blue glass looks blue; poured into red glass looks red, but in both instances it is water. So, too, the Word made flesh, received in the beauty of the incarnation, but poured into the mold of eastern civilization, it will manifest attributes which the western world has not yet perceived[1322].

Commenting on these words of Fulton Sheen, Cardinal Sin argues that while Jesus Christ is «the same yesterday and today and

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[1319] D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 163.

[1320] D. A. Lane, «Pneumatology in the Service of Ecumenism», 157.

[1321] Cf. J. L. Sin, «Dealing With Ultimate Commitment», 65-76.

[1322] Cited by J. L. Sin, «Dealing With Ultimate Commitment», 73.

for ever» (Heb. 13:8), the entire history of the Church, however, reveals to us how the Church has grown in her knowledge of Christ through the different testimonies of individuals and people who, in various times and places, have contemplated the mystery of Christ with different eyes and from different contexts. The four Evangelists contemplate the same Jesus, yet the figure of Jesus in Matthew's gospel reveals different facets from the Jesus of Mark, Luke or John. What makes the various Religious Orders and Congregations that emerged in the Church truly an enrichment to the whole Church in terms of her knowledge of the mystery of Jesus is that the person of Jesus, viewed through the eyes and heart of St. Francis of Assisi, is not entirely the same as the image of Jesus that St. Ignatius of Loyola, or other Founders, saw. Even the images of Christ developed in Latin America, where the local Churches have struggled to make sense of the liberating message of the Gospel in the midst of the dehumanizing condition of the poor, are different from those of affluent Europe where people's existential conditions and theological questions are different.

The same can be said of Asia, of the local Churches of Asia. As the Asian Churches take seriously the challenge of the great religions of the continent and enter into dialogue with them with greater depth and seriousness, we shall grasp more and more the inexhaustible reality of Jesus[1323]. Christianity in Asia will have a different «face», an «Asian face», which will serve as an enrichment to the whole Church, «[f]or the Universal Church is a communion of local Churches, each rooted in a particular place, culture and tradition, but open to all the others, united to them in the faith and contributing to the whole its special gifts»[1324]. How the universal Church is enriched by this process is expressed aptly by the Indian bishops:

> In sincere dialogue with other cultures and religions, the Churches in Asia have a priceless contribution to make to the life of the communion of Churches and to the universal culture around the world. One has only to think of how much the community of

[1323] J. L. Sin, «Dealing With Ultimate Commitment», 74.

[1324] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 7.3, p. 24.

> nations can learn from Tribal religions and values, starting with their reverence for nature and the environment. We have also learned much from our brothers and sisters of other religions about growth in prayer life, asceticism and spirituality[1325].

And this is what «catholicity» means: peoples and nations from all over the world bringing together not only the unique gifts and riches of their cultures and traditions, but also their distinct knowledge and experiences of Jesus.

5.3.3.3 Asian Churches as Servants of Other Religions in the Common Pilgrimage Towards the Kingdom of God

The Asian Churches, however, go even beyond the idea that Christians and followers of other Asian religions journey together towards the Kingdom of God as «true» and «equal» partners. In this pilgrimage, the Asian Churches are not just pilgrim Churches journeying towards the Kingdom of God, but are also servant Churches, at the service of the followers of other religions, of all Asians in fact. For the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue held in 1985, it is «in the spirit of humble servanthood» that the Church must dedicate herself to the mission of «building community among its own members, as well as with mankind», and thus promote the Kingdom of God, as the Church is «a servant of all in God's reign»[1326].

According to the Final Statement of the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly convened in 1990,

> it is as *servants of the Lord* and of *humanity* that we Christians share the same journey with all the Asian peoples. The Church was not sent to observe but to serve—to serve the Asian peoples in their quest for God and for a better human life; to serve Asia under the leading of the Spirit of Christ and in the manner of Christ himself who did not come to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for all (Mk 10:45)—and to discern, in dialogue with Asian peoples

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[1325] Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 21.

[1326] BIRA IV/2, nos. 8.3, 12.2, in FAPA I, 253.254.

> and Asian realities, what deeds the Lord wills to be done so that all humankind may be gathered together in harmony as his family[1327].

It is this servant image of Jesus, in whom we see the face of a God who serves and suffers especially for the poor and the powerless, that speaks more profoundly and convincingly to the people of Asia[1328].

The FABC-Office of Evangelization, in its 1991 Theological Consultation, speaking of how the local Churches should be in the multi-religious context of Asia, states that as a pilgrim Church journeying towards the Kingdom, the Church of Asia is «a servant Church: servant of God, servant of Christ, servant of his plan of salvation; *servant also of the Asian peoples, of their deep hopes, longings and aspirations; servants of the followers of other religions*, of all women and men, simply and totally for others»[1329]. In this journey, «[s]he does not place herself at the center»; «she is not centered on herself but on Christ» and the Kingdom that Christ proclaimed[1330]. As servant Churches, the Asian Churches do not insist upon their rights and privileges, but simply offer their services to the adherents of other religions in the spirit of *kenosis*. In this common pilgrimage with all the peoples of Asia, the Asian Churches place their structures and institutions at the disposal of their mission—that of proclaiming the Kingdom of God, which is «the only goal of Christian mission»[1331].

In a 1994 International Theological Colloquium of the FABC, the Final Statement affirms that this pilgrimage demands the stripping and dismantling not only of all triumphalism in the Church but also of all clericalism, domination, discrimination and exclusivism that may have been built into its structures and institutions, because «the Kingdom of God is greater than ourselves», and «urges us to glory only in being the *humble servant* of the Kingdom, since apart from it

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[1327] FABC V, no. 6.3, in FAPA I, 283; emphasis in the original.

[1328] FIRA IV, no. 16, in FAPA III, 143.

[1329] FABC-OE, no. 23, in FAPA I, 340; emphasis mine.

[1330] FABC-OE, no. 25, in FAPA I, 340.

[1331] P. C. Phan, *The Asian Synod*, «Preface», xi; cf. FABC-OE, no. 23, in FAPA I, 340.

we lose the meaningfulness of our community»[1332]. Indeed, the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission in the continent must be carried out in humility, love and service, with the local Churches as humble servants.

For the Filipino bishops, «in the social context of the great majority of Asian peoples, even more use should be made of the model of the Church as servant, a co-pilgrim in the journey to the Kingdom of God where fullness of life is given as a gift»[1333]. And the ultimate reason why it must be so is that this mission belongs to God and we merely participate in it, and that in this mission we are dealing with «God's Kingdom, whose completion He alone can bring about»[1334]. For the Tenth FABC General Assembly held in 2012, in this pilgrimage, in which the Church announces «the Reign of God and the Good News of Jesus, the one Lord and Savior, the Church has to be a humble servant»[1335]. This assembly envisions a Church that is «a *humble servant of the peoples of Asia*, accompanying them to the Kingdom of God»[1336].

Archbishop Orlando Quevedo, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines at the time of the Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly in 2000, underlined, and summed up, these three aspects of the Asian Churches' identity in relation to other Asians and their religions—as co-pilgrims, equal partners, and servants—when he said:

> To evangelize, the church cannot be uninvolved in the joys and sorrows of Asian peoples.... She has to be a humble *companion* and *partner* of all Asians in the common quest for God, in the struggle for justice and harmony, for a better human life. The church has to

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[1332] FABC, nos. 39, 44, in FAPA II, 224.225; emphasis mine.

[1333] P. C. Phan, «Responses to the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 39.

[1334] BIRA IV/2, no. 15, in FAPA I, 255.

[1335] FABC X, no. 7, in FAPA V, 52.

[1336] FABC X, in FAPA V, 54; emphasis in the original.

be a lowly *servant* of the Lord and Asian peoples in the journey to God's Kingdom[1337].

5.4 **Conclusion**

At the heart of this chapter, which indirectly deals with how the Asian Churches tackle the situation of *impasse* in the Asian theology of religions, lies the fundamental question—expressed generally as «[h]ow to remain faithfully rooted in... [our]... own Christian vision of a time-honoured truth and yet become open to and respectful of those committed to sometimes very different beliefs and values?»[1338] This chapter has shown that, for the Asian bishops and theologians, old categories that have dominated the Catholic theological horizon for decades in the local Churches' evangelizing mission are no longer adequate to address the unique and difficult situations of the Churches of Asia. Hence, there is a need to look not only for new categories but also for new methodologies that respond appropriately to the ecclesiological demands of the continent. For Dermot Lane, «[q]uestions about Christian identity in the presence of other religions will not be resolved merely by reaffirming the christological tradition, nor will progress be made by ignoring that particular tradition. Instead account must be taken of the new historic context in which these questions arise»[1339].

This chapter examined two essential aspects of the Asian theology of religions, as articulated in the copious documents of the FABC: the ticklish issue of the relationship between proclamation and interreligious dialogue in the one evangelizing mission of the local Churches of Asia, and the delicate question of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God and between the

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[1337] Cited by T. C. Fox, «True to their Mission, Polite toward Rome», 290; emphasis mine. The FABC's insight on the Asian Churches as «servants» taps the potential of Avery Dulles' 5th model of the Church, «servant», in a context that speaks of these Churches as «servants»—servants of all the peoples of Asia (Cf. A. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Chap. VI, «The Church as Servant», 81-94).

[1338] M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 3.

[1339] D. A. Lane, «Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions», 153.

Church and the Kingdom of God in connection with the FABC's thoroughgoing regno-centric dimension of its theology.

As regards the first aspect, we showed that in spite of the Asian Churches' urgent and necessary involvement in interreligious dialogue, in the triple dialogue for that matter, the FABC has always remained deeply rooted in their faith-conviction that Jesus Christ is the universal Savior, and therefore the fulfillment of the Asian people's deepest hopes and dreams, longings and aspirations in life. Hence, the FABC has always maintained the primacy and centrality of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel to the Asian people and of opening the doors of the Churches of Asia to those who find salvation in Christ and wish to belong to his Church.

With regard to the second aspect, we indicated that the Asian theology of religions may be characterized by an unflagging concern for the Kingdom of God, yet the Kingdom of God perspective can never be separated from Jesus Christ and the primacy and centrality of the proclamation of his Gospel in Asia. Indeed, as a version of theocentrism, FABC's regnocentrism is not at odds with traditional Christocentrism. Similarly, the Kingdom of God cannot be detached from the Church. If the Church is the sacrament of Christ, and if Christ not only proclaimed the Kingdom of God by his words and deeds but was in himself the personification of the Kingdom, then the Church is also the sacrament of the Kingdom. However, in the Asian theology and praxis characterized by «kenotic ecclesiology», the Kingdom of God, and not the Church, occupies the center of Christian life and mission, and it is in fact the Kingdom of God that determines the shape and mission of the Church. In this «paradigm shift» which places the Kingdom of God rather than the Church at the center of Christian life and mission, the Church's manifold activities and ministries are only means to the Church's missionary and pastoral end, which is the proclamation and establishment of God's Kingdom.

Therefore, it can be said that in spite of its repeated declarations on the necessity and urgency of interreligious dialogue in the multi-religious milieu of Asia and of its emphasis on the Kingdom

of God perspective in its theology and praxis, the FABC has consistently affirmed and maintained the primacy and centrality of the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the role of the Asian Churches in the preaching of the Gospel. Likewise, when Asian bishops deal with the state of *impasse* in the continent, they just go over their previous documents and not only find in those documents insights and reflections that constitute their appropriate responses to ecclesial issues and missiological problems but also realize more deeply that they have been consistently arguing those insights for years and decades.

CHAPTER VI

Karl Rahner's Concept of God as Mystery «Encountered Ultimately Only in Love»: Its Meaning and Implications in the Asian Theology of Religions

6.1 **Introduction**

Chapter 5 has examined the essential elements of the FABC's theology of religions in its attempt to address the situation of *impasse* in Asia, narrowing down the treatment, however, to a couple of crucial and related issues which, aside from the question of the salvific character of other religions, also emerged in the discussion of *Ecclesia in Asia* and *Dominus Iesus* in Chapter 4. These two issues are the place of dialogue and proclamation in the Asian Churches' one evangelizing mission and the question of the Christocentric and ecclesiological dimensions of the Asian Churches' regnocentric approach to mission. The fundamental question that Chapter 6 wishes to respond to is: Given the glaring contexts of Asia as home to the world's major religions, all of which speak of God as incomprehensible mystery, and as a continent of massive poverty, with a vast concentration of what Pope Francis calls «society's most neglected members» (EG 186)—the poor, is there something in Karl Rahner's theology that we can employ that may help us address further the situation of *impasse* in Asia?

In trying to answer this question, we explore the meaning and implications of George Greiner's observation that Rahner's drawing power lies in «his recurring appeal to the radical incomprehensibility of God, who is encountered ultimately only in love»[1340]. In particularly affirming the concept of God as mystery as precisely one of the reasons for Rahner's broad appeal, Greiner has also alluded to another important aspect of Rahner's theology—that this God, who is unfathomable mystery, is encountered ultimately only in love. In Chapter 6, we will attempt «to draw from within Rahner's own writings»[1341] insights dealing particularly with God as mystery and with the unity of love of God and love of neighbor which may prove helpful in our effort to move forward in the praxis of interreligious dialogue in Asia. These two foundational themes of Rahner's theology, which are intimately connected to each other, respond to the question: If God is mysterious and incomprehensible, whose «first commandment» in the Bible is for us to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (cf. Mark 12:28-30), how do we precisely approach, love and worship him? Because in these themes we are dealing with concepts that are particularly relevant to Asia, a deepening of them within the context of the continent may provide a way of addressing the situation of *impasse* by offering the Asian Churches some modest proposals on how they can carry out their evangelizing mission within the circumstances of religious pluralism and massive poverty in the continent.

In investigating these two foundational aspects of Rahner's theology, we will «highlight what», in the words of Michael Paul Gallagher, «seems permanently valuable in [Rahner's] work»[1342]. If most of his theological investigations on innumerable issues were responses to urgent questions and pressing issues across an immense range of interests in theology, Rahner could not possibly write on questions and issues that were not yet the theological concerns of the

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[1340] G. E. Greiner, «Rahner and the Pacific Rim», 58.

[1341] D. Marmion, «Some Aspects of the Theological Legacy of Karl Rahner», 10; ID., «Theology, Spirituality, and the Role of Experience», 65.

[1342] M-P. Gallagher, «Karl Rahner: the magnetism of mystery», 37.

day. Rahner—and it is true with any other theologian—who lived only up to the middle of the 1980s, could not possibly foresee complex developments in so many fields of contemporary theology. Yet, he has some significant things to say about how we can move forward in the future in relation to some critical aspects in the theology of religions especially in the context of Asia. For Todd Johanson, «the mystery of God's gracious, self-communicative, self-giving, universal love» is precisely a «key concept» that we can develop further from Rahner's theology «in moving toward a more open, pluralistic inclusivism in Catholic theology of religions»[1343].

Grounded in two of Rahner's foundational themes, this chapter, with two sections, reflects on the meaning and implications of these themes vis-à-vis the Asian Churches' theology of religions and praxis of interreligious dialogue. The first section, with two parts, explores the incomprehensible mystery of God and what this truth means and implies for Christians who are engaged in interreligious dialogue in Asia. The first part tackles Rahner's two basic, inseparable assertions about God: that God is absolute mystery who, in spite of his radical nearness to humanity in his self-communication in Jesus Christ, has remained an unfathomable mystery. Because mystery is an essential feature of God's being, the human person's experience of God as infinite mystery abides not only in his pilgrim state but also even in the beatific vision. The second part deals with how the ultimate unknowability of God as the proper object of theology demands greater modesty and humility in all theological discourse in the context of Asia, and how the FABC explores the Asian approach to the Divine Mystery through symbolic theology.

The second section, also with two parts, meditates on the universal language of love and its profound implications for the praxis of interreligious dialogue in Asia. The first part probes Rahner's insight on the radical unity of love of God and love of neighbor, and how a shift of focus from an epistemology of correct knowledge of God to a praxis of love may be undertaken in order to achieve a way through the *impasse* created by competing truth-claims in theology of religions and

[1343] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity», 285-286.

in interreligious dialogue. The second part examines the implications of the intimate unity between these two loves in the context of the poverty and destitution of Asia's teeming millions, and how the Asian Churches fulfill Jesus' command to love our neighbors precisely in our preferential love and option for the poor who comprise a bewildering majority in the continent.

6.2 **Karl Rahner's Concept of God as «Holy Mystery» and Its Implications for the Theology of Religions and the Praxis of Interreligious Dialogue in Asia**

In his essay on Karl Rahner, Declan Marmion speaks of «the God of incomprehensible mystery, who cannot be explained with rationalistic clarity», as «a central tenet of Rahner's theology», and concludes that «Rahner's lifelong testimony to the mystery of God as integral to the Christian tradition is probably the greatest achievement of this 'unsystematic' theologian»[1344]. For Peter Phan, no theologian of the last century has so repeatedly, almost obsessively, insisted upon the mystery and incomprehensibility of God as did Karl Rahner[1345]. To recognize that God is mystery means that we can never know God as God is *in himself*, and that we can never fully understand God's ways in the world—ways that in themselves share in the divine character as mystery, since «[w]herever such a free self-disclosure of God reveals something which is and remains a mystery in virtue of God's own inner nature, a quality of mystery is evidently attached to these decisions because of their content»[1346]. Such a recognition means that there are areas about the question of God and religions that are beyond human understanding and comprehension, which, therefore, demands an approach to the question of God and his dealings with the world in the Asian context not only with profound reverence but also with theological modesty and doctrinal humility.

[1344] D. Marmion, «Some Aspects of the Theological Legacy of Karl Rahner», 22. For J. A. DiNoia, «[t]he absence of system in Rahner's theological program finds its final explanation in the nature of mystery» (J. A. DiNoia, «Karl Rahner», 202).

[1345] P. C. Phan, «Are There Other 'Saviors' for Other Peoples?», 172.

[1346] K. Rahner, «The Hiddenness of God», 230.

6.2.1 *Karl Rahner's Notion of God as «Holy Mystery» and Radical Incomprehensibility*

6.2.1.1 Karl Rahner's Twofold Inseparable Assertion About God: God as Mystery and Jesus Christ as God's Absolute Self-communication to Humanity

When interviewed by *America*—an interview that appeared in the magazine's March 10, 1979 issue—and asked what he himself would consider the center of his theology, Karl Rahner replied that it «can't be anything else but *God as mystery* and Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen One, as the historical event in which this God turns irreversibly toward us in self-communication»[1347]. For Rahner, the absolute climax of God's self-communication, its unsurpassable high point, took place when God became human and dwelt among us in Jesus Christ, since in the Incarnation of the Logos, «what is expressed and communicated...[is]... God himself»[1348]. Hence, the core of the Christian message is «the confession that the actual self-communication of the infinite God, transcending all creaturely reality and any finite divine gift, is given in Jesus and in him alone, and is promised, offered, and guaranteed to us through him»[1349]. With a touch of poetry, Rahner, in his 1958 essay, «On the Theology of the Incarnation», writes:

> But when the longing for the absolute nearness of God… looks for *where* this nearness came… then no resting place can be found except in Jesus of Nazareth, over whom the star of God stands, before whom alone one has the courage to bend the knee and weeping happily to pray: And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us[1350].

In the Christ-event, «God's unsurpassable self-communication to all men has reached its fullness and is historically tangible in an irrevocable way»; in his Paschal Mystery, «the living God has spoken

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[1347] K. Rahner, «Living Into Mystery», 180; ID., «Karl Rahner at 75 Years of Age», in H. Biallowons – H. Egan – P. Imhof, eds. *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 196.

[1348] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 174.

[1349] K. Rahner, «Experiences of a Catholic Theologian», 301.

[1350] K. Rahner, «On the Theology of the Incarnation», 120.

to him [man] the final, decisive, comprehensive and irrevocable word»[1351].

Yet, in spite of his absolute and radical nearness to humanity in his unique self-communication in Christ, God has remained a mystery of infinite and unfathomable depth, an utterly incomprehensible God. Claude Geffré, speaking of the implication of God remaining an absolute mystery in spite of his radical self-communication in Jesus, says that while «God is indeed identified in Jesus.... this identification itself [nevertheless] sends us back to the inaccessible mystery of God who eludes all identification»[1352]. For Rahner, God's total self-communication in Christ «does not cancel out or deny what was said… about the presence of God as absolute mystery which is essentially incomprehensible»; in fact, «[t]he immediacy of God in his self-communication is precisely the revelation of God *as* the absolute mystery which remains as such»[1353]. The reason for this is that «[t]his real self-communication (as an event which simultaneously makes itself known) necessarily shares in the character of incomprehensibility which belongs to God», since «he communicates himself, not something finite and other than himself»[1354].

According to Rahner, despite the complex appearance of its theology, Christianity actually says something quite simple: that while the infinite, incomprehensible and ineffable God communicates himself in absolute self-bestowal to the human subject in its experience of its own finiteness, this great Mystery «remains eternally a mystery»[1355]. For Rahner, «God communicates himself in his own person to the creature, as the absolute proximity and as the absolute holy mystery»[1356], a mystery that is therefore both radically *intimate* and infinitely *unknowable* to us. God's nearness in his divine self-gift to the human subject is so radical that Rahner, with an obvious trace of an Augustinian influence, could say: «You are the inmost center

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[1351] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 202.227.

[1352] C. Geffré, «From the Theology of Religious Pluralism», 53.

[1353] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 119.120.

[1354] K. Rahner, «Mystery», 135.

[1355] K. Rahner, «Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today», 6.

[1356] K. Rahner, «The Concept of Mystery», 67.

of my heart, closer to me than I am to myself»[1357]. Indeed, «'God has given himself to man in direct proximity': perhaps the essence of Christianity can be reduced to this formula»[1358]. In the presence of this mystery, the human subject experiences God as «both revealed and concealed», since it is «a mystery which constantly reveals itself and at the same time conceals itself»[1359].

Rahner elaborates this argument in his other writings. In his essay, entitled «The Hiddenness of God»—originally a contribution to the *Festschrift* in 1974 for Yves Congar's sixtieth birthday—Rahner understands God's «mystery» in relation to the divine incomprehensibility, which «follows from the essential infinity of God which makes it impossible for a finite created intellect to exhaust the possibilities of knowledge and truth contained in this absolute fullness of being»[1360]. This is because, for Rahner, mystery «is of itself no merely provisional element of obscurity in a reality or proposition, to be dissipated in time, but always and essentially determinative of the necessary relationship intervening between the created spirit and God»[1361]. In other words, «[t]his orientation towards mystery is not a mere residue of what for the moment is not yet known, nor is it something which is found side by side with what is clearly known and with what can be clearly investigated»[1362]. God is so radically different, so wholly *other*, so absolutely transcendent that to the limited, finite, created human intellect God remains a mystery.

[1357] K. Rahner, *Encounters with Silence*, 9.

[1358] K. Rahner, «Anonymous Christians», 394.

[1359] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 34.42.

[1360] K. Rahner, «The Hiddenness of God», 229.

[1361] K. Rahner, «The Concept of Mystery», 49. «[A] mystery is not something still undisclosed, which is a second element along with what is grasped and understood. This would be to confuse mystery with the still undiscovered unknown. Mystery on the contrary is the impenetrable which is already present and does not need to be fetched: it is not a second element unmastered only provisionally.... Mystery is... not something provisional which is one day to be done away with or which could in fact be non-mysterious» (K. Rahner, «On the Theology of the Incarnation», 108).

[1362] K. Rahner, «Mystery», 135.

6.2.1.2 God's Abiding Mystery in Grace and in the Beatific Vision

For Rahner, God's attribute of mystery is permanent, and not transitory or provisional. God's mystery «is the propriety which always and necessarily characterizes God—and through him, us—so much so, that the immediate vision of God which is promised to us as our fulfillment, is the immediacy of the incomprehensible»[1363]. The incomprehensibility of God, which we encounter both in our pilgrim state and in the beatific vision, is not merely one of God's attributes among many others, considered as a «marginal negative phenomenon», but the «attribute of attributes», the «starting point always and everywhere determining the understanding of [God's] nature and its peculiar and unique character»[1364]. God's incomprehensibility is «one of the essential predicates which characterizes God as God in contradistinction to everything else»; and «[b]ecause of what God is, it is evident that his incomprehensibility essentially belongs to him and is not something which ceases with the beatific vision»[1365]. Indeed, the characteristic of holy mystery does not belong accidentally to God like a qualification that can be readily attributed to any other reality. For Rahner, «[w]e only grasp what is meant by God when the attribute of holy mystery is seen to belong to God solely and primarily, according to which he is there as the Whither of transcendence», for «[h]e would not be God if he ceased to be this holy mystery»[1366].

Rahner, therefore, reminds us of the constant «danger of regarding God's mystery as something that will be overcome, at least in the beatific vision, instead of as precisely what will endure and will constitute our perfect happiness when we are immediately united to God in ecstatic love»[1367]. God's incomprehensibility is something that persists in the immediate vision of God; «it is not merely something

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[1363] K. Rahner, «On the Theology of the Incarnation», 108.

[1364] K. Rahner, «The Concept of Mystery», 55; ID., «The Human Question of Meaning», 92.

[1365] K. Rahner, «Mystery», 133-134.

[1366] K. Rahner, «The Concept of Mystery», 54.

[1367] K. Rahner, «Mystery», 134.

peculiar to the knowledge of God in the pilgrim's earthly life, but also determines our relationship to God in its eternal consummation»[1368]. Far from being the disclosure of something previously concealed, divine revelation, for Rahner, «means that the 'deus absconditus' becomes radically present as the abiding mystery» which «continues in the direct presence of God afforded by what we call the beatific vision and can only be sustained in the loving surrender to the enduring mystery»[1369]. Simply speaking, God's mystery does not cease and disappear in man's beatific vision, because this aspect belongs intrinsically to his being. God is mystery in essence.

Grounding his argument in Thomas Aquinas' teaching, Rahner maintains that the disparity between the infinite being of God and the finite intellect of the human is so great that even in the beatific vision, the immediate vision of God in heaven, to which we look forward in the afterlife, God cannot be totally known and comprehended. Indeed, even when we are supposed to be seeing God face-to-face in the beatific vision, God will remain a holy mystery to us because the «abyss» between *Creator* and *creature* will never disappear and will never be bridged even in heaven.

> Man can never entirely or exhaustively grasp God.... In comparison with this paradigm of knowledge, human perception of God on earth and even in the state of final fulfillment remains deficient. God is, unfortunately, always incomprehensible, however much a man may know of him and however directly he may perceive him in heavenly beatitude[1370].

In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner reasserts this point:

> *Even in grace and in the immediate vision of God, God remains God*, that is, the first and the ultimate measure which can be measured by nothing else. *He remains the mystery*... the absolutely nameless and ineffable One who can never be comprehended, and hence *not through his self-communication in grace and immediate vision either*[1371].

[1368] K. Rahner, «The Human Question of Meaning», 91-92.

[1369] K. Rahner, «The Hiddenness of God», 238.

[1370] K. Rahner, «The Hiddenness of God», 231.

[1371] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 119-120; emphasis mine.

Thus, both in grace and in the beatific vision, the human person experiences God as near and close but always in such a way that God, as incomprehensible mystery, does not cease being mysterious and incomprehensible. Grace, as God's radical proximity in the innermost depth of the spiritual subject, «does not imply the promise and the beginning of the elimination of the mystery, but the radical possibility of the absolute proximity of the mystery, which is not eliminated by its proximity, but really presented as mystery»[1372]. While there is an immediate sight of God in heaven, for Rahner, God nevertheless remains incomprehensible in the beatific vision. «[G]race and vision do not remove the mystery»; on the contrary, «it is in the immediate present vision of God that the incomprehensible mystery of God is most forcibly evident»[1373]. In a succinct way, Rahner states this: «God remains incomprehensible even in the beatific vision»[1374].

Speaking of the elusiveness of the knowledge of God, Rahner, in his 1979 interview with Leo O'Donovan, ends the interview affirming that «[t]he true system of thought really is the knowledge that humanity is finally directed precisely not toward what it can control in knowledge but toward the absolute mystery as such», towards «the system of what cannot be systematized»; that «mystery is not just an unfortunate remainder of what is not yet known but rather the blessed goal of knowledge which comes to itself when it is with the incomprehensible One»[1375]. This «Holy Mystery», which the human spirit anticipates but never grasps, «encounters man in silence, encounters him as the absolute and the incomprehensible, as the term of his transcendence which cannot really be incorporated into any system of coordinates»; this Absolute Being whom Rahner calls Mystery «never becomes subject to man» and «can never be incorporated

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[1372] K. Rahner, «The Concept of Mystery», 55.

[1373] K. Rahner, «The Concept of Mystery», 61. «[T]he more intimately God dwells in the creature, the more he reveals himself as Mystery» (J. O'Donnell, «The Mystery of Faith in the Theology of Karl Rahner», 306).

[1374] K. Rahner, «The Hiddenness of God», 230. For Rahner, «classical theology holds firm to God's incomprehensibility even in the beatific vision» (K. Rahner, «The Concept of Mystery», 72).

[1375] K. Rahner, «Living Into Mystery», 180.

into a human system of coordinates of either knowledge or freedom»[1376]. Hence, for Rahner, the statement of God as mystery

> bids us see all paths as leading to where there are no paths, to ground all reasons where there is no ground, to understand all proofs as pointing to the incomprehensible, and never to think that we can establish once and for all some point around which we could organize an absolute system of coordinates which incorporates everything[1377].

6.2.2 *The Implications of Karl Rahner's Idea of God as «Holy Mystery» in the Religiously Pluralistic Context of Asia*

6.2.2.1 The Ultimate Unknowability of God as Theology's Formal Object: A Call for Greater Modesty and Humility in All Theological Discourse

What are the implications of Karl Rahner's assertion that both in our pilgrim state and in the beatific vision God will essentially and abidingly remain a mystery and will therefore always elude total comprehension?

While calling theology the «'science' of mystery», Rahner argues that

> [i]t must understand itself not as that science which develops itself more and more in a systematic drawing of distinctions down to the last possible detail, but rather as that human activity in which man, even at the level of conscious thought, relates the multiplicity of the realities, experiences, and ideas in his life to that mystery, ineffable and obscure, which we call God[1378].

According to Declan Marmion, re-echoing Rahner's core ideas on the subject, in view of the disparity between God, the proper object of theology, and the language theology employs in order to speak about God, one cannot absolutize dogmatic statements in their reference to God. There will always be a gap, a distance, and necessarily so,

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[1376] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 21.120.

[1377] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 125.

[1378] K. Rahner, «Reflections on Methodology in Theology», 102.

between God and the theological language that we employ in our attempt to articulate our human knowledge and experience of God because of God's ineffable nature and the finite and limited capacity of the human mind for knowing and understanding. In relation to the «reality» of which they speak, dogmatic statements may possess abiding validity in themselves; however, they are by their very nature only partial articulations of this «reality», something that points beyond themselves to the «reality» that is God. Consequently, all faith-formulations are ultimately relativized in the face of God who is absolute mystery and essential incomprehensibility, since all theological reflections commence and terminate in God as their origin and goal[1379]. For Paul Murray, «[i]t is a traditional principle that all theological understanding is inadequate—no matter how valuable—relative to the final unknowability of its formal object, God, whose infinite richness permanently exceeds the grasp of the finite mind»[1380]. Therefore, «if theological understanding is not to fall into idolatry it should be held permanently open to this *more* in the recognition that what we presently know will inevitably require expansion and rethinking»[1381].

What Rahner's concept of God as absolute mystery implies for theology and its practitioners is very clear. A true and honest theologian is someone who, in spite of his extensive and solid theological footing, confesses his immense ignorance in many areas about God in this enterprise we call theology. He admits that he will never come closer to pinning everything down, and consequently to take others on a theological «tour» from knowing very little to knowing a lot. For mystery is not something like a riddle which, with a bit more time, research and information, can be solved, or an aspect of knowledge which remains obscure only in a pilgrim mode of existence, but which will disappear completely in the beatific

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[1379] D. Marmion, «Some Aspects of the Theological Legacy of Karl Rahner», 8.19; cf. K. Rahner, «Reflections on Methodology in Theology», 68-114.

[1380] P. D. Murray, «The Lasting Significance of Karl Rahner», 21.

[1381] P. D. Murray, «The Lasting Significance of Karl Rahner», 22.21-22.

vision, but something that is permanently ungraspable, beyond utter comprehension.

As we have seen in Chapter 3, Rahner, in an interview, warns that «[a] theology that wishes to answer all questions clearly and thoroughly is guaranteed to miss its proper 'object'»[1382]—for in theology, we are dealing with God's incomprehensible mystery which can never be explained and comprehended with logical coherence. Cited by Rahner, Thomas Aquinas himself reminds us that «[m]an's utmost knowledge of God is to know that we do not know him»[1383]. Rahner's discourse on mystery, for Karen Kilby, «is... intended to stop short any tendency we may have to imagine that 'God' is an easy word to understand, just another concept that we can pin down, one thing among many others that we can talk about with equal facility»[1384]. For Rahner, a theology that does not recognize this dimension of mystery is bound to fail in its goal, for mystery is not «a regrettable imperfection in theology, but rather that which is most proper to it of its very nature»[1385].

If God remains a mystery in our pilgrim state, and remains incomprehensible to us even in the beatific vision, and if theology, as Walter Kasper describes it, is «accountable speech (logos) about God (theos)»[1386], then there is always a tentative quality to our theological speech. Theology is substantially an analogical language, what Rahner himself calls «analogous language about God»[1387]; God-talk is essentially analogical in nature. For Rahner, «[a]ll theological statements... are analogical statements»[1388]. According to Declan Marmion and Gesa Thiessen, Rahner assigns the «pride of place» to what he calls «the analogical nature of all theological assertions», since he «always favored an apophatic way of speaking about

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[1382] K. Rahner, «Why Doing Theology Is So Difficult», in H. Biallowons – H. D. Egan – P. Imhof, eds., *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 216.

[1383] Cited by K. Rahner, «Mystery», 134.

[1384] K. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: A Brief Introduction*, 8.

[1385] K. Rahner, «Reflections on Methodology in Theology», 101.

[1386] W. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 3.

[1387] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 71.

[1388] K. Rahner, «Experiences of a Catholic Theologian», 298.

God»[1389]. This manner of speaking about God «comes from the fact that whenever we make this original, transcendental orientation to God explicit and thematic, we have to speak about God by means of secondary and categorical concepts which are contraries within the realm of the categorical»[1390]. Employing the teaching of the *Fourth Lateran Council* (1215) on knowledge of God, that «[b]etween the Creator and creature there is to be noted a greater dissimilitude than a similitude», Rahner argues that

> nothing substantial of a positive nature about God can be stated without, at the same time, perceiving the radical inadequacy of such affirmative statements.... [A]ny statement made about God is legitimate only to the extent that it is always simultaneously negated. It is a question here of enduring the uncanny suspension between affirmation and negation as the true and only fixed term of our knowledge. In doing so, our theological assertions descend into the silent incomprehensibility of God's very self[1391].

Rahner's approach to God as holy mystery and his emphasis on analogical language as the most appropriate for talk about God is echoed by the 2000 FABC document, «Methodology: Asian Christian Theology». Based also on the teaching of the Fourth Lateran Council, this document describes the nature of the language of analogy: «Analogical language», which is what traditional scholastic theology employs in order to avoid the predicament of speaking about God, «steers between univocal and equivocal terms, as it includes sameness but with a greater difference», and proceeds in three phases:

> the way of affirmation, negation and eminence. By following these three steps we come to know more what God is not than what he is. Further, we come to know what we do not know, a knowledge appropriately termed "a learned ignorance" of God. The theological doctrine of analogy therefore opens up to the mystery of God which is always greater than we[1392].

[1389] D. Marmion – G. Thiessen, «Translators' Introduction», 297.

[1390] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 71.

[1391] K. Rahner, «Experiences of a Catholic Theologian», 299.

[1392] FABC-OTC, no. 5.1.3, in FAPA III, 407.

Citing Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa, the document affirms that because of the total inaccessibility of God, «we can be related to God, more by saying what God is not than by saying what God is», and that «knowing God is a not-knowing»[1393].

For Peter Phan, because of God's ineffable nature, «all human language about God [therefore] is nothing more than stammering, necessary though it is, about Holy Mystery», and this «concept» is not so much a divine name but a reminder that «the reality toward which our self-transcendence reaches out but never grasps is the infinite, the ineffable, the indefinable, the "Neti, neti," of which deity we know what he/she/it is not, as Saint Thomas says, rather than what it/she/he is»[1394]. Indeed, in the presence of the ineffable God, all theological discourses are reduced to mere stammering words about God before they finally descend into awestruck and worshipful silence, the purest response of the human creature to the unfathomable mystery of the incomprehensible God. «All theology ends in silence»[1395]. In theology, «it is only after we have first spoken that it is possible–really possible–to be silent»[1396], for, as Henri de Lubac adds, in theology, in a genuinely «negative theology», which does not amount to a «negation of theology», «silence comes at the end, not at the beginning»[1397].

Rahner's concept of God as absolute mystery consequently leads him and other theologians to appeal for greater modesty and humility in theological discourse[1398]. For Rahner, «[o]nly with such humility can one truly speak about God»[1399]. While theology's business is to talk about God, theology's project is always «unfinished»; because God lies beyond the power of human intellect, language and discourse, there is always something «incomplete» in all theological assertions. Indeed, by

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[1393] FABC-OTC, no. 2.1.2.5, in FAPA III, 341.

[1394] P. C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 114.

[1395] W. V. Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 2

[1396] K. Rahner, «Experiences of a Catholic Theologian», 299.

[1397] H. De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 122.

[1398] D. Marmion – G. Thiessen, «Translator's Introduction», 297.

[1399] K. Rahner, «Experiences of a Catholic Theologian», 300.

pointing to the fragility and finite character of all intellectual discourse about God, Rahner warns us about the limits of human knowledge and language in trying to understand the mystery of God. For Rahner, God's mystery demands an epistemological modesty that embraces the finiteness that characterizes the essential condition of the human mind. It demands a kind of theology that acknowledges the permanently finite and restricted character of human knowledge and comprehension, that recognizes, in relation to God's absolute mystery, the limitations and insufficiencies of all theological enterprises—precisely because there is always *more* in God, *more* about God that we can ever hope to know and understand in this life and beyond. Indeed, «[w]hen it comes to God, and matters about God, *unknowing* will always be an important part of the believer's growth in knowledge»[1400].

Taking into account the idea of God's incomprehensibility does not mean that we *cannot* know anything about God at all; in fact, we *know* something about God owing to the testimony of biblical revelation—that God is essentially one and triune, that God is Trinity. Indeed, «such knowledge cannot be of our own doing», for «[i]t would have to be given to us to know, and in this sense revealed to us»[1401]. Yet, while man «can only know of the Trinity through the word of revelation which man does not merit.... [e]ven then, after revelation, the Trinity escapes conceptual mastery and remains a mystery»[1402]. Likewise, it does not mean that we should engage in interreligious dialogue «with a purely negative theology»; rather, it means that we should enter into interreligious dialogue «with a greater degree of humility which will guard participants from adopting inflated claims in their points of departure»[1403]. For Dermot Lane, Christians must retrieve this forgotten truth of the Christian tradition by maintaining

> [a] delicate balance... between what we know and do not know about God, between a theology of divine presence and absence, between a vision about the transcendence of God and the immanence of God....

[1400] F. Ryan, «Rahner and Aquinas», 45; emphasis mine.

[1401] W. V. Dych, «Theology in a New Key», 9.

[1402] K. Rahner, «The Hiddenness of God», 229.

[1403] D. A. Lane, «Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions», 154.

> [which] means, in effect, that genuine inter-religious dialogue will include an important moment of mutual insight summed up in terms of a "*docta ignorantia*"[1404].

Indeed, one possible solution to Christianity's and the Church's tendency to dogmatism and inflated claims is Rahner's (and other theologians') concept of God as mystery and incomprehensibility. We can and should reverently insist on the known, on what we know, and share with and present to others what we know and believe. However, the truth that there are areas and dimensions in life and in theology that are unknown to us—that we do not and cannot in fact know God as God is, as well as the totality of his saving plan for the world which is coterminous and coextensive with his mystery—should put limits to our dogmatic claims and insistence about God and his mysterious ways in the world. Indeed, the necessity of theological humility and modesty on the part of Catholics and the Church comes from the Christian conviction that «[t]he Church, that is, is a people on the way to the Truth, *not yet in full possession of it*», and that «while the Truth is always absolute, the perceiver of truth never is»[1405].

As regards this demand for theological modesty and doctrinal humility in our discourse on God, in relation to *Dominus Iesus*' claim that a «historical religion» such as Christianity can «grasp» and «manifest» the «truth» about God in its «globality» and «completeness» (cf. DI 6), Phan inquires: «If God is absolute mystery, is it not blasphemous to claim that "the truth about God" can be "grasped" and "manifested" in "its globality and completeness" by Christianity, which is a historical religion?»[1406]. And after saying that the hallowed tradition of «apophatic theology» insists on «adoring silence» before the incomprehensible God instead of trying to understand God and grasp the truth about him, Phan asserts that nothing expresses such a «negative theology» more forcefully and beautifully than Thomas Aquinas' famous Eucharistic Hymn: «Devoutly I adore Thee, O

[1404] D. A. Lane, «Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions», 154.

[1405] J. Carroll, «The Beginning of Change», 24; emphasis mine.

[1406] P. C. Phan, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism*, 86.

hidden Deity,/ Truly hidden beneath these visible things,/ My whole heart submits to Thee,/ Because it fails completely in contemplating Thee»[1407]. Phan concludes that given the nature of human language about God, which is «nothing more than stuttering and stammering», Christianity, the Church, or much less the magisterium, cannot claim to «*grasp and manifest the truth about God in its globality and completeness*»[1408].

According to Rahner, because God is mystery, «God remains the Holy One who is really accessible only in worship»; this God is «[the] infinite term of love, which love in the presence of the incomprehensible and the ineffable necessarily becomes worship»[1409]. Because this Holy Mystery is «at once what is most internal to ourselves and also what is furthest from our manipulation», our appropriate human response to it is only «reverence» and «worship», for the ultimate name of this mystery «can only be uttered, finally, in loving silence before his incomprehensibility»[1410]. Theology is the «"science of mystery," which transcends the formulation of mere human words and which ultimately calls for an attitude of worship»[1411]. In Christian tradition, «the God who alone is supposed to be man's absolute future remains the incomprehensible mystery to be worshiped in silence», the absolute fulfillment which «remains a mystery... [and]... which we have to worship in silence by moving beyond all images into the ineffable»[1412]. For the 13th century Persian poet and Sufi, Rumi (Jalal ad-Din), «[s]ilence is the language of God, all else is poor translation»[1413]. Indeed, in Rahner's insistence on approaching God as incomprehensible mystery, he has advocated a

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[1407] Cited by P. C. Phan, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism*, 87.86-87.

[1408] P. C. Phan, T*he Joy of Religious Pluralism*, 87; emphasis in the original.

[1409] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 120.66.

[1410] K. Rahner, «The Need for a 'Short Formula' of Christian Faith», 122.

[1411] D. Marmion, «Theology, Spirituality, and the Role of Experience», 58.

[1412] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 434; cf. ID., «Experiences of a Catholic Theologian», 299.

[1413] Quoted by I. Kononenko, *Teachers of Wisdom*, 134.

new and more tentative, reverential, and worshipful way of speaking about God in theology.

6.2.2.2 The Incomprehensible Nature of God: A Call for Greater Recognition of Diversity and Plurality of God's Ways and of Ways to God in the Asian Context

What does Karl Rahner's insight on God as mystery imply for the theology of religions and the project of interreligious dialogue in Asia?

Asia is home to the great religions of the world where we find a lively sense of the Sacred and of Mystery, which undergirds all Asian cultures and religions. The thirst for the Divine is evident among individuals and peoples despite the inroads of modernity and secularization, as seen in their respect for the Sacred and experience of Mystery in their communities and religious traditions, in their «strong "mystical" dimension, a living sense of God the Absolute One, a lived experience of transcendence, and consequently a constant recourse to prayer»[1414]. This profound sense of the Absolute is «a basic acknowledgment of the pervading sacred horizon of God as Creator, the source of everything that exists»[1415]. Such a quest for the Sacred which characterizes the Asian soul, and which pervades people's religious and philosophical traditions of the continent, is «at the root of humility, non-violence, non-aggression, patience and harmony»[1416]. In Asia, «it is precisely in the ordinary that the Extraordinary is experienced and recognized; in the ordinary, God is made visible and palpable»[1417].

In Asia, the Divine Mystery, which is a shared human quest among Asians, «goes beyond the transient and contingent human events and realities, yet [it] permeates every form of existence»[1418]. In fact,

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[1414] FABC X, no. 54, in FAPA V, 79. Cf. FABC-OTC, in FAPA III, 330; FABC VII, in FAPA III, 13.

[1415] FABC X, no. 37, in FAPA V, 71.

[1416] FABC IX, in FAPA V, 15.

[1417] FABC VIII, no. 107, in FAPA IV, 40.

[1418] FABC-OESC, no. 2, in FAPA II, 21.

the presence of the Transcendent can be experienced and discovered «even in mundane affairs, in tragedy or victory, in brokenness or wholeness»[1419]. It is this common spiritual posture among Asians, marked by a religious desire to return to the Divine and the Sacred, the transcendental and the spiritual, that leads «our path to walking into the world of the Divine, the source of all Wholeness and Holiness of the one true God…. the path to holiness understood as the contemplative path that moves our hearts to seek oneness in the unity of the compassionate and merciful God of all humanity»[1420]. In the continent, the recognition that God who is Mystery, or that the mystery of God, can never be spoken of fully and adequately «gave rise to such classical adages as "neti, neti" (not this, not this), and "the reality is one, and the sages have called it many"»[1421].

The attitude of modesty and humility in all theological conversation should mark not only our Christian assertions about God and our human capacity to know God and understand his ways in the world but likewise our assertions about God and his saving will in relation to other religions. According to Dermot Lane, one way of moving forward out of the state of *impasse* among participants in inter-faith dialogue is «to adopt a greater sense of theological humility in approaching other religions», since, if religions have to do basically with God, «[w]hat we know about God is extremely limited»[1422]. In the context of Asia, this calls for adopting «the attitudes and values of humility and openness before the mystery of God at work in the peoples of Asia»[1423]. For Felix Wilfred, grace, which primarily means God's gift of his very self, is something on which human beings cannot place any control, restraint and limitation. Because «[t]he path of divine grace is mysterious and we do not have full knowledge of the ways God deals with human beings placed in a wide variety

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[1419] FABC VI, no. 10, in FAPA II, 5.

[1420] FABC-OHD, in FAPA IV, 82.

[1421] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2, in FAPA III, 318.

[1422] D. A. Lane, «Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions», 153; ID., *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 122.

[1423] Asian Congress on Evangelization, in FAPA IV, 280.

of situations, including religious», therefore, we should recognize the variety of ways by which God has spoken to humanity and continues to speak in the world and in history[1424]. Similarly, we should acknowledge that «there are varieties of ways through which human beings respond to God's grace encountering them in their concrete existential situations which include also their religious belonging»; hence, «religions can be viewed as *responses to the encounter with the mystery of God* or the ultimate reality»[1425]. Indeed, if God is mystery, then it follows that God's ways and the ways to God are not just mysterious and inscrutable but also diverse and plural, since no single institution, group, or religious tradition can ever dictate or monopolize the course and orientation of his action and grace[1426].

The FABC deepens the consideration of the mysterious diversity and plurality of God's ways and the ways to God by relating the Divine Mystery to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the whole world, beyond the borders of Christianity and the Church. For the document, «The Spirit at Work in Asia Today», to speak of Divine Mystery is to speak of the Spirit, that «[t]his Divine mystery which is inexhaustible and at the same time permits us to have a faint glimpse of its "unapproachable light" can be named—if we can name it at all—as the Spirit»[1427]. As Spirit, «[i]t is intimately present in all that we are and tend to be»; and as Mystery «it cannot be comprehended and its ways cannot be circumscribed and delimited within our scheme of things», for «[i]t blows where it wills (Jn. 3:8)»[1428]. This Infinite Being is «in us and yet mysterious, always ahead of us, who is beyond religions, languages and systems, and whose ways are not our ways»[1429]. Perhaps, the document refers to the Divine Mystery as the Spirit because of the absolute mysteriousness and radical freedom of the Spirit who

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[1424] F. Wilfred, «What the Spirit Says to the Churches (Rev 2:7)», 129.

[1425] F. Wilfred, «What the Spirit Says to the Churches (Rev 2:7)», 129; emphasis in the original.

[1426] Cf. BIRA II, no. 12, in FAPA I, 115; BIRA IV/1, no. 10, in FAPA I, 249.

[1427] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2, in FAPA III, 318.

[1428] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2, in FAPA III, 318.

[1429] FIRA I, no. 2.6, in FAPA III, 120-121.

moves about in the world in ways that are totally unpredictable and uncontrollable—attributes that indeed convey the nature of the Divine as Mystery.

> There is no ecclesial captivity of the Spirit: in the beginning of creation, God's spirit moved over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2), and the promise of God is that He will pour out the Spirit "on all flesh" (Joel 2:28)…. The Spirit of God is not the property of any religion. All human institutions, however secular or holy, are brushed by its wings, and fail to cage it[1430].

The different BIRA documents speak of the freedom and movement of the Spirit who is beyond definitions, descriptions and restrictions. For the Asian bishops, the Spirit of God, as symbolized by Pentecost, has been poured out to all peoples of various nations, races, cultures and languages, and has been at work in weaving bonds of unity and communion among all the peoples of the world today towards wholeness and integrity[1431]. In fact, while this Spirit has been active in the Christ-event and in the Church, it was already active in the world before Jesus' Incarnation and is still active today among the peoples, nations and religions of Asia[1432]. It is the same Spirit who «is at work in all religious traditions, moving the faithful believers of each tradition to a greater commitment to truth and more authentic communion within and beyond their own tradition»[1433], and the same Spirit «who leads us to discern the face of God and to contemplate his splendor in the other»[1434]. The document, «Living and Working Together with Sisters and Brothers of Other Faiths in Asia», specifies

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[1430] M. Forward, «The Reconciling Spirit in the Context of Religious Pluralism», 278-279.

[1431] BIRA IV/11, no. 10, in FAPA I, 320.

[1432] BIRA IV/3, no. 6, in FAPA I, 259. This is a point made by Pope John Paul II in his 1986 Encyclical, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, one of his most «open» texts in terms of showing how God, as Spirit, is at work unrestrainedly in every place and reality of our world (DV 53). It is often brought into the picture by people writing against the more narrow mindset associated with texts like the—much later—CDF document, *Dominus Iesus*.

[1433] BIRA IV/12, no. 7, in FAPA I, 326.

[1434] BIRA IV/7, no. 14, in FAPA I, 310.

that the creeds, codes and cults of the various living faiths of Asia are precisely the varied ways by which the adherents of these religions respond to the Spirit of God who is present and active in the world and its peoples, cultures, and religions[1435].

Alluding to FABC II, the document, «The Spirit at Work in Asia Today», affirms that «in the deeper meanings and intentions of people of other faiths… [that are]… expressed in religious forms alien to our own, we are to recognize "the voice of the Spirit bearing witness to the marvelous variety of God's Self-revelation to man, and able to influence the way we lift up our hearts to the Lord"»[1436]. By suggesting that religions are manifold and diverse ways by which God reveals himself to humanity through the Spirit, the statement implies not only that religions are salvific in themselves because of the presence of God in his Spirit in them, but also that religious pluralism is something willed by God, positively included in God's plan of salvation. The statement also implies that religions do shape and determine the ways various people perceive and respond to the Spirit. Once we recognize that the Holy Spirit, who takes into consideration the plural contexts of people, works and operates in manifold and plural ways, then we can also recognize that various groups of people experience and respond to the Spirit in plural ways.

Indeed, the reason why the presence of the Holy Spirit in and beyond Christianity and the Church must be discerned in many different ways is that if individuals and peoples encounter the Spirit within their own particular contexts and situations which are generally diverse and pluralistic from the social, cultural and religious points of view, then their responses to the stirrings of the Spirit in their lives will also be diverse and pluralistic[1437]. Indeed, the Holy Spirit reveals himself and bestows his life and power in innumerable ways, «ways which cannot be compared with each other, since their interconnections surpass our concepts and world of understanding»[1438].

[1435] BIRA IV/7, no. 12, in FAPA I, 310.

[1436] FABC-OTC, no. 4.2.2.3, in FAPA III, 307.

[1437] BIRA IV/3, no. 16, in FAPA I, 261.

[1438] FABC-OTC, no. 5.3, in FAPA III, 320.

It is this «experience of the Spirit as the author of diversity and plurality» that «helps us to overcome the increasing temptations of steamrollering all differences and forcing them into pre-conceived moulds and standardized patterns»[1439]. It is this power of the Spirit to bring together and unify humanity in its difference and diversity that «holds out the possibility of becoming the center of unity within inter-religious dialogue»[1440].

According to Michael Barnes, we should «learn how to speak, how to communicate what we know, and how to learn from what we do not know»[1441]. In the «context of otherness», the question put to the Catholic Church, therefore, is «how it can be at once faithful to what is known and sensitive to what is unknown—but which may well be revealed through the other»[1442]. Applying this to the Church, Barnes says: «The Church speaks of what it knows in faith—that God has raised Jesus from the dead and thereby transformed the whole creation. What the Church does *not* know is the total reality of what always remains other and utterly mysterious»[1443]. The implication of this insight, for Barnes, is clear: to acknowledge the possibility that «God may act in the world in ways of which the Church does not know», for «[a]nything less would be to risk putting an arbitrary limit on the action of God», and to see that «the Christian experience of the grace of God, of God acting freely and generously to create a people for himself, demands an openness to the Spirit at work in the world of the other»[1444].

Commenting on the statement of the International Theological Commission's document, «Christianity and the World Religions», that «the religions can … be a means which helps for the salvation of their members», yet «they cannot be equivalent to the function which the Church exercises for the salvation of Christians and those

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[1439] FABC-OTC, no. 5.4, in FAPA III, 321.

[1440] D. A. Lane, «Vatican II, Christology and the World Religions», 168.

[1441] M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 22.

[1442] M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 25.

[1443] M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 28.

[1444] M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 28.

who are not»[1445], Jacques Dupuis calls for modesty and humility in theological discourse by insisting that «while we know what the Church is doing for the salvation of her members, we are in the dark as to what she does for the salvation of others», and that «[w]e are better informed, if we wish to be, about what their own religious traditions are able to do for them»[1446]. In fact, while *Dominus Iesus* affirms that the salvation of others has a «mysterious relationship» to the Church, it does not explain the nature and manner of such a relationship. With the Council, the Declaration admits its ignorance by saying that «the salvific grace of God—which… has a mysterious relationship to the Church—comes to individual non-Christians… "in ways known to [God]"» (DI 21). Phan re-echoes this modest confession of *Ad Gentes* 7 and *Dominus Iesus* 21:

> Regarding the dependence of the salvific role of non-Christian religions on Christ and on their "connection" with the church, official magisterium contents itself with affirming their fact. As to *how* non-Christian religions fulfill their saving function in dependence on Christ, Vatican II simply says that the Holy Spirit makes the salvation brought about by Christ available to non-Christians in ways known to God (AG 7)[1447].

It is for this reason that *Dominus Iesus* encourages theologians to try to «[understand] better God's salvific plan and the ways in which it is accomplished» in the world beyond the confines of the Church (DI 21).

Likewise, for the FABC-TAC document, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», every faith-affirmation always ends in the Absolute, and genuine dialogue, instead of bracketing or ignoring the absolute perspectives of various believers, operates in a «space» created between these perspectives through mutual respect for each other's freedom and conscience as well as deep reverence for the Spirit's sovereign freedom to act as he wills. For the document, «[t]his means that while we are sure of the universal salvific will of God and how

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[1445] International Theological Commission, «Christianity and the World Religions», no. 86.

[1446] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 67.

[1447] P. C. Phan, «John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue», 255.

God's salvation is mediated to us, we are not equally sure of how the same salvation is reaching out to other believers with whom we are in dialogue»[1448]. Christian witness has to genuinely consider this mystery, «the mysterious interplay of the freedom of the Spirit and the freedom of the other believers», the same mystery that confronts Christians and which is also being witnessed to by the adherents of other faiths[1449]. In relation to «the mystery of Jesus Christ and his unique and universal mediatorship», the document also argues that however the relationship of this mystery to Christ's Paschal Mystery is conceived, «its uniqueness and universality make it part of the dialectic between the Church and the Kingdom»; hence, «[a]ny attempt to appropriate it exclusively to the pole of the Church can only relativize it and rob it of its universality»[1450]. The Church does not exclusively possess this mystery, which is «at the crossroads of the cosmic and the historical, of the eternal and the temporal, of the divine and the human»; it is «called to be at the service of the mystery»[1451]. Hence, for Claude Geffré, while the Church should continue announcing to the whole world «that God's salvation has come in Jesus Christ», it should be «on the condition of respecting God's mysterious ways in the heart of each person»[1452].

Similarly, the question, for Barnes, is how to cross over the threshold, how to get to the center of a different and even threatening world, and how to remain in that unfamiliar territory with a certain degree of Christian integrity as well as openness and reverence for what God may reveal through the «others»[1453]. It is «to ask where God may be speaking across and between those borders»; for «[i]f… to do theology is to speak of God in response to God's Word, then the first task is to listen for possible 'seeds of the Word', what God may be saying in this new context of otherness»[1454]. In the context of Asia,

[1448] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.7, p. 22.

[1449] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.7, pp. 22-23.

[1450] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.10, p. 23.

[1451] FABC-TAC, «Theses on Interreligious Dialogue», no. 6.10, p. 23.

[1452] C. Geffré, «The Christological Paradox», 171.

[1453] Cf. M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, x.

[1454] M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, x.6.

the document, «Methodology: Asian Christian Theology», argues that while the faith of the Asian Christians rests on their belief in Jesus Christ in whom, as Rahner asserts, God's absolute and radical self-communication to humanity has occurred, they also believe that «the mystery of the depth of this self-communication remains to be explored further» and that «the object of our search remains forever a mystery»[1455]. Referring to the other religions, the document affirms that Asian Christians «will… explore them further to sound the depths of the mystery of God's self-revelation and deepen... [their]... own faith»[1456]. For the document, «"Contemplation and Compassion" Integral Spirituality for Faith Encounters in Asia», «[i] n so far as '[the] breadth and the length, the height and the depth' of the mystery of God's love revealed in Christ continues to be a mystery for us, we have to journey with others in quest for the light and truth of the Divine»[1457]. For BIRA I, the Church should look at its election as the sacramental manifestation of God's salvific will in the world as well as its relationship with other religions and their adherents always in the light of the mystery of God's mercy[1458].

A perennial question in the multi-religious context of Asia is how to account for God's gracious presence and activity beyond the borders of Christianity and the Church, which is central and foundational in determining the Church's relationship with other religions, in constructing an Asian theology of religions, and in pursuing the praxis of interreligious dialogue in the continent. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the place and role assigned to interreligious dialogue in the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission depends on the necessary interdependence between the theological assessment of the various religious traditions of humanity and their significance in God's overall plan of salvation for the world. When the importance of the other religions in God's universal saving plan is minimized, such a negative evaluation inevitably leads to a pessimistic view of

[1455] FABC-OTC, in FAPA III, 330-331.

[1456] FABC-OTC, in FAPA III, 331.

[1457] FEISA I, no. 7.4.2, in FAPA II, 61.

[1458] BIRA I, no. 7, in FAPA I, 110.

the relation between interreligious dialogue and mission. Conversely, a positive appraisal of the other religions in the Christian theology of religions necessarily leads to a healthy attitude and open posture towards the religious others[1459]. Hence, the quality and characteristic of interreligious dialogue changes radically depending on whether we ascribe truth and salvific value to other religions or not. If other religions are bereft of salvific character because they are devoid of truth, then no genuine dialogue which offers mutual learning and enrichment can ever take place. The whole process which we call «dialogue» will merely be one-way and may just therefore be called «monologue», as Christianity's mission in this situation is only to bring to others the truth which they do not have but which is fully possessed by the Church. If Christians cross religious borders and courageously find themselves at the center of a different and unfamiliar world of the «others», it is not to seek and discover the «unfamiliar face» of God revealed in that world of the «others» and consequently learn from them about God and his salvific ways in the world, but to bring to them truth and salvation which only the Catholic Church allegedly possesses in their fullness.

This is what is implied in *Dominus Iesus*' statement that «[s]alvation is found in the truth» and that while «[t]hose who obey the promptings of the Spirit of truth are already on the way to salvation», «the Church must [nevertheless] go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them to the truth» (DI 22). Dupuis has a twofold observation on this quotation: The first is «[t]he supposition… that the Church "possesses" the fullness of truth, that she has a monopoly over it; [and that] her mission is to bring others to it»; the second is «the seeming presumption… that the other religious traditions apparently have no truth to offer to their members»[1460]. The members of other religions may be on the way to salvation, yet the supposition of this quotation is that they can arrive at salvation only if the Church brings them to the truth. Because it is the Church that leads adherents of other

[1459] J. Dupuis, «Interreligious Dialogue in the Church's Evangelizing Mission», 239.

[1460] J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 68.

faiths to the truth, their proper attitude in «dialogue» should be one of listening and receiving and never one of teaching and giving, for they do not seem to have anything to offer and contribute to the process. Concerning the question of the presence of truth in the other religions, it should be noted that Vatican II acknowledges the presence of «elements of truth and grace» (AG 9) in these religions, and that the 1984 document, «Dialogue and Mission», describes interreligious dialogue itself as a process «in which Christians meet the followers of other religious traditions in order *to walk together towards truth*» (DM 13; emphasis mine).

6.2.2.3 The Asian Approach to the Divine Mystery Through Symbolic Theology

If God is the Ultimate Reality who is totally beyond the greatest capacity of the human mind to grasp and understand, how do the Asians approach the Mystery of the Divine? How do they enter into its mysterious presence? For the FABC-Office of Theological Concerns, in Chapter 5 of its document, «Methodology: Asian Christian Theology», Asians enter into the realm of the Divine through the use of symbolic language, which is the main theological language of all religions. In this chapter, which is devoted to exploring the Asian approach to the Sacred through symbolic theology[1461], the document argues that in relation to the Mystery or the Divine, all theological assertions are symbolic, and that even though they are not empirical affirmations which can be proven in a scientific manner, they nevertheless mediate the Transcendent because they open up the different levels of human consciousness to the Ultimate Reality. Hence, symbolic language, in the modes of words, gestures or symbols, should be employed as the main theological language of the Asian Churches as they share with and communicate to adherents of other religions their religious experiences.

The chapter begins with an affirmation that God is not an object among other objects encountered in the world but the absolute subject, and that because God is an absolute mystery, all our theological expressions and formulations about God are unavoidably

[1461] Cf. FABC-OTC, nos. 5.1-5.4, in FAPA III, 406-419.

limited and insufficient. The document asserts that God, as the infinite being who always remains a mystery, «transcends all that we can say about God's being», and therefore insists on the indispensability of understanding the hermeneutics of theological language «if one is to speak about or understand what is said about the being of God»[1462]. Theological language, a language employed to articulate our faith, demands the engagement of the whole person in response to a divine encounter or an experience of God, hence it is a personal language which expresses not just a reality but also a personal experience of this reality. Likewise, because the reality to which theological language points is God who is both transcendent (which means that we cannot speak directly about God who is wholly other) and immanent (which means that we can employ categories about God that are familiar to us), theological language is also necessarily analogical, experiential and symbolic[1463].

For the document, despite the limitations of human language in speaking about God, we still have to use language to be able to come up with theological assertions and share our religious experiences with others. Conscious of the insufficiency of religious language to communicate God who is Transcendent and Mystery, theologians propose the metaphorical and analogical nature of religious language. In analogical language, which navigates between univocal and equivocal terms, as it includes similarity but with a greater dissimilarity, theology tries to avoid two extremes: literal and univocal statements about God *and* extreme apophatic language which, by arguing for total silence, puts an end to all theological discussion, and therefore to theology[1464]. An experiential approach to theological language takes the form of stories, allegories and parables which are not actually new but have been used not only by Jesus in his proclamation of the Kingdom of God in the gospels, but also by Buddhist, Hindu and Zufi teachers through the centuries in their attempt to illustrate the truth of their teachings to their adherents.

[1462] FABC-OTC, no. 5.1.1, in FAPA III, 406.

[1463] FABC-OTC, nos. 5.1.3-5.2.3, in FAPA III, 406-413.

[1464] FABC-OTC, no. 5.1.3, in FAPA III, 406-407.

For the document, an appeal to a narrative discourse, which evokes participation and identification and ushers one into a personal experience of the Divine, is the key to conveying the mystery of God in the Asian context[1465]. This hermeneutical approach has a strong affinity with the way Asians view reality and is therefore particularly appropriate to the Asian manner of doing theology, since this approach caters to the Asian people's holistic and non-dualistic way of seeing reality, in contrast to the Western approach of over-emphasizing the dualism of transcendence and immanence. While this Asian mode of theological discourse does not discount the value of the rational approach to God and of the conceptual formulation of our divine experience, the latter must be supplemented by a narrative theology which has the power to draw listeners to similar experiences. In Asia, this particular hermeneutical approach is the primary way of entering into the religious world of other religions and promotes a more effective interreligious encounter among adherents of various religions; narrative theology, likewise, finds a natural habitat in most Asian religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and tribal religions which also employ stories, myths, and parables to speak about God or the Ultimate Reality[1466].

A few pages later, the document insists that while theological assertions and doctrines have a place in our effort to understand the Transcendent, they are not, however, the primary manner of expressing truth or the mystery of God because of their inability to capture the fullness of truth. «Doctrines delimit and exclude what is false rather than show what is true and what God really is»[1467]. Theological doctrines, which are meant to protect faith from subjectivism and emotionalism, are necessary in order to provide precise definitions of our beliefs, to detect the presence of heresies in theological arguments; yet, they are not meant to shut the door to fuller expression of the truth. For the document, the implications

[1465] FABC-OTC, no. 5.1.4, in FAPA III, 407-408.

[1466] FABC-OTC, no. 5.1.4, in FAPA III, 408.

[1467] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2.3, in FAPA III, 413.

of the use of narratives in theology call for a re-examination of the religious folklore of other religions.

> A quick perusal of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Buddhist Sutras, Jataka and Avadana Stories, and Chinese literature shows how extensively narratives have been used to convey timeless wisdom and truth. Whether the stories are historical, biographical or mere allegories, they present the readers with a vivid and a personal experience of the Sacred. Hence, they must not be easily dismissed as "mere tales"[1468].

However, the employment of narrative theology is complemented by the use of symbols in theology which, due to their mediative character, genuinely bear the reality which they symbolize by making the reality present and effective in the life of the believer. Because there is an inherent relation between the reality and the symbol, believers, through symbols, come to participate in the reality which is symbolized. Hence, in Christianity Jesus Christ, through whom the divinity is fully revealed in space and time, is considered the paradigm of the symbol of God, the Church as the sacrament of Jesus, and the sacraments of the Church as efficacious means which effect what they symbolize. As regards the sacramentality of the rites and rituals found in non-Christian religions, the document declares: «By extension, the symbols expressed in the rituals, sacred objects and images of non-Christian religions have sacramental value»[1469].

For the document, symbols draw us to participate in a divine reality which is the latent, unthematized and unobjectified presence of God within us, providing us with a participatory knowledge of the reality. With a trace of Rahner, even of his expression, this reality «is a kind of pre-apprehension of the divine in us without our being conscious of it»[1470]. Symbols not only help us get in touch with various levels of human consciousness but also unwrap the various levels of Reality within us which cannot be detected by mere

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[1468] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2.3, in FAPA III, 413.

[1469] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2.1, in FAPA III, 409.

[1470] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2.1, in FAPA III, 409.

empirical observation; thus they make us more aware of the presence of God in us. Symbols, therefore, are pregnant with meanings and evoke multiple experiences which are transformative in themselves both in ordinary life and in religious life. For example, a national flag can arouse strong sentiments of patriotism and love of country, the Cross can awaken awareness of God's love and our sinfulness, and the statue of Buddha can evoke a sense of tranquility and peace. Due to the revelatory power of symbols and their ability to arouse imagination and feelings, they can effect conversion and influence and empower one's action and behavior[1471].

One crucial consideration in all these symbolic approaches to the Divine is that God, as God, is beyond us, and «remains a mystery which cannot be grasped, but only revered and pondered in awe and gratitude», «in contemplation, in prayer and ritual»[1472]. Symbols do not offer us information about God as though God were one object among the finite objects in the world but rather attempt to mediate an experience of the Divine in our life. Seen in this way, «[t]heological statements are expressions of religious encounter in a symbolic way», statements which «evoke our experience of the Transcendent universally present in us»[1473]. And by approaching theology by means of symbols, we are able to understand Asian cultures, languages and religions, which value symbols as communication, better and deeper. Again, in a statement that partly comments on the efficacy of the religious symbols of other religions as a means of an encounter with the Divine, the document argues:

> Asian religions, especially tribal, primal and native religions abound in rituals and religious arts. These rites have often been condemned as superstitious or even as occult, and religious art has been labelled idolatrous. In reality, these are simply anthropological means of expressing the experience of the Sacred and the communication with the Sacred. They are efficacious sacramental means of encounter with God. They must not be denigrated as mere superstition. To do so shows an ignorance

[1471] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2.1, in FAPA III, 409-410.

[1472] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2.1, in FAPA III, 410.411.

[1473] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2.1, in FAPA III, 410.

> of Asian cultures and symbols, and a presumptuous judgment that is narrow-minded and triumphalistic towards people who are different[1474].

For the document, contemplating religious arts and rituals, which are rich in meaning and spiritual truths, can usher a person into an immense experience of the beauty and greatness of the Divine, of the Ultimate Reality. Since the Mystery is beyond words, it is better mediated through symbols which evoke direct and personal experience of the Divine rather than through an intellectual discourse.

Moreover, Christians, in the Asian context, can also be led to an experience of the Divine or to the presence of the Mystery through the theopoetic or the theology of religious imagination, which is a kind of non-discursive logic and is expressed through poetry, dreams, visions, myths and rituals[1475]. Poets, painters and sculptors convey their ineffable experience of the Divine in literature, in painting, and in sculpture, which in turn invite others to enter into the mystical world of the artists and consequently evoke in the viewers the presence and mystery of God. It is for this reason that poems, songs, music and the arts are present in all religions and play an important role in arousing the sense of mystery and the sacred among the believers[1476]. Myths, which abound in all Asian religions, are also revelatory of the Divine and therefore communicate genuine beliefs which are not yet crystallized into doctrinal statements. Because myths do not seek to be interpreted but are in themselves an interpretation of the world and of human existence in a non-scientific way, they are therefore comprehensive and inexhaustible, reflective of the nature of the Divine itself. In the interpretation of myths, a person strives for their interior meaning through participation rather than through conceptual knowledge, without saying that there is no inherent connection between myths and theological propositions articulated in doctrines and dogmas. As religious imagination, myths can

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[1474] FABC-OTC, no. 5.2.1, in FAPA III, 410-411.

[1475] Cf. FABC-OTC, nos. 5.3-5.4, in FAPA III, 413-418.

[1476] FABC-OTC, no. 5.3.1, in FAPA III, 414.

effectively mediate the Transcendent and thus have strong affinity with Asian cultures and religions[1477].

Rituals, another basic mode of religious imagination, usher the worshippers into contact with the Sacred through the use of words, bodily gestures and symbols in liturgical celebrations, thus mediating to them the experience of the Divine. Yet, the effort to experience the Mystery sacramentally through rituals is found not just in Christianity but also in other religious traditions, such as in Mahayana Buddhism, in Hinduism, in primal religions, and in Chinese practice of venerating the ancestors. Rituals make up a religious language which, even though they are not translated into words and propositions, are nevertheless no less an efficacious means of conveying the Sacred than a conceptual knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. A growing understanding and appreciation of the rituals of other religions, which in some instances lead to the incorporation of some of their cultural symbols into the Christian liturgy, has become a major step towards interreligious dialogue and inculturation in some parts of Asia[1478]. According to the document, «[i]n the final analysis, silence is the highest form of religious language»; and «as a way to experience God... [it]... is present in almost all religions»[1479].

6.3 **Karl Rahner's Insight on the Radical Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbor and Its Implications for the Theology of Religions and the Praxis of Interreligious Dialogue in Asia**

In the previous section dealing with God's incomprehensible mystery, we quoted Greiner who said that part of Rahner's drawing power is «his recurring appeal to the radical incomprehensibility of God, who is encountered ultimately only in love»[1480]. We cited this

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[1477] FABC-OTC, no. 5.3.2, in FAPA III, 414-415.

[1478] FABC-OTC, no. 5.3.3, in FAPA III, 415-417. The document mentions the Chinese New Year Festival, the Festival of the Hungry Ghosts, and the offering of food and the burning of joss-sticks and ritual papers as expressions of one's prayer, love and communion with the beloved departed (FABC-OTC, no. 5.3.3, in FAPA III, 417).

[1479] FABC-OTC, no. 5.4, in FAPA III, 418.

[1480] G. E. Greiner, «Rahner and the Pacific Rim», 58.

assertion focusing on the first part of the statement, on Rahner's insights on God's radical incomprehensibility. In this section, we wish to draw attention to the second part of the affirmation—that this God, the incomprehensible mystery, is «encountered ultimately only in love», and what this means essentially for the living out of Christianity and for the local Churches' praxis of interreligious dialogue in the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious context of Asia.

6.3.1 *Karl Rahner's Insight on the Radical Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbor*

6.3.1.1 Loving God in Our Neighbor: The Inseparability of the Two Commandments of Love

In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Karl Rahner argues that concretely «in the act of *loving one's neighbor* a person has an *experience of God* at least implicitly», and that this is «established by the truth about the unity between love of God and love of neighbor»[1481]. Certainly, Rahner's biblical argument on the radical unity of these two commandments of love must be based on Matt 22: 34-40, Mark 12: 28-34, and Luke 10: 25-28. Without entering into their exegetical meaning, these gospel passages, which deal with the commandments to love God and to love our neighbor, make the point that true love of God and true love of neighbor are inseparable, for they are like two sides of the same coin. As such, one commandment cannot exist apart from the other commandment. Hence, any attempt to separate them is a falsification of the message of the gospel.

The New Testament offers at least three instances that disclose that one cannot love God without at the same time loving one's neighbor. (1) *The First Letter of John*, in 1John 4: 20-21, argues clearly that anyone who says he loves God but hates his brother or sister is a liar; for how can he love God whom he does not see if he does not love his brother or sister whom he sees? (2) *The Parable of the Good Samaritan*, in Luke 10: 25-37, asserts that the real test of our love for God is our concrete love for our neighbor, and the «neighbor» in the

[1481] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 456; emphasis in the original.

context of Luke's parable is not just the «next-door neighbor» or those who belong to *our* neighborhood, but may be a complete «stranger», or even an «enemy»—someone in dire need of help, anyone in pain, anyone suffering who does not necessarily belong to our social, cultural, racial, and religious group. (3) *The Parable of the Last Judgment*, in Matt 25: 31-46, is more explicit on the inseparability of love of God (in this case, love of Jesus) and love of neighbor by insisting that at the end of our life we will be judged by our concrete love for others, especially the poor and the needy, which the parable spells out as the sole eschatological criterion of salvation.

Rahner developed an argument on the radical unity between the love of God and the love of neighbor in several of his writings, especially in his essay, «Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God»[1482]. In this essay, Rahner grapples with a couple of questions which directly inquire into the relationship between love of God and love of neighbor. The first has to do with the question of whether the love of neighbor is simply the proof of our love for God precisely because it expresses our obedience to God's commandment to love our neighbor[1483]. Rahner, according to Gerald Beyer, «objects to this interpretation because it ostensibly instrumentalizes the neighbour»[1484]. In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner argues that «love for one's neighbour is not merely a commandment which has to be obeyed if a person wants to exist in a salvific relationship to God», but rather «the actualization of Christian existence in an absolute sense»[1485]. The second has to do with the question of whether we may absolutely take the words of St. John stating that the God in us can be loved and reached only and precisely in our love for our neighbor[1486]. Rahner concurs with this second interpretation and expounds on it in the article.

[1482] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 231-249.

[1483] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 235.

[1484] G. J. Beyer, «Karl Rahner on the Radical Unity of Love», 259; cf. K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 244.

[1485] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 309.

[1486] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 235.

Rahner observes the scriptural ambiguity of the *relationship* between the two commandments. Matt 22: 36-39, for instance, speaks of *two* commandments, with the second commandment «resembling» the first. Yet, for him, the two commandments are undeniably and necessarily linked to one another. In Luke 10: 28, both are valued as «life-giving»; in Matt 22: 40, both are regarded as the «epitome» of the law and the prophets; in Mark 12: 31, no other commandment is considered greater than these two commandments; in Matt 25: 34-36, which highlights the unity between the Son and man, Rahner argues that «it certainly must not be overlooked that in the eschatological discourses about the Judgement, love of neighbor is given in St. Matthew as the only explicit standard by which man will be judged», for «what is done to the least of his brethren is done to Jesus»[1487]. For Rahner, this gospel text from Matt 25 leads us back to the «doctrine of the mysterious unity of the love of God and of neighbour and to its Christological basis and radicalisation»[1488]. In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner locates in every authentic gesture of love of neighbor the anonymous presence of Jesus Christ:

> [A] person whom Christ has not yet encountered in an explicit, historical witness which comes to him from history can find him nevertheless in his brothers and sisters and in his love for them. Jesus Christ allows himself to be found in them anonymously as it were, for he himself said, "What you did for the least of my brothers, you have done for me" (Matt. 25:40), for him who lives his life in the poor, in the hungry, in those in prison and in those who are dying[1489].

According to Rahner, this doctrine on the «mysterious unity» between love of God and love of neighbor «becomes most radical in St. Paul», where «love of neighbour... is declared to be *the* fulfillment of *the* law (Rm 13:8, 10; Ga 5:14), and hence as the 'bond' of perfection (Col 3:14) and as the better 'way', i.e. as the Christian form of existence

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[1487] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 234.

[1488] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 234.

[1489] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 311.

simply and finally (1 Co 12:31-13:13)»[1490]. In the Johannine tradition, the love of neighbor is radically elevated to being «the totality of Christian existence»: «[W]e are loved by God (Jn 15:12) and by Christ *so that* we may love one another (Jn 13:34), a love which is the *new* commandment of Christ (Jn 13:34) which is his specifically (Jn 15:12) and which is the command imposed on us (Jn 15:17)»[1491]. Rahner, in fact, goes as far as saying that «for St. John the consequence of this is that God who *is* Love (1 Jn 15:17) has loved us, not so that we might love him in return but so that we might love *one another* (1 Jn 4:7, 11)»[1492].

For Rahner, the Catholic theological tradition also attests to the fact that «the specific Christian love of neighbour is both in potency and in act a moment of the infused supernatural theological virtue of *caritas* by which we love God in his Spirit for his own sake and in direct community with him»[1493]. Consequently, «the love of neighbour is not merely the preparation, effect, fruit and touchstone of the love of God but is itself an act of this love of God itself»; that «wherever a genuine love of man attains its proper nature and its moral absoluteness and depth, it is in addition always so underpinned and heightened by God's saving grace that it is also love of God, whether it be explicitly considered to be such a love by the subject or not»[1494]. In other words, when a person accepts himself and, in the radical acceptance of his own humanity, opens himself in self-forgetfulness and reaches out to others in concrete, self-effacing acts of love, there we find concrete instances of someone who has implicitly embraced the Christian message of love, albeit in an anonymous way. Indeed, there is a radical unity between love of God and love of neighbor, where the latter is not seen merely as a means to the former, as «material» or an instrument for the attainment of the former.

Rahner concludes the essay affirming that «the categorized explicit love of neighbor is the primary act of the love of God»; that

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[1490] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 234.

[1491] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 235.

[1492] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 235.

[1493] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 236.

[1494] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 236.237.

«[i]t is radically true, i.e by an ontological and not merely 'moral' or psychological necessity, that whoever does not love the brother whom he 'sees', also cannot love God whom he does not see, and that one can love God whom one does not see only *by* loving one's visible brother lovingly»[1495]. The commandment to love our neighbor already fulfills the commandment to love God in such a way that a person who has not genuinely loved his neighbor cannot be said to have truly loved God. The love of neighbor is the basic act of loving God, which, while not yet the complete love of God, is nevertheless already the beginning of an opening towards God, an opening which, for Rahner, «already contains the whole of Christian salvation and of Christianity»[1496]. Hence, «[t]his must... still be unfolded in that complete fullness and breadth which we know and preserve, but whenever someone loves someone else truly and 'to the end', it is already grasped in its original root»[1497]. Indeed, the ordinary way in which we respond to God's love in our everyday life is through our love of neighbor. The *other* is the ordinary way to God; the way to God is mediated through the *other*, through our neighbor. As John O'Donnell puts it: «[E]ach day offers me an immediate experience of God, but once again a response mediated through creatures in the world, in this case, through my neighbor»[1498].

For Rahner, the intimate and radical relationship between the love of God and the love of neighbor is further rooted in the fact that «when one gives oneself to the other in selfless love, there is God, object and ground of love»[1499]. In our love for our neighbor, God is there, since every act of love is always realized and elevated by the supernatural grace that makes a human act of love possible. God is the «ground» and «mysterious partner» in any genuine love of neighbor, without whom «interpersonal communication in love among men cannot reach

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[1495] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 247.

[1496] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 249; W. G. Jeanrond, «Rahner's Theological Method», 116.

[1497] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 249.

[1498] J. O'Donnell, *Karl Rahner: Life in the Spirit*, 25.

[1499] S. J. Duffy, «Experience of Grace», 53.

its own radical depths and its final and definitive validity»[1500]. Rahner reiterates such a conviction in an interview:

> I'm… of the opinion that here and there, where someone approaches his or her neighbor in a truly ultimate radicalism of selflessness (let's say it cautiously), he or she is on the way to God himself; for the last power and possibility to get out of oneself and really to love one's neighbor can only come from the eternal, secret mystery which alone guarantees meaning to each one, the mystery we call God[1501].

Because one cannot truly love his neighbor without being initially gifted with God's love as its «enabling condition», love of neighbor is not separated from God's love; «this basic human act of attention to the neighbour is always already related to the God of eternal life, even though we may not always be aware of this relationship»[1502]. In other words, the two loves are intimately related to each other not only because of the radical unity between them but also because God's love serves as the «enabling» power of the love of neighbor. Indeed, «the primary basic act of man who is always already 'in the world' is always an act of the love of his neighbour and in this the original love of God is realized in so far as in this basic act are also accepted the conditions of its possibility, one of which is the reference of man to God when supernaturally elevated by grace»[1503].

If, for Rahner, in the very act of loving others we experience God, and that only through our love of neighbor can we express our genuine love for God due to the radical unity of these two loves, then «[t]he act of personal love for another human being is... the all-embracing basic act of man which gives meaning, direction and measure to everything else»[1504]. One can indeed speak of «the primacy

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[1500] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 309.

[1501] K. Rahner, «Autobiographical Reflections, Anonymous Christians», in H. Biallowons – H. D. Egan – P. Imhof, eds. *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 336.

[1502] W. G. Jeanrond, «Rahner's Theological Method», 115.

[1503] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 246.

[1504] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 241.

of love over knowledge in Rahner's theology»[1505]. Indeed, one way through the *impasse* created by competing truth-claims in theology of religions and in interreligious dialogue is through the universal praxis of love—love of neighbor—which in itself is already both an experience and an expression of the love of God. For Rahner, the human person «is indeed someone always addressed and claimed by this Love», for man is «created for it», «thought and called into being so that Love might bestow itself»[1506]. Hence, if we are created in the image and likeness of God who is love, then our essence as spiritual subjects is love, and we conform ourselves considerably to the divine image in us to the extent that we allow ourselves to be given in love by loving and living in self-giving love. For Christians, «love could sum up for contemporary man the whole of Christianity in his concrete life»[1507].

6.3.1.2 A Shift of Focus from an Epistemology of Correct Knowledge of God to a Praxis of Love

As we have seen in Chapter 4, at the forefront of contemporary discussion in the theology of religions and in interreligious dialogue is the situation of *impasse*, created not only by the competing truth-claims between and among religious traditions but also by the contending typological responses to the «Christological question» about the place and the role of Jesus Christ in the salvation of the world. The proposed solution of the pluralists is to adopt a *de jure* pluralism that completely rejects the absolute truth-claims of all religions, beginning with Christianity. They argue that religious concepts, including absolute truth-claims, are simply human attempts to account for the experience of the Absolute, attempts that are necessarily relative and limited since they are based on one's particular religious worldview and historical experience[1508].

[1505] Cf. D. DeCosse, «Rahner's Ethics and the Pacific Rim», 134-135.

[1506] K. Rahner, «Relationship Between Nature and Grace», 311.

[1507] K. Rahner, «The Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbor», 87.

[1508] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 289; cf. J. Hick, «The Next Step Beyond Dialogue», 3-12.

While this approach is completely inadmissible to the exclusivist who looks at other religions negatively and condescendingly, this is also—for Todd Johanson, in his article, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity" in Light of Pluralism and Contemporary Theology of Religions in Asia»—problematic to the inclusivist in spite of its more holistic openness to other religions on account of its view demanding the total rejection of dogma, especially of Christianity's central truths, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation[1509]. In answer to his own question of whether it is possible to embrace the Catholic Church's inclusivism with its Rahnerian Christocentrism and absolute truth-claims and still maintain a profoundly meaningful and significant interreligious engagement with others, Johanson argues that the affirmation of Catholic inclusivism, of truth-claims related to Christ, is necessary in order not to fall into a *de jure* pluralistic relativism. This means that while there is a move toward a more pluralistic and holistic openness in the Christian theology of religions, still Christian inclusivism affirms that Christ is the ultimate and universal Savior of the world, and that all human beings experience and attain salvation through him and his Spirit[1510].

The epistemological difficulty that such a tension creates is, to a certain extent, unavoidable, but for Johanson,

> one can minimize the impact of this epistemological privileging and possibly find a way through the impasse via a pluralistic inclusivism that emphasizes engaged, *charitable praxis* in ongoing, meaningful

[1509] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 290.

[1510] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 290.

> interreligious relationships, whether in formal theological dialogue or next door neighbors relating to each other in their daily lives[1511].

He continues:

> One must affirm truth and truth-claims to maintain the integrity and robust particularity of one's tradition, but for the pluralist inclusivist, the emphasis on love-based practice helps to mitigate the barriers this may erect by minimizing the inherent privileging that inclusivism entails and seeking to be maximally open and generous in our estimation of the work of the Spirit in the world at large[1512].

For Johanson, the way to get past the *impasse* is to embrace it—«[o]nly by embracing it (and not trying to avoid it in either other-denying exclusivism or a *de jure* pluralism) will we be able to truly begin to move through it»[1513]. And one of the three principles he suggests in trying to concretize this significant move is the shift of focus «from an epistemology of correct knowledge of the divine to a praxis of love from the divine», or the shift of focus «from an

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[1511] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 290; emphasis mine. Johanson does not explain what he means by «pluralistic inclusivism» in his article, and so to avoid being misunderstood and confused with the radical pluralism of the pluralists, we will try to clarify this expression. First of all, this concept is coined by Jacques Dupuis, but it is rooted in and an advance and development of Karl Rahner's theology. Dupuis uses this expression interchangeably with the term «inclusive pluralism», which implies that they mean the same thing. For Dupuis, the aim of «pluralistic inclusivism» or «inclusive pluralism» is «[to hold] together the universal constitutive character of the Christ event in the order of salvation and the saving significance of the religious traditions in a plurality of principle of the religious traditions within the one manifold plan of God for humankind» (J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 95). For Dermot Lane, this concept, as put forward by Dupuis, attempts to bring together the strands of inclusivism and pluralism found within Rahner's theology into a higher synthesis, a synthesis that does away with the absolutism of exclusivism and the relativism of radical pluralism by «[safeguarding] the uniqueness of the Christ-event for the salvation of the world while at the same time recognising the possibility of salvation in other religions for their followers» (D. A. Lane, *Stepping Stones to Other Religions*, 160). This means that «the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as universal Savior does not exclude a positive meaning of the other religions in God's plan for humankind» (J. Dupuis, «The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*», 31).

[1512] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 290.

[1513] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 290-291.

epistemology of theological correctness to a praxis of charity»[1514]. This approach does not necessitate an abandonment of principles embodied in truth-claims, nor a suspension or bracketing of those truth-claims for pragmatic considerations, particularly if those claims belong to the essential tenets of one's religious convictions. Rather, «the focus becomes the praxis of love, because it is based on the deepest and strongest principle—the truth that God is love»[1515].

According to Johanson, «the essence of reality is that God is love, ... [a]nd if we are created in the image of love and redeemed by love, then we are love, and love takes its rightful place of primacy, in both principle and practice»[1516]. If the very motive of God's gracious self-communication to the world is love, for the sake of the salvation of the one loved, then the world is graced because it is loved; and «[t]he one who came as incarnate Love has declared that love is the principle of principles, and is expressed ultimately in action for the good of others»[1517], even if those actions are not accompanied by a thematic, categorical, revelatory knowledge on the part of those who are not Christians. For Johanson, the way through the *impasse* created by competing truth-claims in theology of religions and in interreligious interaction is indeed «to embrace the impasse and move through it by acknowledging the truth that God is love and therefore we are love»[1518].

In a footnote, Johanson reiterates the point that «Rahner's theology gives primacy to love over knowledge, and emphasizes that love is primarily an act that demonstrates our openness and surrender to God's grace; in other words, love has primacy, and is primarily

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[1514] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 291.289. The other two principles are «humbly acknowledging our own epistemic limits, and the epistemic justification of the other as just as valid», and «shifting away from a strong Christocentrism and more toward a pneumatological perspective that actively seeks the gracious work of the Spirit in the world at large» (T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 291).

[1515] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 292.

[1516] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 292.

[1517] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 293.

[1518] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 293.

about a loving praxis»[1519]. This primacy, for David DeCosse, calls for «an openhearted approach toward engagement with the other, with other religions, and with other cultures»[1520]. In such an interaction with the other—whether person, religion, or culture—the most important thing is not in having a distilled, categorical knowledge of the meaning of the encounter, but «in the active surrender to the unfolding reality and dynamism of the other encountered as such», in which «new things—new possibilities for community, new norms for unforeseen problems, new interpretations of old moral principles—may be discovered or created in the course of such loving encounters»[1521].

While the epistemological difficulties arising from the plurality of religious claims persist, yet love—which is intrinsic to our nature and infused in our being by God himself—is «a universal principle and language that all can therefore relate to, regardless of exactly how the concept is expressed in various cultures or languages or philosophies or theologies, due to our common nature as spirit in the Spirit»[1522]. And because it is a universal principle and language, it «may give itself and show itself in an innumerable richness and variety of ways, opening up onto an endless hermeneutical horizon as icon of the divine»[1523]. In a fitting re-echo of what Rahner suggests that «at the dawn of... a new epoch, 'love of neighbour' might easily be the root-word which really moves people and the key-word for today»[1524], Johanson argues that «[i]f there is such a thing as a principle of principles in the postmodern, globalizing world, love is the best candidate»[1525]. Likewise, those epistemological difficulties

> can be embraced as necessary to affirm the truth of love based on one's own understanding of it and ultimate reality, thus maintaining

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[1519] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 289.

[1520] D. DeCosse, «Rahner's Ethics and the Pacific Rim», 134.

[1521] D. DeCosse, «Rahner's Ethics and the Pacific Rim», 134-135.

[1522] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 293.

[1523] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 293.

[1524] K. Rahner, «Reflections on the Unity of Love», 249.

[1525] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 294.

the integrity of one's tradition and giving love a contextualized, conceptual foundation, yet the mountain of those epistemological difficulties can be transformed into a mole hill through the practice of love based on our universal experience of it in myriad ways[1526].

6.3.2 *The Primacy of the Praxis of Love Over Correct Epistemology of God as a Way of Advancing Beyond the* Impasse *in Asia*

6.3.2.1 Exploring the Reasons for the Primacy of the Praxis of Love Over Correct Knowledge of God in the Context of Asia

If God who is incomprehensible mystery can be encountered ultimately only in love, then there is a need for us in our Asian approach to God to focus more on the praxis of love than on a correct epistemology of God. In the context of Asia, this means giving priority to orthopraxis over orthodoxy, an orthopraxis that concretely translates itself into love, that brings us close to Jesus' command to love our neighbors. Since, in Asia, Christians comprise a staggering numerical minority, our «neighbors» then are mostly the adherents of other faiths, the majority of whom, like many Asian Christians, are poor and destitute, living in harrowing poverty. For the 1979 International Congress on Mission, the Churches' evangelizing mission in Asia must then start from a profound awareness of these two sobering realities: that Christians who number only about three percent of the entire population are hugely outnumbered by millions of other believers who search for the Divine through other religious traditions, and that the overwhelming majority of Asian people, Christians included, are poor and are mostly consigned to live in the bowels of society[1527].

Let us examine the reasons for the demand for the primacy of the praxis of love over correct knowledge of God in the Asian theology of religions and interreligious dialogue.

Firstly, this demand for the primacy of love over knowledge in our approach to God has to do with what we have said about God

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[1526] T. E. Johanson, «Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity"», 293.

[1527] International Congress on Mission, no. I.1, in FAPA I, 143.

in the first section of this chapter—that God, as the proper object of theology, is incomprehensible mystery. In opting for this shift of focus from an epistemology of theological correctness to a praxis of love, I do not mean to imply that a correct epistemology of God is not important in the Asian theology of religions. Theology is about God, and therefore the effort to achieve a fuller and more genuine knowledge of God will always be an essential part of every religion's theological enterprise. Yet, a correct knowledge of God is not something that can be achieved once and for all in this life, and not even in the beatific vision, as Rahner insists, owing to God's nature as absolute mystery. Growing more fully in our knowledge of the Divine is a task of a lifetime and beyond, and in this lifetime not only for individual Christians but also for all Christian communities, for all local Churches, and for the whole universal Church. Indeed, if God who is theology's formal object is incomprehensible mystery, then there will always be a dimension in theology that is inexpressible, beyond human words, beyond description, which in fact calls for an apophatic theology.

Secondly, this shift of focus from knowledge to love has to do with the existence of irreducible differences among the various religions of the world. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the *impasse* in the theology of religions and in the praxis of interreligious dialogue occurs because of the differences of religious beliefs and convictions among diverse religious traditions. Part of why there is an *impasse* in interreligious dialogue is the various believers' rigid insistence that their theological assertions about God are the correct ones, and that by extension their religions are the only true religions, often with the presumption that they have comprehended God's deepest identity and mysterious workings in the world and others have not. It is precisely these exclusivistic claims that have fanned religious fanaticisms and wars in the history of humanity among various religions. Indeed, because different religious traditions will have endless debates on the nature of God, the question about the correct epistemology of God will always be a divisive issue in the theology of religions. Even within Christianity and the Catholic Church, there is an *impasse* in terms of whether or not the other religions

are ways of salvation for their members, an *impasse* which, as we have seen above and in the previous chapter, significantly affects the nature and quality of interreligious dialogue in Asia. In other words, there is a theological *impasse* that will never go away and will remain with us not only because there will never come a time when dogmas and doctrines will become absolutely crystal-clear, not even for us Christians, but also because of the irreducible differences among the different religious traditions. As regards the various religions of the world, Claude Geffré argues that «[o]nly on the last day will we see the manifestation of the mysterious convergence of all religions, and understand their place in the unique design of God»[1528].

Let us explore briefly some of the most obvious irreducible discrepancies among the various religions. Certainly, there exist many similarities and resemblances among the different religions, both in terms of doctrines and practices. In fact, if there has been significant progress in the aspect of dialogue and collaboration among the various believers for the past decades, it is to a great extent due to their having focused more on what their different religions have in common with each other than on what distinguishes them among themselves. However, one should not forget that there are also unbridgeable differences among the existing religions. Without, for example, going into the details of what constitutes «sanctity» for Buddhism, one should only consider the observation of the Buddhist scholar, Edward Conze, who said: «I once read through a collection of the lives of Roman Catholic saints and there was not one of whom a Buddhist could fully approve. This does not mean that they were unworthy people, but that they were bad Buddhists, though good Christians»[1529]. This observation shows clearly that the spiritual standards by which people are judged to have achieved the genuine purpose of their religious life are different among religions, at least between Christianity and Buddhism.

In reality, part of the difficulties encountered by theologians of religions and practitioners of interreligious dialogue is not just about

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[1528] C. Geffré, «The Christological Paradox», 171.

[1529] Cited by J. A. DiNoia, «The Universality of Salvation», 385.

the differences among various religions in their understandings of God but also about salvation, a question that is of paramount importance for any theology of religions[1530]. According to Daniel Madigan, when different religions speak of «salvation», there is a presumption that the concept is understood to mean the same thing and to constitute the same «reality» for all religions; that it is «a universal and univocal term»[1531]. Yet, a deeper study of various religions reveals precisely that among them is found «a variety of religious ends on offer»; that it is not just the case of having «one single salvation» and religious adherents only have to decide which among the different religious paths being offered they should take to lead them to salvation[1532]. In fact, for Madigan, even those religious traditions that propose some kind of liberation as their «religious end» understand the term differently; he notes that liberation from ignorance, liberation from sin, and liberation from suffering are not just different words for the same divine reality. Comparing, for example, the Buddhist «Nirvana» with the Christian «heaven», Madigan asserts: «Nirvana is not just heaven with an exotic name»[1533]. For Joseph DiNoia, the different religions of the world cannot reasonably be viewed as merely advancing distinct ways to identical religious aims, since «"Salvation," "Nirvana," and "Paradise" are not simply different terms designating the single reality sought by Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims under different descriptions»[1534].

However, there seems to be no *impasse* when it comes to the demand for and the necessity of the different religious traditions to work together for the alleviation of the poverty of teeming millions of poor people across the various religions, to work together for

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[1530] S. Mark Heim criticizes the assumption that there exists only one single religious goal among the various religions of the world, and that all religions point to the same religious end. (Cf. S. M. Heim, *Salvations*).

[1531] D. A. Madigan, «*Nostra Aetate* and the questions it chose to leave open», 784-785.

[1532] D. A. Madigan, «*Nostra Aetate* and the questions it chose to leave open», 785.

[1533] D. A. Madigan, «*Nostra Aetate* and the questions it chose to leave open», 785.

[1534] J. A. DiNoia, «The Universality of Salvation», 386.

the dismantling of the socio-economic structures that bring untold sufferings to the poor and the oppressed. In fact, the different religions of Asia are beginning to realize that the uplifting of the lives of millions of Asian people is the task of all religious traditions in the continent, that the cooperation and collaboration of all believers and people of goodwill is a must, is indispensable. On the part of the Asian bishops, they perceive the presence «of God at work in our world through the activities and dedication of people—both Christian and non-Christian—committed to the creation of a new society»[1535]. They believe that in order for the Asian Churches to be the voice for the voiceless, «we should cooperate with any person of good will in the same task without narrowness, without paternalism and in open dialogue»[1536]. For the bishops, «[i]t should be our endeavor to unite wherever possible with our brethren of other faiths and religions, and with all men of good will for the speedy and early achievement of justice in the world»[1537]. They believe that the main and crucial issue in Asia has to do with life, and if Jesus came that all may have life, and life to the full (John 10:10), then any effort on the part of the local Churches to bring about solutions to the problems of poverty, injustice, oppression and violence in the continent is in accord with God's precious plan for humanity.

This leads us to the third reason for the primacy of the praxis of love over knowledge and it is this: that the call for the primacy of the praxis of love over any effort to achieve a correct epistemology of God in the Asian theology of religions is something that is imposed by the magnitude of the poverty of the immense masses in Asia and the urgency on the part of the Asian Churches to act upon their plight. It is this sense of urgency that calls for this primacy or this shift of focus in the context of Asia. For Felix Wilfred, in his article, «The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences», «[m]ore than half of humanity lives in Asia and 80% of these people are poor, hungry and oppressed»[1538]. If,

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[1535] BISA II, no. 3, in FAPA I, 203.

[1536] BISA II, no. 11, in FAPA I, 205.

[1537] BISA III, no. 6, in FAPA I, 208.

[1538] F. Wilfred, «The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)», xxv.

according to the 1998 Synod of Bishops for Asia, Asia had at that time a population of 3,456,280,000 which made up almost two thirds of the world's population of 5,682,374,000[1539], about 2,765,024,000 (or 80% of the Asian population) were wretchedly poor. For Wilfred, if «over 50% of the population is below 15 years of age, we can see how those most struck by hunger and poverty are the innocent children»[1540]. According to Gabriela Mistral, cited by Wilfred in another article,

> [w]e are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot wait. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer "Tomorrow." His name is "Today"[1541].

In this revolting situation of children «dying before their time»[1542] because of hunger, malnutrition, and lack of sanitation, and at the sight of so much degradation of human life, of injustice and of oppression being committed against the poor in the continent, the Asian Churches cannot remain indifferent or simply remain on the level of theology or of exhortations. The various religions cannot continue debating on the nature of God while millions of Asians suffer daily from the clutches of poverty and the snares of oppression. With a sense of urgency, as he borrows Mistral's expression, Wilfred contends: «"Today" is the name of the poor»[1543]. According to Peter Phan, for the FABC, «[t]he most effective way to explain *who* God *is* is to show *where* God is *present*.

[1539] J. T. Sanchez, «Statistical Overview of the Church in Asia», 621. It has been more than two decades already since the 1998 Asian Synod, but perhaps the level of poverty among the Asians has not changed at all, or may have even gotten worse. In 1975, the Asian bishops made this observation: «We have seen how millions of our Asian brethren are living below the poverty line. It would appear that due to the present economic systems the disparities between the rich and the poor may not only continue, but may even widen, so that some of the poor might become still poorer with the years» (BISA III, no. 2, in FAPA I, 207).

[1540] F. Wilfred, «The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)», xxv.

[1541] Cited by F. Wilfred, «Church's Commitment to the Poor», 79.

[1542] This expression is borrowed from M. H. Ellis – O. Maduro, *The Future of Liberation Theology*, xiv.

[1543] F. Wilfred, «Church's Commitment to the Poor», 79.

God's essence is revealed in God's actions…. God is present and active mostly in the Asian poor»[1544].

Still, there is another—fourth—reason for this primacy of love over knowledge in the context of Asia. If God is truly loved in our genuine love for our neighbors, which means that God is encountered in our Asian brothers and sisters, the majority of whom are poor, then, in Asia, the local Churches grow more in their epistemology of God in their encounters and loving praxis with the poor, the outcasts, and the marginalized of the continent. We grow more in our knowledge of God not just through our dealings and involvements with the poor but most especially through the poor themselves. The Asian bishops gathered for the Fourth Bishops' Institute for Social Action in 1978 admitted this when they said: «It is our task to put constantly before the people the liberating vision of the Gospel, but it is they who will most often help us to understand its deepest meaning»[1545]. As Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, says:

> [The poor] have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way (EG 198).

In our being with the poor, God may reveal to us his «unfamiliar face» and insights that we may only know through them[1546].

Lastly, the reason for the primacy of love over knowledge has to do with the universality of love and its openness to a myriad of expressions among various religions and people of goodwill. Love is the «basic

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[1544] P. C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 121; emphasis in the original.

[1545] BISA IV, no. 10, in FAPA I, 213.

[1546] A penetrating article by Antonio M. Pernia, SVD, entitled «The Stranger and the Poor: Two Challenges to the Missionary Church in *Evangelii Gaudium*», explores this dimension of the «"Other Face" of God [which] is revealed when we come face to face with the Stranger and the Poor», that «[i]t is when we come "face to face" with the Poor and the Stranger that we get a glimpse of the other face face of God» (A. M. Pernia, «The Stranger and the Poor», 40.37-56).

principle... [that is]... taught by every religion»[1547]. In 2007, a large group of Muslim scholars and leaders came up with the document, «A Common Word Between You and Us», whose main objective is to initiate dialogue with Christians. If such is its goal, it is indeed a timely document not only because «Muslims and Christians make up over half of the world's religious adherents» but also because of the «significant tensions, fears, and a general mistrust between the believers of each religion»[1548] that render dialogue between them extremely difficult, due primarily to the «many quarrels and dissensions [that] have arisen between [them] over the centuries» (NA 3).

According to the document, «[t]he Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love for the neighbor is the common ground between Islam and Christianity»[1549]. The document provides Islamic passages on the necessity and paramount importance of love of neighbor which are very close to Jesus' command for Christians to love their neighbors. The document says:

> There are numerous injunctions in Islam about the necessity and paramount importance of love for—and mercy towards—the neighbour. Love of the neighbour is an essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God because in Islam without love of the neighbour there is no true faith in God and no righteousness. The Prophet Muhammad said: 'None of you has faith until you love for your brother what you love for yourself.' And: 'None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself.'[1550]

In this quotation, we hear Christian reverberations not just from Islamic passages pertaining to the love of God and the love of neighbor but also from the intimate unity between these two loves from the Quranic point of view. For Bernard Brady, if there is a common ground between Christianity and Islam on such a fundamental human experience as

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[1547] BISCOM V, in FAPA IV, 244.

[1548] B. Brady, «Universal Love and Interreligious Dialogue», 40.

[1549] Cited by B. Brady, «Universal Love and Interreligious Dialogue», 39.

[1550] Cited by B. Brady, «Universal Love and Interreligious Dialogue», 48.

love, «perhaps there is a common ground between other religions, ideologies, and worldviews as well»[1551].

In Christian tradition, the Bible is replete with confessions of God as love and what that love means in our relationships with one another. *The First Letter of St John* says:

> Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love…. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us.... Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us…. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them (1John 4: 8-12, 16b).

In the gospels, the two greatest commandments are in fact commands to love God and neighbor: «You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might» (Deut 6: 5), and «[Y]ou shall love your neighbor as yourself» (Lev 19: 18) (Cf. Matt 22: 36-40; Mark 12: 28-31). During the Last Supper, Jesus left his disciples a new commandment: «I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another» (John 14: 34).

While reflecting on «universal love» and expounding on the commonalities between Islam and Christianity in relation to the basic human experience of loving and being loved, the document «skips the complicated questions of Muslim-Christian dialogue, for example, the nature of God and Jesus, the status of the Prophet Mohammed, the understanding of God's revelation, and so on, for something simple and foundational», which for Brady is «the genius of *A Common Word*»[1552]. This goes to show that we can truly pursue the praxis of love and loving service with adherents of other religions without really touching on the complicated theological issues that more often than not derail the projects of dialogue and of human

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[1551] B. Brady, «Universal Love and Interreligious Dialogue», 40.

[1552] B. Brady, «Universal Love and Interreligious Dialogue», 41.

development among various believers. Indeed, «there is much in common between the two religions, not only in the commands to love, but also in the understanding of love itself»[1553].

For the FABC-Office of Evangelization, in its document, «Consultation on Christian Presence Among Muslims in Asia», «Christ's command to universal love, when truly lived, shows Muslims and peoples of other faiths that God's love is not limited by communal or national bonds»[1554]. In the praxis of genuine love, people do not ask whether the recipient of their loving act belongs to their own particular religion or not. The very nature of love itself—if love is true and genuine—demands that the motive of the loving act itself be oblivious of the ethnic, religious, and cultural lines that divide and separate human beings from each other. *The Parable of the Last Judgment* in Matthew's Gospel (as well as *The Parable of the Good Samaritan* in Luke's) is explicit on this. Seated on his throne in all his glory, Christ, the Judge, says: «Truly I say to you, whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did unto me.... Whatever you did not do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did not do unto me» (Matt 25: 40, 45). By the fact that they inquired as to when they saw Jesus in dire necessity and came to his aid, it is evident that the *blessed* in this parable were *never* conscious that when they were doing charitable acts for others they were doing them for Jesus, or were doing them *at the same time* for Jesus. Conversely, the *damned* in this story failed to realize that any charitable act done for others would be considered by Jesus, the Judge, as an act done for himself, or as an act done *also* for himself. In other words, «in the Gospel parable both those who accepted Jesus and those who rejected him are unaware that it was He whom they have met»[1555]. Indeed, there is and can be an implicit or anonymous love of God in our concrete love of others.

That Christ is love and encountered in our love for our neighbors, especially the poor, is expressed in several other FABC documents. For the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly, the compassionate service

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[1553] B. Brady, «Universal Love and Interreligious Dialogue», 44.

[1554] FABC-OE, no. 27, in FAPA I, 170.

[1555] FABC-OTC, no. 1.5.2, in FAPA III, 264.

offered by the local Churches to the Asian people «will welcome in each human being—but especially the poor, deprived and oppressed—the very person of Christ who has united himself to every human being though he/she may be unaware of it»[1556]. In the document, «Methodology: Asian Christian Theology», the FABC-Office of Theological Concerns argues that in *The Parable of the Last Judgment* we see the poor as «vicars of Christ», as representatives of Christ: «In women, children, the sick, the prisoner, the hungry, i.e the poor, we meet Christ and serve Christ. This is a faith affirmation, and for committed persons an unambiguous experience of God and Christ»[1557]. For the Second Asia Conference of Theological Students (ACTS II), just as Jesus commanded his disciples to love not only each other but also their neighbors—«others» who represent various groups of people including «strangers» who belong to other cultures and religions—so must we also love our brothers and sisters from other faiths, the majority of whom are poor and destitute. For the Conference, when we show our love for them through service and servanthood, «[i]t is then that we live up to our discipleship in Jesus, who was emphatic that *the priority of love for our neighbours is the most important virtue in Christian living*»[1558]. With a trace of Rahner, the FABC-Office of Theological Concerns, in its document, «The Spirit at Work in Asia Today», writes: «It is not correct to say that some people have never met Christ, for everyone meets him repeatedly in the person of the neighbour in need. In each encounter, Christ offers the grace of salvation, which each person either accepts or refuses, depending on one's response to the neighbour»[1559]. Indeed, since Christ «has a special love for the poor and wishes to be identified and served in the naked, hungry thirsty, and imprisoned», the Church, therefore, «as a witness to Christ, must make a wholehearted commitment to the poor and is impelled to opt in favor of them»[1560].

[1556] FABC V, no. 6.4, in FAPA I, 284.

[1557] FABC-OTC, no. 3.2.4.4, in FAPA III, 361.

[1558] ACTS II, no. 27, in FAPA IV, 212; emphasis mine.

[1559] FABC-OTC, no. 1.5.2, in FAPA III, 264.

[1560] BISA III, no. 4, in FAPA I, 208.

6.3.2.2 The Asian Churches' Dialogue with the Poor in the FABC Documents

If it is true that God can be and is in fact encountered and loved in our neighbors, then in Asia God is loved concretely and particularly in the poor, who constitute a bewildering majority of the Asian population. In the context of Asia, consideration of the primacy of the praxis of genuine love over an epistemology of theological correctness is of utmost importance, and the local Churches live out and fulfill this primacy precisely in their self-emptying love and preferential option for the poor, in their humble service of the poor, the majority of whom belong to other living faiths. While there is a need to listen to Jesus, as God's Word, in the Scriptures and in the Church, there is also a need to listen to persons and events, and to listen and reach out especially to the least of Jesus' brethren, the poor, the needy and the outcast. For the Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly held in 1986, «[h]ere is where a preferential option for the poor, after the example of Jesus himself, demands a spirituality of incarnated "otherness," all that is meant by the simple words "love of neighbor"»[1561].

It is for this reason that the Second Formation for Inter-Religious Affairs (FIRA II) in 1999 asserts that in carrying out the Church's evangelizing mission in Asia, «our greatest priority as Asian Christians is the witness of love for our neighbors, especially those who are followers of religions other than Christianity»[1562]. Because in dialogue with religions we encounter adherents of other faiths who are mostly poor, interreligious dialogue will also be at the same time dialogue with the poor. In fact, and as we have seen in the previous chapter, because all religions are at the service of humanity, interreligious dialogue cannot be restricted to the religious domain but includes all spheres of life such as socio-economic, political, cultural and religious[1563]. Likewise, the Third Formation for Inter-Religious Affairs (FIRA III) held in 2000 affirms the primacy of orthopraxis over orthodoxy in interreligious dialogue. Because of the ambiguity

[1561] FABC IV, no. 4.8.5, in FAPA I, 196.

[1562] FIRA II, no. 1.1, in FAPA III, 125.

[1563] BIRA III, no. 7, in FAPA I, 120.

of theological issues, like the Church's doctrine on salvation and its teachings on mission, conversion, evangelization, and the presence of truth in other religions, «[w]e are inclined to place less emphasis on doctrines and theologies and more emphasis on emulating Jesus as our model of dialogue, compassion and understanding»[1564]. For this formation program, «interreligious dialogue will be more fruitful if we move away from theological issues which divide and focus on commonalities which unite. In particular we believe that interreligious dialogue ought to focus on issues of social justice and the option for the poor, oppressed and the marginalized»[1565]. In interreligious dialogue, the Asian Churches should therefore advocate a «secular» approach that revolves around the human person regardless of his religious affiliation, and should commit themselves to reducing poverty, deprivation and oppression among the poor, irrespective of their racial backgrounds or religious affiliations[1566].

In the context of Asia, «human development» is synonymous with «dialogue with the poor» since it constitutes an essential goal of such a dialogue. For the Asian bishops, gathered for the Fifth Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA V), «human development is the profound concept that translates sharply for our time the simple and fundamental command of the Gospel that we love one another»[1567]. For the International Congress on Mission held in 1979, there has been no dearth of articulation regarding the meaning and the implications of the discernment that every local Church of Asia must become a Church of the poor. With a sense of urgency, the Congress argues: «To continue with more declarations would be a betrayal of God's People in Asia. From words to action: that seems to be the only theme worthy of our serious missionary activity»[1568]. For the Japanese bishops, «[i]n missionary work among those of other religions, what is more important than convincing words is

[1564] FIRA III, no. 4.4, in FAPA III, 136.

[1565] FIRA III, no. 4.5, in FAPA III, 137.

[1566] FIRA III, nos. 4.5, 4.6, in FAPA III, 137.

[1567] BISA V, no. 6, in FAPA I, 218.

[1568] International Congress on Mission, no. 6, in FAPA I, 145.

the attitude of standing by the side of the weak and powerless and showing them compassion»[1569].

The impulse and discernment of the Asian bishops for the Church of Asia to become the «Church of the poor» came as early as in the historic Asian Bishops' Meeting in Manila, Philippines, in 1970. In this gathering, the bishops looked at the face of Asia and found in this continent of teeming masses «a face largely marked with poverty, with under-nourishment and ill-health, scarred by war and suffering, troubled and restless»[1570]. In response to this sobering situation, the Asian bishops

> resolve[d], first of all, to be more truly "the Church of the poor." If we are to place ourselves at the side of the multitude, we must in our way of life share something of their poverty. The Church cannot set up islands of affluence in a sea of want and misery; our own personal lives must give witness to evangelical simplicity, and no man, no matter how lowly and poor, should find it hard to come to us and find in us their brothers[1571].

They also resolved to commit themselves to the concern for the total development of the Asian people, believing that «man's humanity is God's gift and making, and its promotion a task and duty laid on all of us by Him»[1572].

A more developed articulation of their resolve for every local Church in Asia to be the Church of the poor came in the First FABC Plenary Assembly of 1974. In this assembly, the Asian bishops considered «dialogue with the poor» one of the three «dialogue-tasks» of the Asian Churches and an integral element of the local Churches' overall mission in Asia. For the bishops, «[a] local church in dialogue with its people, in so many countries in Asia, means dialogue with the poor», since «most of Asia is made up of multitudes of the poor».[1573]

[1569] Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of the Asian Episcopal Conferences», 31.

[1570] Asian Bishops' Meeting, no. 5, in FAPA I, 4.

[1571] Asian Bishops' Meeting, no. 19, in FAPA I, 5.

[1572] Asian Bishops' Meeting, no. 21, in FAPA I, 6.

[1573] FABC I, no. 19, in FAPA I, 15.

The document provided one of the most significant statements of the assembly because it settled the whole question of the relationship between evangelization and working for human development. In the assembly, the Asian bishops, obviously influenced by the document, «Justice in the World», of the 1971 Synod of Bishops, argued that «the search for holiness and the search for justice, evangelization and the promotion of true human development and liberation, are not only not opposed, but make up today the integral preaching of the Gospel, especially in Asia»[1574].

The Asian bishops' great solicitude for the poor led to the establishment of the Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA) which had its first gathering in Novaliches, Philippines on March 1-15, 1974, more than a month before the First FABC Plenary Assembly on April 27, 1974. BISA I, in a way, anticipated FABC I's description of the poor and the reason for their poverty. While Asia is a continent so immensely rich in human resources, cultural values and spiritual insights, in fact a continent with many ancient cultures and diverse religions, many of which antedate Christianity by millennia, it is also a continent of teeming millions of poor people. And the major cause of the poverty of the overwhelming majority of Asians, a poverty that cuts across ethnic, cultural, and religious divides, is the unjust distribution of and unequal access to material wealth and economic resources in the continent, the economic inequalities that characterize social relations and the political conditions that maintain such inequalities. The vast majority of Asians are poor because they are deprived—deprived not only of access to material commodities they need in order to live a truly humane life but also of access to the resources they need to produce such commodities. And they are deprived because they are oppressed; they live under economic, social, and political structures marked by inequality and injustice[1575].

[1574] FABC I, no. 23, in FAPA I, 16. In the Bishops' Institute for Social Action meetings, the Asian bishops cite the 1971 Synod of Bishops' declaration again in BISA III, no. 4, in FAPA I, 208 and BISA V, no. 6, in FAPA I, 218, which illustrates the significance of this statement for the Asian Churches.

[1575] BISA I, no. 2, in FAPA I, 199; FABC I, nos. 19-20, in FAPA I, 15.

Analysis of the root-causes of poverty in Asia is deepened more in other FABC documents. In many countries of Asia, a small percentage of the population, mostly the economic elite that is hand-in-glove with the ruling class, controls most of the country's resources, and, according to the FABC-TAC document, «Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony», it is «the single greatest barrier to solving the problems of widespread poverty and inequality» in the continent[1576]. In Asia, «[t]he lack of bread is due to the insatiable greed of a few that imposes poverty on the many»[1577]. It is these social, economic and political conditions characterized by structural injustices that deny the poor «life-conditions worthy of men and women created in God's image»[1578]. It is among the poor of the continent that the God-given gift of life is endangered by these unjust structures that are undoubtedly contrary to God's will. Hence, in Asia, the preferential love for the poor, deprived and oppressed «calls for more than dole-outs, or even for development efforts with and on behalf of the poor»; «[t]o be truly effective, this preferential love must seek the transformation of sinful structures or structures of injustice that prevent the poor from achieving their authentic human development»[1579]. Indeed, if «the glory of God is man [and woman] fully alive», as Irenaeus affirms, and if the condition of massive poverty in Asia is due to millions of Asians being «deprived of access to a full sharing in human brotherhood»[1580], then for the Asian bishops an integral part of their evangelizing mission in Asia is to dialogue with the poor and work for their liberation and their integral human development.

However, for BISA I and FABC I, the preferential option for the poor does not mean merely working *for* them, for their total human liberation, in a paternalistic manner like a benevolent institution, but also and more importantly working and being *with* them, for «[w]hat

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[1576] FABC-TAC, no. 2.1.2, in FAPA II, 248.

[1577] FABC IX, in FAPA V, 31; FABC-TAC, no. 2.1.2, in FAPA II, 248.

[1578] BIMA II, no. 12, in FAPA I, 100.

[1579] FABC-TAC, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», 110.

[1580] International Congress on Mission, no.1, in FAPA I, 143.

we are with the people is more important that what we do for them»[1581]. This process involves a genuine experience and understanding of their poverty, an experience of the actual conditions of the poor in their misery, vulnerability and want, learning from them their real needs and aspirations as they see and are able to articulate them, and striving for their fulfillment by working with them for the transformation of the structures and situations that keep them locked up in a vicious cycle of poverty, deprivation and powerlessness[1582]. The Fourth Workshop of the International Congress on Mission held on December 7, 1979 in Manila, Philippines, re-echoed BISA I and FABC I when it affirmed that «the Church does not merely work for the poor in the manner of a beneficent institution but more so with the poor, sharing their life and their aspirations, knowing their greatest despair and their hope, walking with them in their search for authentic humanity in Jesus»[1583]. Indeed, to dialogue with the poor, «it is not enough that the Church be for the poor—she must in a true sense be a poor Church»[1584]. The Asian bishops believe that their option for the poor «is, in the last analysis, an *act of faith*: faith that it is from the material deprivation of our poor people, as well as from their tremendous human potential, [and from their aspirations for a more fully human and brotherly world], that the Spirit [Christ] is calling the churches of Asia»[1585].

In BISA II, the Asian bishops resolved «to be the *voice* of those without a voice: the poor and the weak, the marginated and the victims of injustice, wherever they may be», and said that «[t]he power we have—be it charismatic, moral, political, social, intellectual, etc.—should be always used in the service of others, especially of the poor and weak»[1586]. In their analysis of the social reality of Asia,

[1581] F. Wilfred, «What the Spirit Says to the Churches (Rev. 2:7», 132.

[1582] BISA I, no. 4, in FAPA I, 199-200; FABC I, no. 20, in FAPA I, 15; FABC I, no. 17, in FAPA I, 23.

[1583] International Congress on Mission, no. 4, in FAPA I, 144.

[1584] BIMA I, no. 11m, in FAPA I, 94.

[1585] BISA I, no. 7, in FAPA I, 200; FABC I, no. 22, in FAPA I, 16. The words in brackets are from the FABC I version.

[1586] BISA II, nos. 11, 14, in FAPA I, 205.

the bishops, in BISA III, affirmed that the injustice, oppression and poverty which characterize the continent are simply reflections of social and structural sins. In answer to their own question of how how they may respond to the cries of the Asian people, especially the poor and the oppressed, the bishops, as mentioned above, declared that the Church, as a witness to Christ who «has a special love for the poor and wishes to be identified and served in the naked, hungry, thirsty, and imprisoned… must make a wholehearted commitment to the poor and is impelled to opt in favor of them»[1587].

In BISA IV, the Asian bishops came to see the evils of colonialism, feudalism and Western capitalism as the root-causes of injustice, oppression and poverty which have disrupted the inherent balance of the traditional economic texture of many countries in Asia. They observed that the main beneficiaries of this system are the foreign markets, investors and the local elites. Since the poor, the victims of these systemic evils, do not go through such despicable conditions willingly and voluntarily, they are coerced through authoritarian regimes, controlled mass media, and denial of their basic human rights. In this situation, «[c]oncentration of power and resources in the hands of a few ensures that all the society's institutions will be biased against the poor, for example, education, housing, health care, jobs and law»[1588].

In BISA V, the challenge, among others, of the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor made the bishops realize that «we must strive to become truly the Church of the Poor»[1589]. In answer to their own question about the meaning of being a Church of the poor if the Church is for all—for the poor and the rich alike—the bishops gave this answer:

> We found an answer in the way many churches of Asia are moving in the direction of greater and greater involvement with the life of their people; their simply being with the poor; their attempts at working out programs of human development—integral, respectful

[1587] BISA III, no. 4, in FAPA I, 208.

[1588] BISA IV, no. 5, in FAPA I, 212.

[1589] BISA V, no. 12, in FAPA I, 219.

> of the people's dignity, attuned to their cultures, their standing with them in their hard struggle for justice and for self-empowerment; their insistence that the rich become themselves real members of the Church of the Poor by fulfilling their obligations in justice and charity toward the poor[1590].

For the FABC, genuine discipleship «naturally flows into generous service of love for others», which «is not foreign to evangelization»[1591]. Adherents of other religions should not only hear the Gospel but also witness it, which means that Christians should give more «examples» than «sermons»; and «[e]ssential to this witness is unselfish service to the world»[1592]. In fact, many forms of apostolate and social service for human development that the local Churches do with and for their Asian neighbors «are integral to evangelization and are indispensable expressions of authentic discipleship»[1593].

> Forming a social conscience, denouncing injustices, collaborating with peoples of other religions in the work of justice, having a preferential option for the poor, caring for the integrity of the environment, caring for the sick, educating the youth, defending the promotion of human rights, renewing social structures, etc. are integral dimensions of the proclamation of the Gospel[1594].

Indeed, «[s]olidarity with the oppressed and the marginalized, involvement in their struggle for justice and their rights, reawakening the conscience of society for their causes—all these are means of expressing the integral salvation which God offers to humanity in Jesus Christ our Savior»[1595]. As early as their First FABC Plenary Assembly in 1974, the Asian bishops have already adopted as their own the prophetic words of the 1971 Synod of Bishops' document, «Justice in the World», which affirm that «action in behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to

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[1590] BISA V, no. 13, in FAPA I, 219.

[1591] FABC-OE, no. 19, in FAPA IV, 254.

[1592] International Congress on Mission, no. 6, in FAPA I, 136.

[1593] FABC-OE, no. 20, in FAPA IV, 254.

[1594] FABC-OE, no. 20, in FAPA IV, 254.

[1595] SABIM, no. 9, in FAPA II, 17.

us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation», and have argued that this particular teaching is «in our time… part and parcel of "preaching the Good News to the poor" (Mt. 11:5; Lk 4:18)»[1596].

It is for this reason that, for the «Message of X FABC Plenary Assembly», «the spirituality of the new evangelizer does not separate our world from God's Reign. It does not separate the material from the religious, nor does it divorce faith-life from the task of transforming the socioeconomic and political life»[1597]. For the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly, God's love, his self-giving love to all, especially to the poor, in Jesus, «is at the heart of all genuine service to life», and it is this love that impels the Asian Churches «to confront and act against death-dealing realities, oppression and injustice, discrimination and exploitation, the destruction of eco-systems, the tampering with life»[1598]. Quoting the October 20, 1962 «Message to Mankind of the Council Fathers» of Vatican II, the bishops of Asia gathered at a meeting in Manila in 1970 assert: «[I]t is far from true that because we are committed to our Christ we are diverted from the duties and tasks of this earth. On the contrary, faith, hope and love of Christ compel us to serve our brothers, knowing that as He laid *down His life for us, we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers*»[1599]. A document issued by the FABC-Office of Human Development in 2001 argues that «[t]o advocate on behalf of the poor, oppressed and marginalized is an integral part of the practice of our faith»[1600]. Alluding to Paul VI's insight in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (no. 31) on the relationship between evangelization and human promotion, the FABC-Theological Advisory Commission's document, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», affirms that the Church's task of «evangelization could and should [not] ignore problems concerning justice, liberation, development and peace…. if it is to be true to the commandment of love which is the

[1596] FABC I, no. 22, in FAPA I, 15-16.

[1597] FABC X, no. 3, in FAPA V, 44.

[1598] FABC VI, no. 14.3, in FAPA II, 9.

[1599] Asian Bishops' Meeting, no. 18, in FAPA I, 5; emphasis in the original.

[1600] FABC-OHD, no. 2.1, in FAPA III, 59.

characteristic mark of Christ's disciple»[1601]. Just as Jesus accomplished his mission through kenotic service and love for others, especially for the poor, so the Asian Churches must follow him in his self-emptying love in their humble service to the poor and the marginalized of the continent. The «Message of the FABC IX Plenary Assembly» declares that «[l]ove made perfect in self-sacrifice by Jesus… calls forth nothing less than a life-style of sacrificial love»[1602]. The Final Statement of FABC X speaks of Jesus' *kenosis* in his passion and death on the cross as the climax of God's utterly gratuitous love for humanity, a total self-emptying in the form of a slave which «demonstrates the depth of his love for us,... a love the world has never seen[,]... the infinite love of God»[1603].

Indeed, since 1970, the Asian Churches have made an option for the poor, aligning themselves with the oppressed and the marginalized, while of course always admitting that, not just in this particular task but also in the spheres of inculturation and interreligious dialogue, there has always been a gap between the vision of the FABC and the actual performance of the Asian Churches in matters of preferential option for the poor. The Asian bishops confess that in spite of the self-sacrificing lives and ministries of so many Christians, the Churches of Asia, on the whole, «do not project the image of a poor Church»[1604]. While they have always been dedicated to the poor, «our institutions and services have often projected images of richness, and even alienation from the poor»[1605]. Speaking of economic power and resources being in the hands of just very few, and of society's institutions being biased against the poor, the Asian bishops gathered in BISA IV acknowledge that «[w]ittingly or unwittingly the Church has been part to this arrangement»[1606]. Despite their being a minority in the continent, the Asian Churches have always been perceived as powerful, wealthy, and privileged institutions. It is this gap, this

[1601] FABC-TAC, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», 110.

[1602] FABC IX, in FAPA V, 6.

[1603] FABC X, no. 48, in FAPA V, 75-76.

[1604] BIMA I, no. 11, in FAPA I, 94.

[1605] BISA III, no. 3, in FAPA I, 207.

[1606] BISA IV, no. 5, in FAPA I, 212.

«inconsistency between word and witness which diminishes the credibility of the message of salvation the Church proclaims in the name of Jesus»[1607].

6.3.2.3 The Meaning and Implications of Jesus' *Kenosis* in the Incarnation for the Local Churches' Evangelizing Mission in Asia

To be truly the Church of the poor, every local Church of Asia must genuinely incarnate in its life and mission the *kenosis* of Jesus, his self-emptying love for others. For Luis Antonio Tagle, in his essay, «The Mission of the Church in Asia: Living the Incarnation in Poverty and Plurality», while the self-emptying of Jesus had its highest point in the Cross, this *kenosis*—understood as abasing one's self, or divesting one's self of one's prerogatives or one's privileges—was already at work in the Incarnation, which is «the source and pattern of the Church's dialogic mission, and therefore of its very life», and «the principle of mission understood and lived as dialogue»[1608]. God's love towards the world was shown in the Incarnation and in the Cross—both of which speak of God's *kenosis* in Jesus. According to Tagle, when understood as a dynamic process of self-emptying or divestment of one's prerogatives or privileges, the Incarnation, as enunciated in Philippians 2:5-8, opens a whole plethora of possibilities and challenges for the Church's mission in Asia.

Tagle identifies three elements of the mystery of the Incarnation and its implications for dialogue and mission in the continent. Firstly, «the voluntary self-emptying of the Son's prerogatives and privileges meant the refusal to mark his human life with the power and magnificence commonly associated with the divine»[1609]. For Tagle, the *kenosis* of the Son of God, spelled out in the anonymity of his life in Nazareth, in the non-messianic character of his public life, and in his death by condemnation, undermines accustomed notions and expectations of a divine appearance. Secondly, «the kenosis of the Son of God is the

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[1607] International Congress on Mission, no. 10, in FAPA I, 146.

[1608] L-A. Tagle, «The Mission of the Church in Asia», 122.123.125.

[1609] L-A. Tagle, «The Mission of the Church in Asia», 125.

expression of God in love», for «God's love, by its nature and dynamism, is self-emptying»; the expression of God's self-emptying takes the form of a human being—Jesus, the Logos incarnate, «the Word, love expressed and emptied»[1610]. And thirdly, if dialogue is relationship, this dialogue is fully gleaned in the Incarnation. In fact, for Tagle, «God's relation with creation at large can be considered kenotic, God's self-giving for the creature, for what is *other*, *other*-than-God»[1611].

Indeed, the *kenosis* of the *Logos* is an opening to, and an embrace of, the *other* as *other*. Michael Barnes, in trying to address the question of how the Church should relate to the «other», speaks of the «other» as «at once a post-modern term of mind-bending obscurity and the heart of the gospel reality: stranger, neighbor, potential friend, with whom so much is shared yet who often represents a difference which can only be comprehended in the silence of faith»[1612]. For Jacques Dupuis, relating to the «other» demands nothing less than «conversion» to the other:

> To begin with, it means a true sym-pathy, or "em-pathy," that helps understand others as they understand themselves, not as we, often according to stubborn traditional prejudices, think we know who they are. In a word, it entails unrestricted acceptance of "others" even in their difference, in their irreducible personal identity. The challenge—but at the same time the grace—of interreligious dialogue consists in this acceptance of the difference of the others[1613].

In the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly, the Asian bishops challenge Catholics not only «to appreciate the other», but also «to learn from the other, even to be corrected by the other», while at the same time «remain[ing] faithful to what is best in our own tradition»[1614].

The implications of these three elements of the Incarnation as kenotic, self-emptying love and service are clear for Tagle:

[1610] L-A. Tagle, «The Mission of the Church in Asia», 126.

[1611] L-A. Tagle, «The Mission of the Church in Asia», 126.

[1612] M. Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, x-xi.

[1613] J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 7.

[1614] FABC V, no. 2.3.3, in FAPA I, 278.

> As Christ emptied himself, so must the Church. As Christ did his mission in self-emptying, so must the Church. As Christ stripped himself of all privileges in favor of a humble hidden manifestation of the divine, so must the Church.... As Christ emptied himself in openness to the other as other, so must the Church. As Christ dialogued with the world and humanity in self-emptying love, so must the Church[1615].

As Christ emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, thus emptying himself of his divine prerogatives, so the local Churches of Asia must embrace the *kenosis* of Christ and make it their own. And they must do this not only because this is the way of Jesus who was poor, not only because the poor are more at home with Christian communities that have emptied themselves of privileges, but also because the Kingdom of God, which is the goal of the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission, is most revealed in people who have divested themselves of prerogatives, both real and claimed, and who work with the poor from the position of weakness, poverty, and vulnerability. Adolfo Nicolas remarks:

> No wonder then that the crisis of Christianity affects mostly the *Church* itself. The Church has to recuperate its humble position in the plan of salvation. Like all human mediations, it is subjected to the law of growth and decay, of sin and grace, of death and resurrection. To pretend otherwise is self-deception and a denial of the Cross and the status of servant that Jesus took for himself and for all those, people as well as institutions, who want to follow him to the end. The Church in Asia has been poor often, persecuted in many places and for long periods of time, powerless and almost invisible in not a few places.... This is the image of the Church of Christ that makes most sense in Asia; a Church at home in the poverty of the masses and the never discriminating hospitality of hope[1616].

And yet, according to Nicolas, «this is not the image that we 'ecclesiastics' communicate most clearly» in Asia, but the image of those «yearning for visibility, for influence, for different forms of

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[1615] L-A. Tagle, «The Mission of the Church in Asia», 127.

[1616] A. Nicolas, «Christianity in Crisis», 69.

power (including, especially, 'spiritual' power!), for visible success, that spoils the joy of accompanying Christ in poverty and humility»[1617].

As regards the Asian local Churches' dialogue with religions and cultures, Tagle argues that «[k]enosis as openness to the other includes openness to the other's religion, culture, and history»[1618]. Jesus appalled his contemporaries, even his disciples, with his prodigious capacity to see in the *other* not a stranger or an enemy but a *neighbor*, as seen not just in his famous *Parable of the Good Samaritan* but also in his ordinary dealing with cultural and religious others. He was quite lavish in his praises of the faith of a Syro-Phoenician mother, a centurion, and a Samaritan healed of leprosy—all non-Jews. He was deeply respectful in his conversation with a Samaritan woman by the well, a «scene» that was considered a cultural taboo at that time. Tagle commends the many efforts of the local Churches of Asia in their kenotic dialogue with adherents of other religions, recognizing that «[t]he identity of the Church does not suffer but is affirmed and purified when set in the wider context of God's self-emptying compassion for all creatures»[1619]. When local Churches fail to live in *kenosis*, the proclamation of the Gospel is emptied of its force and even of its content. Nicolas says it so aptly:

> Asia can never understand how a 'humble' Church can so easily dismiss 'other ways of salvation' or put them down as 'lesser than ours'. Asia, with its saints and mystics, its witnesses and heroic faithful, will never comprehend how a Church born out of the Gospel and led by the Spirit of Jesus Christ can practically ignore the religious wealth of other faiths and the real and actual salvation they have brought to a thousand generations[1620].

What we have been saying so far in this sub-section is, I think, beautifully summed up by Daniel Patrick Huang's article on «Mission

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[1617] A. Nicolas, «Christianity in Crisis», 69.

[1618] L-A. Tagle, «The Mission of the Church in Asia», 134.

[1619] L-A. Tagle, «The Mission of the Church in Asia», 135.

[1620] A. Nicolas, «Christianity in Crisis», 69; cf. P. C. Phan, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism*, Chap. V, «Holy Pagans in Other Religions», 99-128.

Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery»[1621], an article published in 2001, but given as a lecture in 2000. In this article, Huang reflects on what kind of spirituality a missionary must possess by looking at the «mind» of Jesus based on John 13: 1-19, which narrates the washing of the feet by Jesus of his disciples, and on Phil 2: 1-11, which depicts the *kenosis* of Jesus. In the scene of the foot-washing, Huang argues that Jesus' «rising and laying aside of garments» is a deeply symbolic gesture which does not simply mean physical disrobing, but is rather an act of revelation—Jesus removing his outer clothes to reveal, beneath them, his deepest heart, the inner heart of Jesus, his «mind». Huang links this text to Paul's hymn on the Son of God's self-emptying act in becoming human in Phil 2, which urges Christians to have the same «mind of Christ», «who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave», a servant (Phil 2: 6-7). For Huang, what is revealed in Jesus' foot-washing and in his *kenosis* is a «servant mind».

To understand what the «servant mind» of Jesus is, Huang explores first what the mind of the missionary, and certainly of the local Churches in Asia, should *not* be. Borrowing the Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama's insights in his two books, *Three Mile an Hour God* and *Water Buffalo Theology*, Huang argues that the mind of the missionary must be purified and dispossessed of a complex and a mindset: the «teacher complex» and the «crusading mind». Huang describes these two related attitudes in this way:

> The "teacher complex" refers to a missionary superiority complex that wants to teach, but does not want to learn; that is interested in teaching, but not in being taught; that speaks to people but does not listen to them. It is a mindset of "wealth": I am rich with the truth, which I give you like I give alms to a beggar. It is a "one-way traffic" mind, since all that has meaning and value comes from the teacher[1622].

On the other hand,

[1621] D-P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 91-96.

[1622] D-P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 92; Cf. K. Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God*, 51-55.

> The "crusading mind".... is a mindset of competition and force that sees Christianity as the sole force of truth and righteousness in a battle against the godlessness, superstition, ignorance and evil "out there." Intent on victory and tangible results usually measured by extension of territory and influence, by numbers, by defeat of rivals, the "crusading mind" assumes a stance of aggressive proselytizing and "bulldozes man and history without appreciation of their complexities"[1623].

Reflecting on the gospel scene of Jesus' washing of the feet of his disciples, Huang discerns at least seven qualities of the «servant mind» which a missionary, and, again, the local Churches of Asia, must possess. The first quality is that in Jesus' prophetic action of washing the feet of his disciples, «*the servant mind involves and is permeated by a spirit of welcome and respect for the people served*», a spirit characterized by Huang as «a spirit of unconditional welcome and respect, not a spirit of selective respect, which accords different kinds and levels of respect based on human standards of worthiness, importance and dignity»[1624]. In the act of washing of the feet which was «a hidden, unnoticed act of service» Huang sees the second quality—that the servant mind is «*content with hiddenness*», as a self-effacing attitude that does not call attention to oneself[1625]. Because the foot-washing was performed by Jesus *during* dinner and not *before* as was the custom at that time, such an «untimely act of service» reveals the third quality of the servant mind: it «*is not ultimately controlled by human calculations and conventions of schedules and agendas*» but «*flexible enough to allow the times and seasons to be set by the Master*», and «ready to be surprised by the unexpected, the new, the unusual call to service»[1626]. The fourth quality of the servant mind is «*its willingness, indeed its inner compulsion, to go in search of where there is dirt, ugliness, negativity—to wash, to clean and refresh, even if it means being stained by the dirt in the process*»[1627]. In relation

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[1623] D. P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 92-93; Cf. K. Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology*, 223-224.

[1624] D-P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 93-94.

[1625] D-P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 94.

[1626] D-P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 94.

[1627] D-P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 94.

to the scene of the foot-washing and shortly afterwards where Peter not only misunderstood the meaning of what Jesus was doing to him but also disowned Jesus some hours later, and where Judas betrayed Jesus, the fifth quality of the servant mind is one that «*continues in graciousness and self-giving even in the face of misunderstanding and rejection*.... and continues to be faithful even in apparent failure»[1628]. Jesus' exhortation to his disciples that they too should wash each other's feet offers us the sixth quality: that «*the servant mind awakens servanthood in the ones served*»; instead of keeping people in a state of perpetual dependence, the servant must «awaken... [and]... inspire a similar spirit of self-donation in those served»[1629]. The seventh, and last, quality of the servant mind is that «*servanthood claims all the little details of one's life*»; that it should not seek «heroic circumstances for its expression», but—almost in a Rahnerian and Ignatian language—«can and must be lived in the little, seemingly insignificant details that make up one's life»[1630]. Huang sums up the seven qualities of the servant mind as involving «self-forgetfulness, self-emptying, self-gift, dying—to comfort, to security, to privilege—for the sake of life»[1631]—characteristics that the Churches of Asia must embrace so that they may be true and faithful to their *sequela Christi* who came «not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many» (Matt 20: 28; Mark 10: 45).

For the FABC, Asia and its inhabitants from varied and diverse cultural and religious backgrounds will indeed listen more attentively to the Good News, will be more receptive to Jesus' message of salvation, and «Christ's presence in the midst of Asia's teeming millions will be felt more strongly», only when the Church becomes more clearly «the *Servant Church*, a true living, vibrant witness to Christ»[1632]. It is only when pastoral agents, especially bishops, priests and religious, live an evangelical poverty, with such a profound solicitude for the

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[1628] D-P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 95.

[1629] D-P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 95.

[1630] D-P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 95.

[1631] D-P. Huang, «Mission Spirituality: The Paschal Mystery», 96.

[1632] FABC, no. 114, in FAPA I, 88; emphasis in the original.

poor, that they can «credibly witness to the Lord Jesus who himself had a preferential love for the poor»[1633]. The Asian bishops believe that the local Churches in Asia will not become Churches of the poor *naturally*, as a matter of course; being Churches of the poor can only be «the result of an option consciously and deliberately taken», an option that is in the last analysis «an act of faith», faith that it is what the Spirit of Christ is calling the local Churches to become in Asia[1634]. There is, therefore, a call and a demand «to experience in their lives the actual condition of the poor» and «to put her resources and her influence at the service of those who suffer from hunger, disease, homelessness, persecution, discrimination and oppression»[1635]. For the Vietnamese bishops, only when the Asian Churches are poor, humble, and powerless will they be able to adapt themselves to, blend more easily with, and with ease approach the vast majority of poor people in the continent[1636].

Thus, in the 1991 Theological Consultation organized by the FABC-Office of Evangelization in Thailand, the final document speaks of how the Church should be in the context of Asia:

> We dream of a servant Church: servant of God, servant of Christ, servant of his plan of salvation; servant also of the Asian peoples, of their deep hopes, longings and aspirations; servant of the followers of other religions, of all women and men, simply and totally for others. A servant Church has no pretensions and no exigencies. A servant Church does not insist upon its right; she offers her services, without getting offended when they are not accepted. A servant Church keeps silence when bypassed, forgotten or unfairly treated…. [W]e dream of a Church without conditions or calculations, at the service of the followers of other faith traditions, a reconciling Church at the service of human communities in conflict, an open Church at the service of the poor[1637].

[1633] FABC X, no. 3, in FAPA V, 83.

[1634] BISA I, no. 7, in FAPA I, 200.

[1635] International Congress on Mission, nos. 12, 14, in FAPA I, 146.

[1636] Cited by P. C. Phan, «Responses of Asian Episcopal Conferences», 51.

[1637] FABC-OE, nos. 23, 54, in FAPA I, 340.347.

The same document spells out the reason why the Church must be a poor and a servant Church:

> The "self-emptying" of the Son of God in Jesus Christ is the decisive theological reason why the Church must be a poor Church; his identification with the figure of the "Servant of God" is the reason why she in turn must be a servant. The preferential option for the poor, which the Asian context demands from all local Churches, is in deep harmony with the nature of the Church herself as the sacrament of Jesus Christ, who for us became poor and made himself a servant[1638].

In its 1992 document, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», the FABC-Theological Advisory Commission declares: «The Church thus prolongs the service of Christ. To glorify its Lord it must take the form of a servant as he did»[1639].

For Tagle, in another article originally published in 1998, the reason the Asian Churches are summoned to a humble, discerning attitude regarding their mission in Asia is that «it is Jesus' mission in the Spirit that must be at work in Asia. It is Jesus' mission, not ours—it is Jesus' way of fulfilling the Father's salvific plan. It is Jesus' way of concretizing love, service, life-giving love and service»[1640]. Jesus' way is indeed the norm for the local Churches' mission in Asia. And if Jesus' «way» is one of *kenosis*, of self-emptying love and service, then the Asian Churches' way of fulfilling their mission is also one of *kenosis*. They must carry out and prolong Jesus' mission in Asia in a *kenotic* way, in the only manner in which Jesus fulfilled his mission.

For the FABC, «the servant image of Jesus speaks better to the heart of Asia. In him we recognize the face of God who suffers with us and the power of God who re-creates life»[1641]. Indeed, the image of the Asian Churches as servants of the peoples of Asia, as servants especially of the adherents of other religions in their collective quest for humanity, for the fullness of life, resonates well with the image of

[1638] FABC-OE, no. 34, in FAPA I, 343.

[1639] FABC-TAC, «Asian Theological Perspectives on Church and Politics», 127.

[1640] L-A. Tagle, «The Challenges of Mission in Asia», 214.

[1641] FIRA IV, no. 16, in FAPA III, 143.

Jesus, their Lord, who emptied himself, became human and assumed the form of a slave, a servant (Phil. 2:5-8). In order for the Churches to be servants, they have to follow their Lord in his kenotic life. Hence, what the Asian Churches desire to be is in accord with what Jesus wants them to be—*servants of the Asian people in a kenotic style of life*. Indeed, the Asian Churches, in continuing the mission of Jesus who came to serve and not to be served, «must conform to the model of humble service set by the Master»[1642].

6.4 **Conclusion**

This chapter, with two sections, explored Rahner's continuing relevance in theology by drawing clearly from within his own writings a couple of intimately related insights that are essential in our effort to move forward in our contemporary discourse on the theology of religions and the praxis of dialogue in Asia—Rahner's idea of God as incomprehensible mystery and his notion that this Divine Mystery is encountered ultimately only in love, in the love of God which is inseparable from the love of neighbors. In the context of Asia, the «neighbors» are the «religious others», the majority of whom live in harrowing poverty and destitution. Thus, this chapter examined Rahner's relevance in relation to two of the three «dialogue-tasks» that the Asian Churches are called to carry out in their evangelizing mission in the continent, in relation to dialogue with adherents of others religions and dialogue with the poor, which in the context of Asia means dialoguing with one and the same people.

The first section looked into Rahner's concept of God as incomprehensible mystery, an affirmation about God that characterizes all religious traditions of the world, and thus a statement that is of utmost importance in the Asian theology of religions. Because this mysterious God can never be subsumed into a system of coordinates of human knowledge and understanding, theologians of religions and practitioners of interreligious dialogue must therefore refrain from talking about God as if «God» were a concept easy to comprehend, a concept that we could discuss with great ease. God's being as

[1642] FABC, no. 23, in FAPA I, 72.

mystery calls for a profound awareness that all human language and expressions about God are nothing more than stammering because of the infinite, ineffable and indefinable nature of God in relation to the finite character of human intellect and understanding. In the religiously pluralistic context of Asia, these considerations point to the importance of adopting a symbolic theology as well as a sense of theological modesty and doctrinal humility in talking about God, in doing theology, and in approaching other religions and their beliefs and practices. Theologians of religions and participants in interreligious dialogue are challenged to take a stance of modesty and humility which will guard them from adopting inflated claims in theological conversations among themselves.

The second section meditated on the universal language and praxis of love and its profound implications for the Asian Churches' dialogue with the poor in the continent. Based on Rahner's idea of the radical unity of love of God and love of neighbor, this section revolved around the affirmation that God can be encountered ultimately only in love, in the love of God which cannot be separated from the love of neighbors. For Rahner, because of the radical unity between these two loves, in the very act of loving our neighbor, we experience and love God who is the object and ground of our love for our neighbor. In Asia, because of the nature of God as mystery, because of the irreducible differences among different religions in terms of doctrines and practices, because of the magnitude of poverty in Asia which calls for an urgent response on the part of the Asian Churches, because of the «unfamiliar face» of God being revealed more clearly in the poor and by the poor, and because of the universality of love and its openness to manifold expressions in the world among various religions, the praxis of love takes precedence over correct knowledge of God and serves as a way of advancing beyond the *impasse* in the continent. Such praxis of love is lived out by the Asian Churches in their dialogue with and self-emptying love for the poor of the continent.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This Conclusion has four parts: (1) a brief summary of the dissertation, (2) some major findings of the research, (3) some recommended areas for further study, and (4) the immediate significance of this dissertation for my future ministry.

1. **A Brief Summary of the Dissertation**

The dissertation consists of six chapters. The first three chapters deal with the threefold «nexus» of Vatican II texts on religions and their members, of Karl Rahner's theology of religions, and of the FABC's documents on this subject which, in the multi-religious context of Asia, is an extremely important theme. These chapters zero in on the very delicate issue of the salvific character of non-Christian religions, which is one of the most fundamental questions of the Catholic theology of religions in the post-Vatican II period. In terms of the question of whether other religions are salvific in themselves or not, the first three chapters have shown a progression in their positive assessment of non-Christian religions as structures of salvation. They have gone from Vatican II's «silence» as regards the salvific character of non-Christian religions (Chapter 1), to Karl Rahner's *a priori* argument that they can be regarded as «ways» of salvation for their adherents (Chapter 2), to the FABC's *a posteriori* conclusion that the other Asian religions—which, for millennia, have been the Asian peoples' «doorways» to God—must be salvific (Chapter 3). For Rahner and for the FABC, the Asian religions are nonetheless salvific always in reference to Christ, the unique and universal Savior.

The next three chapters deal with the question of *impasse* in the Asian theology of religions and how the Asian Churches in the FABC's abundant documents on this subject and a couple of Rahner's

foundational themes in theology address this situation. In Chapter 4, the nature of *impasse* in the Asian theology of religions revolves around the ticklish issue of the salvific value of other religions, as well as around other relevant and crucial issues in the theology of religions. As regards the question of whether or not the other religions are salvific in themselves, both *Ecclesia in Asia* and *Dominus Iesus* do not regard these religions as ways of salvation for their adherents, in contrast to the Asian Churches' unfailing conviction of the salvific role of these religions in God's plan of salvation. *Ecclesia in Asia* partly contributes to the state of *impasse* by failing to affirm the salvific character of the other religions in a magisterial document that is precisely intended for Asia, while *Dominus Iesus* plays a part in the situation of *impasse* by upholding the «sharp distinction» between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions», a distinction that renders the other religions devoid of salvation. Chapter 5 tackles and clarifies a couple of broad-ranging issues that are closely related to the basic question of the role and place of Jesus Christ and of the Church in the salvation of the followers of other Asian religions: the nature and necessity of interreligious dialogue in the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission whose primary and central element is the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel, as well as the relationship of Christ and of the Church to the Kingdom of God within a thoroughly regno-centric Asian theology of religions. Chapter 6 offers ways of dealing with and of moving forward out of the situation of *impasse* by employing a couple of Rahner's central themes in theology and applying them to the unique circumstances of Asia's religious pluralism and massive poverty: the nature of God as mystery and its demand for theological modesty and doctrinal humility in all our discourse on God in interreligious dialogue, and the question of the praxis of love as being more compelling and urgent than the epistemology of theological correctness in a continent of teeming millions of poor people.

2. **Some Major Findings of the Research**

For reasons of space, we will only point out and highlight some of the major findings of this research, findings that are relevant for

the central argument of this dissertation on the salvific meaning and significance of the other religions[1643].

a) On Karl Rahner's and the FABC's argument that the other religions are salvific in themselves, albeit salvific always in relation to Christ

In his theology of religions, particularly in his pre-conciliar essay, «Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions», Rahner developed a vision of the religions which acknowledges the other religions as ways of salvation for their members, that they are willed by God and are therefore positively included in God's plan of salvation for humanity. While it is true that Vatican II is «silent» on the question of their salvific status, it is a «silence» that should not have been, according to Rahner, if only the Council followed its premises to their logical conclusion. Based on Rahner's pre-conciliar insights, Vatican II affirms a couple of «premises» whose «conclusion» can only be that religions are «ways» of salvation for their adherents: God's universal saving will and humanity's essentially social nature. For Rahner, the intrinsically social character of human existence demands that in the absence of any historical contact with Christianity, it must be within God's providential plan that non-Christians live their relationship with God in the religions that are accessible to them in society. Indeed, if non-Christians are saved, something that, for Rahner, we have to think about with optimism in view of God's universal and efficacious saving will for all people, then they are saved *in* and *through* their religious traditions. God's saving grace and the human response to this grace take place in and are sustained always and everywhere by the objective elements of the religions that exist in society, elements such as their sacred scriptures, prayers, and rituals. Hence, it must be recognized that these religions contain supernatural grace-filled elements, and that it is in their response to these elements that believers find salvation in the world. Rahner arrived at this conclusion from an *a priori* perspective, as

[1643] For a more comprehensive «list» of this work's «unique contributions» not only to the exploration of the salvific value and character of other Asian religions but also to the discussion of other important questions and issues, problems and concerns in the Asian theology of religions, examined especially in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, see Introduction, 5. Originality and Contribution.

a dogmatic theologian who had no direct contact with non-Christian religions.

Since the beginning, the FABC has always affirmed the salvific status of the other religions. However, unlike Rahner's *a priori* method, the Asian bishops and theologians have arrived at the conclusion that other religions are salvific in themselves through an *a posteriori* approach, by looking at the lives of holy people in other religions and by discerning the presence of Kingdom-values in their lives and in their religious traditions. The Asian Churches' profound experiences of goodness, truth, wisdom and holiness among the members of other religions compel them to confront with utter seriousness the question of the salvific character of other religious traditions. If Vatican II has acknowledged that salvation is available to all human beings, albeit in ways known to God alone, for the FABC, it is through the religious traditions of the world that God's saving grace reaches the members of these religions. In Asia, the great and living religions are where God's salvific grace assumes visible and tangible presence in the world in the most concrete and efficacious manner. The Asian bishops' and theologians' conviction of Jesus Christ as the unique and universal Savior of the world and of Christianity's special place and role in God's overall plan of salvation does not distract them from arguing for the salvific value of the other religions. They insist that the Catholic Church should go beyond simply acknowledging the presence of positive elements and spiritual values in the Asian religions to moving towards the explicit recognition and appreciation of the salvific value of these religions and their role in God's universal economy of salvation.

b) On the question of the salvific character of other religions and its intimate relation to the issue of the presence of truth in these religions

The question of whether or not the other religions are salvific in themselves, which is a central issue in *Dominus Iesus*' distinction between «theological faith» and «belief in the other religions», is extremely important not only for the Asian theology of religions but also for the Asian Churches' praxis of dialogue with the members of other religions. While it is true that Vatican II neither affirmed nor denied categorically the salvific value of other religions, it was

the Council's positive evaluation and assessment of these religions that paved the way for the post-conciliar Church to enter into interreligious dialogue with their adherents.

However, the argument that the other religions do not possess any salvific value in themselves because of the absence of truth in their traditions affects not just the theology but also the praxis of interreligious dialogue. The nature, meaning and quality of «dialogue» changes radically depending on whether or not the Church recognizes the other religions as salvific in themselves and as possessing divine truth in their traditions. For if the other religions are viewed as being bereft of salvation and truth, then, in response to Vatican II's exhortation for Christians to engage in dialogue, their posture towards the «religious others» in this «dialogue-task» will simply be one of giving and teaching but never one of receiving and learning since the other religions have already been adjudged as devoid of salvation and truth. The other religions will be treated as always on the receiving end of our evangelizing mission precisely because they have nothing to give and share with us in terms of saving truth. If we argue that the Church is the sole depository, and therefore has the exclusive monopoly, of divine truth, then interreligious encounter between Christians and others will be empty of any true exchange and mutual enrichment.

c) On the priority of orthopraxis over orthodoxy in the Asian theology of religions

In their engagement with adherents of other religions, the Asian Churches do not wait until doctrines become crystal-clear, or questions are answered and issues resolved, before they engage in dialogue. They believe not only that there is a priority of the act of dialogue over theological reflection but also that clarifications in the field of doctrine and theology come about precisely as a result of the praxis of dialogue. In the context of religious pluralism, the praxis of dialogue with other religions is considered the «first act» and serves as the obligatory foundation for theological reflection which is regarded as the «second act». In the famous words of Gustavo Gutierrez: «What Hegel used to say about philosophy can be applied to theology: it rises only at

sundown»[1644]. It is for this reason that the Asian bishops and theologians do not begin their reflection from an *a priori* approach but from an *a posteriori* method, a method that seriously takes into consideration the context and experience of doing theology. In the Asian context, the *a priori* procedure is replaced by an *a posteriori* method.

d) On the important point of divergence between the Roman Magisterium and the FABC

In terms of proclamation in the Asian theology of religions, it is not in the «content» of the Asian vision of Christianity (understood here primarily as Jesus Christ and his Gospel) but in the manner of articulating and living out that vision that the Asian Churches depart from Rome. In other words, given the distinct socio-economic, cultural and religious contexts of Asia, the fundamental question confronting the Asian Churches, and which is in dispute in the Asian theology of religions, is not the «who», the «what», and the «why», but the «how» of proclamation, the manner of doing theology. The FABC theology of religions is essentially Christocentric in character. Like the rest of the universal Church, the «who» and the «what» to proclaim to the continent of Asia has always been a «constant» for the Asian Churches—it is Jesus Christ and his Gospel. It is on the «how» of proclaiming Christ in Asia, which is sensitive and responsive to the uniquely multi-religious context of the continent, that they differ. Nowhere in the abundant documents of the FABC have the Asian bishops and theologians ever wavered in their conviction of the primacy and centrality of the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel in Asia; and that conviction, which constitutes the «why» of proclamation, is rooted in their faith that Jesus Christ is the unique and universal Savior of the world, and thus the fulfillment of the Asian people's deepest hopes and dreams, longings and aspirations in life.

The Asian bishops and theologians believe in the contextual nature of theology, that the unique milieux of Asia must enter into the consideration of theological reflection. If, traditionally, the sources for Christian theology were restricted to Scriptures

[1644] G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 9.

and Tradition which constitute one sacred deposit of the Word of God that is interpreted authentically by the Magisterium, in contemporary Asian theology, the resources for theological reflection *also* include the Asian realities of diverse cultures, ancient religions and immense masses of poor people, owing to the conviction that God and his Spirit are present and active in the Asian people's life, realities and histories. The contextual character of Asian theology, which is rooted in the particular context of the continent, demands a unique modality of carrying out the local Churches' evangelizing mission, a distinct manner of theologizing that necessarily gives birth to a contextualized and inculturated theology. In the FABC documents, the Asian bishops and theologians demonstrate not only their *a posteriori* approach to doing theology but also the very source of their theologizing. An integral source of their theologizing is their deep knowledge of the immensely diverse socio-economic, cultural, political and religious circumstances in Asia, as well as their profound awareness of the complex ecclesial conditions in which the Asian Churches find themselves in the vast continent. In other words, while the FABC has always maintained its crucial Christological position in its theology of religions, it has also insisted on the distinctiveness and particularity of its method for doing theology because of Asia's essentially unique situations.

e) On the lack of recognition and appreciation of the FABC's essentially Christ-centered theology of religions

This research has brought to light not only the primacy and centrality of proclamation in relation to interreligious dialogue, but also the Christocentric dimension of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, in spite of the repeated and urgent call of the FABC on the Asian Churches to enter into dialogue with adherents of other faiths, it has always affirmed the centrality of the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel in the Asian Churches' evangelizing mission. The FABC has, in fact, consistently referred to proclamation as the primary element of evangelization without which the local Churches' engagement in triple dialogue loses its cohesion and meaning; it is a non-negotiable faith-conviction of Asian Christianity without

which there is no true and authentic evangelization. For the FABC, proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Lord and Savior of the world and sharing the unsurpassable riches of his Gospel with others are the Asian Churches' most precious gift to Asia and their specific and most sublime contribution to the Asian people in response to their deepest human and spiritual yearnings and aspirations in life.

As regards the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, the research has shown that the Kingdom of God perspective is essentially Christocentric in character. The Kingdom of God is not just the core of Jesus' proclamation and the kernel of his ministry; Christ himself is the embodiment and the personification of the Kingdom of God. While the Kingdom of God remains an eschatological reality, which will be consummated fully only in the *Parousia*, in the Christ-event, especially in Christ's paschal mystery, the Kingdom of God has already begun, has irrupted into space and time, and has become a present reality. There is, thus, an inseparable link between Jesus and the Kingdom of God; one cannot separate Jesus from the Kingdom, nor dissociate the values of God's Kingdom from his person. Hence, contrary to those who oppose the regno-centric approach of the Asian Churches' theology of religions, particularly *Dominus Iesus*' strong criticism against Asian bishops and theologians who have espoused this regno-centric perspective (cf. DI 19), arguing that it waters down the Christocentric dimension of the Church's evangelizing mission, the research does not support such an allegation.

In the Asian theology of religions, not only does the FABC demonstrate the inseparability between Christ and the Kingdom of God, it also shows the intimate connection between the Church and the Kingdom. In the treatment of the Kingdom of God, nowhere does the FABC separate the Kingdom from the Church, or deny or empty in any way the intimate relation between the two. Since the mission of the Church is to perpetuate Jesus' mission which is proclaiming the Kingdom of God, then the Kingdom is also the Church's *raison d'etre*. While the Church cannot be identified with the Kingdom of God because the Kingdom is a universal reality far greater and more

comprehensive than the Church, whose presence and saving acts are prior to the Church's mission and extend far beyond its borders, the Church, as the sacrament of Christ, is nevertheless related to the Kingdom of God as its sacrament, instrument, and servant. However, there is in Asian ecclesiology an attempt to correctly establish the Church's nature and purpose vis-à-vis the Kingdom of God, without devaluing the ecclesial role and place of the Church in its evangelizing mission. In this ecclesiology, the Church, which is incomprehensible outside of God's universal saving plan embodied in the Kingdom of God, exists for the Kingdom, in order to serve the Kingdom, in order to actualize, through its institutions and ministries, the values of the Kingdom in the world. It is the Kingdom of God, and not the Church, that occupies the center of Christian life and mission; it is in fact the Kingdom of God that determines the shape and mission of the Church. In Asian theology of religions, local Churches are built up, their institutions and structures developed, their mission expanded, so that they may promote and serve the Kingdom of God more effectively and faithfully in the socio-economic, cultural and religious contexts of Asia.

f) On the primacy of a praxis of love over a correct epistemology of God vis-à-vis God's incomprehensible mystery in the Asian context of massive poverty

Christian theology teaches that while there is an abiding necessity to purify our image and deepen our knowledge of God, this process is nonetheless the project of a lifetime, a project that endures even in our glorified existence in the afterlife. Even in the immediate sight of God in heaven, our glorified life will consist of growing more and deeply in our knowledge and understanding of God that will never end because God is essential mystery. In Asia, the primacy of a praxis of love over an epistemology of theological correctness acquires greater urgency and importance because of the dreadful situation of massive poverty that cuts across cultural and religious differences. It is a primacy of something that cannot wait and be postponed because its implementation is urgent, paramount and crucial over something that characterizes our creaturely existence in this life and beyond.

In the Asian situations of religious pluralism, the poverty in the continent calls for a shift of focus from trying to be correct about God in our theological discourse to living a life in accord with God who is love. In the context of dialogue among various religions, it calls for a shift of focus from not giving so much importance to theological debates—which can be endless—on the nature and essence of God to working together in love for the end of poverty and destitution that dehumanizes persons and disfigures God's image in them. Indeed, more than just simply coming up with conceptual or propositional statements about one's religion, proclaiming the truth of such a religion is, in the last analysis, essentially about living a life that is perfectly in accord with one's faith. Thus, if we proclaim the essential truth of Christianity that God is love, Christian life must witness to this truth through our loving and life-giving service to others and to society. In Asia, for instance, the efforts of the Catholic Church, and of missionaries in particular, to build schools in the hinterlands in order to provide good education to children belonging mostly to other religions, or to construct houses for and provide livelihood programs to communities whose members are mostly adherents of other faiths, express this crucial dimension of witnessing to one's faith, a witness that is far more efficacious in proclaiming the religious truth of Christianity than any verbal, propositional statements about Christianity.

3. **Some Recommended Areas for Further Study**

In Chapter 6 of the dissertation, we looked at a couple of Rahner's central and foundational themes in theology and explored their relevance and implications for an Asian theology of religions. We took into consideration Rahner's concept of God as incomprehensible mystery and the meaning and implications of this truth for those who are involved in dialogue with other religions in Asia. We also examined the universal language of love in Rahner's insight into the unity of love of God and love of neighbor and how the intimate relationship of these two loves demands the primacy of the praxis of love over correct epistemology of God in the context of Asia's grinding poverty. Perhaps, a couple of other major themes

of Rahner that may be explored and developed in a future study that are of special relevance to the Asian theology of religions are: (1) Rahner's concept of the universality of the «experience of God» across the various religions of the world and how the radical religious dimension of human existence may be considered as humankind's «common ground» before the Absolute or the Ultimate, and (2) Rahner's pneumatology—the «outpouring» of the Holy Spirit in the entire world by virtue of God's universal saving will and the ubiquity of saving grace due to the universal presence and action of the Spirit in the world—as his point of entry in his positive attitude and openness towards other religions.

As regards the first suggested area for further study, Rahner developed a theology of an «experience of God» and argued that this human experience is universal and therefore an experience that can be found across the diverse religions of humanity[1645]. The human person, for Rahner, is essentially an absolute openness towards the Holy Mystery, a spiritual subject whose existence is dynamically oriented towards God. Human beings *qua* human beings stand on a shared and common ground before God as creatures oriented dynamically and transcendentally towards this absolute Mystery. Because every person is a dynamic «propulsion» towards God, the whole of humanity is inextricably related to God and is the «site» of God's indwelling love. Rahner's insight that the entire humankind is the creative work of God, as the precondition for the possibility of God's self-communication and revelation, indeed serves a «common ground» for interreligious encounter with others. Rahner's transcendental project presupposes the existence of permanent and universal ontological structures in human beings as spiritual subjects, ontological structures that are characterized by pure openness to the Holy Mystery. It is this insight that sustains Rahner's conviction that the whole of humanity is summoned by God to a universal communion with him which constitutes human salvation. Hence, even though the offer and the acceptance of God's

[1645] Cf. K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116-133; ID., «Anonymous Christians», 390-398; P. G. Crowley, «Encountering the Religious Other», 567-585; J. H. Fletcher, «Rahner and Religious Diversity», 235-248.

self-communication to humanity achieved its climax in the Christ-event, and therefore has become historically situated in Christianity, the other religions also can become and are in fact «sites» of this self-communication of God, of the divine-human encounters in history, due to God's universal saving will and the social nature of man and the historical character of religions.

Concerning the second proposed area for future research, the later Rahner, in his primary preoccupation to bring people to the profound awareness of God's ubiquitous presence in the world and in their lives, gravitated towards a strong emphasis on Pneumatology in which grace, understood primarily as *uncreated* grace, as God's absolute and loving self-communication to the human, was identified with God's bestowal of the Holy Spirit for the transformation of people and of the world. There are at least three significant insights in Rahner's theology of the Holy Spirit that we find re-echoed in a way by some of the writings and reflections of the FABC[1646]. The first is his assertion that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the whole world, yet both our experience of God and our human response to it in the Spirit do not occur only in purely religious acts and instances but also in human affairs and occasions that do not necessarily fall within the domain of the spiritual and the otherworldly but constitute the basic material of the ordinary routine of our daily life. The second is his argument that religious experiences, occasions of mysticism, and varied signs and indicators of the presence of the Spirit are not confined to Christian experience but are available in other religious experiences, and that they are, in fact, verbalized and thematized in different but discernible ways in and by the great religious traditions of the world. And the third is his affirmation that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the risen Christ, hence if the Spirit is present and operative in other religious traditions, then Jesus Christ is present and at work in these traditions through the Spirit. Although this

[1646] Cf. K. Rahner, «Aspects of European Theology», 97.98; ID., «Reflections on the Experience of Grace», 86-90; ID., «Experience of the Holy Spirit», 189-210; FABC-TAC, no. 5, in FAPA II, 218; BIRA IV/3, nos. 6, 12, in FAPA I, 259.260; FABC IX, in FAPA V, 10.11; BIRA IV/7, no. 12, in FAPA I, 310. FABC-OEIA, no. 7, in FAPA I, 166.

third insight has already been explored in the dissertation, it may be deepened more in future studies.

4. The Immediate Significance of This Dissertation for My Future Ministry

At the very end, the reader will permit me to share a little «autobiographical fragment» regarding where I will be assigned in the Philippines after my doctorate, and in so doing, to reveal the significance of the topic of my dissertation for my future ministry.

In 2009, I came to Rome and pursued my two-year Licentiate in Dogmatic Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. After finishing the program in 2011, I went back to the Philippines and taught courses in theology especially in the Claretian-run Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (ICLA) in Quezon City. As its website describes it:

> ICLA is a center of higher studies in theology and pastoral ministry. What makes it unique from other educational institutions is its vision to be an academic-formative community of higher learning in doing Theology, lived Spirituality and Mission, serving a multicultural student population (Religious, Lay leaders, ministers, and Priests) from emergent Churches particularly in Asia[1647].

After my doctorate, I will go back to the same institution to be of service to our Asian students, the vast majority of whom come from more than twenty countries in Asia, where Christians live in close proximity with our Asian neighbors of other faiths on a daily basis. In a course on Theology of Religions that I will certainly be asked to teach in ICLA, I can share with our Asian students the «fruits» of my labor, the significant insights and major findings of my research, and assist especially in the vital task of shedding light on ecclesiological problems and missiological issues that constitute some of the most fundamental questions in contemporary Asian theology of religions. In doing so, I may, among others, contribute not just to the more positive appraisal of other religions but also and most especially to the recognition of the place and role of these religions in God's

[1647] http://www.icla.org.ph downloaded on March 10, 2020.

divine economy of salvation, which embraces the whole of humanity. I hope that this may lead to the fulfillment of Asian Christianity's deepest desire: that all Asians—Christians, adherents of other faiths, and people of goodwill—may embrace each other as co-journeyers in the same and common pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom that beckons everyone to its domain of everlasting love, justice, peace, joy, and harmony.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	Asian Bishops' Meeting
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
ACTS	Asia Conference of Theological Students
AD	*Anno Domini* ("Year of Our Lord")
AG	*Ad Gentes*
BILA I	First Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate
BIMA I	First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate
BIMA II	Second Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate
BIMA III	Third Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate
BIRA I	First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs
BIRA II	Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs
BIRA III	Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs
BIRA IV	Fourth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs
BIRA IV/1	First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/2	Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/3	Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/4	Fourth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/6	Sixth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue

BIRA IV/7	Seventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/10	Tenth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/11	Eleventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA IV/12	Twelfth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue
BIRA V/1	Working Together for Harmony in God's World
BIRA V/3	Working for Harmony in the Contemporary World
BIRA V/5	Commitment to Interreligious Dialogue (Evaluation of the BIRA V Encounters)
BISA I	First Bishops' Institute for Social Action
BISA II	Second Bishops' Institute for Social Action
BISA III	Third Bishops' Institute for Social Action
BISA IV	Fourth Bishops' Institute for Social Action
BISA VI	Sixth Bishops' Institute for Social Action
BISA VII	Seventh Bishops' Institute for Social Action
BISCOM V	Fifth Bishops' Institute for Social Communication
CBCI	Catholic Bishops' Conference of India
CCA	Christian Conference of Asia
CDF	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
Col	Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians
DH	*Dignitatis Humanae*
DI	*Dominus Iesus*
DM	Dialogue and Mission
DP	Dialogue and Proclamation
DS	*Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*

DV	*Dei Verbum*
DV	*Dominum et Vivificantem*
EA	*Ecclesia in Asia*
EG	*Evangelii Gaudium*
EN	*Evangelii Nuntiandi*
ES	*Ecclesiam Suam*
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
FABC I	First FABC Plenary Assembly
FABC II	Second FABC Plenary Assembly
FABC III	Third FABC Plenary Assembly
FABC IV	Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly
FABC V	Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly
FABC VI	Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly
FABC VII	Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly
FABC VIII	Eight FABC Plenary Assembly
FABC IX	Ninth FABC Plenary Assembly
FABC X	Tenth FABC Plenary Assembly
FABC XI	Eleventh FABC Plenary Assembly
FAPA	For All the Peoples of Asia
FAPA I	For All the Peoples of Asia, Vol. 1
FAPA II	For All the Peoples of Asia, Vol. 2
FAPA III	For All the Peoples of Asia, Vol. 3
FAPA IV	For All the Peoples of Asia, Vol. 4
FAPA V	For All the Peoples of Asia, Vol. 5
FEISA I	First Programme of Faith Encounters in Social Action
FEISA IV	Fourth Programme of Faith Encounters in Social Action
FIRA I	First Formation Institute for Inter-religious Affairs

FIRA II	Second Formation Institute for Inter-religious Affairs
FIRA III	Third Formation Institute for Inter-religious Affairs
FIRA IV	Fourth Formation Institute for Inter-religious Affairs
FIRA V	Fifth Formation Institute for Inter-religious Affairs
GS	*Gaudium et Spes*
Heb	Letter to the Hebrews
Ibid.	*Ibidem* ("in the same place")
ITC	International Theological Commission
John	The Gospel According to Saint John
LG	*Lumen Gentium*
Luke	The Gospel According to Saint Luke
Mark	The Gospel According to Saint Mark
Matt	The Gospel According to Saint Matthew
NA	*Nostra Aetate*
OE	Office of Evangelization
OEIA	Office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Affairs
OHD	Office of Human Development
OSC	Office of Social Communication
OT	*Optatam Totius*
OTC	Office of Theological Concerns
Phil	Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians
RH	*Redemptor Hominis*
RM	*Redemptoris Missio*
SABIM	South Asia Bishops' Meeting
SC	*Sacrosanctum Concilium*
TAC	Theological Advisory Commission
Tim	Letter of Saint Paul to Timothy
TMA	*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*

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