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## **EVANGELIZATION, INCULTURATION AND THE THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS**

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### **Abstract**

The canons on evangelization in the Eastern Code (CCEO), which were drafted by the author, prescribe inculturation as the style of evangelization, whereas the Latin code (CIC) speaks of adaptation by the foreign missionaries. Evangelization is not mere conversion but the formation of an ecclesial community inculturated in liturgy, art, theology, law, etc. Inculturation of the Indian culture, which is not identical with Hindu culture, is to be done in the light of the developing theology of religions, of which Jacques Dupuis was a leading exponent. Misunderstood by his Vatican censors used to the Italian style sheet, he was censured but not condemned. He died heart-broken in 2004. Finally, the article examines critically the modern Indian *mahāvākya* that all religions are equal, which is virtually denied

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not only by the history of religious persecutions but by those Hindus themselves who are intent on reconversion. What is true in the thesis is the legal principle that all religions deserve equal respect: *sarvadharmasambhāvana*.

The year 2014 marks the tenth anniversary of the death of Jacques Dupuis, SJ, a front line explorer of the theology of religions. He developed his theology in India but came to grief in a tragic confrontation with the official Vatican magisterium. This study is dedicated to his memory.

But in honouring him thus I am aware that I run the risk of being regarded as a sympathizer of his views which were censured by the magisterium or teaching office of the Church as ambiguous, misleading or obscuring. Consequently this article can be suspicious from the very start. To steer clear of this danger I shall start with the bedrock of canon law, the practical norms given by the Church based on a theological vision. It may be news to many that while giving norms for evangelization, canon law also speaks of inculturation and the theology of religions.

Evangelization of Peoples (*De evangelizatione gentium*) is treated in the Eastern code *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (CCEO) in title 14, which precedes Ecclesiastical Magisterium dealt with in title 15. The corresponding canons of the Latin code *Codex Iuris Canonici* (CIC) *De actione Ecclesiae missionali* (cann. 781-792) are placed under title II in book III entitled *De Ecclesiae munere docendi* (The Teaching Office of the Church). But my personal missionary experience, little though it was, prevented me from placing evangelization under the teaching office of the Church or ecclesiastical magisterium as I drafted the text of the future canons in CCEO. Today the preaching of the gospel is done chiefly through the ministry of charity as is shown by Bl. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, foundress of the Missionaries of Charity, Nobel Prize winner. The teaching of the missionaries consists basically in "giving the reason for the hope that is in them" (1 Pt 3:15) and thus witnessing to Christ. Pope Paul VI has said "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."<sup>1</sup>

In this study I shall first deal with evangelization in the two codes of the Catholic Church. Secondly, I shall consider inculturation as the style of evangelization before passing on to the theology of

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<sup>1</sup>Paul VI, Address to the Members of the Consilium de Laicis (2 October 1974), AAS 66 (1974) 568; quoted in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41.

evangelization dealt with in the third section. In the fourth place I shall linger on the theology of religions, which Jacques Dupuis developed in his last and mature years. The fifth and final section will be devoted to a critical examination of the common dictum that we hear in India, "All religions are equal."

### 1. Evangelization in the Two Codes

Under the teaching function of the Church (*De Ecclesiae munere docendi*) CIC has twelve canons (781-792) on "The Missionary Activity of the Church" (*De actione Ecclesiae missionali*) placed between "Catechetical Formation" (cann. 773-780) and "Catholic Education" (cann. 793-821). In the Study group or Coetus IV of the Eastern Code Commission Pontificia Commissio Codicis Iuris Canonici Orientalis Recognoscendo (PCCICOR) I prepared two separate drafts "*De Evangelizatione gentium*" and *De magisterio ecclesiastico*. In its session held from 26 November to 7 December 1979 Study Group IV approved my draft on evangelization without any significant change.<sup>2</sup> In CCEO the canons of evangelization are placed under Title 14 (cann. 584-594) before title XV on ecclesiastical magisterium.

Title 14 on evangelization is not a mere revision of the initial text (TI), which was supplied to the Study Group IV. It was very jejune having followed verbatim CIC-1917 can. 1350 § 2: "In other territories the entire care for the missions to non-Catholics is reserved strictly to the Apostolic See." This was virtually to assert papal monopoly of "missions to non-Catholics," a term that covered also Christians who were not Catholics and hence were generally regarded as being outside the pale of eternal salvation. TI was hence concerned about receiving non-Catholic converts into the Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup>

Papal monopoly of the missions, which was implicit in the two previous codes, had been modified by the conciliar teaching on episcopal collegiality and on the People of God. "The charge of announcing the gospel throughout the world belongs to the body of the shepherds, to all of whom in common Christ gave the command imposing on them a common duty" (LG, 23). Here the council effectively abrogated reservation of "the entire care for the missions to non-Catholics to the Apostolic See" (CIC, can. 1350 § 2). More broadly, having received the command to evangelize, the Church "continues without ceasing to send out preachers until new Churches

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<sup>2</sup>*Nuntia* 11 (1980) 55-59. This was a half yearly publication reporting progress of the work of PCCICOR (1975-1990).

<sup>3</sup>*Nuntia* 3 (1976) 76-78, "De recipiendis in Ecclesiam acatholicis."

are fully established and they themselves continue the work of evangelizing" (LG, 17). This concept of evangelization is clearly broader than the teaching function of the Church. Evangelization is not reserved to the pope and the bishops, although they bear ultimate collegial responsibility for supervising it.

I do not propose to comment on each of the eleven canons of CCEO title XIV.<sup>4</sup> That would be mere class work. Rather I shall draw attention to the new orientation these canons give to evangelization drawing inspiration from the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Missionary Activity of the Church (*Ad gentes*). The opening canon 584 § 1 is inspired by the following conciliar text rather than by the sources given in the notes to that canon in the 1995 edition of CCEO *cum fontibus*.

The mission of the Church, therefore, is fulfilled through an activity by which, obedient to the command of Christ and moved by the grace and charity of the Holy Spirit, it makes itself fully present to all people and nations, so that by the example of its life and preaching, by the sacraments and the other means of grace, it may lead them to faith, to the freedom and peace of Christ" (AG, 5).<sup>5</sup>

The command of Christ to the Apostles (Mt 28:19) is interpreted by the council as given to the whole Church, not only to the Apostles and their successors the bishops. "Moved by the grace and charity of the Holy Spirit" the Church fulfils this command by making "itself fully present to all peoples and nations." This presence is one of grace and love. People are attracted to Christ the light of the world by seeing his light illumining his disciples, who become thus light in their turn. *Bhāntam anubhānti*" ("Lit up light up") was the motto of St Mary's College, Kurseong, where I studied theology for four years and taught the course on Revelation for one year after graduation (1961-66). Lit up by the Light of the World and radiating the joy of the risen Christ, Christians become effective evangelizers.

A Hindu girl used to watch the nuns in a nearby Christian convent, who were always joyful and full of good cheer. She wanted to know the secret of their joy. Away from their homes and having no family of their own how could they be so joyful and cheerful? One day she

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<sup>4</sup>See my detailed commentary on Title XIV in George Nedungatt, ed., *A Guide to the Eastern Code: A Commentary on the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (Kanonika 10), PIO, 2002. A shorter commentary is due to appear in the CLSA commentary on CCEO edited by John Faris and Jobe Abbass (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup>The first source given for CCEO can. 584 § 1 is not exact and may be corrected as follows: Vat II, decr. *Ad gentes*, 5, 2 "Missio"; 35 "Cum tota Ecclesia."

made bold to ask one of the sisters what the secret of her joy was. The sister reflected for a moment and told her the parables of the costly pearl and of the hidden treasure. "I have found a pearl and a treasure in Jesus Christ, who is in my heart and makes my joy "complete" (Jn 15:11). That set the girl thinking. It was the beginning of her conversion against the grim opposition of her family, who disinherited her upon her receiving baptism.

Opposition to conversion is not uncommon. This is foreseen in CCEO, can. 586, which speaks of freedom both from coercion to join the Church and freedom from vexation in joining it. This canon is pertinent to missionary work in several countries including India. In India the law and practice often differ much. The Constitution of India guarantees the right to "freely profess, practise and propagate religion" (art. 25). Babsahab Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution, declared: "I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an untouchable. It is not my fault but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power."<sup>6</sup> Ambedkar renounced Hinduism (the religion which others like Gandhi attributed to him) and became a Buddhist along with many Dalit followers. Viswa Hindu Parishad actively promotes reconversion to Hinduism. Some states like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh have enacted laws requiring that conversions should be reported to the police, which works mostly as a check on the Christian missionaries. The ancient Roman Empire and the Persian Empire persecuted Christians, who were considered traitors for not following the state religion. In modern India persecutions are unleashed by the mob. In 2013 in Karnataka State alone 200 serious attacks on Christians and Christian churches were reported and denounced to the authorities. In 2008 in Kandhamal, Odisha State, the radical Hindu Sangh Parivar activists burnt 5600 houses of Christians, 300 Christian institutions (churches, schools, medical centres) causing 56,000 Christians to flee to the jungles to escape the lot of dozens who were killed in reprisal.<sup>7</sup> In 1999 the Australian missionary Graham Stuart Staines, who was known for his service to the lepers, was burnt alive in his car with his two sons. These examples underscore the relevance of CCEO, can. 586, which was

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<sup>6</sup>Babasaheb Ambedkar, in *The Bombay Chronicle*, 15 October 1935.

<sup>7</sup>The figures are approximate since there has been no official enquiry or fair involvement of the National Human Rights Commission. The occasion of the persecution was the murder of a Vishva Hindu Parishad leader Lakshmananda Saraswati by unknown assassins but cleverly laid at the door of the Christians. Significantly, the Christians were given the option to embrace Hinduism as an alternative to death or flight to the jungles, thus baring the tactic of reconversion.

inspired by the conciliar declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* (DH, 2 and 10).<sup>8</sup>

The proclamation of the good news is an important element of evangelization and as such it comes under ecclesiastical magisterium.<sup>9</sup> But evangelization includes also several other important things that do not come under magisterium or the teaching function. The council lists them: Christian witness of good works followed by dialogue (AG 11), charity and social work in the service of the poor (12), announcing God's call to conversion from sin and salvation in Christ (13), catechumenate and Christian initiation (14), formation of the Christian community (15), establishing an indigenous clergy (16), formation of catechists (17), promotion of religious life and forms of apostolate (18).

The sources of the CCEO canons under Title XIV include also Pope Paul VI's motu proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (6 August 1966), part III, with which the pope translated into juridical terms the conciliar directives of AG. The same pope's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975) gathered together and presented the main thrusts of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome on the subject of evangelization in 1974. The canons 4, 11, 62, and 64 of the project *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis* (LEF) were also drawn upon, but LEF is not cited as a source of the canons in CCEO since it remained a draft and failed to be promulgated.

## 2. Inculturation

If the preaching of the gospel is to be understood as good news of salvation, it should be expressed in the language and culture of those to whom it is announced. This is an exigency of inculturation, which presupposes appreciation of the culture of the people to whom the gospel is preached. In the early Church Clement of Alexandria (150-215) is a remarkable example for the appreciation of the Greek culture. He regarded Greek philosophy as the preparation of the Greeks for the gospel of Jesus Christ just as the Law of Moses prepared the Jews for the same gospel.<sup>10</sup> In its decree on the "Missionary Activity of the Church" the Second Vatican council does

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<sup>8</sup>Where Christians were in power they have also sometimes been persecutors. In 392 Emperor Theodosius I issued an edict forbidding pagan sacrifices both public and private. The popes segregated the Jews in Rome in a Jewish ghetto.

<sup>9</sup>The commission on evangelization of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India is called "Commission for Proclamation."

<sup>10</sup>S.R.C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971; Robert M. Grant, *Gods and the One God: Christian Theology in the Graeco-Roman World*, London: SPCK, 1986.

not go that far but calls upon the Catholic faithful to “recognize, preserve and promote those spiritual and moral good things as well as the socio-cultural values which are to be found among the followers of other religions” (NA, 2).

As regards “socio-cultural values” let us note that the word “culture” occurs once in CIC-83, namely in can. 787 § 1, which asks missionaries “to enter into a sincere dialogue with those who do not believe in Christ, so that adapting themselves to their proper character (*ingenium*) and culture ways may be opened by which they can be led to the knowledge of the good news.” Missionaries are presumed to be outsiders to the culture of the people to be evangelized, and they are asked to adapt themselves to the culture of the people. In this scenario are not foreseen, for example, Indian missionaries evangelizing Indians. “Adaptation” presupposes an outsider and is not the same as inculturation.

The word “culture” occurs 19 times in CCEO. Of these 17 canons were drafted by me (an illustration of the Ganges flowing into the Tiber, a metaphor for the Indian influence in the codification of the Eastern code). It points up one of the more important differences between CCEO and CIC. CCEO, can. 584 § 2 speaks of inculturation as the style of evangelization. It is the expression of the gospel (the good news) in the culture of the people that is evangelized.

The evangelization of the peoples should be so done that, preserving the integrity of faith and morals, the gospel can be expressed in the culture of each people: that is, in catechesis, in their own liturgical rites, in sacred art, in particular law, and, in short, in the whole ecclesial life (CCEO, can. 584 § 2).

CCEO does not use the *term* inculturation, which is post-Vatican in origin and was avoided as a neologism lacking precise juridical contents. But the *idea* or *concept* is spelled out in can. 584 § 2. The Church that comes into being from evangelization should be an inculturated Church which preserves the integrity of faith and morals. Inculturation embraces the entire ecclesial life: catechesis (both pre-baptismal and post-baptismal), liturgy, art, particular law; in a word, the whole life of the Particular Church that sprouts forth from the gospel seed sown in a particular culture. Inculturation involves a whole lifestyle, following the *typos* (type or model), which is the incarnation of the Logos, the Son of God, who became man in a particular culture. If the gospel, which is to be preached to all peoples, is to be properly understood and assimilated it must become “incarnate” in their own culture. But just as the incarnate Word

assumed human nature, not however its sin, so also inculturation is to assume into the life of the Church all that is good, true, and beautiful; in a word all that is of positive value, but discard whatever is negative and sinful, thus redeeming cultures. For example, Indian culture has many positive values of wisdom, mysticism and aesthetics, but it contains also the belief in karma and reincarnation, which favours a sense of fatalism and facile recourse to suicide with the hope for a better life in the next birth. Not surprisingly India holds the world record of suicides: 2,58,075 in 2012 according to the World Health Organization. Inculturation involves discernment of values. Just as the incarnate Word assumed human nature but not its sin, so too, evangelization involves purification and elevation. The Church assumes whatever is good and pure and noble in a culture but also, as the council says, “purifies, strengthens and raises it up” (LG, 13). Inculturation is thus a redemptive and enriching service (AG, 9, 19).

Since cultures vary, the cultural expression of the gospel also will vary. Unity of faith does not require uniformity of cultural expression.<sup>11</sup> Inculturation respects legitimate variety, which is a quality of the catholicity of the Church. But this variety should not harm unity and integrity of faith and morals, which must be preserved in the different cultural expressions of the gospel.

While Hinduism has a rich religious vocabulary to refer to God like *Isvara*, *Katavul*, *Bhagavan*, *Daivam*, etc., and many symbols to represent him, such is not the case with the Khasis (included in the official census of India among Hindus) of North East India. They believe in many deities and demons but also in a supreme Being, *U Blei*. Traditionally this Being is called *Ka Blei*, in the feminine gender.<sup>12</sup> Evangelizers may keep the designation of God as *Ka Blei*, while leaving to theological formation the precision that God is transgender, neither feminine nor masculine.

During the era of colonialism the idea that the missionaries should not impose their culture but should *adapt* to the local conditions, was regarded as progressive missiological thinking. But inculturation is

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<sup>11</sup>A.A. Roest Crolius, “Inculturazione,” *Dizionario di Missiologia*, 281-286; A.A. Roest Crolius and T. Nkeramihigo, *What Is So New About Inculturation*, 2 ed., Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1991; Bosco Puthur, ed., *Inculturation and the Syro-Malabar Church*, Kakkanad, Kochi: LRC Publications, 2005.

<sup>12</sup>B.I. Nongbri, “Religious Transformation in North East India: A Study of the Conversion Movement Among the Khasis During the Nineteenth Century,” in O.L. Snaityang and George Menachery, ed., *India's Christian Heritage*, Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 2012, 468-485, at 478-479.



not merely “adaptation.” As already stated, the model of inculturation is the incarnation of the Son of God, who emptied himself while assuming the human nature. Jesus was a Jew culturally. Likewise, the Church in Europe is to be European in culture, and the Church in Africa should be African in culture, and the Church in India should be Indian in culture.

The Catholic Church learnt this lesson only slowly and painfully. Whereas Saints Cyril and Methodius gave a Christian expression to the Slavic culture with papal support, evangelization in China and in India is a different story. For example, Jesuit missionaries Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in China and Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) in India were pioneers of inculturation. In China besides Ricci (acclaimed by the Chinese as “the wise man from the West”), there were other Jesuit pioneers of inculturation: Tomas Pereira José Soares, Joano Mourao, Jean François Gerbillon, Ignaz Kogler, Dominique Parrenin, Jean Baptiste Régis, Joseph de Prémare, Antoine Gabriel and Gottfried Xavier von Laimbeckhoven. They saw the Chinese veneration of ancestors as a version of the Christian veneration of saints.

Inculturation in Malabar (which once designated broadly South India) was led by Roberto de Nobili, who adopted the lifestyle of a Brahmin sannyasi attracting many Brahmins as disciples. He was followed by other Jesuits: Giuseppe Costanzo Beschi, Gaston Coeurdoux, Venance Bouchet, John de Britto, and Johann Ernst Hanxleden (popularly known as Arnos Padiri in Kerala). The pioneering efforts of these Jesuit missionaries at inculturation included the adoption of certain Brahmin usages like putting sandal paste on the forehead, wearing a thread and tuft of hair, ceremonial baths, etc., which were denounced to Rome by the Capuchin missionaries as tolerance of caste distinctions.<sup>13</sup> The Jesuits followed the example of St Paul who wrote: “I became all things to all people, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22): to the Jews a Jew, practising the Mosaic Law; to the gentiles as one not under the Law but only under the law of Christ to win those outside the Law (20, 21). Thus De Nobili lived like a Brahmin and established a Church of the Brahmin converts, tolerating the separation of castes with the hope that this could be overcome gradually. The alternative to this tolerance was no conversion of Brahmins at all. But other missionaries opposed this policy of accommodation. The controversies dragged on under several popes. Finally Pope Benedict XIV with his bull *Omnium*

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<sup>13</sup>S. Rajamanickam, “Malabar Rites,” *Caritas* 53 (1979) 44-51.

*sollicitudinem* (1744) condemned and suppressed the Chinese rites and the Malabar rites putting an end to the controversies.<sup>14</sup> In 1939 Pope Pius XII lifted the ban on the Chinese rites and in 1940 the ban on the Malabar rites. On 7 September 1955 Pope Pius stated at the tenth International Congress of the Historical Sciences: "The Catholic Church does not identify itself with any culture; its essence forbids this. The Church is ready to engage in relations with all cultures."<sup>15</sup> Finally, on the eve of the Great Jubilee Year 2000 Pope John Paul II confessed publicly the sins of the Church, but his list did not include the suppression of the Chinese rites or the Malabar rites, acts which did immense harm to the cause of evangelization of Asia. Nor did the list include the allied act of the suppression of the Society of Jesus by Pope Clement XIV in 1773.<sup>16</sup>

Among the more recent foreign pioneers of inculturation may be mentioned Henri Le Saux, alias Abhishiktananda (1910-1973), Bede Griffiths (1906-1993) and Francis Acharya (1912-2002). There are also several examples of pioneering efforts at inculturation in India by Indians themselves. I shall only mention two of them in the interests of brevity.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) was born in Bengal in a Brahmin family and was named Bhabani Banerji. He received instruction from a Jesuit priest Theophilus Perrig and became a Catholic in 1891 taking the name Brahmabandhab, meaning "Friend of the Absolute/Beloved of God," same as *Theophilus* in Greek. His vision of and passion for inculturation were too far ahead of his times and got him into trouble with the Catholic Church authorities, chiefly the Apostolic Delegate Ladislaus Zaleski, who forbade Catholics to read the publications of Upadhyay. Upadhyay composed a beautiful Sanskrit hymn to the Trinity *Vande Saccidānandam*, which is comparable to the Latin hymn *Adoro te devote* composed by Thomas Aquinas and of which two stanzas are sung during the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The word *saccidānanda* occurs in the late Vedanta and bhakti literature and is a compound of *sat* (being), *cit*

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<sup>14</sup>William V. Bangert, SJ, *A History of the Society of Jesus*, St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986, 324-346. Edward R. Hamby, SJ notes that Pope Benedict XIV put an end to the controversy in India among the missionaries without condemning "the principle of inculturation... Thus the missionaries continued to live and act as *sanyasis*." See his *History of Christianity in India III, Eighteenth Century* (CHAI), Bangalore 1997, 463.

<sup>15</sup>Pius XII, *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, Rome: Vatican Press, 1956, 220.

<sup>16</sup>This year 2014 marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of the Society of Jesus in 1814 by Pope Pius VII, who regretted the suppression by his predecessor.

(consciousness), and *ānanda* (bliss), three categories which Upadhyay related to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to express the mystery of the Trinity in Indian theological categories. This mystery is admittedly beyond human comprehension and expression, but *Saccidānanda* is its closest Indian approximation. Upadhyay lived the celibate and frugal life of a sannyasi of the Hindu tradition. He tried to start an ashram in Jabalpur, for which he got the permission of the Bishop of Nagpur, but was again opposed by the Apostolic Delegate. He visited Rome, Oxford and Cambridge but failed to sell his ideas abroad unlike Vivekananda. After his return to India, his new efforts at inculturation earned him the misunderstanding that he had become an apostate. Arrested for his opposition to the British colonialism, he died a prisoner of the Raj in 1907. Brahmabandhab resembles Thomas Aquinas, who was also first misunderstood and rejected before being declared the model of Catholic theologians by Pope Leo XIII. After the Second Vatican Council Upadhyay has come to be hailed as the “father of Catholic Indian theology.”<sup>17</sup>

Another pioneer of inculturation did not have trouble with his Anglican Church authorities but with his family. Krishna Mohan Banerjea (1813-1885), called Bandhyopadhyay, was born into a Bengali Brahmin family. Already as a boy a liberal critic of Hinduism, Krishna Mohan was thrown out of his house and rejected by his family. He became an atheist but was attracted to the Brahma Samaj. At eighteen he started a journal, which criticized Hinduism violently. In 1832 he was received into the Anglican Communion and was ordained pastor in 1836. What appealed to him in Christianity most was the sacrifice of Christ, in the light of which he could understand better the ancient Hindu sacrifices mentioned in the Vedas. Besides Bengali and English he had a good mastery of the classical languages Sanskrit, Greek, Hebrew and Latin. Developing a Hindu-Christian theology, he expounded his ideas chiefly in short tracts like *Dialogues on Hindu Philosophy* (1861, republished posthumously in 1903), *The Aryan Witness* (1875) and *The Relation of Christianity and Hinduism* (1897).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Julius Lipner and George Gispert-Sauch, ed., *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, 2 vols., Bangalore: The United Theological College, 1991, 2002; George-Gispert-Sauch, SJ, “Brahmabandhab Upadhyay,” *A Concise Encyclopaedia of Christianity in India*, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth/ Mumbai: St Pauls, 2014, 60-63.

<sup>18</sup>T.V. Philip, *Krishna Mohan Banerjea: Christian Apologist* (Confessing the Faith in India, 15), Bangalore: CISRS/ Madras: CLS, 1982.

The Second Vatican Council in its decree on missionary activity speaks of “the implantation of the Church” (AG, 15) for which “some conformity to the local culture” (AG, 19) is needed. In order that “Christian life be adapted to the character and disposition of each culture” (22) missionaries must “adapt to foreign (*alienis*) customs” (25).<sup>19</sup> CIC followed this lead. But adaptation is not inculturation, which requires more: just as the Word of God became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, so too the Church born of the seed of the gospel becomes incarnate in the local culture.<sup>20</sup>

Pope John Paul II has the following word of warning: “The gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted... nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries.”<sup>21</sup> The gospel reaches us as already inculturated. For an in-depth understanding of the Bible we need to have a good mastery of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek besides a fair knowledge of the cultural world of the Bible and its religions. Moreover, it can be instructive to know how the gospel has already been expressed in some cultures like the Greek, Latin, and Syriac.

Inculturation preserves all that is true and holy. The Second Vatican Council states: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of those things which are true and holy in these religions” (NA, 2). For example, the Hindu symbols of Nataraja and OM express profound religious truths. Christians may adopt them. Inculturation expert Fr D.S. Amalorpavadas exhibited Nataraja (dancing God) in a church to represent God who creates in his joy; but he was sued by the Hindus for appropriating a Hindu religious symbol; and he lost the case in the court. Prior religious dialogue could perhaps have prevented misunderstanding as robbery what was a Christian tribute to Hinduism. Indonesia with its dominant Islam recently forbade Christians to use the word for God Allah. Similarly during the British

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<sup>19</sup>AG is a rich document but pedestrian and uninspiring. It does not mention any missionary by name like St Boniface or St Francis Xavier (patron of the missions) or, while speaking of the missionary role of contemplative religious institutes (AG, 40) St Therese of Lisieux (patroness of the missions). Nor does AG name Ricci or de Nobili as models of inculturation — probably diplomatic conciliar silence since their mention would evoke Pope Benedict XIV, who condemned them implicitly along with the Chinese rites and the Malabar rites. The deficit of AG needed to be filled after the council.

<sup>20</sup>Peter Hünermann, “Il problema dell’inculturazione,” *Civiltà Cattolica* 3082, 8 Nov. 1978, 313-322; Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, Michigan: Paulist Press, 1990.

<sup>21</sup>John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53.

Raj the Khasis, mentioned earlier, sued the Christians for using the traditional term U Blei for God, but lost the case.

OM is a well-known Hindu symbol, which has acquired many layers of meaning. I remember devoting two weeks during my theology days to study OM and then being absorbed in it in prayer for a month. Recently I adapted OM (AUM) transposing it into Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8; 22:13) and depicted it around a blood-red cross on the front cover of a book I published on the life of the great Indian mystic Blessed Mariam Thresia:<sup>22</sup> This may be considered an instance of inculturation in sacred art.

To the three *margas* or ways of the Indian spirituality *jnana*, *bhakti*, and *karma* (spiritual wisdom, devotional mysticism, and religious rites or worship respectively) Christianity has added a fourth *marga*, namely, the way of service (*sevana*), as Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen recognized. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta is widely known as the icon of Christian service of charity, whose *sevana* to the poorest of the poor has spread out to 136 countries.<sup>23</sup> *Sevana* has made good a deficit of the Indian culture. Today, organized humanitarian services are no more a monopoly of Christians in India, which speaks well of the inculturation of the gospel. Traditional Indian spirituality knows ecstatic love, the passionate love (*prema*) of Radha for Krishna, who enraptures and teases the *gopis* with playful tricks of love or *lila*. But love purpled with the blood of the cross, the folly of self-sacrificing love, is original to Christianity.

“Hindu in culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship,”<sup>24</sup> is often quoted as an aphorism of Father Placid Podipara. For a proper understanding of it we must see it in its historical context of the discussion about the identity of non-Hindus in independent India. Whereas Muslims (177 million according to the 2011 census) feared that they would not find themselves at home in India (1.2 billion) and opted for a separate Muslim state, Pakistan, Christians (2.3 % of the total population) had no such option and stayed on. The Christians were generally looked upon by the Hindus as adhering to the religion

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<sup>22</sup>George Nedungatt, *Crucified with Christ for All*, Mannuthy: Holy Family Publications, 2002. This Christianized AUM may further be crafted into the façade of a church architecture.

<sup>23</sup>Data valid for the year 2014. In India Christian missionaries led the way in works of charity and social service. Today 80% of HIV clinics in India are run by Catholics, chiefly by religious sisters.

<sup>24</sup>Placid Podipara, “Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship,” *Ostkirchliche Studien* (1959) 89-104; CW II, 531-540.

of the foreign colonialist rulers. In this context there was talk of inculturation to make Christianity rooted in the Indian soil. Some spoke of the need to create a new Indian rite that will be common to all Catholics in India. In this context Placid Podipara wrote his article to show that the Thomas Christians had long been well rooted culturally in India. He mentioned several customs that were common to them and to the Hindus, customs which had retained from their Hindu ancestry. Thus they dressed like the Hindus, had the same hairdo, preserved the Hindu rituals of birth, of marriage (for example the bridegroom tying a *tāli*, the wedding medal, around the neck of the bride), of death (rites of mourning, *śrādhā*, etc.). Father Placid noted that many of these social practices and family rites were no more observed by many Thomas Christians. Nevertheless he called them "Hindu in culture." Hindu culture of course is much richer than social practices and family rites. Moreover, it is but a component of the Indian culture, which is a complex reality shaped by various peoples like the Dravidians, the Dalits and the Aryans, and with the contribution of various religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity. Although the Thomas Christians in the past contributed hardly anything to enrich the Indian culture — in philosophy, theology, spirituality, historiography, poetry, arts, etc. — they have contributed much in recent times. All in all, they may be said to be Indian in culture rather than Hindu in culture, as Father Placid himself recognized in the last article he wrote in 1984 a year before his death, in which he qualified the Thomas Christians as "Christian in faith, Oriental in worship and Indian in culture."<sup>25</sup>

Recently Pope Francis underscored the importance of inculturation in his first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) issued on 26 November 2013. He says: "I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy" (1). On inculturation he writes: "We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous" (117). He continues: "While it is true that some cultures have been closely associated with the preaching of the gospel and the development of Christian thought, the revealed message is not identified with any of them; its content is transcultural." The cultural expression of the Christian faith achieved by Europe is not normative for people of other cultures, says the pope (118). It is true that as mediators of divine revelation the Semitic

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<sup>25</sup>Placid Podipara, "Eugene Cardinal Tisserant: Reminiscences," *Christian Orient* 5 (1984) 52-54.

culture and the Greek culture have a unique and irreplaceable role, so much so that without some knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek there can be no solid study of the Bible and of the divine revelation contained in it. However, the dynamism of Christian revelation does not allow it to be confined to these cultures, which are but its vehicles. As Pope Francis stresses, "Culture is a dynamic reality, which a people constantly recreates; each generation passes on a whole series of ways of approaching different existential situations to the next generation, which must in turn reformulate it as it confronts its own challenges" (122). Further, in dialogue with Antonio Spadaro, SJ, editor of *Civiltà Cattolica*, Pope Francis explained as follows the dynamics of this process of inculturation of the Churches that come into life as a result of evangelization.

The young Catholic Churches, as they grow, develop a synthesis of faith, culture and life, and so it is a synthesis different from the one developed by the ancient Churches. For me, the relationship between the ancient Catholic Churches and the young ones is similar to the relationship between young people and elderly people in a society. They build the future, the young ones with their strength and the others with their wisdom. You always run some risks, of course. The younger Churches are likely to feel self-sufficient; the ancient ones are likely to want to impose on the younger Churches their cultural models. But we build the future together.<sup>26</sup>

A young Church becomes adult and attains ecclesial maturity when it is able to send out missionaries in its turn and carry on the work of evangelization. For this maturity it must have its own hierarchy (exarch, vicar apostolic or bishop, to start with), which is only the institutional element of ecclesial maturity (CCEO, can. 590). In India, the Latin bishops, who succeeded the Chaldean bishops at the end of the sixteenth century, long believed that the Indians were only good to be ruled but not to rule, and therefore they held on to power till it had to be wrenched from them. Pope Leo XIII, however, saw that if more than five hundred kingdoms in India were being ruled by Indian rulers, Christians in India could be cared for by their own Indian bishops. He therefore instituted for the Syro-Malabar Church a separate hierarchy in 1887, which he made fully indigenous in 1896. Since then this Church has made phenomenal progress both in its home territory and outside through evangelization and the pastoral care of its migrants. Today it has nine mission eparchies

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<sup>26</sup>"The Heart of a Jesuit Pope: Interview with Pope Francis," *Studies*, 102, number 407, Autumn 2013, 255-278, at 265.

outside its proper territory (Chanda, Sagar, Satna Ujjain, Bijnor, Jagadapur, Rajkot, Gorakhpur, and Adilabad) and five mission eparchies in its home territory (Thuckalay, Belthangady, Bhadravathi, Mandya and Ramanathapuram).<sup>27</sup>

The last three canons of title XIV are devoted to mission territories. Can. 592 prescribes the norms regarding their progress towards ecclesial maturity. Canon 593 requires “all presbyters of whatever condition working in a mission territory to cooperate earnestly in the work of evangelization.” The motive is “because they form a single presbyterium,” not “presbyterate” as in the CLSA translation. *Presbyterate* is the middle degree of the sacrament of order received by clerics (*episcopatus, presbyteratus, diaconatus*) whereas *presbyterium* is the corpus of presbyters united with the bishop or competent hierarch in a given place. The last canon 594 gives a formal definition of mission territories as “those recognized as such by the Apostolic See.” This precision precludes ambiguities in rhetorical expressions like “France mission territory” or dechristianised great cities of the West as “privileged places of the mission *ad gentes*” which are in need of “new evangelization,” as Pope John Paul II stated in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990). We are dealing here with evangelization, not new evangelization.<sup>28</sup> In canon law, France is not a *mission territory*, nor are the dechristianised big cities *mission territory*, nor are their people *gentes*.

### 3. Theology of Evangelization

The motive force of evangelization for centuries in the past was the necessity of baptism for salvation based on the belief that “there is no salvation outside the Church” (*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*). The thought that those who were not baptized were eternally lost in the flames of hell had galvanized the zeal of men like St Francis Xavier, patron of the missions, who spent the last ten years of his life like a hurricane sweeping over the East (1541-1552). The record of his

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<sup>27</sup>Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church. *Mission Year 2011-2012, Souvenir*, Kakkannad: Mount St. Thomas Publication, 2012.

<sup>28</sup>What the pope meant by “new evangelization” was the re-evangelization of dechristianized countries (the so-called Christian countries of the West), which were in need of “rechristianisation.” Historically after paganism was proscribed by Emperor Theodosius, mass conversions took place and under Emperor Charles the Great even forced conversions were made. As a result many were Christians only in name. Under the impact of modernity and materialism Western Christianity was in danger of disappearing. New evangelization aims at the formation of Christian communities whose faith is mature.



baptisms is put at 30,000. He reported from India that he baptized 2,000 persons in a single day. His overriding passion was to save as many souls as possible. The theological formation I received in the early 1960's spoke of the necessity of intrauterine baptism of the unborn in case of difficult birth. Not a few Protestants like Hendrick Kraemer also hold that there is no salvation outside the Church.

The last famous Catholic defender of this thesis was the American Jesuit Leonard Feeney, professor of Boston College, who taught that none but Catholics and catechumens wanting to join the Catholic Church could be saved. That was a rigorist interpretation of the traditional teaching. Feeney claimed to be a "defender of the faith," not a heretic. But he was condemned and excommunicated on 4 February 1953 by the Archbishop of Boston under orders of the Roman Holy Office.<sup>29</sup> Feeney held on to a traditional doctrine but failed to move and keep up with the official magisterium, which had shifted position from a conservative stand to a more liberal one, to use popular terminology.

Feeney was excommunicated by applying cann. 1325 § 2 and 2314 of CIC-17. The news was sensational but it was an ambiguous signal. If there is salvation outside the Church, some asked, why bother to do missionary work at all? What is the justification of evangelization? Are not the sweat and toil and sacrifice of missionaries ultimately a waste? I remember a panel discussion in the form of a missiological drama we enacted during my study of theology at Kurseong. The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) was then discussing its decree on the "Missionary Activity of the Church." I wrote the text of our missiological drama, which was approved by Fr Jacques Dupuis, professor of Christology, about whom I shall say more in the sequel. The drama was mostly a dialogue in the style of Plato, with little action. Four persons seated around a table talked: a dogmatic theologian, a missionary, a missiologist and an indologist. I acted as the indologist. Regrettably, my copy has been lost. But CCEO title XIV bears invisible traces of that panel discussion where it speaks of cultures, inculturation, pluralism and unity in diversity.

The crucial issue was the question of salvation outside the Church, on which Feeney had come to grief.<sup>30</sup> He held on to the traditional

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<sup>29</sup>Denzinger-PH, 3866-3873.

<sup>30</sup>On the relationship between the Church and salvation, Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?*, New York and Mahwa, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 86-99; *Christianity and the Religions*, 203-206 (see below note, 38).

teaching of the Church since Boniface VIII, who had taught that there was no salvation for those who were not subject to the pope. This teaching was widened by Pope Eugenius IV in his Bull "*Cantate Domino*" promulgated in the Council of Florence on 4 February 1442), which stated that there was no salvation outside of the Catholic Church.

None of those who are outside of the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews, heretics and schismatics, can become sharers of eternal life, but they will go into eternal fire... Only for those who remain within her do fasts, almsgiving and other acts of piety and exercises of Christian discipline bring forth eternal rewards. No one can be saved, no matter how many alms he has given and even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church<sup>31</sup>.

According to Pope Paul VI, the non-Christians have, as it were, their arms outstretched toward heaven," expressing a human aspiration for God, while Christ and Christianity are the divine response.<sup>32</sup> Catholics believed that non-Christian religions were of no avail for salvation. Such was the *sensus fidei* of the Catholic Christian faithful following the authentic ecclesiastical magisterium.

But there have been changes. A first modification of this wholly negative view was that those who had a "*votum*" (desire) for the Church could attain salvation (Pius XII). The Second Vatican Council went further and became more positive and specific. The declaration *Nostra aetate* on the Church's relation to non-Christian religions speaks of the Jews as people of the former or Old Covenant who are related to Christians as people of the New Covenant. Muslims, too, revere Abraham like the Christians and the Jews and have a monotheistic religion (NA, 2). When Islam was included in the declaration, Indian bishops asked that Hinduism also be mentioned. And the council obliged with a statement noted for its masterly succinctness.

In Hinduism people explore the divine mystery and propound it with an inexhaustible wealth of myths and penetrating philosophical investigations, and they seek liberation from the distress of our human condition either through various forms of ascetical life or deep meditation or taking refuge in God with love and confidence.

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<sup>31</sup>Denzinger-H, 1351. Also J. Neuner- J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, ed., Jacques Dupuis, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2004, 810. According to a benign interpretation of the conciliar text salvation is denied only to those who are willfully outside the Catholic Church.

<sup>32</sup>Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evanegeliu Nuntiandi*, 53. See AAS 68 (1976) 41-42.

And then a word had to be said about Buddhism, which had its origin in India and spread to other countries and flourished till it waned and dwindled in numbers. But still it has significant followers and holds a subtle attraction on certain intellectuals in the West.

In Buddhism, according to its various forms, the radical inadequacy of this changeable world is acknowledged and a way is taught whereby those with a devout and trustful spirit may be able to reach either a state of perfect freedom or, relying on their own efforts or on help from a higher source, the highest illumination.

Finally, the council speaks of the other religions but without naming any by name (Sikhism, the tribal or traditional religions). "The other religions, too, which are to be found throughout the whole world strive in various ways to relieve the anxiety of the human heart by suggesting ways, that is to say, teachings and rules of life as well as sacred rites."<sup>33</sup> Whatever be the religion one professes (indeed, even if one does not profess any religion at all) what is decisive for salvation is to follow the dictate of one's conscience, according to *Lumen Gentium*.

Eternal salvation can be obtained by those who without any fault on their part do not know the gospel of Christ and his Church, yet who seek God with a sincere heart and try under the influence of grace to effectively carry out his will as known through the dictate of conscience (LG, 16).<sup>34</sup>

This key statement about conscience is to be completed with what the council says about the possibility given to all by the Holy Spirit to be associated with the paschal mystery of Christ and to be saved in a manner unknown to us.

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen manner. For, since Christ died for all human beings, and since the ultimate vocation of humankind is in fact one and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit offers to everyone in a manner known to God the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery (GS, 22).

And the council adds that "by his incarnation the Son of God in some sort united himself to every human being" (GS, 22). This statement is

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<sup>33</sup>For a brief but excellent commentary on NA see Michael L. Fitzgerald, "Revisiting *Nostra Aetate* After Fifty Years," in Shaji George Kochuthara, ed., *Revisiting Vatican II: Fifty Years of Renewal*, vol. 1, *Keynote and Plenary Papers of the DVK International Conference on Vatican II*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, 422-437. This volume contains five (!) papers on evangelization and interreligious dialogue but does not mention Jacques Dupuis (see below note, 38).

<sup>34</sup>My translation. The translation in Tanner (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, II, 861) is defective.

better understood in the light of what Karl Rahner calls “supernatural existential,” that is, human beings are created as oriented to God and capable of receiving saving grace. Hence even those who have never heard of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world can obtain salvation by being associated with his paschal mystery. This is stated in a recent document issued jointly by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, entitled *Dialogue and Proclamation* (29).

Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their Saviour (cf. AG, 3, 9, 11).

The various religions are expressions of the human aspiration for salvation. Salvation is a grace, which is offered to all in and through Jesus Christ, the Word of God calling, the unique and universal Saviour. This offer and its reception take place in the innermost sanctuary of the human conscience even unknown to the human partner and with or without the mediation of the various religions. Sacred texts, prayers, hymns, purificatory baths, pilgrimages, sacrifices, feasts, temple worship, etc.<sup>35</sup> are means of salvation divine providence offers to the followers of the world religions.<sup>36</sup> Salvation is extended also to children and others who have not attained the use of reason and therefore cannot make a conscious choice; this is implied in the Christian liturgical feast of the Holy Innocents (28 December), slaughtered by Herod but venerated by the Church as martyrs.

We have come a long way from Feeney, but also from Pope Boniface VIII and from the Council of Florence! This is not merely theological progress but a shift in official ecclesiastical magisterium, which has taken a U-turn from No to Yes. This can have consequences *a pari* for the Church’s traditional teaching in other areas also like sexual ethics.

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<sup>35</sup>Nihal Abeyasinha, *A Theological Evaluation of Non-Christian Rites*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1984; Michael Amaladoss, “Other Religions and the Salvific Mystery of Christ,” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 70 (2006) 8-23.

<sup>36</sup>Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. V, London: DLT, 1969, 128. Rahner’s expression “Anonymous Christians” has sometimes been misunderstood. It refers to those who are in Christ without being baptized and even without an explicit knowledge of Christ as the unique saviour. There are similar concepts like “anonymous Jews” and “anonymous Brahmins.” Augustine Thottakara, CMI, author of *Sanskrit for Beginners*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014, studied Vedanta under a Brahmin pundit, who was reproached by some other Brahmins for teaching it to a non-Brahmin. “He is also a Brahmin by *karma*,” replied the pundit (personal communication).

#### 4. Theology of Religions

There has been significant development of the theology of religions since the Second Vatican Council. However, the problem of the role of other religions is not new. It had exercised the ingenuity of the fathers of the Church. Special mention may be made in this connection of Clement of Alexandria, according to whom “the Indian philosophers” particularly, the Brahmans and the followers of the Buddha, were inspired by God and impelled by the Logos to teach very profound divine truths.<sup>37</sup>

In the post-conciliar theological development Jacques Dupuis occupies an important place. A Belgian Jesuit, he first taught christology (1959-1984) at St Mary’s College, Kurseong, Darjeeling Dt, where I had the good fortune to be his student (1961-1965). I shall speak of him in some detail for three reasons: first, his case illustrates the relationship between theology and authentic magisterium, a problem that is of enduring interest. Second, after Dupuis moved in 1984 to the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, where he developed his theology of religions, I often met him. During our conversation he used to confide to me certain details of his confrontation with the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), which can be of general interest.<sup>38</sup> Thirdly, as stated in the beginning, 2014 is the tenth anniversary of his death.

With a rare mastery of the relevant bibliography Dupuis cited authors extensively. The Italian experts of the CDF, however, misunderstood him. According to the English style sheet, which Dupuis followed, when you cite an author extensively in indirect speech, you need not repeat in every sentence “he says” or “as she writes.” But this repetition is necessary according to the Italian style sheet, so that if you do not repeat, what you cite is taken as your view

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<sup>37</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1: 5.

<sup>38</sup>There are chiefly three works of Jacques Dupuis, all published by Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, that deal with our subject. 1) *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* (1991); 2) *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (1997) reprinted several times and published also in French and Italian (1997), Portuguese (1999) and Spanish (2000); 3) *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (2006), translated from Italian, *Il cristianesimo e le religioni dallo scontro all'incontro*, Brescia: Queriniana, 2001. This last work is for the general reader, while the first is Christological and considers world religions in an Indian setting. The second elaborates a theology of religious pluralism aimed at the academia. It came under the censorship of the CDF, which in 1999 found in it “notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points, which could lead a reader to erroneous or harmful opinions,” especially on “the sole and universal salvific mediation of Christ.”

and not of the author you cite. This peculiarity of the Italian style sheet led to Dupuis being misunderstood by his Italian censors. During his interrogation at the CDF on 4 September 2000, presided over by the Prefect Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, his counsel Gerald O'Collins pointed out repeatedly: "Dupuis does not say this, it is the view of the author he cites." His examiners were nonplussed. The cardinal then asked Dupuis to help correct the text of his censure ("notification"). "That is too much to ask me" answered Dupuis. Later when we met Dupuis told me: "He was asking me to help write my own condemnation, which I refused to do." Instead he told the cardinal, "But I have sent you 260 typed pages on the text of your notification." The cardinal replied: "You can't expect us to read and study all that material." Thus misread and unread, Dupuis was censured but not condemned by the CDF declaration *Dominus Iesus* (2002).<sup>39</sup> He suffered the humiliation acutely but did not protest publicly. Through 2003 he was invited to give lectures in several cities in Italy and elsewhere: Belgium, France, Holland, India, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland, Thailand and the United States. The publication of his lectures brought the renewed charge from the CDF in 2004 that he had undermined the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Before a fresh summon by the CDF scheduled for early 2005 could take place Dupuis died on 28 December 2004.

The painful story of Dupuis has been told engagingly by the Australian Jesuit theologian Gerald O'Collins in a recent book.<sup>40</sup> A colleague of Dupuis at the Pontifical Gregorian University since 1984 and his defence counsel before the CDF in 1999, Collins writes: "the CDF... repeatedly attributed to him views that he had not only never expressed in the book but also had in several passages explicitly rejected: for example, the bizarre notion of different heavens for the followers of different religions." Father Peter Hans Kolvenbach, the Jesuit Superior General, who was also present at the interrogation, repeatedly observed "But Father Dupuis does not say this." The Italian censors (Tarcisio Bertone, secretary of the CDF, and Angelo Amato, theologian expert), who had prepared the charge sheet against Dupuis attributed to him opinions of writers he quoted at

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<sup>39</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Dominus Iesus. Commentaries and Studies Series*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana/Washington, DC: Unites States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2012; Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, *Dichiarazione "Dominus Iesus" circa l'unicità e universalità salvifica di Gesù Cristo e della Chiesa. Documenti e studi*, Città del Vaticano: LEV, 2002.

<sup>40</sup>Gerald O'Collins, *On the Left Bank of the Tiber*, Connor Court: Melbourne, 2014.

length in indirect speech without repeating in every sentence “as the writer/author says.” In short, the Dupuis affair was largely a case of misunderstanding born of conflict of style sheets.<sup>41</sup> It raises the question about the need to internationalize the Vatican administration making it truly representative of the Catholic Church so that similar misunderstandings can be avoided in the future.

There is as yet no standard theology of religions or of evangelization. The leading ideas of such a theology should contain the following. “God our Saviour wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Religions are essentially ways of salvation. They are like the talents entrusted to the servants in the parable of Jesus (Mt 25:14-30), five, two or one. What matters for each one’s reward and salvation is what each has done with the talent received “according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Rom 12:3).

So did the father of believers Abraham, who believed in God and saw the day of the Saviour of the world. “Before Abraham was, I am. Abraham rejoiced to see my day,” Jesus told the Jews (Jn 8: 58, 56). When and how did he see it? Jesus Christ transcends history, time and space because he is the Logos or Word, who was from the beginning. “Many will come from east and from west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 8:11; Lk 13: 29). Those who “do the works of Abraham” (Jn 8:39), who is regarded by Jews, Christians and Muslims as their father in faith, will be admitted to the eschatological messianic banquet.

God has spoken not only through the Jewish prophets but also through Balaam (Num 22-24), who did not belong to the chosen people. Are there perhaps Balaams with other names in other religions? Jesus found exceptional faith in the Roman centurion of Capernaum as in no one else (Mt 8:10). Another devout centurion Cornelius of Caesarea saw in a vision an angel, who told him that his prayers and alms had “ascended as a memorial before God.” And he was given the grace to receive the good news from Peter and be sanctified by the Holy Spirit and be baptized (Acts 10). John the

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<sup>41</sup>In the foreword to Dupuis’s first book (1991) Joseph Doré writes: “He holds that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of the entire world” (p. x), a point which the CDF construed differently. Dupuis explains “precisely how the spatiotemporal historical unicity of Jesus and the universal dimension of the *Christ* professed in him by Christian faith interrelate” (p. xi). See also Jacques Dupuis, “The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the Early Christian Tradition,” *Jeevadhara* 47 (September-October 1978: *Religious Pluralism*) 393-408; *Jesus Christ and His Spirit: Theological Approaches*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1977.

Baptist, who baptized Jesus but did not receive the baptism of Jesus; belongs to the new covenant and is venerated in the Christian liturgy. John the Baptist, Balaam and the Roman centurions mentioned by name in the Bible tell Christians that they may find such prophets and saints in other religions as well which are not foreign to the providence of God.

Jesus declares "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12), a light that "enlightens everyone" (1:9). Being life and light (Jn 1:1) he is ever active illuminating each and every person.<sup>42</sup> "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly," he declares (Jn 10:10). "And of his fullness all have received" (Jn 1:19). "All things have been created through him and for him... and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things" (Col 1:16, 20). Hence "whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure" (Phil 4:8) is acceptable to God in different religions, which await Christ to be admitted to "the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb 12:23).

Dialogue with other religions is prescribed by canon law (CCEO, can. 592 § 2) as the style of evangelization. Dialogue<sup>43</sup> differs from the forced imposition of Christianity on the one hand, and on the other beguiling the gullible with charity or social service and making "rice Christians." The model of dialogue is Jesus himself, the Word of dialogue between God and Man. Jesus dialogued with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar, with Nicodemus who came by night, with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. Note that Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman led to a further dialogue lasting two days with the Samaritans of Sychar. In the end many confessed their faith, "Now we know this is indeed the Saviour of the World" (Jn 4:42). Such open, public confession may not always result from interreligious dialogue. Scholarly interreligious dialogue will also have to be more sophisticated.<sup>44</sup> When the initiative for dialogue comes from the Christian partner, as often happens in India (unlike in

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<sup>42</sup>John Paul II, enc. *Redemptor Hominis*, (4 March 1979) 14; *Origins* 8 (22. 3. 1979) 625-645, at 634.

<sup>43</sup>Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 1991. For more documents by the same council and others see Francesco Gioia, ed., *Il dialogo interreligioso*, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994; transl. *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963-2005)*, Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006; Michael Amaladoss, "Evangelization as Dialogue," *Indian Theological Studies* 43 (2011) 34-49.

<sup>44</sup>Francis X. Clooney, *Theology After Vedanta*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1993; *Hindu God, Christian God* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; edited by FXC, *Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation*, New York: T & T Clark, 2010.



Japan), the starting point may have to be collaboration in common projects of service.<sup>45</sup> And the task may often consist in building bridges of mutual understanding and cooperation to construct a world free of force and fear, in which all can follow their conscience without being misled by false prophets, religious bigotry and ignorance.

The prophecy of Jesus the Good Shepherd, "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one fold and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16), is to be understood in an eschatological sense and not as a project to establish Christianity as the only religion of the world, as was formerly understood in missiology. The one fold will be gathered from many religions, for which apostles must work as missionaries to evangelize all peoples cooperating with God who is creating the future. Does this mean that all religions are equal?

### **5. All Religions Are Equal or *Sarvadharmā samabhāva*?**

"All religions are equal." We hear it repeated often as a *mahāvākya*. It is a modern trend. In the nineteenth century, Hindu writers and leaders like Raja Rammohan Roy recognized the many negative traits of traditional Hinduism like idolatry, sati (widow burning), *devadāsi*, child marriage, caste, etc. and set out to reform Hinduism even provoking violent opposition. However, in the Parliament of Religions held in California in 1893, Vivekananda carried the house with his oratory asserting that Hinduism was the *sanātana dharma*, the universal religion, the crown of religions. That was the rebuttal of the claim of the Christian missionaries in India that Christianity was superior to all other religions, indeed the "crown of Hinduism." Claims of superiority can be irksome in the age of democracy. Twentieth century shifted to the teaching of Narayana Guru, "All religions are equal." Just as all rivers flow into the sea, so do all religions help humans reach the Absolute/God. Hence all religions are equal. This dictum has become a *mahāvākya* or aphorism, if not an unquestioned dogma.

It deserves a closer look. Let us start with the parable of motor cars. "All cars are equal." Toyota, Maruti, Rolls Royce, Volvo, Mercedes, Ford, Fiat, Skoda, Ambassador ... Just as all rivers flow into the sea, so do all cars take you where you want to go. You may drive any of these cars and reach your destination. But if you are driving a Maruti

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<sup>45</sup>Michael Amaladoss, "Asian Theology for the Future," in Paul Hwang, ed., *Asian Theology for the Future*, Seoul: Center for Asian Theology Solidarity, 2014, 19-34.

or Skoda and every Mercedes or Volvo overtakes you, will you say that all cars are equal? Cars do vary in speed, size, comfort, and price — a Rolls Royce Phantom series 2 produced in 2014 and imported to Kerala was priced at 90,000,000 (ninety million/nine crore) rupees! Again, no one says all countries are equal: India, China, Russia, USA, Malta, Bangladesh, Bhutan... They vary in size, wealth, standard of life, freedom, and security. Surely not all works of art are as admirable as the Pieta of Michelangelo. Before a Miss World or Miss Universe you will not blurt out that all women are equally beautiful! But many repeat as a *mahāvākya* “All religions are equal.”

Surely all religions deserve equal respect: *Sarvadharmā samabhāva*. The law allows all licensed cars on the road — Rolls Royce, Fiat, Mercedes, Maruti, Ambassador, etc. That may be called *sarvavāhana samabhāva*, although all cars are not equal for comfort, speed and price. As regards religions, however, the *mahāvākya* has it that all religions are equal. It is an unquestioned Indian cliché that has been hoisted as a dogma by repetition. According to Article 14 of the Constitution of India all have equal right to practise any religion and to propagate it subject to morality and public order (Articles 25-28). This is *sarvadharmā samabhāva*, equal respect for all religions. But this does not mean that according to the Indian Constitution all religions are equal. Theravada Buddhism is atheistic, Hinduism is theistic (with a vengeance!) with the worship of gods and goddesses often alongside one supreme deity, Bhagavan or Katavul. Unlike the rigorous monotheism of Judaism, Christianity and Islam the theism of Hinduism is liberal accommodating the worship of animal-gods like Hanuman, Ganapati, and Nagaraja. But at the opposite extreme, the Charvakas of old professed atheism and continued to be in the Hindu fold. While atheism is not compatible with Christianity or Islam (in the latter atheists risk death by fatwa issued by the Mullahs) the Theravada school of Hinayana Buddhism is atheistic. Surely these three religions are not equal. In modern times Mahatma Gandhi repudiated the Vedas which sanction caste distinctions. A Hindu may deny that the Vedas are sacred scripture and still continue to be a Hindu, although not regarded as orthodox. In short, on a closer look it is clear that in the face of so many contradictions all religions are not equal. A wit has said that the genius of Hinduism is that it can accommodate contradictions. But some other religions cannot, which proves that all religions are not equal.

Christians as a whole believe that Jesus Christ is unique, the incarnate Son of God, who died on the cross<sup>46</sup> and rose again in glory for the salvation of all. His virgin mother Mary is also unique, “our tainted nature’s solitary boast” (Wordsworth). Apart from beliefs there are facts. The shrine of Mary at Lourdes has no rival for the hundreds of miracles certified as scientifically inexplicable by an International Medical Bureau of experts including not only believers but also rationalists and atheists. These miracles are historical facts different from the miraculous stories narrated in Indian mythologies.<sup>47</sup>

Although religions hold many things in common, they also differ on fundamentals like the idea of God (or gods and goddesses?) and human destiny (heaven/hell or *samsāra*, rebirth?). Jews and Muslims regard the Christian Trinity as incompatible with monotheism. While adultery is a sin for Christians, promiscuous sexual intercourse is a rite of salvation in Vajrayana Buddhism, an offshoot of Mahayana Buddhism. Buddhism does not believe in hell but in rebirth. Such diversity is a call for interreligious dialogue. It should start with what unites rather than what divides religions. For example, following in the footsteps of Robert de Nobili, Jesuit scholars like Pierre Johanns (1882-1955), Georges Dandoy (1882-1962) and Richard De Smet (1916-1997) have pioneered research into what is common to the Vedanta and Christology. Buddhism and Christianity have “certain common practices such as monasticism, confession, the veneration of relics and images, the use of the rosary and incense, etc.”<sup>48</sup> In its declaration on religions the Second Vatican Council says briefly as follows regarding what religions hold in common.

People expect from the different religions an answer to the obscure riddles of the human condition which today also, as in the past, profoundly disturb their hearts: What is a human being? What is the meaning and purpose of our life? What is good and what is sin? What origin and purpose do sufferings have? What is the way to attaining true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? Lastly, what is that final unutterable mystery which takes in our lives and from which we take our origin and towards which we tend? (NA, 1).

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<sup>46</sup>Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan writes: “A suffering God — a deity that wears a crown of thorns — will never be able to satisfy the religious soul.” See his *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1928, 15.

<sup>47</sup>Professor A.K. Ramanujam says that mingling much myth and a modicum of history, India has produced “three hundred Ramayanas.” See Harbans Mukhia, “Between History and Mythology,” *The Hindu*, 17 July 2014, 11.

<sup>48</sup>Noel Sheth, “Christianity and Buddhism,” *A Concise Encyclopaedia of Christianity in India*, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth/Mumbai: St Pauls, 2014, 110-113, at 111.

Jews and Christians believe that they are the chosen people of God. Christians also believe that through baptism they are incorporated as members of the body of the risen Christ, which is the Church. Christians share the body and blood of Christ sacramentally at the Eucharistic meal, to which only the baptized are admitted. But there are counterparts of these sacraments in other religions like bath in the Ganges and *prasāda* distributed by the *pūjāri* in the temple. But for all their similarity they are no real equivalents.<sup>49</sup> On a closer look it will be seen that the Eucharist is not *pūja*, although this word has often been used for the Mass.

All religions contain good grain and cockle sowed under cover of darkness by the infernal enemy aided by human minions. Secularists and rationalists may well laugh at the cockle, but interreligious dialogue can focus on the good grain. Dialogue can be at the level of theology, spirituality or life itself and can be mutually enriching. It requires mutual respect issuing from the recognition of the equal dignity and right of the dialogue partners. But in dialogue with religions that lack an official magisterium or a certain centralization one practical difficulty is to find representative dialogue partners. In such cases dialogue leaves the vast masses untouched.

An instance of dialogue and evangelization in the New Testament is the story of Cornelius, the Roman centurion who sent for the Apostle Peter (Acts 10). Cornelius was a worshipper of God even as a follower of his Roman religion. "He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God" (10:2). His prayers and alms "ascended as a memorial before God" (4), who directed him to send for the Apostle Peter. Peter realises that "God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (34-35). God sent his Son Jesus Christ, through whom forgiveness of sins is offered to all (43). When God poured out his Holy Spirit on the gentiles who heard Peter, the Apostle interpreted this as a sign of the divine call to extend baptism to them.

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<sup>49</sup>At Kurseong I used to visit a Buddhist lama on Sunday afternoon in the company of my friend, an American Jesuit student. The lama, a family man, educated and well-off, read the bible and some other books we gave him. The sacrament of penance impressed him most. He would mention it again and again during the conversation, shedding tears when told that by this sacrament one could obtain the forgiveness of one's sins. But baptism did not impress him. When my Jesuit friend proposed it to him (perhaps prematurely, I thought) in view of his forthcoming priestly ordination, the lama broke off all dialogue and friendly relations. He did not want to receive us any more.

And they were baptized by order of Peter “in the name of Jesus Christ” (48).<sup>50</sup>

For God all devotees are acceptable who do what is right according to their conscience irrespective of their religion. God gave his Son to the world as its saviour and judge. Those who receive him in faith and are baptized in his name become his people united to him in a new covenant. Christians believe that they belong to this new covenant in spite of the historical record of sin, divisions, persecutions and wars. But dialogue will be ready to see shining examples of holiness and goodness wherever they appear. As the bearer and envoy of Christ, the only Son of God and unique Saviour of the world, Christianity is unique, although as a historical phenomenon it is equal to other religions in certain respects and has been worse than some in other respects. For example, traditionally Buddhism has been more tolerant than Christianity, although recently it has been discriminative and even violent towards other religious minorities in isolated cases. But Christianity, Judaism and Islam have historical records of organized religious persecution.

To conclude: A fully satisfactory Christian theology of religions is still in gestation and has been struggling to be born, as is illustrated by the painful encounter of Jacques Dupuis with the Vatican doctrinal congregation CDF. He was a shining star that lit up the Asian horizons but fell into disgrace with the official Roman magisterium. It will be ten years on 28 December 2014 since he fell into grace.

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<sup>50</sup>During the international conference “Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal” at the DVK (2013) one of the participants, who was engaged in interreligious dialogue, declared with satisfaction that he had not baptized anyone and did not intend to do it either. That sounded like the claim that he had progressed beyond Vatican II making it outdated.