

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. *Statement of the Problem*

A survey concerning the status of church attendance in Belgium from 1967 to 1998 shows that in 1967, 42.90% of Catholics went to church weekly; in 1977, this had dropped to 29.40%; in 1987 it was 20.70%; and in 1998, only 11.20%. Thus, from 1967 to 1998 the number of weekly church attendees in Belgium decreased by 31.70% of the Catholic population. Another survey, regarding the “social and cultural changes in Vlaanderen” (*sociale en culturele verschuivingen in Vlaanderen*) from 1996 to 2004, states that in 1996, 13.70% of Catholics attended weekly church-services; in 2000, this had declined to 10.90%; and in 2004, the number was only 7.70%. The number of *kerkpraktijk* in Vlaanderen from 1996 to 2004 had thus declined by 6%.¹ This decrease of church attendance, or church involvement, is a common issue throughout the West. But it also occurs, in fact, in almost all countries around the world.²

In addition to a world-wide secularization, a “believing without belonging” mentality can be seen as the main cause of the phenomenon of this sharp drop off in church attendance among Catholics. This is so because there are many people who are still seeking religious refuge in Christianity as well as in other great religions, still believing in God, but staying away from (if one does not want to say, allergic to) the

¹ Cf. Marc Hooghe, Ellen Quintelier en Tim Reesken, *Kerkpraktijk in Vlaanderen, Trends en Extrapolaties: 1967-2004*, in Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Overlegcentrum voor Ethiek, *Ethische Perspectieven*, 16/2 (Juni 2006), Peeters, pp. 115-116.

² Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World, a Conversation with Peter Seewald*, (originally published in German as *Gott und die Welt: Glauben und Leben in unserer Zeit, Ein Gespräch mit Peter Seewald*, Stuttgart, Munich, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000), trans. by Henry Taylor, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2002 and Alfred Kuen, *Les défis de la postmodernité*, Saint-Légier, Editions Emmaüs, 2002, pp. 86-88.

Church, the doctrine and teachings. Such people, and especially young people, are more interested in spirituality than in doctrine, in God than in the Church. Individualism from the side of people, and doctrinal, institutional and moral burden or even scandals from the Church, the clergy, could be some among many reasons for this.³

Christian faith, Christian identity, the credibility and relevance of Christianity, are seriously challenged not only by the widespread secularization and the prevalent “believing without belonging” mentality, but also by the fact of religious plurality, which is no longer confined to the East. Even in the recent past, most parts of Asia were referred to as the so-called mission territories or mission churches because of the limited presence of Christians; and, therefore, mission *ad gentes* seemed to be reserved for this large continent. Nowadays, however, one could say that these mission territories have been expanded back to the Christianized West due to the extensive migration from the East to the West and the phenomenon of globalization. Christians in almost every part of today’s world live in a context of religious and cultural plurality. Christians, more than ever, need to express their faith in ways that are not only meaningful to them but also to their neighbors who are different from them religiously and culturally.⁴

Jesus’ questions to his disciples “Who do the people say I am?” “Who do you say I am?”⁵ are still relevant. These questions which concern Jesus Christ and his role in the order of salvation and revelation are important to both Christians and non-Christians. They have to do with the heart of Christian faith, and are associated with many other principal and fundamental questions, such as the credibility of Christianity, the role of the Church and that of the liturgy, sacraments and rites of the Christian life, in God’s plan of salvation and revelation for humankind. The present awareness that the Christian religion

³ Cf. José María Mardones, *¿Adónde Va la Religión? Cristianismo y Religiosidad en Nuestro Tiempo*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 1996, pp. 17-25 and Kuen, *Les défis de la postmodernité*, pp. 82-87.

⁴ Cf. Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism, The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission*, Nottingham, Apollos, 2001, pp. 346-348, Joseph C. McLelland, *Pluralism without Relativism, Religious Studies à la mode*, Toronto, Clements Academic, 2008, pp.108-110 and Kuen, *Les défis de la postmodernité*, pp. 177-184.

⁵ Mk. 8: 28-29.

is only one of several major religions also challenges the faith of traditional believers. In what way can one maintain that Jesus Christ, as the only Son of God Incarnate, is the Savior of the world and the *only* savior?⁶

In maintaining the traditional understanding of Jesus Christ as the unique and universal Savior, or of his salvific mediation as absolute and universal, one is also facing the question of the role of the Holy Spirit. What role does the Holy Spirit, whose presence and activity are universal, play in God's plan for human salvation? The Catholic Christian is faced with the additional challenge that the Church has maintained for centuries that she is the guardian of the true faith and that salvation is mediated only through her.

What values can one attribute in this context to other religions and what possibility is there for non-Christians to be saved? Is there any religious, spiritual or salvific value in non-Christian religions? These religions do not merely exist, or simply survive. In many cases, they give clear evidence of a revival and continue to inspire and influence the lives of millions of men and women, their adherents. What is their role in relation to the salvation of their own adherents? Do they exercise any kind of salvific mediation? If so, do they exercise a mediation that can be understood as parallel to or as complementing that of Jesus Christ? In what sense can they be considered legitimate and effective ways of salvation in their own right? How are the meaning and the salvific value of Jesus Christ to be seen in relation to other religious paths of salvation?⁷

All these questions and many more are major issues in contemporary theological discourse and will be for years to come. They concern a Christian self-understanding and a Christian understanding of the world religions in the one divine plan of salvation and revelation for humankind. In making this dissertation, I cannot pretend to offer a definitive answer to all the above-mentioned issues and challenges, or even to present or

⁶ Cf. Claude Geffré, *Le pluralisme religieux et l'indifférentisme*, in *Revue Théologique de Louvain*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 31 (2000), pp. 18-21 and Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism, the Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission*, pp. 308-313.

⁷ Cf. Netland, *Pluralism without Relativism, Religious Studies à la mode*, pp. 311-313 and McLelland, *Pluralism without Relativism, Religious Studies à la mode*, pp. 84-86.

evaluate adequately the different aspects of the Christian faith and Christian identity. Rather, I try to do justice to O'Collins' understanding of symbols, experience and revelation, which is the core of the Christian faith. It shows the integrity of the Christian life, or Christian faith, which includes *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy*, *individual* and *collective* dimensions, *traditional* and *renewal* factors, and so forth. Moreover, it also offers a positive view of the role of all religions in the order of salvation and revelation, which is better viewed and further developed in Dupuis' theology of religions. Standing together, O'Collins' understanding of symbols, experience and revelation, and Dupuis' theology of religions can be a great help for Christians in today's world, who need to have an expression of Christian faith that is meaningful not only for themselves, but also for those who are religiously and culturally different from them. They also provide a theological foundation and encouragement for Christians to enter into interreligious dialogue.

2. *Objective of the Study*

In fact, O'Collins' understanding of symbols, experience and revelation is a part of his fundamental theology, in which he reflects critically on four essential themes, namely, the divine self-revelation, the subjects who can receive that revelation, the relationship between faith and reason, and the transmission of revelation. In line with this, I will explore how, in O'Collins' view, the divine self-revelation, which is primary for Christian faith, takes place in the world, and especially in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ. How, in his view, can we relate the supreme revelation in Jesus Christ to the knowledge or even revelation found elsewhere, such as in non-Christian religions, cultures and creation? In what sense does God's revelation continue to occur? What is the content of the divine revelation, and its nature, its aims, its means, its mediators, and its addressees?

Considering that the divine revelation always takes place in the form of symbols and within human experience, I will also study O'Collins' understanding of symbols and

experience, and their relationship with the divine revelation. How can we access the reality of revelation when both symbols and experience are historically, socially, and religiously conditioned and limited? What is the role of symbols in both the communication of the divine revelation by God and its experience by human beings? If the divine revelation was communicated in the form of symbols and there is always a gap between the symbols themselves and what they symbolize, how can we reach the reality or the content of revelation? Moreover, how can we see the revelation in Jesus Christ as absolute and unsurpassable, if Jesus himself is also a kind of symbol?

To further evaluate O'Collins' understanding of symbols, experience and revelation I try to see how his understanding can work together with Dupuis' theology of religions, which, in fact, tackles many aspects of Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology and Pneumatology. Dupuis' theology of religions is studied from a Christian perspective, but within the context of religious pluralism and in the light of interreligious dialogue. This is an attempt to answer and clarify some issues, mainly regarding Jesus Christ and the role of the Church in the salvation of humankind. It investigates the positive values in non-Christian religions, their salvific mediation, and their validity or legitimate place in the divine economy of salvation for humankind. In other words, it considers religious pluralism not only *de facto*, but also *de jure*.

3. *Scope of the Study*

As the title of my dissertation already indicates, this is not a study of symbols, experience and revelation in general, but of these things as understood by O'Collins. Thus, even though one may, from time to time, find references to other views or authors for the clarification of O'Collins' views, the study has no intention of making any kind of comparative study or of developing a comprehensive account of symbols, experience or revelation. Accordingly, one would not be able to see in this study a historical discussion or development of these topics, either from the Church's official teachings or from other theologians. Being based essentially on O'Collins' theological works, the study focuses on

exploring and presenting his ideas of symbols, experience and revelation, in order to relate them to Christian self-understanding, Christian identity and Christian life in today's world.

It should be noticed that O'Collins' account of symbols and experience is not developed as an extensive and independent study, but in relation to, and at the service of, his theology in general, and his theology of revelation in particular. Therefore, despite their crucial role in O'Collins' thinking and theologizing, one should not be surprised in finding that O'Collins' discussion of symbols and experience is rather brief, and that the materials or resources available for us to access his work are also limited.

To further evaluate O'Collins' theology in the context of religious and cultural plurality, this study tries to demonstrate a correlation between his understanding of symbols, experience and revelation and Jacques Dupuis' theology of religions. Accordingly, this is not a study of religions *per se*, or any religion in particular, which Dupuis sometimes discusses separately, e.g., the case of Hinduism. Moreover, though this study hopes to make a positive contribution to interreligious dialogue, it will not directly touch the "dialogue of life," where the partners of different religions strive to live in harmony, sharing their joys, sorrows, or concerns. Likewise, it will not discuss the "dialogue of action," in which people collaborate for integral liberation or strive together to achieve a common goal. Partially, it is the "dialogue of theological exchange and of religious experience,"⁸ where the participants seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage, and to appreciate or share each other's spiritual values and riches. In this sense, the study can be seen more as an attempt at understanding both oneself and others (here, Christianity and the world religions), which in fact, constitutes the initial stage of any dialogue.

In order to have a better understanding of Dupuis' viewpoints, the study will include some remarks on Dupuis' ideas compared with those of pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism. It is not my intention to develop a separate account or study of these three

⁸ Cf. DP 42: *The Forms of Dialogues*.

popular approaches to the theology of religions. Likewise, though taking into account critiques of Dupuis' certain theological points, this study is not intended to get involved intensively in any particular debate.

4. *Significance of the Study*

a. *A Response to the Foundation of the Christian Mission*

"The Church's universal mission is born of faith in Jesus Christ."⁹ This statement of John Paul II explains well the heart of the Christian mission, which is essentially related to our understanding of Jesus Christ and the salvific and revelatory value of his death and resurrection. This Christological dimension of the Christian mission is further explained and supported by Karotemprel in the book "Following Christ in Mission," especially when he states: "To lose the focus on Jesus Christ in evangelization is to lose one's focus on Christian mission itself. Confusion about Jesus Christ can only result in confusion about Christian mission and finally, confusion about God and humanity."¹⁰

The objective of this study is related closely to our faith in Jesus Christ. It tackles the ways God acts in the world, especially through the Incarnate Christ and his Spirit. It affirms the absolute and universal mediation of Jesus Christ, and the participating mediation of Christianity and other religious traditions, in the order of salvation and revelation. All of these belong to the centrality of Christian theology and the foundation of the Christian's mission.

The study acknowledges that no religion, including Christianity, possesses the absolute truth about God, or constitutes the absolute way of salvation and revelation. By

⁹ RM 4.

¹⁰ Karotemprel, Sebastian & al., *Following Christ in Mission: Christological and Soteriological Foundation of Mission*, Boston, MA, Pauline Books & Media, 1996, p. 62.

so doing it invokes a humble attitude for all Christians with which to live their faith and to go on mission. It also indicates the need for us – Christians – to engage in interreligious dialogue, to which now we turn.

b. A Response to the Need for Interreligious Dialogue

The “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” (*Nostra Aetate*) of Vatican Council II is said to have opened the windows of the Church to the more than two-thirds of humanity who embrace a religious orientation other than Christianity.¹¹ Consequently, various Episcopal conferences, especially the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), together with its institutes for interreligious affairs, have repeatedly emphasized the need for the Church to engage in dialogue.¹² Interreligious dialogue is considered as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment. It has a special link with the Church’s mission and is one of its expressions.¹³ It “does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity.”¹⁴

However, the Christian who engages in interreligious dialogue and meets with the adherents of other religions, must do so as a member of the Christian faith community, and therefore, needs the support of a theology of religions, which in turn is also enlightened by interreligious dialogue. This study, thus, aims at making a contribution toward the work of interreligious dialogue by reflecting on the central points of Christian faith and identity: Jesus Christ and the salvation of humankind. Although the scope may appear to be vast, the problem is immediate and vital in the researcher’s country of origin,

¹¹ Cf. Pierre Hegy M., (ed.), *The Church in the Nineties, Its Legacy, Its Future*, Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1993, p.302.

¹² Cf. FABC, *Renewed Evangelizers for New Evangelization in Asia*, Message of X FABC Plenary Assembly, Xuan Loc and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, 16 December 2012.

¹³ Cf. AG 10-12 & RM 55.

¹⁴ RM 56.

Viet Nam, as well as in the whole of Asia. It should be understood that the non-Christian environment where the researcher grew up, played an important role in the choice of this topic. He has been searching, since the early years of his Christian life, for some of the answers which have emerged from this study.

5. *Survey of Related Literature*

This dissertation is based principally on the written works of O'Collins and Dupuis, especially on the following books and articles:

By O'Collins:

- *Catholicism, the Story of Catholic Christianity*, Oxford University Press, 2003.
- *Christ and the Religions*, in *Gregorianum* 84, 2 (2003), pp. 347-362.
- *Cosa si Dice di Gesù Cristo?* in *Rassegna di Teologia* (Maggio – Giugno 1981, N. 3), 174-179.
- *Criteri per l'Interpretazione delle Tradizioni*, in René Latourelle – Gerald O'Collins, eds., *Problemi e Prospettive di Teologia Fondamentale* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1982), 397-411.
- *Experience*, in R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella, eds., *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (English-language edition), New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994, 306-308.
- *Experiencing Jesus*, London, SPCK (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge), 1994.
- *Foundations of Theology*, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1971.
- *Fundamental Theology*, New York / Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1981.
- *Jacques Dupuis, His Person and His Work*, in Kendall, Daniel and Gerald O'Collins (eds.), *In Many and Diverse Ways, In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, New York, Orbis Books, 2003, 18-29.
- *Retrieving Fundamental Theology: The Three Styles of Contemporary Theology*, New York / Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1993.

- *Rivelazione: Passato e Presente*, in R. Latourelle, ed., *Vaticano II: Bilancio e Prospettive* (Assisi: Cittadella, 1987), 125-135.
- *Salvation for All, God's Other People*, Oxford, University Press, 2008.
- *Theology and Revelation*, Cork, the Mercier Press, 1968.

By Dupuis:

- *Cristo Universale e Vie di Salvezza*, in *Angelicum* LXXIV (1997) 193-217.
- *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, translated from the French by Robert R. Barr, New York, Orbis Books Maryknoll, 1991.
- *La Fe Cristiana in Gesù Cristo in Dialogo con le Grandi Religioni Asiatiche*, in *Gregorianum* 75, 2 (1994) 217-240.
- *La Novedad de Jesucristo Frente a las Religiones Mundiales*, in *Estudios Trinitarios* 32/ 1-2 (Enero-Agosto1998) 3-37.
- *La rencontre du christianisme et des religions: De l'affrontement au dialogue*, Paris, Cerf, 2002.
- *La Teologia del Pluralismo Religioso Rivisitata*, in *Rivista di Teologia Morale*, 40 (1999) 667-693.
- *Le dialogue interreligieux à l'heure du pluralisme*, in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 120/4 (Octobre-Décembre 1998) 544-563.
- *Le Verbe de Dieu, Jésus Christ et les religions du monde*, in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 123 (2001) 529-546.
- *The Truth Will Make You Free, The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited*, in *Louvain Studies* 24 (1999) 211-263.
- *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York, Orbis Books Maryknoll, 1997.
- *Who Do You Say I Am? Introduction to Christology*, Philippines, Claretian Publications, 1995.

In addition to O'Collins and Dupuis, among the other theologians whose works have had much influence on the researcher in choosing the theme, as well as in structuring the Thesis are Alfred Kuen, Avery Dulles, Claude Geffré, Edward

Schillebeeckx, Eugene Hillman, Francis A. Sullivan, Gavin D'Costa, Harold Netland, John Hick, Joseph C. McLelland, Karl Rahner, Louis Dupré, Louis-Marie Chauvet, Paul Knitter, Richard Viladesau, Terrence Merrigan, and Yves Congar. It may be good to mention here some of their particular books and articles:

- CHAUVET, Louis-Marie, *Du symbolique au symbole, essai sur les sacrements*, Paris, Cerf, 1979.
- CHAUVET, Louis-Marie, *Symbole et sacrement, une relecture sacramentelle de l'existence chrétienne*, Paris, Les Édition du Cerf, 2008.
- CONGAR, Yves, *This Church That I Love*, translated by Lucien Delafuente, New Jersey, Dimension Books, 1969.
- D'COSTA, Gavin, *Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, in *Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs* 9, Leuven, Peeters, 1992, pp. 140-154.
- DULLES, Avery, *Models of Revelation*, Garden City (NY), Doubleday, 1983.
- DULLES, Avery, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, New York, Crossroad, 1992.
- DUPRE, Louis, *Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection, Excursion in the Phenomenology and Philosophy of Religion*, Cambridge, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
- DUPRE, Louis, *Symbols of the Sacred*, Cambridge, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.
- HILLMAN, Eugene, *Many Paths, A Catholic Approach to Religious Pluralism*, Philippines, Claretian Publications, 1991.
- KNITTER, Paul F., *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions*, Philippines, Claretian Publications, 1985.
- KUEN, Alfred, *Les défis de la postmodernité*, Saint-Légier, Editions Emmaüs, 2002.
- MCLELLAND, Joseph C., *Pluralism without Relativism, Religious Studies à la mode*, Toronto, Clements Academic, 2008.

- MERRIGAN, Terrence, *Book Essay: 'Exploring the Frontiers:' Jacques Dupuis and the Movement "Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,"* in *Louvain Studies* 23, 1998, pp. 338-359.
- MIQUEL, Dom, *Petit traité de théologie symbolique*, Paris, Cerf, 1987.
- NETLAND, Harold, *Encountering Religious Pluralism, The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission*, Nottingham, Apollos, 2001.
- RAHNER, Karl, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, translated by William V. Dych, New York, Crossroad, 1995.
- SCHILLECBEECK, Edward, *Church: The Human Story of God*, New York, Crossroad, 1990; London, SCM Press, 1990.
- SULLIVAN, Francis A., *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*, New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press, 1992.

6. **Definition of Terms**

a. **"Mediator"**

The English word "mediator" derives from the Latin: "medius" i.e. the one in the middle. The meaning of the term in religious or theological discourse relates to what occurs between God and humankind. In order to perform his or her function, the mediator needs to be acceptable to both parties. The closer he or she is to them, the easier for him or her to mediate. Thus, in a strict sense, Jesus Christ alone, who possesses both divine and human natures, is the mediator between God and human beings, just as St. Paul said: "There is only one God and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself as human being, Christ Jesus, who offered himself as a ransom for all." (1Tm 2:5). Others, for example, the prophets in the history of Israel, the sages and the founders of the world religions, or whoever else, are considered "mediators" in the sense they participate in Jesus Christ's mediation in achieving and distributing salvation and revelation for the human race.

b. “Pluralism”

Certain Christians were shocked by Dupuis’ use of the term “pluralism.” Perhaps, they had associated it with those “pluralists” like John Hick, one of the most controversial proponents of pluralism, who seems to abandon the Christian claim of Christ as the unique Savior, and seems to place Him “on par with other religious founders,” or at least regards Him as differing from the latter “only in degree, but not in kind.”¹⁵ “Pluralism” has two primary meanings: “pluralism *de facto*” and “pluralism *de iure*.” While no one would deny the former, which acknowledges the fact of the multiplicity of religions, not all people accept the latter, which holds the truth of “pluralism in principle.” In illustrating and confirming the universality of Christ and the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the cultures and religions of the world, Dupuis affirms “pluralism in principle,” because, as O’Collins said, “God never acts merely *in fact* but always *in and on principle*.”¹⁶ Dupuis, thus, on the one hand, asserts the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ in the order of salvation and revelation, on the other hand, confirms the legitimate role of non-Christian religions in the one divine economy of salvation and revelation for humankind. Thus, the “pluralism” that Dupuis endorses is different from that of Hick and other pluralists like him. In fact, one can regard Dupuis’ approach to the theology of religions as “inclusive pluralism.”¹⁷

c. “Salvation”

“Salvation” is the most generic term used to describe the divine action of restoring humankind to the state from which it had fallen as a result of the sin of Adam. Since the

¹⁵ Cf. O’Collins, *Jacques Dupuis, His Person and His Work*, in Kendall, Daniel and Gerald O’Collins (eds.), *In Many and Diverse Ways, in Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, New York, Orbis Books, 2003, p. 25 and John Hick (ed.), *Jesus and World Religions*, London, SCM Press, 1977, pp. 168-169.

¹⁶ Cf. O’Collins, *Jacques Dupuis, His Person and His Work*, p. 25.

¹⁷ Cf. Terrence Merrigan, *Book Essay: ‘Exploring the Frontiers:’ Jacques Dupuis and the Movement “Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,”* in *Louvain Studies* 23, 1998, pp. 355-358.

experiences of suffering and guilt are universal, the hope for salvation by some act of the deity is a prominent element in many religions.¹⁸

Nowadays, the term “salvation” is a much-misunderstood word. There is a tendency to reduce it to something purely temporal and secular. The term is best understood as liberation from one state to another. In scriptural language, it is transference from straitened and perilous circumstances into a state of freedom and security.¹⁹ Throughout Christian history it has been used to describe a transition from the states of “enslavement to sin, death, the law, flesh, the devil, oppression, and the power of the world and darkness,” to the states of “forgiveness, eternal life, freedom, transformation, divine sonship, liberation, new birth, life and light.”²⁰ Thus, it can be understood mainly in the sense of redemption and liberation from sin and its consequences.

d. *“Theology of Religions”*

In this study, the term is understood as the Christian theology of religions, which is a study of the world religions from the perspective of Christianity, rather than a study of religions itself.

e. *“Unique” or “Uniqueness”*

The first meaning of the term is “existing as the only one or as the sole example; single... or characteristics.” Its second meaning is “having no like or equal; standing alone in quality; incomparable.”²¹

¹⁸ Cf. *New Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. 12, Washington DC, Catholic University Press, 1967.

¹⁹ Cf. Conde B. Pallen & John J. Wynne (eds.), *The New Catholic Dictionary*, New York, The Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1929.

²⁰ Cf. Joseph Komonchak A. & Al., *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Philippines, Saint Paul Publications, 1991.

Everything or everyone can be considered unique in the first sense, simply as being distinguished from others. But, the *unique* mediation of Jesus Christ refers to the second meaning. This is to say, Jesus' mediation is unique or distinct from others in terms of its unsurpassable strength, extent, or effect in God's plan for the salvation and revelation to humankind. Other mediations can also have salvific and revelatory merit or value, but can never surpass or replace that of Jesus Christ.

7. *Division of the Dissertation*

The dissertation comprises five Chapters, including an Introduction and a Conclusion. After situating the context in set Chapter I, Chapter II will proceed in aiming to present O'Collins' understanding of symbols and experience, which could be seen as a key point for his entire theology, especially his theology of revelation. It covers O'Collins' discussion of the human condition, a definition of symbols, the distinction between the symbol and the symbolized, the distinction between symbols and signs, the historicity of symbols, the relationship between symbols and the divine revelation. It also includes O'Collins' analysis of the subject of experience, its immediacy, its relationship with sense and knowledge, its meaning, its purposefulness or finality, its concreteness, its newness. Moreover, it brings in O'Collins' distinction between individual and collective experiences, between positive and negative experiences, his account of the discernment of experience, its interpretation, its expression, and religious experience. It shows how, for O'Collins, symbols and experience are indispensable means for all human understanding, expressing and relating, not only leading to placing a high value on the necessity of the sacramental life, rites and church practices in Christian life, but also offering a framework that helps Christians, or adherents of any other religion, to avoid any absolute claim concerning divine truth or reality, and all extreme tendencies in religious discourse, such as authoritarianism, totalitarianism, absolutism, exclusivism, fundamentalism and the like.

²¹ *The Random House College Dictionary*, Revised Edition, 1975.

Entitled “O’Collins’ Understanding of the Divine Revelation,” Chapter III deals with O’Collins’ perceptive of revelation and its multiple dimensions, for example, propositional and interpersonal, informative and effective. It also tackles O’Collins’ understanding of the relationship between revelation and human experience, the means and mediators of revelation, its discernment, and its history, which includes its preparation in Old Testament history, its climax in Jesus Christ, and its continuity in the world. Likewise, it presents O’Collins’ distinction between God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, and in the world, as foundational revelation and dependent revelation, respectively. Even though the Scriptures and tradition are not the primary concerns in the concept of revelation, but in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of it, and to acknowledge the special-but-not-absolute role of Christianity in the order of revelation and salvation, the Chapter also takes in O’Collins’ view concerning the relationships among revelation, Scriptures and tradition.

Chapter IV aims to present a correlation between O’Collins’ understanding of symbols, experience and revelation and Dupuis’ theology of religions. The Chapter shows how O’Collins’ orthodox theology which is not directly oriented toward the questions of religions can actually stand as a foundation for what may appear to be Dupuis’ less orthodox theology. Dupuis’ theology simply brings into bold relief, in a focused area, possible implications of what O’Collins is saying without having himself ever drawn those conclusions from his own theology.

The Chapter is based on the theology of religions in Dupuis’ scheme; comparative reflections are presented as the chapter is developed. Thus, the Chapter starts with Dupuis’ understanding of salvation history, which could be seen as a key element in his entire theology of religions. It also covers Dupuis’ discussion of the covenants, the relationship between the covenants, and the relationship between human religious history and the history of the Judaic-Christian tradition. Further, it presents Dupuis’ ideas of the manner of God’s presence in history, undertaking a discussion of the Logos and Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church in the order of salvation and revelation. These are crucial themes in any discussion of the theology of religions. Dupuis affirms the

centrality of Jesus Christ in the divine economy of salvation for humankind, while maintaining the role of the Holy Spirit in that economy and emphasizing the saving work of the Trinitarian God. According to Dupuis, the Church, which receives the fullness of revelation through Christ and possesses the means of salvation, is not the reality of salvation. This idea of Dupuis regarding the Church, and his idea of the universal presence and activity of the Logos and the Spirit, leads to a positive view of the world religions. This point is further developed in the Chapter, which brings in Dupuis' affirmation of the religious traditions' role or function in the one economy of God's salvation and revelation. In concluding the Chapter, I will place Dupuis' theology alongside the other three approaches to the theology of religions. In this way, I attempt to show the advantages and disadvantages of Dupuis' ideas, while systematizing and summarizing what I have presented concerning Dupuis.

The dissertation closes with the Conclusion Chapter, which offers a summary of the work. It also recommends an integrative theology, which upholds Christian identity, Christian faith, while corresponding to the varying conditions of human existence and the social, cultural and religious contexts of Christian life in today's world. Furthermore, it points out the essence of the theology of religions, and the delicate issues involved, and calls for more cooperation not only among Christians, but also from the non-Christian side, for the work of interreligious dialogue.