Jacques Dupuis’ Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

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Abstract: Given the politics and publicity surrounding Jacques Dupuis’ *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*,¹ his contribution to the developing theology of religious pluralism deserves closer scrutiny. The general question guiding this discussion is the following: does Jacques Dupuis provide adequate resources for claiming the both the authenticity of Christian revelation and a genuinely positive acceptance of religious pluralism? The article outlines Dupuis’ interreligious hermeneutical methodology, enquires into his understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and examines the implications of his Trinitarian Christology for a theology of religious pluralism. Dupuis’ contribution is then assessed from the dual perspectives of Christian theology and theological rhetoric. Finally, the issue of Christian universalism is brought to hermeneutical attention.

Introduction

The issue of Christian identity and religious pluralism is an emerging area of theological debate. The time is not so long past when Christian apologetics simply rejected the ordinary possibility of salvation for "pagans and infidels".² For Catholics, the second Vatican Council marked a significant change of approach to other religions by declaring that they may indeed contain divine "rays of truth".³ Nearly half a century later, there has been an explosion of opinions and

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¹ Jacques Dupuis (1923-2004) was a Belgium Jesuit missionary in India before becoming professor of theology at Rome’s Gregorian University. His major work, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1997), was investigated by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) between June 1998 and January 2001. Although not found to be in doctrinal error, CDF issued a statement in which it found his book contained "notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points which could lead a reader to erroneous or harmful opinions." For an abridged version of the official "notification" (signed by Cardinal Ratzinger, 26th February 2001), see *The Tablet* (3rd March 2001): 325f.

² Many theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, were more cautious. The "implicit desire" for baptism, for example, was sometimes understood in fairly universal terms. In the Patristic era, there was an even wider expression of belief about the contours of salvation, especially in terms of the "Cosmic Christ." See TRP, 53-83.

³ *Nostra Aetate*, 2. Similar expressions are found in other Vatican II statements. See, for example: *Lumen Gentium*, 16; *Gaudium et Spes*, 92; *Ad Gentes*, 9, 11, 15, 18.
writings on the subject of religious pluralism not least from a Christian perspective. At this point, it is helpful to note that some approaches are more sociological or ideological than theological. Jacques Dupuis' own contribution is both theological and, one may safely say, Catholic. He says at the beginning of his book that he intends "an introduction to a theology of religions, at once historical and synthetic, genetic and up-to-date". His concern is to show that a theology of religious pluralism is possible not just in a general Christian sense, but especially within the heritage and with the resources of the Roman Catholic tradition.

**Dupuis' Avowed Method and Argument**

In contrast to traditional theological methods, which were deductive, dogmatic and genetic – beginning with doctrinal principles and/or biblical data to arrive at logical applications for today – Dupuis proposes an inductive, contextual and hermeneutic theology. He speaks not of the "hermeneutical circle" but the "hermeneutical triangle" consisting of the mutual interaction between text, context and interpreter. These are interpreted broadly: *text* includes everything contained in "Christian memory"; *context* is both a concrete place and time in human history and its theoretical complexities; *interpreter* is less the individual theologian than the community of faith to which the theologian belongs. Dupuis is, then, indebted to the hermeneutical theology of mutual and critical correlation, as well as to the Anselmian insistence that theology arises from Christian faith.

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4 TRP, 2.
5 TRP, 13-19.
6 See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology in an Age of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), and; Claude Geffré, *The Risk of Interpretation: On being Faithful to the Christian Tradition in a Non-Christian Age* (New York: Paulist, 1987). Both works are included in Dupuis' bibliography and he explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to the hermeneutical methodology of Geffré in TRP, 15.
When it comes to doing a theology of religious pluralism, Dupuis suggests we need a *new method* which makes its point of departure the *praxis* of interreligious dialogue.\(^7\) Such an "interreligious hermeneutical theology" will hopefully lead to the discovery of cosmic dimensions of the mystery of God, Christ and the Spirit "at a new depth." Dupuis finds the praxis methodologies of liberation theology instructive. Just as liberation theology begins with reflection on the concrete context of injustice and oppression, the theology of religious pluralism begins with reflection *on* and *within* interfaith dialogue. Moreover, as in liberation theology, this will lead to a critique of aspects of the tradition and the discovery of new understanding of God's revelation in the contemporary world.

Dupuis speaks of the "remarkable evolution" and "spectacular changes" in today's world which justify a "paradigm shift" in Christian theology. This is pertinent in view of the traditional, theological tendency to define all religious traditions in universalist terms. He states that his goal is not to develop some new "universal theology" which levels out all differences, but to promote "dialogical openness and mutual enrichment through conversation".\(^8\) Effectively, Dupuis is taking up the challenge of postmodernity with its increased sensitivity to the demands of the religious 'other' to be respected and understood "in their very otherness".\(^9\) This necessarily represents a significant challenge to traditional Christian understanding of the mystery of Christ and the world's religious traditions.

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\(^7\) TRP, 18f.

\(^8\) TRP, 7. Dupuis is here indebted to the writings of Raimon Panikkar which he indirectly acknowledges.

\(^9\) TRP, 7. The importance of "the other qua other" as the issue for religious pluralism is well described in Raimon Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism" in *Cross Currents* 29 (1979) 197-230; and *Invisible* Harmony (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 52-91. Emmanuel Levinas has developed the notion of "being-for-other" as the ethical challenge for postmodernity: theological implications are developed by Terry Veling, "In the Name of Who? Levinas and the Other Side of Theology" in *Pacifica* 12/3 (October 1999) 275-292.
For all that, Dupuis adopts a rather traditional structure for his work described as historical and systematic (Part One) and organic and thematic (Part Two). The historical and systematic theologian will be most at home in Part One which is a helpful overview of the history of doctrines and beliefs that inform the Christian—especially Catholic—memory important for any contemporary approach to religious pluralism. However, the approach is more deductive than inductive. The paradigm shift towards an inductive theology based on the praxis of interreligious dialogue only emerges in Part Two. The attempt is to present an understanding of salvation that is faithful to the constitutive and unique role of Jesus Christ while also affirming a genuine plurality of religious paths in accordance with the divine plan. Dupuis wishes to achieve this by moving beyond any kind of "fulfillment theology" which affirms the value of other religious traditions only in a secondary and provisional sense. The rest of this article will present and assess Dupuis' proposals.

**The Constitutive Uniqueness of Jesus Christ**

Unlike some religious and theological pluralists, Dupuis affirms unconditionally the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. He is in no manner disputing either the ontological, divine status of Jesus Christ or the pivotal role of the incarnation in the divine economy of salvation. He specifically rejects a purely functional, low christology which would equate the role of Jesus Christ in Christianity to the role of other Saviour figures in their particular traditions. Such

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10 See, for example, Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions" in Theological Investigations 5 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966) 115-134. Despite rejecting Rahner's "fulfillment theology," Dupuis' dependence on Rahner's theological underpinnings is considerable. The "fulfillment theory" is also associated with Jean Danielou, Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs van Balthasar. For a discussion of these approaches, see TRP, 130-157.

11 Dupuis presents the major aspects of his Christology in chapter eleven, "Jesus Christ--One and Universal" in TRP, 280-304.
relativism is dismissed out of hand with reference to the inadequacy of its biblical and christological hermeneutics as well as to an inappropriate reading of the specific roles of other Saviour figures with respect to their own traditions. We will return to this second point. For the moment, we will concentrate on Dupuis' affirmation that the traditional Christian claim still stands: "Faith in Jesus Christ does not merely consist in trusting that he is 'for me' the path to salvation; it means to believe that the world and humankind find salvation in and through him". 12 This, it is argued, is evident in the "massive claims" of the New Testament.

Dupuis is fully aware that both the New Testament and subsequent Greek thought influenced, systematized and, in some sense, ontologized Christ. However, he understands this in terms of "homogenous development" and "inculturation" rather than as a simplistic "process of deification" that has no warrant in the original kerygma. 13 He stresses that the Church's explicit Christology is grounded in the implicit Christology of Jesus himself. Moreover, admitting that concepts such as preexistence and incarnation are expressed in "symbolic language" and are "open to misunderstanding" does not thereby deny their essential truth-claim: "the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Logos of God in person." Otherwise stated, "the constitutive uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ" rests on his "personal identity as the Son of God."

Nonetheless, the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth as "a mortal man" needs to be taken seriously. 14 It is here that Dupuis hopes to find an opening for a theology of religious pluralism. The limitations of every human existence, including that of the historical Jesus, are real. Neither the mystery of God nor God's saving power can be

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12 TRP, 292f.
13 TRP, 294-297.
14 TRP, 297-300. Dupuis quotes at length, and with approval, Geffré, Schillebeeckx and Duquoc who likewise stress the historical particularity of the Christ-event.
exhausted by even such a sublime revelation as the Christ-event. This means that, while Jesus Christ is "the universal sacrament of God's saving action," he is not thereby the only expression of the divine will to save. Making it clear that the mystery of the incarnation is unique in Jesus, there is room for "other saving figures" to be enlightened by the Word and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Here, Dupuis suggests that a Trinitarian Christology and a Spirit Christology are needed. After all, the non-incarnate Logos and the universal presence of the Spirit are present both before and after the incarnation. The Christ-event is certainly the "culminating point" of God's one economy of salvation; but the God who saves is three.

Stated differently, Dupuis tells us that while Jesus Christ is the "universal Saviour," he is not thereby the "Absolute Saviour". Absolute is an attribute of the ultimately Real, namely, God. Nor, of course, should one speak of any historical religion, including Christianity, in absolute terms. However, what is most at stake here is the understanding of the relationship between God and Christ and, more particularly, Christ and the Logos. Relying on his Trinitarian Christology, Dupuis states that Jesus-the-Christ and the divine Word or Logos are inseparable yet distinct. It is the paradox that Nicholas of Cusa referred to as the "concrete universal". Jesus Christ is the Logos in human flesh and, as such, has universal significance for the world's salvation; however, the God of Jesus, whose "superabundant graciousness and absolute freedom" abound, does not exhaust the divine saving reality in the human action of the Logos.

Consequently, according to Dupuis, the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ are neither absolute nor relative, but what he calls constitutive and relational. He develops his

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15 TRP, 282, 292, 303f.

16 TRP, 299.
understanding of these categories in relation to the question of possible multiple paths of salvation.

Implications for a Theology of Religious Pluralism

Having asserted that Jesus Christ is the universal sacrament of salvation and the culminating point of a single divine economy, Dupuis then addresses the issue of how a Christian theology of religions can account for multiple salvific paths.\(^\text{17}\) We recall that he wishes to do this without advocating a fulfillment theology of religions. Taking his Trinitarian/Spirit Christology as a starting point, he considers in turn: (1) the inclusive presence in history of the mystery of Jesus Christ; (2) the universal power of the Logos; and (3) the unbound action of the Spirit. This leads to his conclusion that the religions represent complementary values and divergent paths which are, nonetheless, authentic human paths to salvation.

With reference to the inclusive presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ in human history, Dupuis is not satisfied with an approach that ignores the actuality of the various religious traditions. He insists that the mystery of Jesus Christ is historically mediated to non-Christians in and through specific religious beliefs and practices such as the Hindu worship of sacred images. It is in "the very practice of their religion" that God is present to them in a "privileged instance" of divine self-communication.\(^\text{18}\) In stating this, Dupuis is affirming the integrity of the religious traditions on their own terms as distinct from their relationship to Christianity. However, this does not imply an equality of religions since religious practices and sacramental rites of other traditions "are not on the same footing as the Christian sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ".\(^\text{19}\) In brief, other religions may be authentic paths to salvation, but they remain

\(^{17}\) TRP, 305-329
\(^{18}\) TRP, 319 & 303.
\(^{19}\) TRP, 319.
qualitatively distinct from the manner in which Christianity mediates the mystery of Christ overtly, explicitly and with full visibility.

Directing his attention to the universal power of the Logos and unbound action of the Spirit, Dupuis affirms the divine presence in historical persons and movements in the religious traditions. This leads him to acknowledge a two-way process of "mutual enrichment and transformation" between Christianity and other religions. Buddhist enlightenment and love of wisdom, for example, complement Christian emphasis on agapeic involvement in the struggle for justice.20 The two ways are complementary and diverse: Buddhism emphasizes the saving value of wisdom; Christianity, the saving value of love. Each tradition can learn from the other so that, according to Dupuis, complementarity does not imply a fulfillment theory. In this instance, Buddhism has its own unique revelation of the non-incarnate saving Word that is qualitatively different to Christian experience of the one and same Word. Dupuis is quick to add that while all manifestations of the Word do not have the same significance this does not mean they need to be understood in fulfillment terms.

Where does this lead? Following Alois Pieris, and in similar vein to Raimon Panikkar, Dupuis posits a distinction-in-identity between Jesus Christ and the saving Logos.21 The "mediating reality" (Pieris) or the "saving supername" (Panikkar) is not simply and unequivocally identified with Jesus Christ, Gautama Buddha or any other historical saving figure. From the Christian perspective, Jesus Christ is the unique Saviour, the one in whom salvation is accomplished (identity), but manifestations of the saving Word are not unique to Jesus Christ (distinction). Stated differently, it is the

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20 TRP, 326-329. Dupuis makes productive use of the Sri Lankan Jesuit, Alois Pieris, whose writings on Buddhist-Christian dialogue are well known.

same Word that enlightens Gautama Buddha and becomes flesh in Jesus Christ. This leads Dupuis to speak of "various though not equal paths" in which the divine, saving presence is mediated in history through Word and Spirit. Moreover, as an historical religion, Christianity also stands in an ambiguous relationship to the mystery of Jesus Christ which surpasses all historical, cultural and religious expressions. In this sense, Dupuis alludes to a "convergence between the religious traditions and the mystery of Jesus Christ".

What then is the precise relationship between historical Christianity and other religious traditions? Dupuis speaks of a "regnocentric perspective". What is important is the "reign of God" of which the Church is the "universal sacrament" but not the only historical mediation. Other religions "exercise a certain mediation of the reign" which are described as "different . . . but no less real". Moreover, Dupuis rejects any notion of historical or even eschatological convergence of the religious traditions: "Other religious traditions . . . can at the end of time share in the fullness of the Kingdom without having to be linked at the last stage to an 'eschatological Church'". Consequently, convergence between the religious traditions does not assume the eradication of religious divergence even in the final Kingdom since the eschatological reality

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22 TRP, 328.
23 TRP, 328.
25 TRP, 356. Dupuis uses Rahner's sacramental theory to describe the relationship of identity and non-identity between the historical Church and the universal reign of God. Other religions are described in terms of 'mediation' rather than 'sacrament' of God's reign though the distinction between these two terms is not explicated.
26 TRP, 357.
is not the heavenly Church but the fullness of God's reign. Meanwhile, dialogue is possible among members of the various religious traditions *insofar* as they are already connected under the universal reign of God.  

Finally, it is communion with the Triune God that is the ultimate goal of human beings, a goal achieved in God's grace and providence through multiple religious paths.

**A Theological Response**

From a Christian theological perspective, Dupuis is clearly faithful to the Christian tradition in stating that all divine revelation is the communication of the triune God. Other religious traditions may receive their unique divine treasures of grace and wisdom but, for the Christian, these will always be measured against revelation in Jesus Christ who is the universal Saviour and culminating point of the single economy of salvation. Within this framework of traditional Christian theology, the novel aspect is the suggestion that other religions represent *permanently distinct and valid ways of salvation* through the mediation of the non-incarnate Logos and the unbounded action of the Spirit. Consequently, Christianity is not the only beneficiary of divine revelation. In fact, there may be divine self-communications to other traditions that Christians do not, perhaps cannot, receive. This provides the space for encounter among religious traditions that is genuinely dialogical and forms the basis of his Christian theology of religious pluralism.

A theological response to Dupuis' proposal needs to question to what extent he achieves his goal of moving beyond the fulfillment theology of Karl Rahner. It is true that Rahner concentrates on how Jesus Christ is present and operative in the faith of individual non-Christians. Nonetheless, even Rahner leaves the way open for the mediation of grace in "non-Christian religions as social and

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27 "Dialogue takes place between persons who already belong together to the reign of God inaugurated in history in Jesus Christ”. TRP, 346.
in institutional realities”. Where Dupuis extends Rahner is in the explicit rejection of an approach that sees Christianity bringing other religions to fulfillment in a one-sided process. For Dupuis, the process is two-way so that it remains possible that Christianity will only find its own fulfillment through encounter with other traditions. Although this may seem to be a radical departure from traditional Christian teaching, its radicality should not be overemphasized. Dupuis maintains that all religious traditions remain oriented to the mystery of Jesus Christ who "brings salvation history to a climax". Thus, while avoiding a one-sided fulfillment theology of religions, he still advocates a universal theology of religions that interprets all religious faith in Christian categories.

In a language reminiscent of Rahner, Dupuis understands that the mystery of salvation is mediated overtly, explicitly and with full visibility through Christianity. In other traditions, the mediation is implicit, concealed and incomplete. Such subordinationist language may acknowledge that other religions contain elements of divine wisdom and moments of divine grace, but these still only "anticipate God's fuller disclosure and decisive self-gift in Jesus Christ". Evidently, this represents a fulfillment-type theology in which Christians alone see the work of salvation accomplished in the concrete figure of the crucified Christ. At the very least, Christians have an epistemological superiority despite the integrity of the religious experience of divine grace in other traditions. This implies

29 TRP, 326.
30 Dupuis affirms Teilhard de Chardin's "eschatological sense" of the "convergence of religions in the universal Christ”. TRP, 388-390.
31 Although Dupuis distinguishes between a "theology of religions" and a "theology of religious pluralism" (see TRP, 12f.), his aim is still to establish a universal theology from the perspective of Christian particularity.
32 TRP, 319.
33 TRP, 325. Emphasis added.
34 TRP, 328.
that other religious paths to salvation are valid and genuine but, as he states unequivocally, they are not equal. Christianity can certainly learn from them through the experience of interreligious dialogue, but the relationship between the divine saving *Logos* and Christianity remains especially privileged.

There remain, nonetheless, ambiguities in Dupuis' understanding of the relationship between Christ, the *Logos* and the Church that traditional Christian theology will want to question. By emphasizing the non-identity between Jesus Christ and the saving *Logos*, Dupuis will be accused, in his own words, of threatening "the indissoluble link between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history".35 By minimizing the saving role of the Church,36 he will be accused of reducing the significance of his "constitutive Christ" to the historical Jesus with all but a tenuous connection to the post-resurrection, post-Pentecost community of Jesus' explicit and visible followers.37 There is paradox here insofar as Dupuis emphasizes the importance of the socio-historical mediation of grace in other religions while appearing to minimize its import for Christianity.

The importance of these critiques from both religious pluralists and Christian theologians is that they highlight the difficulty, if not impossibility, of arriving at a theology of religious pluralism based on the "universal" role of a particular Saviour figure however narrowly or broadly interpreted. Perhaps the best we can hope for are diverse theologies of religious pluralism on the basis of different and finally

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35 This is Dupuis' earlier assessment of Panikkar's Christology. See Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1991) 183-190 esp. 187.

36 In his desire to overturn a rigid interpretation *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, Dupuis constantly advocates that non-Christians may attain salvation "without belonging in whatever way to the Church". TRP, 349.

incomparable religious experiences.38 Dupuis' own theology has been called a mixture of "practical radicalism and doctrinal conservatism".39 Others may claim that his praxis of interreligious dialogue is too limited or that his doctrinal modifications are too extreme. Nonetheless, his contribution to Christian self-understanding in a pluralistic religious world is significant, not least from a rhetorical perspective.

A Rhetorical Response

For this reason, Dupuis' work is better read as a theological rhetoric rather than formal theological doctrine. As David Klemm states, whatever else theology is, it is "eminently rhetorical--and in need of a new rhetoric".40 Unlike doctrine, which focuses on the intellectual formulation of belief, rhetoric focuses on the images, metaphors and partial logics associated with the communication of new ideas and values.41 This is to affirm the place of human experience and intuition in the search for truth. Accordingly, rhetoric is also described as "discourse on the margins of thought and action".42 In fact, Dupuis sometimes finds himself on the margins of traditional Christian rhetoric only because such rhetoric largely belongs to an era in Christian life that espoused a language and self-

38 Raimon Panikkar has long maintained that religious traditions share incommensurable, mutually exclusive, respectively contradictory and finally unbridgeable values that no theory of religious pluralism can ultimately explain. For Panikkar, religious pluralism needs to be appropriated at the level of the mythos rather than the logos. See, for example, "The Myth of Pluralism" and Invisible Harmony.

39 See George Lindbeck's review of TRP in International Bulletin of Missionary Research (January 1998) 34.


understanding *in opposition to* other traditions. Religious experience today is increasingly concerned with the *space of mutuality* in which Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and other are able to validate a broader religious experience than that of any single tradition.

Scholars of rhetoric identify four master tropes of discourse: *metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche* and *irony*. Where such tropes are used effectively in theological communication, they provide a "deeper grammar" which mediates concepts and doctrines with intuitive religious experience. Certainly, rhetorical devices cannot in themselves settle doctrinal truth-claims, but they may indicate the limitations of a worldview and language in which those truth-claims were formulated. They may also point to new possibilities for theological discourse which arises from the Christian tradition while also being responsive to the emerging experience of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. As will now be shown, Dupuis makes productive use of the four major tropes which can aid our interpretation of his work as a postmodern theological discourse.

Dupuis' primary metaphor is his Trinitarian Christology through which he affirms the pluralism of divine self-communication in Word and Spirit. This accords with the emerging postmodern metaphor of otherness which seeks "to uncover what is questionable and what is genuine in self and other, while opening self to other and allowing other to remain other". Postmodern theological rhetoric needs to take religious pluralism seriously without denying the authenticity of either one's own or the other's religious experience. This is a significant challenge for Christianity and the other monotheistic traditions. Trinitarian christology as a metaphor for divine self-


44 Klemm maintains that the overriding metaphor for modernity was the "crisis of history"; this is being replaced in postmodern thought by a new metaphor, namely, the "crisis of otherness". See his "Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology," esp. 456.
communication meets this challenge through its intuitive grasp of the universality of the divine saving action which is not overturned by reference to the particularity of Christian experience.

Metaphor operates as an initial moment of apprehension of a complex reality. The second trope of discourse, metonymy, disperses the metaphor in more concrete ways. According to Klemm, the metonymic elements of the postmodern metaphor of otherness are dispersed according to the self, the other, the encompassing world and time. Dupuis' Trinitarian metaphor can be interpreted according to these same elements: the Christian 'self,' the non-Christian 'other,' the 'encompassing world' beyond the religions and, finally, historical and eschatological 'time.' The divine self-communication to Christians is uniquely mediated through the incarnation of the Word in the historical Jesus. In other traditions, the non-incarnate Word may mediate the experience of grace and salvation in ways that are unique to them. Beyond the particular religions, the universal power of the Logos and the unbounded action of the Spirit are likewise able to mediate God's saving love in historically specific ways. Finally, the divine Trinitarian communication does not presume the convergence of the various historical communities even at the end of time. This makes Dupuis' God thoroughly postmodern in the divine refusal to eliminate religious difference either in our historical world or, indeed, at the eschaton.

The third major trope of discourse, synecdoche, represents the in-breaking of new consciousness. Synecdoche is like a "second metaphor" which arises from the experience of dissatisfaction with former experience and language. Dupuis' synecdochic insight is the

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45 Klemm, 457.
46 In rhetorical terms, the movement from metonymy to synecdoche is described as "a return from the many to the one or shift from dispersal to integration . . . ". (Klemm, 452). For Barth, the synecdochic figure is the inbreaking of the wholly other God; for Heidegger, the irruption of being into everyday existence; for Panikkar, the cosmosetheandric experience. See
"reign of God in history (which) extends to the whole world, both visible and invisible". This universal reign of God provides the basis for interreligious dialogue since members of different religious traditions are already "co-members of the reign of God in history". While the Church remains the "universal sacrament" of that reign, it has no monopoly: other religions are also authentic mediations of God's reign in their own right. This revelatory insight enables Dupuis to invert the traditional focus on Christianity alone (extra ecclesiam nulla salus) in favour of Christianity and other historical mediations of grace (extra mundum nulla salus). The synecdoche of the reign of God admits ultimate religious difference and diversity while also affirming mutuality and relationship.

Finally, there is irony. Religious affirmation of the triune unity of God is a notable example of irony as a trope of classical Christian discourse. The very notion of divine revelation is ironic insofar as the divine mystery is mediated through human or earthly symbols—or "through what is not itself but is other than itself". Irony is certainly at play in Dupuis' theological rhetoric: the presence of Christ and the power of the Logos are identical yet distinct; there is a single divine economy and multiple paths to salvation; the constitutive uniqueness of Jesus Christ is neither absolute nor relative but universal and relational. Dupuis also paints an ironic relationship between Christianity and other religions. Christianity mediates the mystery of salvation in a more complete manner, yet other religions may receive their own privileged mediations that Christianity does not receive.

47 TRP, 344.
48 TRP, 346.
49 TRP, 356
50 This is Schillebeeckx' rhetoric: not 'no salvation outside the Church,' but 'no salvation outside the world.' Cited in TRP, 355. Elsewhere, Dupuis states: "The eschatological fullness of the Reign of God is the common final achievement of Christianity and the other religions". TRP, 390.
51 Klemm, 563.
Other religions may find their fullness in dialogue with Christianity, but Christianity too may only find its fullness in dialogue with other traditions. As well, the synecdoche of God’s reign can neither be detached from nor fully identified with the Incarnate Logos or the Christian Church.

Rhetoric, it needs to be noted, is always directed towards a particular audience. In Dupuis’ case, the audience in question is the Christian community of faith, specifically, the Roman Catholic communion. In this sense, what Dupuis is doing belongs more properly to the *intrareligious* conversation as distinct from a moment in the *interreligious* dialogue.52 This is the place where Christians examine their “faith in Jesus Christ as traditionally understood by mainstream Christianity”.53 The task of arriving at a theological rhetoric acceptable to other traditions requires the collaborative effort of believers across those various traditions.54 If we are to take religious pluralism seriously, no single religious perspective is adequate to the task. The problem for traditional Christian theological rhetoric is precisely its tendency to impose a universal language of faith on the basis of its own very particular religious experience. Dupuis’ contribution is precisely in his readiness to challenge some of Christianity’s universalist assumptions, a challenge that is first and foremost an *intra-Christian* issue.

52 This is what Panikkar calls the "intrareligious soliloquy," the internal dialogue which one has with oneself or one’s own tradition following the initial interreligious encounter. It precedes the moment in the interreligious dialogue when the participants judge whether or not what one has learnt is acceptable or not to the religious other. Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999) 51ff.

53 TRP, 1.

54 There remains, of course, the possibility of someone like Raimon Panikkar who claims religious faith in more than one tradition— in his case, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist. Insofar as this is humanly possible, such a “multireligious experience” provides the basis for a single person to elaborate a genuinely interreligious theology. However, this is clearly not the claim nor the position of Jacques Dupuis. For Panikkar, see *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 41ff.
Beyond Christian Universalism?

As a Catholic theologian, Dupuis has rightly chosen to re-examine Christian teaching on salvation and the universality of Jesus Christ in light of the contemporary experience of religious pluralism. Despite theological ambiguities, his achievements are significant. While continuing to affirm the constitutive uniqueness of Jesus Christ, he exposes the limitations of an approach that identifies the Christ-mystery with the historical Jesus and the Christian Church in an absolutist fashion. At the same time, he explores ways in which the Triune God of Christian faith is manifested in the authentic religious experiences of other traditions on their own terms. Moreover, he does this without resorting to a simplistic fulfillment theology in which all religious difference is finally abolished either on earth or in heaven. Each religion, including Christianity, has something to learn from the other. This is a genuinely pluralist position.

At the same time, we have noted Dupuis' occasional retreat into a subordinationist view of other religions in respect to Christianity. This can be viewed from a number of perspectives. It may be argued, for example, that Christianity is inherently universalist in the sense that God’s definitive revelation in Jesus Christ gives Christians both a superior view and a richer experience of the divine economy of salvation. But as Dupuis himself argues, the saving reality of Jesus Christ is a claim of faith, "not truth in the absolute sense".55 In the context of interreligious dialogue, this amounts to stating that Christian belief in the universality of Jesus Christ is just that – a statement of faith. It does not, indeed cannot, presume to be a logical argument for Christian superiority –

55 TRP, 294. Dupuis is here quoting Ariarajah with approval. The statement is not meant to imply that either Dupuis or this author believes that absolute truth claims are the preferred mode of interreligious rhetoric. In fact, the opposite is argued below.
epistemological or otherwise. Christians believe that Christ is the universal Saviour, but they do not thereby claim to know how others experience the divine saving mystery. Nor should they compare respective religious traditions especially when it is readily admitted that Christianity is also an historical, finite religion far from completion, perfection or fulfillment.

The caveat in Dupuis' theology of religious pluralism is that he is finally more committed to a "universal theology of religions" than he is to an "interreligious hermeneutical theology". He has extended the teachings of Karl Rahner but remains caught within the Christian universalist paradigm. As an intra-Christian dialogue it has much to recommend it because it points to Christianity's need to dialogue with other traditions. There are some excellent examples of how an interreligious theological dialogue may proceed and how Christian theology may reinterpret its own tradition in light of that experience. Most importantly, it provides a Christian theological rhetoric that is most effective in bridging the gap between universalist Christian claims and the contemporary experience of religious pluralism.

Nonetheless, many within and beyond Christianity will judge Dupuis for continuing the "western universalizing thrust" with its monistic tendency to colonize the 'other' according to its own lights. At its best, his theological rhetoric avoids this type of universalisation – that is, taking the particularity of Christian faith as a measuring stick for judging the respective values of other traditions. In the main, he tries to avoid modernity's tendency to claim some higher, objective vision which surely belongs to God alone. However, because he is working within the Christian – especially Catholic – tradition, he sometimes finds himself using Christian universalist language in a literal rather than rhetorical

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56 Karl Rahner once wrote that "even less than other people do Christians have 'final' answers". See his The Practice of Faith (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 7.

manner. Yet, in context of that tradition and the intra-Christian dialogue, he is breaking new ground. The next step is to return to the interreligious dialogue in the knowledge that Christian faith in the saving reality of Jesus Christ is not a cause for wielding the "big stick" of Christian universalism, but an invitation to be the "crushed reed" of Christian particularity. This is surely Dupuis' intention since at the heart of his theological rhetoric is the insight that to be a Christian is both a divine gift and a human and religious limitation.

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