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## Attempts by Asian Theologians to Evolve a Viable Theology of Religious Pluralism and Dialogue for Our Times

*Abstract:* Asian experience shows that religious influences on this continent interweave in the sense that e.g. Catholics understand their beliefs in a Buddhist way if they live in a majority Buddhist environment. Heretofore Christian paradigms of religious pluralism as analyzed in the first part of the paper have not proved themselves worthwhile. Asian Catholic theologians Jacques Dupuis and Felix Wilfred both tried to find a way out of the impasse in this area, therefore their work is presented in a critical manner in the second part of the paper, where the direction of further thinking is suggested as well. The third part gives a proposal for pluralism and dialogue in the area of religion: religious dialogue should primarily take place at the grassroots and religious discourse must return to the rough grounds. Religion is not just a group of abstract doctrines and esoteric beliefs, but a way of life. In this way of life the »third magisterium« and the »discipleship of equals« are formed. People in the village meet at the well where they get water to survive. Here they solve their problems and make their plans. Therefore the well is an appropriate image of religious pluralism and dialogue; Jesus and the Samaritan woman found there their common depths there as well.

*Key words:* Asian theology, interreligious dialogue, dialogue paradigms, pluralism, exclusivism, inclusivism, Jacques Dupuis, Felix Wilfred, »third magisterium«, »discipleship of equals«

*Povzgetek:* **Poskusi azijskih teologov, da bi razvili vzdržno teologijo religijskega pluralizma in dialoga za naš čas**

Življenjske izkušnje Azijcev kažejo, da se religijski vplivi na njihovi celini prepletajo v tem smislu, da na primer katoličani razumejo svoja verovanja po budistično v večinskem budističnem okolju. Dosedanje krščanske paradigme religijskega pluralizma, ki jih razprava v prvem delu analizira, se niso obnesle. Azijska katoliška teologa Jacques Dupuis in Felix Wilfred sta vsak po svoje iskala izhod iz slepe ulice na tem področju, zato je njuno delo kritično predstavljeno v drugem delu, ki je v njem tudi nakazano, v katero smer velja razmišljati. V tretjem delu je obravnavan predlog za pluralizem in dialog na religijskem področju, ki

se glasi: religijski dialog mora v prvi vrsti potekati med »preprostimi« verniki in religijski diskurz se mora vrniti na trdna življenjska tla. Religija ni le sklop visokoletečih doktrin in nenavadnih verovanj, marveč način življenja. V tem načinu življenja se oblikujeta »tretje učiteljstvo« in »skupnost enakih«. Ljudje se v vasi srečujejo ob vodnjaku, kjer dobivajo vodo za preživetje. Tam rešujejo svoje težave, tam načrtujejo. Zato je vodnjak ustrezna podoba za religijski pluralizem in dialog; ne nazadnje sta pri njem našla skupne globine Jezus in Samarijanka.

*Ključne besede:* azijska teologija, medverski dialog, dialoške paradigme, pluralizem, ekskluzivizem, inkluzivizem, Jaques Dupuis, Felix Wilfred, »tretje učiteljstvo«, »skupnost enakih«

## 1. Stories from the ground

Let me start with personal experience. Among the students that I teach in the Philippines are young people from Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, China and other Asian countries. In one of those classes, we talked about the resurrection. One student from Cambodia stood up and said he had experienced the resurrection himself. I asked how. He said his brother resurrected in him. I asked him how can that be possible. »My mother said so. While I was still five years old; I seem to speak and know what only my late brother could have said and known. So, my mother told me that I am my brother. My brother resurrects in me. Is this what you mean by resurrection?« he asked. Then another student from Laos stood up and said the same thing happened to his friend. And another, the same happened with her neighbour! I am not talking about Buddhists. I am talking about Christians living in Buddhist contexts. The most natural thing for them is to think of Christian doctrines in Buddhist categories – the only framework which they are familiar with. These are also the thought patterns of their friends, of the stories they tell everyday, of the songs they sing from childhood. This encounter has shaken my single Christian, maybe Western, frame of thinking about the resurrection. As a theology professor, I was at a loss on how to continue. Our theological categories do not just fit. In the philosophical language common to the postmodern mind, we belong to different *language games* and language games are incommensurable, incomparable. And if that is so, we can ask, how can interreligious dialogue be possible?

There is another personal episode I would like to share. I was once invited by small Christian communities in the southernmost islands of the Philippines (Jolo and Sulu) to give them talks on community organizing. The residents of these islands are mostly Muslims and small Christian groups live among them. The Christians have a small chapel in the midst of several mosques. They are all good neighbours. Their husbands – Muslims and Christians – share the sea for livelihood. Their wives share in the same stories, jokes and gossips. Their children are friends and playmates as they study in the same school, the only elementary school

in the island. The Muslims have their local imam who faithfully leads in their prayers. The Christians have their lay ministers who also take care of their spiritual activities. During the Catholic fiesta, the Muslim brethren attend the Mass, bring their share of food and present their numbers in the common program. The Christians, on the other hand, also respect the solemnity of the days of the Ramadan. Young people of the place make efforts not to eat their snack in public to sympathize with their Muslim friends. Despite the differences of their religions, they live quite normal, happy and harmonious lives among themselves. Until the day when a famous *mubaligh* came!

As you know, *mubalighs* are some sort of Muslim missionaries trained somewhere else and who comes to a local community to bring the message of revival, renewal and fidelity to their faith. This *mubaligh* began preaching on the themes of religious differences, superiority, distinctiveness and uniqueness. He began to stir up suspicions and resurrected old biases. »You know what happened to him, Father?« the Christians who told me ask. »The local imam and the Muslims themselves drove him out of their place.« Of course, the Christians did not think I was going to preach the same thing with them. But their telling me the story is also their way of saying, »if you do the same, we can drive you out as well.«

I will go back to these stories in the end. I just narrated them now in order to state the thesis I have in this paper. True, religious languages are in fact incommensurable. They do not really fit. Interreligious dialogue is not to conquer and subsume one discourse over the other but to respect these utter differences. But to respect these differences does not mean being incommunicable, being sealed-off. If our theological categories could not interact, our lives do – because we need to survive. And if our doctrines destroy our lives, they would have to go. Most often our differences could not be arbitrated in the level of ecclesiastical exhortations, theological reflections or academic conferences. They need to be referred back to the »rough grounds« where real people make sense of their faiths as they struggle to survive everyday life. It is only people in »laboratories« – detached as they are from the real stakes of life – who are plagued by sectarian fixations. People in the rough grounds have even no time for these preoccupations. Unless, of course, if they are instigated to do so by people from outside, from somewhere, from above – those who in fact do not know the rough grounds of their local lives. In most cases, religious differences find convergence not in detached situations but in the »rough grounds« of life.

But let me first go back to the intended objectives of this paper. I am requested to give the »biblical and theological interpretations of interreligious dialogue« – as the original title goes. It appears that the basic questions that I am supposed to answer in this conference are the following: 1) What does the bible say about interreligious dialogue? 2) What theological frameworks are available to understand our relationship with other religions?

I would only like to focus on the second (the paradigms of theological interpretations). I will answer the first question. The scriptural data on the Christian relationship

onship with other religions is so complex and ambivalent that one can find what one wants to see. On the one hand, you can read narratives of Hebrew bias against surrounding faiths which ranges from assertion of Israel's election to waging violent wars of aggression. On the other hand, one can also see Israel's and Christianity's positive view of other religions shown in Isaiah's characterization of the Servant of Yahweh as a »light to all nations« (Isa. 42:6) and Paul's sermon about the »unknown Gods« of the men of Athens at the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-23) (Legrand 1990). Members of other religions are derided as »pagans«, »heathens«, »gentiles« or »dogs« – but at the same time, they are also praised for being »good Samaritans«, »believing centurions«, or »Syrophenician woman« whose faith even surpassed the rest. We need to remember that the bible does not ask our present questions. Its writers were preoccupied in having to show that Israel was God's chosen people or, in the case of the New Testament, that Christianity is the realization of God's promise of a messiah. At worst, other religions are seen with hostility as it competed with Israel or Christianity; or, at best, were mere stages through which history travels to arrive at the peak of their Christian fulfilment in Jesus.

What appear as crucial to our present search are the paradigms of interpretations so that when we read and search the Scriptures, we know where we are coming from and what reading glasses we use. This leads me to my next point.

## 2. Paradigms of theological interpretation

There are three important points to consider before we venture into the descriptions of different paradigms. First, we adopt the word »paradigm« instead of »models«. Models are descriptive and inclusive of one another. For a full understanding of »church«, we need to take all the models together – institution, sacrament, herald, servant, etc. These models are complementary and not mutually exclusive of one another.<sup>1</sup> Positions in interreligious dialogue are different. The different »paradigms« mutually cancel each other out. Following Kuhn's notion of paradigm shifts (1970), one cannot at the same time profess both the Ptolemaic and Copernican worldviews. Either the earth is at the center of the universe or the sun! Pick your choice.

Second, there are different ways of mapping these divergent Christian views of other religions. However, for our purposes here, we follow the triple classification which is shared by several theologians like Alan Race, Jacques Dupuis and Aloysius Pieris. Alan Race (1982) is responsible for the systematic treatment of the now classic distinctions of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Jacques Dupuis names the three paradigms – ecclesiocentrism, christocentrism and theocentrism (2001a; 2001b). Reminiscent of Niebuhr's *Christ and Cultures*, Aloysius Pieris (1982) also talks in tripartite fashion: Christ against religions, Christ of the religions and Christ among religions.

<sup>1</sup> The notion of models was first introduced into theology by Avery Dulles (1974).

Third, J. Peter Schineller's categories of »constitutive«, »exclusive« and »normative« prove helpful to understand the differences among different paradigms. I will explain as we go along.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.1 Ecclesiocentrism / exclusivism

The first and most conservative position is »ecclesiocentrism« (*exclusivism*). In this paradigm, both Jesus Christ and the Church are the »constitutive«, the »exclusive« way to salvation. To be »constitutive« and »exclusive« means to be indispensable. It means that God's saving grace only comes to us through Christ and him alone. Without the historical incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, no one human being will be saved. Not only that »Jesus saves,« as famous evangelical posters tell us, but »only Jesus saves« and no one else. The bible is thus read from the perspective of this paradigm and one can also find proofs for it. »There is no other name in the whole world given to man by which we are to be saved.« (Acts 4:12) »I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me« (John 14:6).

The foremost corollary in ecclesiology is the now famous dictum: »*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*« (outside the Church, there is no salvation).<sup>3</sup> Implicit belonging to the Church also becomes the only way to be saved. Other consequences follow as can be found in medieval theological treatises on the necessity of infant baptism, the talk about limbo, or the aggressive approach to missions, etc. There are narratives of a missionary in the Philippines who goes around the fields on their horses. When he meets someone along the way, he asks if they have been baptized. If not, he makes them kneel down and he begins to pour water on them while pronouncing the baptismal formula. His motives are great: he does not want them to go to hell! This seemingly medieval Catholic position appears ridiculous and funny today but the same framework is also present in the neo-orthodox Protestant positions of Karl Barth (1956).<sup>4</sup> The same positions are alive in both sides of the denominational divide – both in the ultra conservative *Opus Dei*<sup>5</sup> and

<sup>2</sup> In this section, we are deeply indebted to J. P. Schineller (1976). Even as Schineller talks of four different positions, the explanation of each position is quite helpful and, in Dupuis's assessment, is still valid in current discussions. Though Schineller follows the fourfold division, this can also be harmonized in the triple division which we have adopted. Other authors also propose fourfold divisions. Knitter has four types: 1) conservative evangelical model (one true religion); 2) widespread Protestant model (all salvation comes from Christ); 3) open Catholic model (various paths, Christ is the sole norm); 4) theocentric model (various paths, God as the center). See Paul Knitter (1985). Hans Küng (1987) has also four divisions: 1) no religion is true; 2) only one religion is true; 3) every religion is true; 4) one religion is true, one in whose truth all religions participate.

<sup>3</sup> For a good discussion on this maxim, see Jacques Dupuis (2001a, 84–109) and Gavin D'Costa (1990).

<sup>4</sup> The heading goes thus: »The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion.« For Barth, men and women do not possess the capacity to experience the divine; such capacity is only given by the Incarnate Word. Thus, all other religions are nothing but illusion. They are totally opposed to the revelation brought about by Christ.

<sup>5</sup> This comes from the writings of Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer (1990), the founder of the Opus Dei: »*Extra Ecclesiam, nulla salus*. That is the continual warning of the Fathers. Outside the Catholic Church you can find everything except salvation, Saint Augustine admits. You can have honour and sacraments: you can sing 'alleluia' and respond 'amen'. You can uphold the gospel, have faith in the Father, in the

the documents of some evangelical churches like *Lausanne Covenant* (1974) and *Manila Manifesto* (1989).<sup>6</sup> I also have in mind the thousands and thousands of priests, missionaries, religious and lay people whose faith life and pastoral options are derived from such a theology. This is not a dead paradigm. It is still very much alive as it fuels present-day fundamentalist efforts both in Protestant and Catholic circles (not to mention the other faiths). It is like saying: in a world where people are educated in the Copernican worldview, there are still people who believe and act as if the sun revolves around the earth.

## 2.2 Christocentrism / inclusivism

When the paradigm shifts from ecclesiocentrism to Christocentrism, the role of Christ in salvation is still affirmed but the role of the Church fades in the background. Jesus remains constitutive or normative but not the Church. There are different shades of this paradigm. One position states that Christ is the »constitutive« way to one's salvation but not exclusive. »Salvation is here available *extra Christum*, but it is only possible *propter Christum*.« We can only be saved by the grace of Christ, but this grace is available even to those outside the Church through Christ. A modified and more open position goes like this: Christ is not constitutive but »normative«. Normative means he is the superior and ideal type through which other mediators can be measured and evaluated. »Salvation, which was always possible for all mankind, becomes decisively and normatively manifest in Jesus. God is love and this love has been operative always and everywhere; this love is revealed more clearly in the person and work of Christ, but it is not mediated *only* through Christ.« (Schieneller 1976, 557) This is the most crucial issue in interreligious discussions today: the issue of the uniqueness of Jesus. The Notification sent to Jacques Dupuis is revelatory of the Vatican position in this issue. It upholds that Jesus is the »sole and universal mediator«; that he is the fulfilment, completeness and fullness of God's revelation (that is, constitutive).<sup>7</sup> This paradigm is best expressed by John Paul II when he said in *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* (no. 6): »Christ is thus the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion.« Or, in the *Ecclesia in Asia* (no. 14), he proclaims: »We believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is the one Savior because he alone – the Son – accomplished the Father's universal plan of salvation.«

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Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and preach that faith. But never, except in the catholic Church, can you find salvation... It is a matter of faith that anyone who does not belong to the Church will not be saved; and anyone who is not baptized does not enter the Church.«

<sup>6</sup> The Manila Manifesto 1989 states: »We affirm that other religions and ideologies are not alternative paths to God, and that human spirituality, if unredeemed by Christ, leads not to God but to judgment, for Christ is the only way.«

<sup>7</sup> »It must be firmly believed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, crucified and risen, is the sole and universal mediator of salvation for all humanity... It is consistent with the Catholic doctrine to hold that the seeds of truth and goodness that exists in other religions are a certain participation contained in the revelation of Jesus Christ. However, it is erroneous to hold that such elements of truth and goodness, or some of them, do not derive ultimately from the source-mediation of Jesus-Christ.« (Congregation for the doctrine of the faith 2001)

Scripture texts can be summoned to support this paradigm. For instance, Paul's sermon at the Areopagus is a challenge to consider the Christian God as the name of the »unknown God« whom the Greeks worship. Or, in another part, Paul exclaims: »God our savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth; for there is one God and there is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all« (1 Tim 2:4–6). Examples of this position can be seen in the »logos Christology« of the early Fathers Justin and Irenaeus, in the »*preparatio evangelica*« discourse of Clement of Alexandria, in the fulfillment theories of Danielou and De Lubac, or in Rahner's »supernatural existential« and »anonymous Christianity« (Dupuis 2001a, 53–83; 130–157).

Whatever the shades of this position in Christology, it is the role of the Church that is decentered; it now becomes the sign – even a privileged sign, if you want – of God's saving love to the world. But even here, the Vatican is very cautious. Even as »elements of truth and goodness« in other religions are expressions of the Spirit, to consider these religions as »ways of salvation« in themselves has »no foundation in Catholic theology« (Congregation for the doctrine of the faith 2001). It is in these areas that the debate continues.

### 2.3 Theocentrism / pluralism

The move from Christocentric to theocentric paradigm (that is, from inclusivism to pluralism) touches on the constitutive role of Jesus in the order of salvation. Here, Jesus is considered as just one mediator among many others; Christianity as one way among the many ways to God. In the terms used by Schineller, Jesus' mediation is non-constitutive and non-normative to achieve salvation. This position seems to be the farthest from Christian tradition. But its strength is its emphasis on the incomprehensibility of God. One remembers Thomas Aquinas who, after having written the *Summa*, proclaimed that all he did was »straw«. <sup>8</sup> All human ways to God are attempts to fathom the deepest mystery called God. We are here at the borders of apophatic theology and silence is the only respectable stance in front of God's greatness. All others – *summas*, creeds, morals, religions – fade into their own relative space in front of the »incomprehensible God« (Rahner 1978).

There is a big gap between the inclusivist paradigm and the pluralist paradigm. From acknowledging Christ as the focal point of all religions in inclusivism, God now takes the center stage in pluralism. John Hick, one representative of this position, calls this a Copernican turn in theology (1973; 1977; 1980; 1983). Just as there was a paradigm shift from Ptolemy to Copernicus, there is also a paradigm shift from thinking that all religious traditions revolve around Christianity. There is the need to decenter it and place God back to the vital axis around which all

<sup>8</sup> Three months before Thomas Aquinas died, he could no longer write. He hung up all his instrument of writing and never dictated anything. He then confided to Bro. Reginald but made him promise not to tell this to others as long as he lives: »All I have written seems to me like straw compared to what has now been revealed to me.« (Weisphehl 1974, 322)

religions – and Christianity is just one among them – revolve. If we are to be true to the project of dialogue with other religions, Hick enjoins Christianity to let go of its central position in the inclusive paradigm, the uniqueness of Christ, included. For him, the »uniqueness of Christ« discourse has purely devotional and subjective functions: »That Jesus is my Lord and Savior is language like that of a lover, for whom his Helen is the greatest girl in the world,«<sup>9</sup> a personal response to an experience of life and salvation but one which can never be universalized as valid for all.

There are different ways to call or conceptualize this Divine Center. John Hick talks about »the Real«. All religious traditions pursue the Real in paths known to them, all of which are equally precious and valid. In this newer context, the theocentric paradigm undergoes further development. »God« this time is decentered, the Real comes in. Paul Knitter (1987; 1995) also proposes another term: »regno-centrism« or »soteriocentrism« (instead of theocentrism). Since all religions carry with them aspirations for liberation, what proves central therefore is the salvation we all aspire for. In Christian language, all religions are relative attempts to establish God's Kingdom of justice and equality in our midst. Interreligious dialogue thus becomes an ongoing conversation towards liberation.

### 3. Transgressing borders

We have said above that paradigms are mutually exclusive and incommensurable. Embracing one paradigm prevents one from affirming the other. If one is exclusivist, she could not be inclusivist or pluralist and vice versa. This »either-or« way of thinking, characteristic of the Scholastic principles of contradiction, proves to be too Western. The Asian worldview is better characterized as »both-and«, not »either-or«. Oriental logic would have no problem reconciling opposites, harmonizing contradictions, like the co-existence of »yin and yang« in a single reality. Like bamboos, Asians do not insist on one side; they can bend, bow or swing. Their strength is not found in firmness of positions but in being able to sway with the wind.

The above paradigmatic approach to interreligious dialogue looks like a Western preoccupation. However, there are contemporary attempts by Asian theologians to transgress the boundaries of these hard line distinctions in order to evolve a viable theology of religious pluralism for our times. Let me single out two: the »inclusive pluralism« of Jacques Dupuis<sup>9</sup> and the »religious cosmopolitanism« of Felix Wifred. The first is to solve the impasse from the view of systematic theology; the second from the perspective of sociology of religions. In the following section, I will also forward my own proposal to transgress the borders of this current debate.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Dupuis, of course, is a Belgian Jesuit but he has spent the greater part of his missionary life in India and his reflections echo the Asian preoccupations of our relationship with other religions.

### 3.1 Inclusive pluralism (or pluralist inclusivism): Jacques Dupuis

Four years after the controversial *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (1997) and three years before his death in 2004, Jacques Dupuis published *Christianity and the Religious* (2001). This work intends to go beyond the current Western impasse on interreligious interpretative paradigms. »If we hope to build a theology of religions founded not on mutual contradictions and confrontation but on harmony, convergence and unity, the current problematic must be abandoned.« (2001a, 84) To do so, he forwarded a category not present in his previous works: »inclusive pluralism« – a framework that transgresses both the imperialistic tendencies of inclusivism and the relativistic inclinations of pluralism (2001a, 87–95).

In this book, Dupuis aimed to answer three basic questions in interreligious dialogue: 1) Can the members of other religions be saved? 2) If yes, can these religions be said to contain »elements of truth and grace« so that their adherents, if they are saved, are saved in them and somehow through them? 3) If yes, can it be said that these religions have positive meaning in God's single overall plan of salvation? (O'Collins 2003, 389–90) Dupuis answered »yes« to all these questions – departing, as it were, from traditional Christocentrism (inclusivism) and locating his position on the borders of theocentrism (pluralism).

1 Tim. 2:4–5 is paradigmatic for the contemporary discussions on interreligious dialogue. One can find two poles present in these verses. On the one hand, there is God's universal will of salvation (»desires all men and women to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth«, verse 4). On the other hand, there is also the mediatorship of Jesus (»For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus«, verse 5). One takes his/her position in the interreligious debate depending on which pole one emphasizes. If you privilege the first pole, you are a pluralist; if you opt for the second, you are an inclusivist. For Gavin D'Costa (1986; 1987), John Hick's foremost critic, the only viable Christian option is inclusivism. Dupuis wants to go beyond it and argue for a pluralist position. Dupuis, of course, is not a pluralist and has always been critical of Hick who, according to him, does not accord some proper place to the unique role of Jesus. He thus attempts to negotiate the boundaries of these supposed-to-be mutually exclusive paradigms.

How does he do it? Dupuis have recourse to what he calls »Trinitarian Christology« as his interpretative key. He does this on two counts. First, he points to the crucial relationship of Jesus to the Father. In the Trinitarian mystery, he wants to highlight the fact that Jesus is the »Son« and not the »Father«. Lest we forget, they are different »persons«. John 14:6 tells us that Jesus is »the way, the truth and the life.« Jesus is the way, the mediator, the »decisive« revelation of God's action in the world. By his being the Son of God, he is very intimate with the Father; but he is not the Father. He is not the goal or the end of our human longings. Jesus of Nazareth is not the »absolute mystery«; only the Father is. This assertion aligns Dupuis with other pluralists who place God, the »Real«, the »Ul-

timate« as the center of all our strivings. All the others are different ways to the Real, to use the words of Hick. But such position does not relegate the role of Jesus to oblivion. Jesus is still the »definitive« revelation of the Father.

In a second move, Dupuis also points to the relationship of Jesus with the Spirit. There is a tendency among Western Christians to forget the Spirit. Western Christianity, he says, is often criticized by Eastern Orthodox Christianity for its tendency to be »Christomonistic«. There is an impression that in the West, Christ seems to be isolated and divorced from his relationship with the Father and the Spirit. There is thus a need for a stronger Spirit-Christology. Just as there is a need to establish the »personal distinction« between Jesus and the Father, there is also a need to point to the distinction between the Son and the Spirit. But distinct as they are, »there is between them no dichotomy but total complementarity in a single divine economy of salvation« (2001b, 93). Dupuis quotes one theologian to bolster his claim: »Their respective roles are equally essential and necessary, and, on this very account distinct... Pentecost does not inaugurate a religion of the Spirit; it initiates the dispensation throughout space and time of the fruits of the incarnation.« (93–94) In other words, to emphasize Jesus' relationship with the Spirit as both distinct and complementary is helpful to Dupuis's position on two levels. On the one hand, the distinction between Jesus and the Spirit keeps the assertion of »uniqueness« intact. Jesus is decidedly the apex of God's revelation (inclusivism). The Spirit does not inaugurate something new. It merely continues the mission of Jesus in the world today. On the other hand, the complementary relationship of Jesus and the Spirit signals that other revelations, other mediators after him are also valid revelations of God. Such complementarity establishes the continuity of God's saving action between Christianity and other religions (pluralism).

### 3.2 Religious cosmopolitanism: Felix Wilfred

Another attempt to break the contemporary impasse is forwarded by Felix Wilfred. In the recent issue of *Concilium* (2007) whose theme centers on *Pluralist Theologies: The Emerging Paradigm*, Felix Wilfred wanted to do this not from the inner perspective of religious doctrine as Dupuis has done, but from an external view of religions in general (sociology of religions). In the social sciences, there is a term that gains currency as a description of our times: »cosmopolitanism«. Following this lead, he thus proposes the notion of »religious cosmopolitanism« to counteract fundamentalism, sectarianism and bigotry often connected with religions (Wilfred 2007, 112–122). Wilfred takes into account the present economic-cultural globalization and technological developments. Through this, one becomes »a citizen of the world«, as it were. People today travel and communicate in quite an unprecedented pace. Instead of viewing these movements with pessimism, Wilfred extrapolates from this the universal destiny of all religions. What does this concretely mean? What are the repercussions of this assertion?

First, religions, he argues, belong to the whole of humankind. Contrary to sectarianist tendencies attributed to it, religion in fact has some universal destiny.

Second, no particular religion can ever claim to exhaust and fully possess the »mystery« which all religions point to. »That would be a sin against humankind for having claimed for oneself what, in reality, belongs to all (114).« Third, all expressions of religions – creeds, rituals and practices – are means, and not ends in themselves. These are pointers to the »mystery«, not the Mystery itself. Religion is a penultimate experience, Wilfred says, not the ultimate one. Fourth, the mission of religions is the flourishing of the human family. A religion can be judged based on whether it causes the annihilation or the flourishing of the human community. The above assertions on universality, inexhaustible mystery, relativity of religious expressions and the mission of human flourishing easily locate Wilfred in the pluralist camp.

But Wilfred is also aware of the bourgeois tendencies of contemporary cosmopolitanism as it colludes with globalization, transnationalism, and even western classical antiquity.<sup>10</sup> Such a bourgeois cosmopolitanism, which extols the »tourist« on airlines' frequent flyer lists, is an instrument of capitalism that destroys cultural identities of rooted communities. There is, however, a »humanistic cosmopolitanism« which embraces »the particular and in solidarity with the local.« This movement in the grassroots level is in search of »alternative modes of life« (human flourishing) not as separate groups but as networks of communities thereby in direct resistance to the universal, individualistic, imperialistic logic of global capitalism. What are its implications to Wilfred's notion of »religious cosmopolitanism«?

If Christianity owns up to its universal destiny, as Wilfred suggests, such centrifugal direction needs to be complemented with centripetal force to root religions in communities, cultures and peoples. In other words, Christianity does not just go out and proclaim its message to the whole world. If this is the only movement, it becomes imperialistic as in the missionary projects in the past. Christianity's proclamation needs to be appropriated, owned, reinterpreted, revised or reshaped from the perspective of the grassroots. The proclamation thus reverses to the opposite direction resulting in dialogue between faith and cultures, between Christianity and other religions, between the missionary and the grassroots community. This is what Wilfred calls »reverse universality«. Here, it is not only Christian faith that enriches and challenges cultures; it is also cultures that enriches and challenges the faith. It is not only Christianity that fulfills other religions; it is also other religions fulfilling Christianity. In the view of Wilfred, »reverse universality« brings in pluralism and diversity in faith expressions. But unlike the position of hard line pluralists, such diversity is not mere aesthetic plurality but one that is cemented by »the spirit of solidarity and translated into corresponding practice« (120). In other words, reverse universality can only be seen in actions of solidarity in the grassroots level. Cosmopolitanism without solidarity is bourgeois as proclaimed by the individualistic and consumerist march of global capital. Humanistic

<sup>10</sup> Wilfred here cites the efforts of Martha Nussbaum to develop cosmopolitanism inspired by western classical antiquity. M. Nussbaum and J. Cohen, *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

cosmopolitanism, and consequently, religious cosmopolitan, want to counter such imperialistic moves through its emphasis on solidarity and dialogue in the local communities.

In metaphorical terms, religious cosmopolitanism reminds us both of »root« and »journey«: »To live is to strike roots; [but] it is also equally true that life is a journey« (117). Rootedness and journeying do not necessarily contradict; together they can exist in one reality. To be true to one's being, one needs to be rooted in but also to be detached from one's religion. A »religious cosmopolitan« needs to keep this dialectical tension.

## 4. Religions: back to the »rough grounds«

### 4.1 Beyond Dupuis and Wilfred

The efforts of Dupuis to overcome the impasse between inclusivism (which is a Vatican preoccupation) and pluralism (which is dear to the Asian churches) are quite opportune. »Inclusive pluralism« is not a direct response to the questions which the Vatican posed to him about his earlier book, *Toward a Theology of Religious Pluralism* (1997) but it is a courageous and decisive position vis-à-vis the same questions.<sup>11</sup> According to one author who has interviewed Dupuis during these difficult times, there was no doubt »that the ordeal he went through with the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith had caused havoc to his mental and physical health at the age of near 80« (Phan s.a.). Yet the act of standing up to this ecclesiastical interrogation at the end of his life after 60 years of faithful service to the same Church is testimony enough to the courageous spirit that underlies the work of Dupuis.

On a more theoretical level, I think Dupuis has cracked the impasse of hard line paradigmatic positions interreligious dialogue has travelled all these years. If we follow the logic of »paradigms« set by the Western discourse of interreligious dialogue, there will be no hopeful end in view. To use the language of contemporary philosophy, the positions are »incommensurable«. There is no way for us to compare positions just as there is no way for us to exchange 1 meter of cloth and 1 kilo of sugar. There is just no point of comparison. Thomas Kuhn first introduced the idea of »incommensurability« in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* through his notion of »paradigms«. »When paradigms change,« Kuhn argues, »the world itself changes with them« (1970, 111). Thus, different scientific paradigms are incom-

<sup>11</sup> The manuscript of the second work was finished in March 31, 2000, five months before the *Dominus Jesus* and almost a year before the Notification concerning his work came (February 21, 2001). Thus, it cannot be a direct reply to both documents. But as Peter Phan (s.a.) says: »That does not mean that the book was written, as Dupuis himself acknowledges, without careful attention to the objections brought forth by the Congregation for the doctrine of the faith as well as by his theological peers against his previous work, since it was written during the three years in which he was responding to the questions raised by the Congregation for the doctrine of the faith.« See also a comparative review of the two works by Dupuis in Gerard O'Collins (2003).

measurable. There cannot be points of contact since each comes from a different way of speaking, a different way of living, a different language game. The paradigms of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism (or ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism and theocentrism) are quite mutually exclusive that they can only cancel each other out. Thus, from the perspective of incommensurable paradigms, the »inclusivist« Rome (or, at worst, exclusivist) will always have problems with Asian theologians whom it suspects to be flirting with pluralism. But if we want this Church to move to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this situation cannot continue. There is a need to look for alternatives. Dupuis has courageously attempted to venture on one.

Even as his work is necessary, Dupuis's elucidation of his position is only accessible to theologians, to the experts who have the necessary academic background to agree or counter his positions on the Trinity, Christology, pneumatology and ecclesiology – all »big words« inaccessible to the ordinary Christian. And since these positions are often misunderstood even by the experts themselves who do not agree most often, the project of interreligious dialogue usually ends in an impasse, as it often does today. If interreligious dialogue is mainly done »from above«, like the classical »top down« economy, the benevolent effects do not usually trickle down. What trickles down in fact are the conflicts and confused positions of the experts as they are fanatically digested by avid loyalists and fervent supporters.

What comes to mind is the *tabligh* that one day arrived in that local island community. Left to themselves, people in the »rough grounds« know what respect and solidarity is all about. Despite their differences in religion (Islam and Christianity) and cultural backgrounds (Muslim islanders and Visayan settlers), they learn to live together and respect their diversity. It was only the *tabligh* – someone from outside, someone from above – that complicated their lives. If we are going to survey most of the religious and cultural conflicts happening around us, it is because there were people, dogmas, decrees, exhortations which come from nowhere that unduly influenced, manipulate or incite the local community. Most often, these hegemonic ideas are imposed on the grassroots without their wanting to or without full knowledge of their consequences. It was fortunate that the local island community was courageous enough to say no to the *tabligh's* impositions. They had the courage to expel him. I think the Christians in that community would have the courage to throw me out of the island, if I acted in the same way.

That makes Felix Wilfred's framework closer to my position. »Reverse universality«, he argues, refers to acts of solidarity in local communities. My only apprehension with Wilfred's proposal is its starting point. His framework starts with a centrifugal force – a movement towards the outside, the universal destiny of all religions. Only then in a second move does he think of »reverse universality« – the appropriation of that universal religion in local contexts. For me, such a cosmopolitan and panoramic outlook still smacks of imperialism and colonialism; this time with a reverse movement which can also be construed as »counter imperialism« – as expressed in a post-colonial movement of formerly colonized peoples writing back (Ascroft and Tiffin 1989). In my mind, such a cosmopolitan view is not necessary. The locus and point of action and analysis are not the cosmopo-

lis but the local grassroots community itself. Of course, it receives different voices from outside brought by the media, missionaries, business, cultural trends, etc. All of these are hegemonic and universalizing. It has been always like that since the dawn of human communities. What is crucial is to uphold the autonomy of the local grassroots communities where all these forces intersect. It is these communities that need to decide what to take in and what to reject, what to keep and what to expel, what helps and what destroys. All these discourses and initiatives from outside can only be arbitrated in the rough grounds of the people's praxis.

## 4.2 The rough grounds

My proposal is quite simple: interreligious dialogue should primarily happen **M**at the grassroots. Religious discourses should be brought back to the »rough grounds«. <sup>12</sup> Religion is not a separate sphere merely composed of abstract doctrines and esoteric beliefs. It is a way of life. And like all ways of life, it is lived everyday together with economic struggles, political relations and other cultural practices. Only religion existing in the abstract – in documents, dogmas and decrees – can become fundamentalist. When it strikes the rough grounds, it could not but negotiate, adjust, accommodate, respect, dialogue. <sup>13</sup> There is no other way – that is, if people want to survive.

Even as Wittgenstein speaks from another context, I appropriated his »rough ground« discourse to advance my proposal here: »We have got on to slippery ice when there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk: so we need friction. Back to the rough ground« (Wittgenstein 1958, § 107). Most often, religious discourses (and religious practitioners) live in frictionless ideal worlds. The missionaries come and go. Their lives are not intimately connected with the communities on the ground. These leisurely contexts allow them to play, as it were, to imagine, invent, dream

<sup>12</sup> For this framework, see my work on theological methodology Daniel Franklin Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu* (Leuven: Peeters and Leuven University Press, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> There is a need for us to answer a typically postmodern question. How can dialogue be possible when »language games are incommensurable«. Language games, but also cultures and religions – all »forms of life« – do not and could not communicate among themselves. They are seen to be islands unto themselves. »There is no unity to language,« says Lyotard (1993, 20), »there are islands of language, each of them ruled by a different regime, untranslatable into the others.« Such plurality, in the mind of postmoderns, is good news in order to prevent the hegemonic dominance of one discourse, one culture, one language game over others. So far, so good! But it is the incommensurable language games that also inspire Samuel Huntington's idea of the »clash of civilizations«. According to him, in the post-Cold War era, the source of conflict is not so much politics and economy but cultures and religions. Different civilizations and religions (Western, Buddhist, Islam, Sinic, Hindu, African, etc.) will continue to clash as they are incommensurable language games – a glaring example of which is the 9/11 event. But are religions and cultures really locked up in permanent conflict? Edward Said criticizes Huntington as an ideologist, »someone who wants to make 'civilizations' and 'identities' into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and counter-currents that animate human history.« See Edward Said (s.a.). True, there have been conflicts fuelled by imperial aggression but also lively cross-fertilization. In the first place, there are no monolithic civilizations and religions. These are all plural discourses in constant exchange, sometimes in some forceful manner, others times, cooperating, but always negotiating, sharing and influencing each other.

with concepts and words without life and death consequences in actual lives. But it is also because of this social location that their ideas do not work. We need to be immersed in the friction of real life to be able to move. Religions: back to the rough grounds.

This is what I would like to say: it is only the »local community« that is the main agent of interreligious dialogue. The Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences is clear on this: »An authentic dialogue with other religious traditions is the task of a local Church, fully involved in the life and struggles of the people, especially the poor« (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences 1990, 82). I would even go further than that. It is not the local Church considered as diocese or parish – but each grassroots community whose different lives, cultures and religious traditions are so deeply intertwined in their common search for human well-being. I am referring here to what a philosopher – Raymond Williams – call »knowable communities« or »placeable social identities«: »places where we have lived and want to go on living, where generations not only of economic but also of social effort and human care have been invested, and which generations will inherit« (Williams 1989, 124).<sup>14</sup> It is the common commitment of these communities to live fuller lives »that they discover their complementarity and the urgency and relevance of dialogue at all levels« (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences 1990, 82).

### 4.3 The »Third Magisterium« and the »Discipleship of Equals«

I am not alone in this proposal. Aloysius Pieris (1993; 2005) also talks about the I»third magisterium«. The first magisterium refers to the hierarchy; the second are the Western theologians and scholars; the third are the »basic human communities« or what I call the »rough grounds«. The first and second magisterium have long been interacting with each other; most often, they clash as seen in several disciplinary action on theologians in the recent past. But, as we have shown above, most of these discussions lead to a hopeless impasse. Pieris thus argues for a »third magisterium« as a hope out of this stalemate. In these communities, interreligious dialogue is not even the main concern; it is the survival of their children, of their families, of their local community. And in the context of survival, the concerns of religion – Jesus, Allah, Buddha, Mohammed, the Bible, Koran, Bhagavad-Gita is shared and talked about, is interpreted and re-interpreted, is lived and acted upon. These grassroots communities serve as the new *locus theologicus*. »These locations may be places of study combined with practice, of places where symbiosis occurs and theologians can also get to work. Talk and action within this third magisterium seem to me to constitute the most challenging instance of renewed discourse about the divine at the present time« (Troch 2007, 78).

<sup>14</sup> It is parallel to Stuart Hall's (1991, 35–36) insistence of 'ethnicity': that »face-to-face communities that are knowable, that are locatable, one can give them a place. One knows what the voices are. One knows what the faces are... Ethnicity is the necessary place or space from which people speak... [Speaking] cannot be unplaced, it cannot be unpositioned, it is always positioned in a discourse. It is when a discourse forgets that it is placed that it tries to speak everybody else.«

Another contemporary theologian who has a parallel intuition is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza with her model on the Kingdom of God as a »discipleship of equals« (1983, 140–154; 1993). Reinterpreting the experience of the early followers of Jesus, Fiorenza sees it as a movement of »solidarity from below« where women, children, slaves, farmers – all marginals take an active and primary role. In these rough grounds, borders of gender, religions, social status are transgressed engendering a real discipleship of equals. It is in a *koinōnia* free from sexism, classism, casteism, racism, clericalism and all forms of prejudices against the other and the marginalized. In short, it is in these rough grounds that consensual fellowship and ministry is to be incarnated. And, if there are still structures of dominance in present social and religious arrangements, it is these same communities which shall confront, resolve and work together towards justice and equality.

## 5. In search of a metaphor: paths or wells?

To give an image to what I have been talking about, let me compare two dominant metaphors for interreligious dialogue. The most common metaphor is that of a »path«. Many paths, one end! Many religions, one God! Even as the image of path is liberating, it still betrays the individualistic approach to the Divine. After all, paths, roads and highways, even as they intersect and meet somewhere, remain solitary spaces of one's journey reminiscent of »incommensurable language games«. Let me suggest another metaphor – that of the »village well«. In most of our poor rural villages, people do not have individual wells. There is just one single well for the whole community. It is here that all people meet to fetch water. From their different family concerns, different religious longings, different occupations, it is here that their lives interact each day. This well is the common source of their existence. It is here that they share stories, solve problems, talk about their lives. It is here that solidarity becomes alive. And if they share deep enough, beyond their distance and differences, they will find the well-spring of life. Jesus and the Samaritan woman knew this too well!

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