

## Religious voicelessness: a challenge to the Catholic Church

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### *Abstract*

According to Professor Hans Küng, there will be no peace among nations until there is peace among the religions. People of religious belief constitute the majority of humankind who share the same basic values, such as peace, harmony, justice and neighbourliness. Historically, there has been and there still is apathy, if not antagonism, between people of different religious beliefs. At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the Catholic Church turned over a new page with an outreach towards the religions of the world. In this article we will firstly look at the development of two original documents which spell out this new attitude towards others. We will then reflect on the present Catholic-Jewish relationship which has been marred for centuries by indifferentism and even hatred. We then take a look at theological developments over the past 50 years concerning the church's relationship with other world religions, before looking to the way forward into the future.

### **Introduction**

During the latter part of the twentieth century there was a movement towards a new understanding of the relationship between Christianity and the other major religions of the world. For Jacques Dupuis, it was a matter of facing up to the fact that most people today live in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious societies.<sup>2</sup> Further, the discovery in the fifteenth century that the world was much larger than Europe meant that the Catholic belief that *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ("outside the church there is no salvation") was seriously challenged. What was used as a condemnation of the Jewish people for not accepting Christ as Saviour, and later as a response to the Muslim military threat to Europe, could no longer be used universally.<sup>3</sup>

Reflecting on the *notorious powder kegs of the world*, Hans Küng became convinced that, with the majority of the world's population belonging to one religion or another, there could be "no peace among the people of this world without peace among the world's religions". And there will be no peace among the world religions without dialogue among them.<sup>4</sup> From this stance he began a movement in search of a global ethic.

This article is about various viewpoints within the Catholic Church towards such a global dialogue and how it has developed over the past half century. At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) this church turned over a new page with an outreach towards the religions of the world. This article is limited to looking firstly at the development of two original documents of the Council which spell out this new attitude towards others. Then there will be a reflection on the present Catholic-Jewish relationship which has been marred for centuries by indifferentism and even hatred. Finally, we take a look at theological developments over the past decades concerning the Church's relationship with other world religions, before looking to the way forward. At the same time the voicelessness of religions must be kept in mind unless they positively and concretely reach out toward each other and thus towards world peace.

### **History of the documents**

#### *Ad Gentes*

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> See Bonaventure Hinwood, *What About the Others? Theological Reflections on Non-Christian Religions*. (Pretoria: Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, sa), 24-28.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Küng, *Christianity and World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism* (New York: Orbis Press, 1993), xiii, 441-443.

The original “document on the missions” almost did not see the light of day. By the time of the third session of the Council (1964) it had been reduced to a mere 14 propositions. Pope Paul VI, the first time a pope had appeared personally at a working session, offered a short address to the assembly in which he stressed the importance of the church fulfilling the Gospel’s missionary command. Some of the Council fathers had argued that enough had been said in *Lumen Gentium* about the church’s mission, namely, its task to proclaim the word and plant the church in every country (the document on the life of the church, #16 & 17). However, most of the missionary bishops were unhappy with the scheme because it seemed to place “the missions” on the margins of the church’s activity. (The subject was to be dealt with again in *Gaudium et Spes* – the Council’s document on the relationship of the church to the world –#22, 26, 38, 41 & 57).

Cardinal Bea argued that the church as a whole was looking for a new stimulus from the Council. “The idea and theology of the missions must be thought out afresh and given a biblical basis,” he said.<sup>5</sup> Despite this plea, the text was heavily criticised by Bishop Lamont of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) who described it as dry bones, a skeleton which needed to be clothed with flesh and to have fresh life breathed into it.<sup>6</sup> With further criticisms, it was decided that a new document would be prepared for the fourth session and that it would have a deeper theological basis. A number of theologians, including Y Congar, OP, J Schütte, SVD, and J Ratzinger, met on a number of occasions to hammer together an acceptable document. After a number of further versions, the Decree was accepted by the Council fathers during the final session.

The most important part of the document is contained in the first chapter which deals with a theology of mission. The missionary nature of the church is founded in the life of the Trinity, the primordial fountain of love. Created by this missionary God, the church itself is described as “missionary by nature”; this means that mission, or the spreading of the gospel, is of its essence. This mission is the proclamation of the word, which leads to entry into the church through baptism. Thus the church is implanted in new territories and the sacraments are administered. The term mission is to be used strictly for that activity which is carried out in “not yet” situations. Work in de-Christianised countries, such as in Europe, is to be regarded as “pastoral work”. While the implantation of the church in new geographical territories is emphasised, and spelled out in more detail in chapters two and three, the newer emphasis which comes through in this chapter is that mission is primarily aimed at human beings who are to be gathered together as “the People of God in active and living communities of faith”.<sup>7</sup>

Without referring to the long disputes among missiologists before the Council about the possibility or not of salvation for “the others”, the document plainly describes the value of non-Christian religions, although all people are called to faith in Christ and to baptism as entry into the church for salvation. Missionaries, who participate in the one mission of Jesus Christ, need to be aware, though, that the Holy Spirit has preceded them and that they need to become aware of this divine activity as they enter new cultures.

Under pressure from missionaries who wanted a clear theological mandate for their activity, the Council document speaks of the necessity of faith, baptism and membership of the church for salvation. This was in response to a concern that mission would be weakened by the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* (#16) that there is a possibility of salvation for non-Christians. *Ad Gentes* states explicitly that Jesus Christ’s role is unique and incomparable and that, for all intents and purposes, the axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* still stands (see #7). The church is intended for all humankind and it is the instrument through which people are to come to the truth and to be saved. “Anyone who is saved finds salvation through Christ and the church”.<sup>8</sup> However, with *Lumen Gentium* having opened the possibility of salvation through other religions, and with *Ad Gentes* having spoken of the presence of the Holy Spirit preceding missionaries who enter new cultures, the whole question of salvation outside the church had been left unanswered. Since the end of the council and until today this subject has come under close scrutiny by theologians as we shall see.

### *Nostra Aetate*

This document, which probably had the most difficult passage through the Council’s deliberations than any of the other 15 documents, has its origins with Pope John XXIII himself who wanted a “declaration concerning the Jews”. Later expanded to include other faiths, *Nostra Aetate* acknowledges for the first

<sup>5</sup> Suso Brechter, “Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. IV, (ed. H. Vorgrimler. London: Burns & Oates, 1969), 98.

<sup>6</sup> Brechter, Decree, 98.

<sup>7</sup> Brechter, Decree, 120.

<sup>8</sup> Brechter, Decree, 123.

time that there is a genuine search for the Divine by people of other faiths and cultures, and that God's grace is universally present and active in the world's religions. In 1960 the pope had been greeted by a large group of American Jews who had come to thank him for saving thousands of Jews from extermination while he was Apostolic Delegate in Turkey. He greeted his visitors with: "I am Joseph, your brother!" He went on to speak of the solidarity which extends to the whole of humanity, and especially of the spiritual basis for the relationship between Christians and Jews.<sup>9</sup> Preceding and following this meeting, many other attempts were made to bring Christians and Jews to a common understanding of each other. Emphasis in these attempts was put on the common origin of both faiths, as well as the mistaken belief of many Christians that the Jews as a nation were responsible for Jesus' death.

John XXIII gave the task of writing this declaration to the Secretariat for Christian Unity, headed by Cardinal Bea. Their task ran into problems from the beginning. "A pronouncement intended as pastoral and theological was transformed in no time into a political document".<sup>10</sup> Leaders of Arab nations complained that such a statement would be to the advantage of the State of Israel. Bishops from Arab countries complained that they would have serious problems when returning home. Meanwhile, there was heavy influence from the State of Israel itself to have the declaration passed by the Council fathers. Due to this unexpected political bickering, the Vatican's curial members became uneasy and began to waver. At a meeting of a sub-commission in April 1961, Abbot Rudloff, in an attempt to lift the document back to its original pastoral and theological level, argued that, according to Romans 11:26-29, the re-unification of the old and new Israel would come at the end of time, and the Church, meanwhile, needs to live in expectation of this. This was a God-given moment, he said, for the Council to speak in an ecumenical spirit about the people of whom Christ was born in his humanity. He further argued as follows: the Jews are our brothers in Abraham, the father of faith. If the Church were now to keep silent, there would be no regard paid to their place in God's plan for salvation. Also, the Council fathers would be capitulating to the Declaration's opponents. He further declared that "a deep knowledge of Christ and the Church was impossible without knowledge of God's dealings in the days of the patriarchs and prophets".<sup>11</sup> The work of the Secretariat continued unabated, despite the fact that they were faced with two major obstacles: the opposition to the Declaration on the part of Arab governments, and the unreadiness of Catholic theologians at that time to deal with the issues of anti-Semitism and the accusation against the Jewish people of deicide. Then in the summer of 1962 the work of the Secretariat was put into jeopardy again.

The president of the World Jewish Congress announced that he would be despatching a senior official to Rome as representative of the Congress. No religious group had established any official at the Council without invitation, and now the worst fears of the Arab governments were confirmed, leading to "a storm of protest against the seemingly preferential treatment of the Jews".<sup>12</sup> The Arab Supreme Committee was soon to send a deputation to the Vatican in order to counter the efforts being made at the Council "to declare the Jews innocent". To add to the fuss, three Eastern patriarchs were particularly virulent in their fears that favouring the Jews would endanger Christian minorities in Arab countries. Cardinal Bea withdrew the Declaration and, until the last session of the Council in 1965, no one could be sure whether the document would eventually reach the *aula*, let alone be voted on positively by the bishops. Bea continually attempted to convince the bishops that this was a theological, not a political, issue. At one point he told the bishops:

The aim of this very brief decree is to call to the attention of Christ's faithful these truths concerning the Jews which are affirmed by the apostle and contained in the deposit of faith, and to do this so clearly that in dealing with the children of that people the faithful will act in no other way than did Christ the Lord and his apostles Peter and Paul.<sup>13</sup>

On another occasion, when arguing against the accusation of deicide, he asked: "Is there any other case in which we reproach another people for the actions of their ancestors nineteen hundred years ago?" While the debate raged on, two positive consequences ensued. Firstly, there developed "a new awakening to the mystery of Israel in the hearts of many bishops".<sup>14</sup> Secondly, there were suggestions that the Declaration be widened to include Christian relations with other religions which, in the words

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<sup>9</sup> John Oesterreicher, "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions." in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* Vol.III, (ed. H. Vorgrimler. London: Burns & Oates, 1969) 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Oesterreicher, Declaration, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Oesterreicher, Declaration, 20-21.

<sup>12</sup> Oesterreicher, Declaration, 39.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by Oesterreicher, Declaration, 54.

<sup>14</sup> Oesterreicher, Declaration, 81.

of Pope Paul VI, also contain “a ray of the light which we must neither despise nor extinguish”.<sup>15</sup> Although both religious and political arguments continued to be used to either support or negate the Declaration, it was finally approved by an overwhelming majority as the Council drew to its close. The main points of what was eventually called the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* need to be listed here as they were to form the basis for much dialogue, disagreement and theological debate over the ensuing half century.

All people in the world form but one community because they stem from the one stock which God created, and they all share a common destiny, namely God. People look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence. There has been found among different peoples a certain awareness of a hidden power which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life. Religions to be found “in more advanced civilizations” are Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

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 doctrine which ... often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all people. Yet she proclaims and is duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ ... [In him] people find the fullness of their religious life (#2).

Discussion and collaboration with members of other religions is encouraged. Concerning Muslims, the Declaration asks us to forget the past and pleads that sincere efforts be made to achieve mutual understanding, peace, liberty, social justice and moral values (#3). Particular mention is made of the fact that the Church is rooted in Israel, that Jesus, Mary and the apostles were members of that nation, and that the promises made to the Jewish people still stand (Rom 11:17-24). Christians and Jews, because of their common spiritual heritage, are encouraged to pursue mutual understanding and appreciation through theological enquiry and discussion. “Neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during [Jesus’] passion” (#4). Finally, “we cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all people are created in God’s image” (#5). Thus all discrimination between individuals and groups is condemned.

Looking at these two documents almost fifty years later, the remark could be made that not much has been achieved in terms of relations between the church and other religions. Yet, the protracted disputes point to where the leaders of the church were at half a century ago. In four short years a change of mindset had taken place and at least the door to inter-religious dialogue was unlocked, although not fully opened. Until the year 2002 the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, along with its Secretariat and Commissions, has joined in twelve official international dialogues or consultations with various churches and groups of churches. Its members have also been heavily involved in work with the World Council of Churches and with the preparation of working documents with various Christian groups.<sup>16</sup> One of the departments of the Pontifical Council is the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. As the original purpose of *Nostra Aetate* was regulating relations of the Catholic Church with the Jewish people, brief reference will now be made to Christian-Jewish relations over recent years. We then turn our attention to the underlying theological issue of salvation.

### **Christian-Jewish relations**

As mentioned above, intense diplomatic pressure had been put on the Vatican not to support the Jewish people in any way as this would be seen in the eyes of many Arab nations as tantamount to acknowledging the State of Israel which, they were convinced, should not exist. As a result, there were certain compromises made in *Nostra Aetate* in wording and nuance. For example, the word “decide” was dropped, although the decree makes it clear that “neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during [Jesus’] passion” (#4). Another compromise was to include the relationship of the Catholic Church with other “non-Christian religions”, which was to prove fortuitous, as shall be pointed out below.

The decree remains a most important document for it is the first declaration by a Church Council which reverses a long history of prejudice, and even contempt, against the Jewish people, along with comments made in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* (see above). An example of a

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<sup>15</sup> Oesterreicher, Declaration, 87.

<sup>16</sup> Gerald O’Collins, *Living Vatican II: The 21<sup>st</sup> Council for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 29-33.

warped attitude is given by Cunningham.<sup>17</sup> Although Pope Pius XI had condemned anti-Semitism in 1938 in an encyclical which was never published because of his death, he wrote the following:

The social separation of the Jews from the rest of humanity...is because the Saviour was rejected by that people ... However, the very act by which the Jewish people put to death their Saviour and King was the salvation of the world. [As a result] the Jewish nation bore a collective responsibility for the death of Jesus ... and was doomed to perpetually wander the face of the earth.

In the light of these words, Cunningham refers to *Nostra Aetate* as nothing less than “a revolutionary document”. “It is the Magna Charta for interreligious relations”.<sup>18</sup> It teaches that Jews and Christians come from a common father, Abraham, and share in the same revelation found in the Hebrew scriptures. The church “draws nourishment from that good olive tree on to which the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (cf. Rom 11:17-24)” (#4). Moreover, the covenant between God and the Jewish people has never been revoked. The “fulfilment theory” – that Christians took the Jews’ place as God’s chosen people through a “new covenant” – must thus be rejected.<sup>19</sup>

The issuing of *Nostra Aetate*, and particularly the re-patterning of minds that went into its tortuous history, has led to theological insights and personal relationships between Catholics and Jews that were scarcely thought possible before 1962. In 1974 Paul VI instituted a Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and issued guidelines for this dialogue a year later. In the latter document he says, “Through dialogue Christianity must overcome the triumphalism of power, and Judaism the triumphalism of pain”.<sup>20</sup> Klenicki comments:

The Christian-Jewish relationship has ... gone from argument to dialogue, from conflict to a situation of meeting, from ignorance and alienation to encounter, a conversation between equals.<sup>21</sup>

Despite this giant step forward, many challenges remain. According to Bretton-Granatoor,<sup>22</sup> *Nostra Aetate* could only create the atmosphere in which the beginnings of reconciliation could take place. A number of obstacles still need to be faced and dealt with. The first of these is the necessity for both Christians and Jews to accept the validity and, indeed, the authenticity of each other’s religious experience. This means “making room for” the diversity and multiplicity which has existed from the beginning of creation. A second obstacle to be faced is that Christians need to re-read the Christian scriptures in the light of the Jewish world from which most of them came. For example, understanding the Jewishness of Jesus is imperative and necessary for a Christian self-understanding.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Jews need to learn how Christians read and interpret the Hebrew Scriptures. An acceptance of each other’s point of view, and the differences that arise from this, can then be taken up in dialogue.

O’Collins has suggested that joint statements will lead nowhere without personal contact. “Fruitful dialogue with other Christians and with members of other religions takes place on the human level”.<sup>24</sup> In addition to his own rich teaching on the subject, particularly his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (“the mission of the Redeemer”) which we cannot go into in this short article, perhaps John Paul II achieved more through his actions rather than words in moving forward relations between the Christian and Jewish faiths. In 1979 he was the first pope to visit and pray for peace at Auschwitz. In 1986 he was the first pope to enter and pray in the Great Synagogue in Rome. In that same year he met in Assisi with leaders of many world faiths to pray for peace. In the year 2000 he celebrated a “Mass of Pardon” in St. Peter’s Basilica in which he included, among many of the sins committed by Christians in the previous millennium, a confession of guilt for the contempt and treatment which Christians showed to the people of Israel. Later that year he was the first pope to insert a prayer in the Western Wall in Jerusalem in which he committed “ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the

<sup>17</sup> Philip Cunningham, “The Beginning of the Beginning”, in *Nostra Aetate: Transforming the Catholic-Jewish Relationship*, (Anti-Defamation League, 2005), 17-26.

<sup>18</sup> Chidi Isizoh, “Presentation,” in *Milestones in Interreligious Dialogue*, (ed. C Isizoh, Rome-Lagos: Ceedee Publications, 2002), xv. See also Claude Geffré, “From the Theology of Religious Pluralism to an Interreligious Theology,” in *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honour of Jacques Dupuis*, (ed. D Kendall & G O’Collins, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 46.

<sup>19</sup> Gary Bretton-Granatoor, “Unresolved Issues and Suggested Solutions in *Nostra Aetate*,” in *Transforming the Catholic-Jewish Relationship* (ed. P Cunningham, Anti-Defamation League, 2005), 33.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Leon Klenicki, “Nostra Aetate: A Jewish View ‘From Disputation to Dialogue’,” in *Nostra Aetate: Transforming the Catholic-Jewish Relationship*, (ed. P Cunningham, Anti-Defamation League, 2005), 15.

<sup>21</sup> Klenicki, “Nostra Aetate,” 15.

<sup>22</sup> Bretton-Granatoor, “Unresolved Issues,” 28-37.

<sup>23</sup> Bretton-Granatoor, “Unresolved Issues,” 29.

<sup>24</sup> O’Collins, *Living Vatican II*, 110; see the final section of this article.

Covenant”.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps, in light of all that has happened in the past half century, and facing all that is yet to be addressed in this matter of Christian-Jewish relations, we can with Cunningham say: “We are probably still only at ‘the beginning of the beginning’.”<sup>26</sup>

### Relations with people of other religions

What may have been regarded as a political compromise at the time – the expansion of a *Declaration concerning the Jews* to a *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* – has turned out to be a catalyst for a new approach to what many today call a theology of religions. This applies particularly to a new understanding of world religions and their place in God’s plan for the salvation of humanity. Three perspectives on this issue can be distinguished: *exclusivism* (ecclesiocentric), *inclusivism* (christocentric) and *pluralism* (theocentric).<sup>27</sup> Christians who are attached to the exclusivist approach describe how salvation is only mediated through the church. (Members of other religions who hold this position will also claim their religion to be the exclusive way to the fullness of life.) This is clearly taught by Karl Barth and the missiologist Hendrik Kraemer. Barth, for instance, taught that the only valid knowledge of God is the Christian one. “The god of others is an idol”.<sup>28</sup>

Only those classified as fundamentalist Christians would today hold to this attitude which amounts to a strict belief in the dictum *extra ecclesiam nullus salus*. However, there are theologians who come close to this position and who use phrases from documents issued by Vatican II, for example, to strengthen and support their approach. One of these is Avery Dulles who uses *Lumen Gentium* #4 to affirm the necessity of the church for salvation “for through baptism as through a door people enter the church”.

Dulles maintains that Christ is the unique source of salvation and that “Vatican II clearly rejected any kind of relativism or radical pluralism that would attenuate or negate the traditional teaching on the absolute primacy of Christ”.<sup>29</sup> He supports his view with many other quotations from the Council’s documents, as well as those of recent popes, including Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam* and John Paul II’s *Redemptoris Missio*. Referring to Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*, he writes: “in the absence of some kind of union with Christ and the church, at least by way of a dynamic orientation (*ordinatio*), salvation would be completely unattainable (LG #14-16). ... The Council makes no reference to their religions as mediators of revelation or grace. ... At no point does Vatican II characterise the religions as good, holy or true”.<sup>30</sup>

Referring to those statements of the Council which are used by “contemporary religious pluralists” to uphold their “relativism”, Dulles claims that these sentences “are, one might say, diplomatic and non-committal,” there is a deliberate ambiguity – though he does not explain why this should be. When he turns to the theme of dialogue, Dulles is adamant that this refers to “conversations” with other Christian bodies through which there is the possibility of establishing what is required for effective proclamation. Dialogue with the religions of the world means proclaiming the truth, namely, the conviction that there is “but one true religion, the religion of Christianity”.<sup>31</sup>

### *Inclusivism and pluralism*

These two terms need to be defined separately, although Dupuis (as we shall see) was later to combine them in his important contribution to the subject. *Inclusivism* refers to the possibility of members of non-Christian religions attaining salvation through living out their beliefs, but that in some way Christ is involved in the salvific process.<sup>32</sup> This maintains the superiority of Christianity over all other religions, something denied by the pluralists. The latter state that “salvific knowledge of a transcendent reality is mediated by more than one religion (not necessarily by all of them), and there is none among them whose mediation of that knowledge is superior to all the rest.”<sup>33</sup> This latter view has caused a

<sup>25</sup> O’Collins, *Living Vatican II*, 33; Cunningham, “The Beginning of the Beginning”, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Cunningham, “The Beginning of the Beginning”, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 157; Terrence Merrigan, “Jacques Dupuis and the Redefinition of Inclusivism,” in *In Many and Diverse Ways*, (eds. D Kendall & G O’Collins, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 60; Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue*, (London: Burns & Oates, 2005), 18.

<sup>28</sup> Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 158.

<sup>29</sup> Avery Dulles, “World Religions and the New Millennium: A Catholic Perspective,” *In Many and Diverse Ways*, (eds. D Kendall & G O’Collins, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Dulles, “World Religions”, 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> Dulles, “World Religions”, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Merrigan, “Jacques Dupuis and the Redefinition of Inclusivism,” 60.

<sup>33</sup> Schmidt-Leukel, *Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue*, 20.

strong reaction from leading authorities in the Catholic Church but, before reflecting on this inclusivist/pluralist approach to the subject, it is important to know how certain authors develop their arguments within the context of the documentation of the Catholic Church.

### **Ecclesiastical texts**

In 1964 Pope Paul VI issued *Ecclesiam Suam* in which he examined the attitude which the Catholic Church needs to adopt towards the contemporary world. He spoke of the need for dialogue which he describes as four concentric circles. The outside circle represents the church's dialogue with humankind, the second is with the great religions of the world, the third with other Christians, and the innermost circle of dialogue is with members of the Catholic Church. We are concerned here with the second form of dialogue by which Paul VI recognises "the spiritual and moral values of the various non-Christian religions, for we desire to join with them in promoting and defending common ideals in the spheres of religious liberty, human [fellowship], education, culture, social welfare and civic order" (1964:#108). This dialogue does not preclude the pontiff from insisting that the "Christian religion is the one and only true religion" (:#107).

Three months later the bishops gathered at Vatican II issued a document on the nature of the church, *Lumen Gentium* (already referred to above), in which they took it one step further by stating that Christ wills all people to be saved. Those who do not know Christ but seek God, as well as those who have no knowledge of God but "strive to live a good life," may achieve eternal salvation. "Whatever good or truth...found amongst them is considered by the church to be a preparation for the gospel" (LG: #16).

We have already noted the progress made in the documents *Ad Gentes* and *Nostra Aetate*. It is these statements that Catholic inclusivist and pluralist theologians use for the ecclesial foundation for their views. Perhaps it was in response to these more developed theologies that the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue in 1991 issued a document entitled *Dialogue and proclamation* (DP) in order to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*. The document breaks no new ground in its attempt to balance dialogue, which is a positive and constructive effort at inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths, by proclaiming that the Kingdom of God has been established on earth in Jesus Christ (DP #9, 58). There are four forms of dialogue: of life, of action, of theological exchange and of religious experience. Meanwhile, the urgent need for proclamation of the gospel must be confident, faithful, humble, respectful, dialogical and inculturated (DP #42, 70).

These documents, and many others which cannot be mentioned for lack of space, would be seen as ringed with guarded caution by those theologians labelled (or self-labelled) as inclusivist/pluralist. Dialogue, for them, is not mere warm conversation, but a genuine search for the truth which no one religion can claim to possess fully. For Cunningham, for instance,

inter-religious dialogue actually leads participants to a deeper understanding of their own tradition as a result of being asked new questions or of viewing their own tradition from the other's perspective.<sup>34</sup>

Klenicki echoes a similar sentiment:

Real dialogue calls persons into their own being while also acknowledging the others as persons with a way and a commitment. Inter-faith dialogue is a recognition of the other as person, and God as the common ground of being. ... Ours is a search in humility for God's presence and call.<sup>35</sup>

### **The contribution of Jacques Dupuis**

In his book *Who do you say I am?* (1994) Dupuis argues that, just as a plurality of Christologies can be found in the New Testament, so new ways of inculturating and contextualising the faith need to be enunciated today.<sup>36</sup> There are two basic axioms of the Christian faith: God's will that all humanity be saved, and the necessary mediation of Jesus Christ through the church. Exclusivism relies on the second to the detriment of the first; pluralism relies on the first to the detriment of the second.<sup>37</sup> Dupuis believes that inclusivism can hold on to both principles:

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<sup>34</sup> Cunningham, "The Beginning of the Beginning", 23.

<sup>35</sup> Klenicki, "Nostra Aetate," 15-16.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am? Introduction to Christology*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 20.

<sup>37</sup> Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am?*, 160-161.

On the one side, Jesus Christ is clearly asserted to be God's definitive revelation and the absolute Saviour. On the other side, the door is open to a sincere acknowledgement of divine manifestations in the history of humanity in various cultures and of efficacious "elements of grace" to be found in other religious traditions; elements that are salvific for their members.<sup>38</sup>

Dupuis refers to his theology of religions as "theocentric qua christocentric" because God is at the centre, not human beings or Christianity. Jesus is the mediator for all humanity and thus faith in Christ is not closed, but open, indeed, cosmic in its dimension.

The theology of the religions of humanity based on that faith establishes, on a cosmic scale, a wonderful convergence in the mystery of Christ of all that God in the divine Spirit has realised or continues to accomplish in the history of humanity.<sup>39</sup>

Dupuis had already developed his theology of the religions extensively in his *Toward a Christian theology of religious pluralism* in 1997 (which evoked over 500 reviews and articles) and took this further in his *Christianity and the religions: from confrontation to dialogue* (2001). He is at pains to point out that once the "new world" was discovered towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century it was not possible to hold on to the principle that one cannot be saved unless one explicitly believes in Christ as Saviour. While Christ remains the "one mediation" between God and humans, this does not rule out the possibility of other "participated mediations" in other religious traditions.

Such shared mediations must not be placed on a level of equality with that at work in the church ... It must be maintained that the church, founded on the Christ event, and whose Head and Lord is Christ, represents more completely the sacramental visibility of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ; but it is not the only possible way.<sup>40</sup>

The theology of Dupuis was influenced by his nearly 40 years in India where he lived in the midst of "massive poverty and deep religiousness".<sup>41</sup> Deeply involved in dialogue with people of other faiths, he developed a "hermeneutical theology" whose method consisted of an "interaction between three realities: the 'text' (the data of faith), the 'context' (the total reality, including its socio-political, economic, cultural, and religious dimensions), and the 'interpreter' (both the individual theologian and the community)".<sup>42</sup> He came to see his theology as "inclusivist pluralism" and realised that the whole question of inter-religious dialogue needed further elaboration. He was involved in the writing of *Dialogue and proclamation* while teaching at the Gregorian University in Rome. This did not prevent him from being seriously questioned on three occasions by Josef Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF).

### *Dominus Jesus*

In the year 2000 the CDF published a document entitled *Dominus Jesus: on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (DJ). The purpose of the Declaration was to respond to relativistic theories of theologians who "seek to justify religious pluralism" (DJ #4). The fullness of the revelation of God is found only in Jesus Christ. All other religions, while they may contain rays of truth, cannot possess the absolute truth for there exists "a single church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church" (#17). God wills that this church be the instrument of salvation for "all humanity" and thus this teaching rules out any kind of religious relativism. Inter-religious dialogue is part of the missionary mandate of the church. "Equality, which is a presupposition of inter-religious dialogue, refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ ... in relation to the founders of the other religions" (#22).

This seeming return to an exclusivist ecclesiocentric theology caused a storm of protest. Cardinal Ratzinger responded to the criticisms in an interview in which he expressed "sadness and disappointment" at the way the Declaration's true theme was disregarded. The Vatican published a

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<sup>38</sup> Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am?*, 161.

<sup>39</sup> Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am?*, 162.

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions, From Confrontation to Dialogue*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 14-15.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Phan, "Jacques Dupuis and Asian Theologies of Religious Pluralism," in *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honour of Jacques Dupuis*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 72.

<sup>42</sup> Phan, "Jacques Dupuis and Asian Theologies," 73.



book to explain the document and Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, explained that there had been misunderstandings on the meaning and intention of the text. The document was widely discussed in Asia, particularly because Cardinal Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, was quoted as saying that the text was directed above all “to theology professors of India, because in Asia there is a theological problem over the oneness of salvation”.<sup>43</sup>

The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) issued a response to *Dominus Jesus* (Chia 2001) in which it was noted that most of the hundreds of negative criticisms of the document came from the West, especially from members of churches who had been told that they were “not churches in the proper sense”. In light of Cassidy’s comment above about theological problems in Asia, and Ratzinger’s concern (DJ #7) that the document was really aimed at asserting the supremacy of the Christian faith in its relations to other religions, we will here concentrate on an important document on Asian theology today: *Methodology: Asian Christian theology. Doing theology in Asia today* (MACT 2000). While this document appeared only two months after *Dominus Jesus*, it had been three years in preparation and is concerned with the very issues which arise in the Vatican document.

MACT states in the Introduction that “today Asians are doing theology and draw nourishment from their Asian cultures and the lived experience of Asian Christians at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century ... The seed of the Word has fallen into the rich soil of Asia. It penetrates that soil and produces fruits that may be different from the results of other branches.” Of the many values which are paramount in Asia, one is harmony. “What is needed is a vision of unity and harmony, and a language of reconciled diversity that will enable people of different communities to work together for peace and the building of a more just society.” Referring to the various religious traditions on the continent, the introduction continues:

The Spirit is at work outside the visible Christian community, through these various traditions. The Christian will always see these mediations as being related in some way to Jesus Christ ... The Christian will rather explore them further to sound the depths of the mystery of God’s self-revelation and deepen his or her own faith. This is not to say that all ways are the same, but rather that the object of our search remains forever a mystery and the various ways and paths do intersect.<sup>44</sup>

This teaching is based on a cosmic view which integrates the question of human salvation within a unified view of the whole cosmos. “The Asian way is one of integration and inclusion ... 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. Hence, the Asian Christian is open to dialogue.”

Having set the scene for their theological method, the bishops continue with the subject of pluralism. Firstly, and importantly, they define the difference between pluralism and relativism. “Pluralism generally refers to a situation in which a variety of viewpoints, explanations or perspectives are offered to account for the same reality.” “Relativism holds that there are many truths which vary according to the subjects who hold different opinions of reality. Such relativism destroys the rich meaning of pluralism”.<sup>45</sup> People know that they hold different points of view of reality. There is a variety of linguistic patterns by which these views are expressed. “Such pluralism presupposes a cultural and religious atmosphere in which every group is willing to learn and unlearn, where all are eager to know one another better and thus also to know themselves better.”<sup>46</sup> One of the problems is that the excessive individualism of contemporary society has led, for many, to a relativising of reality in which all points of view are equally valid. “We cannot conclude that all pluralism leads to relativism” because “the affirmation of plurality rests on the human search for an underlying unity that enables us to understand plurality better”.<sup>47</sup>

Having reflected on pluralism as a fact in church history, in the documents of Vatican II, as well as in their own FABC documents, the Asian bishops bring this section to a close with a reflection on pluralism as enrichment.

In theological knowledge the expression always falls short of the reality, precisely because we are dealing with a mystery which cannot be fully comprehended. Since no

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted by Edmund Chia, *The Asian Church in dialogue with Dominus Jesus*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology. (MACT) Doing Theology in Asia Today.” *The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences*, (Hong Kong, 2000), Introduction.

<sup>45</sup> MACT, #1.1.

<sup>46</sup> MACT, #1.1.

<sup>47</sup> MACT, #1.1.

expression is perfect, additional expressions are not only possible, but beneficial for a fuller understanding of the mystery. In the Asian way of perceiving, where experience has priority over rational knowledge, this point becomes more significant because the ways of experiencing any reality are diverse. ... Reality is one and multidimensional.<sup>48</sup>

This very insufficiency of expression demands plurality in theology. Emphasising the three essential criteria of “revelation, the *sensus fidelium* and the magisterium”, the bishops conclude that “legitimate pluralism in theology ... is also a sign that faith is incarnated in the history and life of different people”.<sup>49</sup> This is why Asian theology contains “a certain ambiguity, uncertainty and tenuousness ... It is rather a pilgrimage”.<sup>50</sup>

### The way forward

It is a truism to say that the contemporary means of communication has made the world a “global village”. In the words of Dupuis, most people today are living in multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-lingual societies.<sup>51</sup> It is impossible for Christians to ignore this. The question of the relationship between Christianity and other religions must out of necessity be addressed. For this reason, many theologians admit that we are “only at the beginning”, “on a pilgrimage”. Continuing study of the issues concerned with the subject is leading to more and more meetings for dialogue, as well as a plethora of publications. These efforts must proceed. Yet, there is another side to the coin.

Fruitful dialogue with other Christians and with members of other religions takes place on the human level. Even well-crafted joint statements will not lead anywhere, unless they are grounded in personal exchanges and a loving regard for one another.<sup>52</sup>

“Genuine inter-religious dialogue does not concern doctrine but rather the meaning that life has for each of us when we live out our religion”.<sup>53</sup> For this reason Panikkar, in his foreword to de Béthune’s book on hospitality (2010), prefers the term *intra*-religious dialogue which, he says, is part of all cultures and religions. De Béthune’s theory is that the “fulfilment of dialogue” is hospitality. Through meeting people as they are, as it were, in contrast to discussions across the table, one is led to rid oneself of any thoughts of superiority. It is a matter of receiving the other into one’s spiritual home, of talking heart to heart (*cor ad cor loquitur*, in the words of John Henry Newman). This is true *intra*-religious dialogue and it is “at the very heart of religious life”. We welcome the other with the hope that he/she “will come bearing a gift of particular spiritual value.”<sup>54</sup> The aim is not the conversion of the other, but the conversion of oneself which leads to a deeper understanding of one’s faith.

This is why all true spiritual quests are compatible. Just as it is possible to offer hospitality to a stranger, on the premise of our shared humanity, it is likewise possible to encounter a believer from another religion at the place at which his faith is at its truest, because he also is *capax Dei* (capable of God; a principle quoted from St. Augustine), open to the Absolute. This openness is given to every human being who seeks it sincerely.<sup>55</sup>

For Fredericks, when one surveys the vast diversity of religions, one recognises the necessity of being rooted in one tradition. At the same time, one remains open to experience, recognising “in the teachings of another religious tradition a theological resource ‘waiting to lead us to a new light and a new vision’”.<sup>56</sup> This inclusivist/pluralist attitude is not proposing that one religion is as good as another. Pluralism is not relativism. The pluralist, though, recognises that the first Person of the Trinity is Creator of all and is present in all and that all of creation, including people, is good. The pluralist holds that, before Jesus of Nazareth was born, the second Person of the Trinity was already present as Word in all of humanity. Christ, the Word of God, remains for the Christian “the definitive clue to the whole

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<sup>48</sup> MACT #1.5.

<sup>49</sup> MACT #1.5.

<sup>50</sup> MACT, Introduction.

<sup>51</sup> Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 2-3.

<sup>52</sup> O’Collins, *Living Vatican II*, 110.

<sup>53</sup> Raimon Panikkar, in Pierre-François de Béthune, *Interreligious Hospitality*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), ix.

<sup>54</sup> De Béthune, *Interreligious Hospitality*, 138-139

<sup>55</sup> de Béthune, *Interreligious Hospitality*, 142.

<sup>56</sup> James Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 96.

process but not the whole itself. Of necessity he points beyond himself to other creative-redemptive figures and practices, and demands of us openness toward them”.<sup>57</sup> The pluralist believes that the third Person of the Trinity, who “hovered over the chaos” inter-penetrates the whole cosmos.

God has something to do with the fact that a diversity of independent ways of salvation appears in the history of the world. This diversity reflects the diversity or plurality within the divine life itself, of which the Christian doctrine of the Trinity provides an account. The mystery of the Trinity is for Christians the ultimate foundation for pluralism.<sup>58</sup>

### **Mutual understanding as inter-religious dialogue**

This dual thrust – the study of inter-religious dialogue and the need for personal relationships – has been well put together in a recent article entitled: *Faith to faith – Missiology as encounterology* (Kritzinger 2008). Kritzinger’s argument is that, without reflexivity, inter-religious dialogue can too often end up as “a form of ‘othering’ that does not directly enhance inter-religious relationships”.<sup>59</sup> It is an argument against book knowledge only, which can so often be “correct”, but which does not bring people of different faiths together, literally “face to face”. A further element to be taken into consideration is that religious identity is a complex phenomenon. One member of a certain faith may not explain, or even agree, with a description of that faith, or part of that faith, by another member. (We have already seen an example of this in the varying attitudes to *Dominus Jesus*.) Kritzinger suggests that Christians “start listening to the ‘self-identification’ of religious believers, ... to hear how South African Hindus, Muslims and others explain their own faith”.<sup>60</sup> Such mutual listening would help people to understand another faith “from the inside”, as it were. A dialogue aimed at mutual understanding would thus develop into an exercise of mutual witness.<sup>61</sup> The seven-step praxis model that Kritzinger develops for this dialogue steers away from a narrowly doctrinal dialogue to “an interactive-practical *method* that focuses not only on the other, but also on who *we* are, what the context is, and what happens when we meet other people of faith” (:769; the second emphasis added). Instead of dealing with an “other”, one enters into an environment of “one-anothering”.<sup>62</sup>

The result of this will be the development of a “theology of inter-religious encounters between living *religious people and communities*”. Once this in-depth personal and theological reflection is written up, one will not so much have a theology of religions, as “a theology of Christian-African encounter, Christian-Buddhist encounter, Christian-Muslim encounter”, Christian-Jewish encounter, etc.<sup>63</sup> The science of missiology will be re-written and read through the eyes of “encounterology”.

### **Conclusion**

The four-year struggle of those who helped to see that *Ad Gentes* and *Nostra Aetate* would see the light of day has led to a further 50-year investigation of the meaning of Christ’s role in God’s plan for the salvation of humanity. The journey has just begun. Now there is no turning back for the Catholic Church. Its members have no choice but to engage in personal and theological reflection with those of other faiths and be open to where this will lead them. Fifty years ago there was no mention of the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) in Catholic documentation. These churches are expanding rapidly in numbers. It is our duty to engage with them and enter into a dialogue. As a collective they remain voiceless. We, without them, have no strong constituency anymore. We, too, without true intra-religious dialogue, are voiceless in a world searching for meaning. South Africa is rich with religious belief: there are the Pentecostal churches, Shembe, Hindus, Muslims, the AICs, and more. Encounter in a face-to-face conversation is a necessary requirement for any kind of step forward in having a voice in order to influence the society in which we live, and for working towards that peace that eludes us yet draws us all forward.

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<sup>57</sup> Peter Hodgson, “The Spirit and Religious Pluralism,” in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multi-Faith Exploration*, (ed. P Knitter, New York: Orbis Press, 2005), 137.

<sup>58</sup> Hodgson, “The Spirit and Religious Pluralism”, 136.

<sup>59</sup> JNJ Kritzinger, “Faith to Faith – Missiology as Encounterology,” (*Verbum et Ecclesia* 29, 2008), 766.

<sup>60</sup> Kritzinger, “Faith to Faith,” 767.

<sup>61</sup> Kritzinger, “Faith to Faith,” 768.

<sup>62</sup> Kritzinger, “Faith to Faith,” 769.

<sup>63</sup> Kritzinger, “Faith to Faith,” 787.

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