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TOWARDS A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

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Introduction

From the time of St. Augustine the general teaching of the Catholic Theology is that creatures are a “trace of the Trinity” (*Vestigium Trinitatis*), and the rational creatures are an “image of the Trinity” (*Imago Trinitatis*), and those endowed with saving grace a likeness (*Similitudo*) of the Trinity. We can apply this theology with respect to the non-Christians. The Mystery of the Blessed Trinity is known only from divine Revelation. Yet are there hints of it to be found in the field of philosophical experience without faith? That it can be recommended to reason is shown by the treatise on the Trinity in Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Also analogies can be found from outside explicitly Christian theology. It cannot be proved however from creation.

Appropriation means attributing a perfection to one Divine Person to the exclusion of the other two Persons, though the perfection is common to the three Divine Persons. The reason is that this perfection is more in accordance to the mode of being of that Person, distinct from that of other Persons.

In the order of creation. We know that Power, Wisdom and Goodness are common to three Divine Persons but we attribute them to the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. There is question here of a simple appropriation. Augustine appropriates Power to the Father, Wisdom to the Son, and Goodness to the Holy Spirit, relying on the Scripture which calls the Christ “the Wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1.25)¹.

¹ *De Doctrina Christi*: 1.5.5.

St. Augustine writes of a trace of the Trinity being discoverable in every creature, for each is a definite thing shaped to a meaning and holding within itself a bearing on others².

We can resume the economy or dispensation of the universal divine Providence according to St. Augustine as follows. The starting point for following the true religion is the record and the foretelling of the temporal dispensation of divine providence in its work of reforming and restoring the human race to make it fit for its eternal destiny. Believing in this revelation, a way of life in accordance with the divine commands will purify the mind and enable it to perceive spiritual things. These remain the same in every age: the one God, the Father himself, the Son and the Holy Spirit. With a knowledge of this Trinity, we can see certainly that every intellectual, animate and corporeal creature has its existence, its proper nature and its perfectly ordered career, from the creative power of the same Trinity. At the same time each and every nature has been made by the Father through the Son and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. For every thing, every nature has these three perfections at once: it exists as a single something; its own nature sets it off from other beings; and it does not deviate from the universal order of things³.

St. Augustine says: "One and the same religion has been outwardly expressed and practised under one set of names and signs in times past, and another set at present; it was more hidden then and more open now; it had fewer worshippers in olden times, more later on, yet it is one and the same true religion"⁴. A little further on in the same letter, St. Augustine had compared that phenomenon of a "reality" (*res ipsa*), identically the same under different religious signs, with the phenomenon of languages. The same truths are uttered by means of different sounds and word combinations. He concluded his comparison: "The saving grace of this religion, the only true one, through which alone true salvation is truly promised, has never been refused to any one who was worthy of it; and whoever lacked it was unworthy of it"⁵. "The reality" existed from the

² *De Trinitate* VI. 10 (PL 42.932).

³ Cfr. *The True Religion*, 7.13-8.14, St. Louis University, 1945, pp. 37-41.

⁴ ST. AUGUSTINE, *Epistola 102 ad Deo Gratias presbyterum*, 2, n. 12.

⁵ *Ibid.* 2, n. 5.

beginning of mankind, and was ordained to Christ. In Christ, then, became manifest what was previously hidden, though it had never ceased to be real.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, it is to be held that God is the first exemplary cause of all things. For a thing to be produced an exemplar is required so that it may achieve a determined form which serves as a model, conceived in his mind. The determinate forms of nature have their original source in divine Wisdom which contrived the world order which consists of distinct things. The divine Wisdom holds the originals of things created, which are called ideas or the exemplar forms existing in the divine mind⁶. By one and the same act God comprehends his essence in itself and as variously 'imitable' (*participabilis*) by creatures each after its own fashion, and so is to know with the 'idea' proper to each⁷. This philosophy is taken into the dimension of the theology of Revelation on the uncreated Word and the image of the Father⁸. The Logos expresses the Father, and both expresses and make each creature.

An effect somehow copies its cause but variously. Some represent the causality alone of the cause, not its form. (Smoke and fire). This is called a likeness of trace; for a trace or footprint shows that somebody has passed that way, but not what manner of person he was. Some effects represent their cause in the likeness of its form; e.g. a fire flame and the fire that sets it alight; this is the likeness of image. We consider the comings forth of the divine Persons after the model of understanding and willing. The Son issues as the Logos of mind, and the Holy Ghost as the Love of will. So that in rational creatures, endowed with mind and will, we find a likeness of the Trinity in the manner of an image when they conceive an idea and love springs from it.

In all creatures there is a likeness of the Trinity by way of trace in that there is something in all of them that has to be taken back to the divine Persons as its cause. For each created thing subsists in its own existence, has a form which makes it the kind of thing it is, and bears on something

⁶ S. TH., I.44.3.

⁷ S. TH., I.14.6 & 15.2-3.

⁸ S. TH., I.34.3;35.1.

other than itself. Because it is a definite and created substance it tells of its principle and cause and so indicates the Person of the Father, who is the beginning from no beginning. Because it has a certain form and species it tells of the Logos, for form in a work of art is from the artist's conception. Because it goes out from itself it tells of the Holy Ghost as Love, for wanting another comes from the will of him who created it so. Another triad, indicated by St. Augustine is: that which a thing consists in, makes it distinct, and answers to it. For it consists in its substance, is distinctive through from, and fits in by its ordered setting⁹. Creatures are like divine footprints and bear a representation of trace (*Vestigium*). Rational creatures, however, can reflect God by knowledge and love, and are said to bear a representation of image (*Imago*).

Since man is said to be after God's image in virtue of his intelligent nature, he is most completely God's image in as far as he has an intelligent nature which imitates God's understanding and loving of himself. God's image can be considered in man in three stages: (1) Man's natural appetite for understanding and loving God, an aptitude which consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. (2) The next stage is where a man is actually or dispositively, i.e., when he has the disposition or aptitude (*habitus*) of one who knows and loves God, but is not actually exercising this disposition, knowing and loving God, but is still imperfectly; and here we have the image by conformity of grace. (3) A man is actually knowing and loving God perfectly; the image by likeness of glory. A threefold image is had: the image of creation, of re-creation, and of likeness. The first stage is found in all men; the second only in the just; the third in the blessed¹⁰.

Being in God's image in the sense of imitating the divine nature does not exclude being in God's image in the sense of representing the three Persons; indeed one follows on the other. Hence we must say that God's image is in man with reference to both the divine nature and the Trinity of Persons; for after all God is actually one nature in three Persons. God's image in man does not perfectly represent God. There is the greatest difference between the Trinity that can be discerned in man and the

⁹ S. TH., I.45.7.

¹⁰ S. TH., I.93.4.

divine Trinity. The Trinity in ourselves we see rather than believe. But God is a Trinity we believe rather than see. Since the Son is like the Father in virtue of the essential equality of being between them, it follows that man was made after the Son; he was also made after the likeness of the Father. "Let *us* make man after our image and likeness"¹¹.

The divine processions are distinguished from each other in terms of the procession of the word from its utterer and of the love which connects them both. But there can be no word in our souls without actual thinking. And so an image of the Trinity is to be looked for in the mind first and foremost in terms of activity, in so far as out of the awareness we have we form an internal word by thinking, and from this burst out into actual love. Because the source of activities lies in attitudes and powers, and everything exists virtually in its source, we can go on in the second place, as a sort of consequence to look for the image of the Trinity in the soul in terms of powers and especially attitudes, in so far as activities already exist virtually in them.

Footprints of the Trinity in Creation

Traces or footprints of the Trinity in creation indicates how the reality which is under all the visible realities of experience is subject to a Trinitarian structural mode. Every visible and experimental is nothing but the representation created by God of the divine Being itself. From this therefore God is transparent. Even if by sin it is veiled or corrupted, it remains nonetheless true that the world is in some way an epiphany of God. Hence in all the created reality occurs as a fundamental reality the three. The believing eye or the eye of him who through Christ has acquired the sight, sees therefore everywhere in creation, more or less intensively the traces and signs of the Trinitarian existence of God. These are only traces in which man sees the imprint of God, analogically as the hunter recognizes from the shade in the bush which species of animal has passed in that point. At other times the images of the divine Trinity is reflected precisely as the human face in a mirror. A psychologist can see

¹¹ S. TH., I.93.5.

the image of the triune God in the triad of knowing, willing and loving or in the triad of memory, reason and will.

The Trinity of the divine life clears the motive by which in all religions recur ternary groups of the Divinity. This does not mean that the Christian Trinity is one of the so many divine triads, the belief of which is common. But such beliefs derive from the Trinity of the divine reality. But between the Christian Trinity and the triads of other religions there is a world of difference. The trinity of other religions refer to either tri-theism or pantheism or panentheism, or absolute monism underlying the Trinitarian concepts.

In theogony the various types and ranks of the gods are brought together in affinity, the simplest being perhaps that of the Triad: Father, Mother and Child. This existed in ancient Egypt: Osiris, Isis, Horus.

In Taoism, Lao-tze was proclaimed as the Great Sage Ancestor (in 713-42 A.D.). At a later stage he was made a member of the Taoist Trinity. The second member is a metaphysical principle named Pan.ku (the Demiurge). The third member of the Taoist Trinity is another historic personage, 'The Pearly Emperor' who was apotheosised in 1116 A.D.¹².

The Mahayana Buddhism sees in Buddha not simply a teacher who passed into Nirvana at his death but a true divine Saviour. He was pre-existent, planfully incarnate, supernaturally conceived, and miraculously born¹³. Though he was sinless, yet he was suffering inexplicably¹⁴. He entered the world with a redemptive purpose (SBE 21:40,46). He was All-knowing and All-seeing¹⁵. He was the Saviour of gods and men¹⁶. He is everlasting¹⁷. Not only Buddha was deified but was made a member of the Buddhist Trinity. The historical Buddha becomes the God-man, and then the godhead itself. This godhead (the Buddha) has three aspects (bodies): the Dharma-body, the Body of bliss, and the construct Body. The Dharma-Body is the Buddha seen as Absolute, transcendent,

¹² Cfr. R.E. HUME, *The World's Living Religions*, Scribners, New York 1949, pp. 132f.

¹³ WARREN, *Buddhist Texts*, 42-46.

¹⁴ SBE 35:178. (SBE: *Sacred Books of the East*, edited by F. Max Müller, Oxford 1879-1910.

¹⁵ SBE 21:44,118,121.

¹⁶ SBE 21:120.

¹⁷ SBE 21:302.

omnipotent, omniscient, infinite and eternal. The construct Body is the Buddha incarnate in Gautama and all the other Buddhas that appear on the earth at different times. The Body of bliss in the Glorious body in which the Buddhas manifest themselves to devotees.

The Hindu Trinity

1. *The origin*: Theories of emanation from a permanent and universal essence adapted themselves readily to the time-scheme of the evolution, maintenance, and the dissolution of the world. The Supreme Self, the only really existing Essence, delights in infinite expansion, in infinite manifestations of itself, in infinite creation, dissolution, and re-creation through infinite varieties and diversities of operation. The first and highest manifestations of the eternal Essence is the tri-murti (triple form), one God in three forms, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, a trinity in which Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Siva the destroyer.

2. *The doctrine*: Of these Holy Three each is in turn described as infinite, eternal, self-existent, absolute. In the economy of the universe they have their own shares, yet each is apparently capable of discharging the functions of the others, and in solitary majesty conducting the whole process of the work alone.

“In those three Persons the one God was shown,
Each first in place, each best, – not one alone;
Of Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, each may be
First, second, third, among the Blessed Three”¹⁸.

The Samkhya philosophy provides a suggestive application of the sacred number: “Reverence to Thee in the Triple form, who before creation was one complete Self, and afterwards didst undergo division into the Three Strands” (Ibid. 2.4).

The Triad is also proposed in another form: Saccidananda (Being-Consciousness-Bliss). Three characteristics are ascribed to the Supreme

¹⁸ *The Kumara Sambhava* 7.44.

who possesses Being, Knowledge and Bliss or joy. As the Real of the real, he of course *is*, and can be designated Being. The very essence of his being is knowledge and includes all understanding. Negatively his Bliss consists in freedom from mutations and the world of birth and suffering and death. Positively, the divine bliss is symbolically expressed thus: love is the divine Being's head, joy its right side, and bliss its trunk.

3. *Comparison with the Christian Trinity*: The Hindu Trinity is founded exclusively on the functional relationships between the Deity and the world and would approach what Catholic theologians call 'appropriations' if these could be disassociated from the fundamental Trinitarian mystery. Christian Trinity is the mystery of the most intimate Life of the living God, of the immanent Processions of the Word and of the Spirit, and of the Missions of the Son and of the Paraclete in the History of Salvation. On the other hand, the Hindu Trinity does not present itself as an inner 'unfolding' of the unique God; it is constituted by the synthesis, on the same plane, of the divine figures which at first had their own independent mythical formation, and in spite of their equality in theory, are far from reaching in practice the same degree of personal intensity and religious signification.

The Trinity and Divinization through Divine Grace

In the history of revelation and salvation there is a particular intervention, a presence proper to only one Divine Person to the exclusion of the other two Persons. For instance the incarnation is proper to the Son to the exclusion of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Thus redemption to the Son, sanctification to the Holy Spirit and recreation to the Father are attributed in the supernatural order of revelation and salvation. Jesus said: "It is good for you that I go away, for if I do not go, the Consoler will not come to you... when that Spirit of Truth has come, he will teach you all Truth" (Jn 16.7-13). "He (the Holy Spirit) will teach you all things and remind you of all that I have said to you" (Jn 16.26). "He will bear witness on my behalf and you too will be witnesses for me" (Jn 15.27). Jesus presents the temporal mission of the Holy Spirit as being absolutely analogous to his own Mission.

Vatican II: (LG 3-4): “The Son came on a mission from the Father... When the work which the Father had given the Son to do... was accomplished the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost to sanctify the Church forever”. A perfect analogy between the two Missions. When a Divine Person is sent by another Divine Person it begins to be in a place in a new way through the will of the Person who sends. This mode of presence is different from the previous presence of the Divine Person. Cfr. the Holy Spirit before and after Pentecost; Christ before and after Incarnation. A new relation to the creature? No, for the Divine Persons are immutable as the Divine Nature. Hence not because of any change in the Divine Persons but because of the change that occurs in the creatures. This change in the creature can consist only in a special grace, which in a particular way makes that creature resemble the Divine Person who ‘is sent’ and who is said to come in the creature. Through an operation common to the three Divine Persons, the human nature assumed by the Word began to subsist truly in and by the Person of the Word, Son of God, and Mary became truly the Mother of God.

The whole change took place in the creature, which affects the creature alone; thus St. John: “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1.14). Jesus is son of Mary although there exists in the Word only the eternal filiation. Hence the relation of filiation of Jesus to Mary is only *relatio rationis*, which has as its foundation the divine maternity which is truly real in Mary. The new modes of being attributed to the Person of the Word in virtue of incarnation are not a mere appropriation; for it would be heretical to attribute these new modes to other Persons, Father and Holy Spirit. In simple appropriation the qualities especially attributed to one Person, such as Power, Wisdom, Goodness, or creation must likewise be attributed to other two Persons. Thus in an operation common to three Divine Persons can result in a creature in the latter’s special relationship to one Divine Person which it has not at least in an identical way with respect to other two Persons.

The Mission of the Spirit in the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination receive special grace and special relationship to the Holy Spirit, to the exclusion of the other two Persons.

In what does that particular assimilation to the Holy Spirit consist? The soul is assimilated to the Holy Spirit according to the gift of Charity.

The Holy Spirit is at the same time the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son, the love of the Father and the love of the Son, the love of the Father for the Son, and the love of the Son for the Father, as also the love of the One and the Other for each one of us. The sacraments establish us in Christ as members of his mystical Body, as witnesses of his divinity and as members of his priesthood. Each Divine Person in the Holy Trinity is an *other* Person, but they are not another Being, another God. Thus when we speak of the Holy Spirit we cannot leave entirely the other Two Persons, for the Holy Spirit as a Person is essentially relative, i.e., wholly and essentially directed to the Father and the Son.

The Father is not only the one who has the fatherhood but is subsistent Fatherhood, wholly directed towards the Son; so also the Son not only has filiation but is subsistent filiation, wholly directed to the Father. Every true relationship of the creature to one divine Person necessarily brings with it in that same creature a real different relationship to other two Persons. The Holy Spirit is the *way* that leads to the Son, as the Son himself is the way to the Father in the Trinity. For it is not only in as much as he is man that the Son is the way to the Father. Jn 11.5; 14.6: No one comes to the Father but through me. He is also the Way to the Father in as much as he is the Son. For it is only through participation in the Divine Filiation, which belongs properly to the Son and belongs to him and constitutes him as such that we can become children of the Father. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Sons of adoption (Rom 8.11). Christ and the Spirit are not only mere mediators but constitute one and the same God with the Father.

The Mystery of Christ and the relationship to the Three Divine Persons

1. *Monotheism ought to be Christocentric.* The Apostles were perturbed by the predictions of Christ's betrayal and departure and of Peter's denial. Jesus wanted to strengthen their faith. Hence he said to them: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still and trust in me" (Jn 14.1). Christ refers monotheism to himself: "You believe in God. Believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house; I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me, so that where I am you may

be too. You know the way to the place where I am going. Thomas said: "Lord we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way?". Jesus said: "I am the way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him. Philip said: "Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied... Jesus said to him: ...To have seen me is to have seen the Father... I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn 14.1-10).

When Jesus designated himself as Christ, Son of the Father, or Son of Man his purpose was to instigate his hearers to interrogate on his identity. The pedagogy of Christ consisted in revealing himself in attitudes, words, in acts which for him had the value of "signs" and then to ask them who were around him: "Who do people say that I am?" (Mt 16.13-15; Mk 8.27-29; Lk 9.18.20). It pertains us to seek to penetrate his mystery by grasping, if possible, the reality of his being. Now we see him manifesting himself continually in relation with God whom he calls his Father. In this he shows himself to be profoundly religious to the point that the whole of his life appears as a perfect act of religion. It is on this religious attitude of Christ with regard to his Father the Christian religion is established. For Christians Christ is the foundation and ideal of religion. But the encounter with various religions obliges us to affront once again the problem of Christ and of religion.

For monotheistic religions there exists only God and all that is manifested in the universe is the expression of his power, of his presence and of his love. At the end monotheism renders account, better than any other system, of the fundamental experience of man before the divine, on condition that this monotheism accepts at the same time the immanence of God in everything with his presence and power.

It is in this monotheistic current that Christ is manifested. Different from many founders of religions, he is not presented as an inspired simple announcer of the Word or the indicator of life. He invites his hearers to pay attention to that which he is, beyond that which he says and does. Little by little he himself as man takes consciousness of a relation with that God whom he calls his Father, and makes us to penetrate into the essence of his own being which is religion, i.e., substantial link of man with his God. He is presented as one who came from God and had with

him an absolutely special relation, a relation of son to the father. He realized in himself the relation of man with God. On this point he has not made any dogmatic declaration. But those who had known him and meditated on the meaning of his acts and words, had recognized that he came from the Father. They came to the conclusion that with his very being he was the perfect link, the absolute relation of man with God.

The consciousness which Christ had of this relation constituted the absolute act of religion. He is in fact all man and all God. He is therefore the two terms of the act of religion and that act itself. In confront, all other religions are insufficient, either because they are too much rooted in their human aspect or because they are so much concentrated on the divine that the human pole loses its value. It is a false notion of Christocentrism of Christianity. For many Christ is the ultimate of their religious journey (itinerary). Christ always reports us to the Father and orientates us to him. When Christ has become truly the centre of our life he leads us to the Father and this makes us know him. In this act of return to the Father, Christ makes us to do in him and with him the perfect act of religion.

2. *The actual lordship of Christ.* Liberating Jesus from death, God has exalted him to the point of making him sit at his right hand (cfr Rom 8.34; Col 3.1; 1 Peter 3.22; Heb 1.3.13; Acts 2.33-34; 5.31 etc). The spatial language is symbolic and leads to the ontological language. It means that the resurrection is the act by means of which God confirms definitively the filial relationship of Jesus with Him. A relationship between "equals" by which Jesus is God as the Father is God; in his identity of the glorified Son He can do all that which is proper to God, because he lives in a full and perfect communion with the Father.

The salvific mediation of the risen Lord excludes whatever reductive consideration of him as a simple "intermediary", because as true God and true man he stands completely from the part of God and from the part of man.

Above all we have to take into account the "primacy" of Christ in the order of creation and that of redemption. He who has completely and definitively conquered in him the death, and as the Risen gives life by means of the Holy Spirit (or giving the Holy Spirit), is the "first" and

“promoter” of new humanity and new creation, which are so oriented and gone through towards the eschatological fulfilment of their new condition. There is only one mediator of creation and one sole mediator of redemption, the Christ. Everything is given in him absolutely and his mediation embraces all (time and place). No created reality however elevated can equal him. If Christ were a mediator of redemption without being mediator of creation, or inversely, we would not have received all in him and would be obliged to venerate other beings on whom we would depend and be reconciled. There is an essential link between Christology and soteriology.

3. *Absolute centrality of Christ.* Christ being together the mystery which reveals and the mystery which is revealed, the mediator and the fullness of revelation (*Dei Verbum* 2 & 4) occupies in the Christian faith an absolutely unique place. This distinguishes Christianity from other religions, including Judaism. Christianity is the only religion in which revelation is incarnate in one Person who is presented as the living and absolute Truth. Other religions have their founders, but no one of them (Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, Muhammed) is proposed as the object of faith of their followers. To believe in Christ is to believe in God. Christ is not only a simple founder of religion; he is immanent in history and absolutely transcendent, as the unique Other. If Christ is held with us as the incarnate Word, the signs which permit to identify him as such are not exterior to him, in the manner of a passport, or a certificate of an ambassador, but they emanate from the personal centre of irradiation which is Christ. This is so because he is in person, in his internal being, Light and the fountain of light; Jesus gives signs, proclaims a message, introduces in the world a quality of life and love, which is never seen and never imagined, but lived, and this raises the question of his true identity. In fact the message, works and behaviour of Jesus are of another order; they manifest in our world the presence of the wholly Other. In reality he is transcendent and unique. Jesus is the sign that all other signs are directed towards him. This precisely is the mystery of the Christian revelation.

The essential nucleus of Christianity is Jesus of Nazareth, in its concrete existence, in its works and in its destiny. Christianity affirms that by

the incarnation of the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, by the mystery of faith and of grace, the whole creation ought to be submitted to the Lordship of the concrete Person of Jesus Christ and make of it the proper norm which is decisive. Christianity is concentrated in one living Person, concrete and existential, the Son of God made man, to save the world and with him we have to be united personally in faith and in love. Christ Redeemer is the centre of Christianity.

Different from other religions, Christianity has as foundation the revelation of God which is placed in historical forms. It was God himself to place it in history, human and actual. The whole Christianity is pervaded by one historical personality who is Christ. To be Christian signifies to have relationship with Christ in faith; i.e., dedication of oneself to God, who in Jesus Christ is made present in the history of humanity. Christ gives an interpretation of existence but also wishes to be himself the fulfilment of existence, which is different in other religions. Christ is within history the point in which man encounters himself. The domain of this love which is God is called the Kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit is present and active in creation, in the history of salvation of the holy people of God, operates the incarnation in the virgin Mary, acts on Jesus at baptism in Jordan, in his public life, in the transfiguration, resurrection, Pentecost, is given by the Father and the Son to the whole Church.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the non-Christian religions. The work of the Holy Spirit precedes the work of redemption, come once for all at the incarnation, death and resurrection and with the gift of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit operates a long preparation in the world. It refills the earth, renovates the earth, directs to its ends the course and the events of time, is present and directs this evolution (GS 26). In the apostolic action it stimulates in man the religious problem (GS 41); it stands present in the hearts of non-Christians (AG 13).

Universal plan of God for the salvation of men, is realized also by the religious acts (also religious incepts) with which they seek God truly (AG 17).

Undoubtedly the Holy Spirit already operated in the world before Christ was glorified (AG 4). The Holy Spirit calls all men to Christ across the seeds of the Word and the preaching of the Gospel (AG 15).

The Trinity and other Religions after the Vatican II

Christ offers to man through his Spirit the light and the forces necessary to respond to his supreme vocation (GS 10). The Church believes to be guided by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole earth. Moved by this faith it seeks to discover the true signs of the presence and design of God in events, in needs and in desires with which it agrees with the men of our time (GS 11). The Church knows that man under the influence of the Spirit of God will never be indifferent to the religious problem... Man seeks always to know, at least confusedly, what sense have his life, his work, his death. The Spirit stands at the root of the religious quest of man (GS 41).

Seeds of the Word present and operating in other religions (NA 2, AG 11, LG 17). Every search of the human spirit in the direction of truth and goodness, and in the ultimate analysis of God, is provoked by the Holy Spirit. Precisely from this primordial openness of man towards God are born these religions. The approach of the Church towards the religions consists in sincere respect and profound sympathy and cordial collaboration. This does not imply that the Church forgets that Jesus Christ is the unique Mediator and Saviour of the humankind. Through diverse ways the most profound aspirations of the human spirit are turned in the unique direction, which is expressed in the search of God and in the search by means of the tension towards God of the full dimension of the humanity, of the full sense or meaning of human life. "With regard to religion, what is dealt with is in the first place religion as a universal phenomenon linked with man's history from the beginning, then the various non-Christian religions, in particular the Church, is filled with deep esteem for the great spiritual values, indeed for the primacy of the spiritual, which in the life of mankind finds expression in religion and then in morality, with direct effects on the whole of culture. The Fathers of the Church rightly saw in the various religions as it were so many reflections of the one truth, "Seeds of the Word", attesting that, though the roots taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending toward God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life" (RH 11).

The seeds of the Word in diverse religions are a reflection of the unique Word of God who illumines every man (Jn 1.9) and who is made

flesh in Jesus Christ (Jn 1.14). These are together “the effect of the Spirit of truth operating beyond the visible confines (borders) of the Mystical Body and who blows where he wishes (Jn 3.8; RH 6&12). Hence the inter-religious dialogue is necessary¹⁹. The founders of various religions have realized with the help of the Holy Spirit a more profound religious experience. Transmitted to others, such experience has taken the form of doctrines, rites and precepts of various religions. We can say that every authentic prayer, because of its constitutive openness of the human spirit to the action with which God solicits to transcend oneself, we can retain that every authentic prayer is provoked by the Holy Spirit which is mysteriously present in the heart of every man both²⁰.

Not only in prayer the Holy Spirit is present in other religions; the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in other religions touches both the individuals and the society, history, peoples, cultures, religions. The members of other religions respond positively to the invitation of God and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, also if they do not recognize Christ as the unique Saviour (AG 3, 9, 11; Dialogo e Annuncio 29; GS 22). The Spirit gives to all the possibility of coming into contact with the Paschal Mystery. This possibility is realized by means of intimate and sincere adhesion to Truth, the generous gift of oneself to the neighbour, the search of the Absolute provoked by the Holy Spirit of God. Also across the actuations, precepts and practices, conformable to the moral law and the authentic religious sense is manifested the ray of the divine wisdom. Properly in force of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit the elements of good at the core of religions disposed mysteriously the heart to receive the revelation full of God in Christ. Hence, respect, sympathy, collaboration with other religious members²¹.

¹⁹ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, n. 53.

²⁰ “Allocution to the Members of the Roman Curia by Pope John Paul II”, 22 Dec. 1986; cfr. also the “World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi”, 22 Oct. 1986.

²¹ See: “The Catechesis of John Paul II”, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 Sept. 1988.

The relationship between the Old and New Economy of salvation

There is a profound difference between the Old Testament economy of salvation and the New Testament economy of salvation, issuing from the incarnation of the Son of God. The problem has been treated in the Catholic Church from the perspective of the theology of grace.

According to several of the Greek Fathers of the Church there were divine (supernatural) gifts under the Old Testament Dispensation but they were only a preparation for the gift of Christ. In other words they were gifts like power, prophecy and miracles which were not a substantial and personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit; they had a specific active purpose of preparing for Christ, different from the general active purpose as found in non-Christian religions. Since the incarnation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which followed the death and resurrection of Christ, the Lord not only gives his gifts but gives himself to us. The Person of the Holy Spirit is not only revealed but is given; it dwells substantially in the faithful who form the Church. Some theologians make a further precision, by distinguishing between created and uncreated grace. The created grace is the inner, supernatural quality which enables to act supernaturally and to produce meritorious acts, as in the case of the just in the Old Testament; and the uncreated grace is the Person of the Holy Spirit who is the formal cause of our status as sons of God²².

The Latin Fathers (St. Augustine, St. Leo), followed by St. Thomas Aquinas, held that those who lived before Christ could be justified by implicit faith in the Saviour who was to come. St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas say that by faith and grace, the just of the Old Testament belonged to the times of the Gospel. As individuals they were freed from the collective system of the Law which did not justify those who observed it; but they became the temples of the Holy Spirit.

For St. Thomas Aquinas, the grace of the just in the Old Testament was the grace of Christ with its fruits such as the divine sonship and God's indwelling, but this grace was unable to bear its ultimate fruit which is spiritual and bodily glory, because the passion of Christ had not

²² Cfr. Y. CONGAR, *The mystery of the Temple*, Burns & Oates, London 1962, p. 277.

taken place²³. There is the intrinsic qualitative difference between the grace of the just in the Old Testament and the grace which follows the incarnation, Easter and the Pentecost²⁴. We can summarize our conclusion as follows: Israel was God's People but not the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit exercised various functions within it, but he dwells only in the Body of Christ whose soul He is. The Father and the Son perform the works *ad extra*, attributed (appropriated) to the Holy Spirit, for all is common to the three Divine Persons, except that by which the first Person is the Father, the second the Son, and the third the Holy Spirit, and hence according to the order in which the three divine Persons exist, since this order derives from the relations which make them what they are as Persons.

It is legitimate to appropriate some essential attribute to one Person, without excluding others, because there is some similarity between the attribute or act and the personal character, and hence may suggest the special characteristic of each Person. Hence there is not only the appropriation of the essential attributes such as Power, Wisdom, Goodness, but also the appropriation of the *ad extra* acts which make the history of salvation. The order of the Missions in the economy is based on the order of the Processions and reveals it. Mgr Journet says: "The Spirit proceeds in eternity as God; but he proceeds also in time, since he is sent both visibly and invisibly to be, in his turn, among men and with the Church. Thus the birth in time both of Christ the Head, and of the Church which is his body, is the final outcome of that eternal act of the Father united to the Son the purpose of which is to send forth, to bring forth the Spirit. That is why St. John sees the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven, coming down from God (Apoc 21.2)"²⁵.

²³ S. TH., I-II. 1.1. ad 3;107.7. ad 2 and 3; in Heb 9.2.

²⁴ Cfr. G. PHILIPS, «*La grace des justes de l'Ancien Testament*», in *Ephem. Theol. Lovan.*, 23 (1947), pp. 521-56; 24 (1948), pp. 23-58.

²⁵ *Eglise du Verbe incarné*, t. 2, p. 455, Paris 1951.

World Religions and the general history of salvation

Immediately after the fall of our first parents, the mediation of Christ for the salvation of humanity began and worked in a hidden way by anticipation. In the age of expectation before the incarnation salvation can be obtained by human persons without knowing Christ's future coming in an explicit way but in an imperfect and obscure way which is implied in their sincere belief in God or the Divine; i.e., by an assent of theological faith that God exists and helps sincere souls. In the faith that God exists is contained, although they were not able to realize it, faith in the Trinity; in their faith that God helps is contained the faith in the incarnation and Redemption. "Now it is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and rewards those who try to find him" (Heb 11.6).

A definition of faith is given. Faith gives substance to our hopes; i.e., faith points to the future; faith makes us certain of realities we do not see; i.e., faith points to the heavenly realities in the present time. Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen. We can take this as a theological definition of faith; i.e., the anticipated and assured possession of the heavenly realities (cfr Heb 6.5.; Rom 5.2; Eph 1.13ff). Any one who seeks fellowship with God must obviously believe in his existence and good will. God shows forth his boundless love by giving his Son for the salvation of the world. From then on everything was to be centred on the Cross. Jesus said: "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself" (Jn 12.32). There is here an allusion to both the lifting up of Christ on the Cross and his lifting up to heaven on the day of his resurrection. The two events are the two aspects of the same mystery. The crucified Jesus will be set forth before the eyes of the world as its Saviour. God willed that "all things are to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the Cross" (Col 1.20). This reconciliation of the whole universe (both Angels and human beings) does not mean that every single individual will be saved but that all who are saved will be saved by their collective return to the right order and peace of perfect submission to God. "God has let us know the mystery of his purpose, the hidden plan he so

kindly made in Christ from the beginning to act upon when the times had run their course to the end: that he would bring everything together under Christ as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth (Eph 1.9-10).

Recapitulation means Christ as the Head: To gather round a new centre or to recentre all things in Christ. So the grace given before the incarnation is already by anticipation a Christian grace. Hence those who opened themselves to the promptings of his grace, Christian by anticipation, there was salvation by the merits of Christ. This grace was hidden in the hearts of men, seen only by God; there is a hidden way in which grace worked its way into men's hearts. St. Thomas Aquinas calls this the age of the natural law since grace came into human hearts by adapting itself to the movements of nature to do good acts when he chose the morally good; grace was there secretly and placed him in contact with higher realities. The impulse which urges him to acknowledge God's sovereignty, to adore, to confess his dependence upon him, to confess his sins came from a higher source; i.e., from the heart of the Trinity. "This is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit" (Jn 3.8).

St. Paul gives a description of the condition of the Gentiles as follows (Eph 2.11f): They were physically uncircumcised. They had no Christ, i.e., no Messiah. They were excluded from the membership of Israel; aliens without the Covenants with their Promise. They were without the hope of the Messiah; they had many gods but not the one true God (Col 8.5f). Now the crucifixion of Christ has brought together Jews and Gentiles and reconciled both with the Father. The Mosaic Law gave the Jews the privileged status, not including the Gentiles. Jesus abolished this Law by fulfilling it once for all on the Cross (Col 2.14). New Man is the prototype of the new humanity that God recreated (Col 5.17) in the person of Jesus Christ, the second Adam. The sinful corrupt race of the first Adam has been destroyed by the crucifixion (Rom 5.12f; 8.3; 1 Cor 15.21). He is unique because in him the boundaries between any one group and the rest of humanity disappear (Col 3.10f; Gal 3.27f).

Religiously illumined people considered the cosmic phenomena as symbolic of divine realities; the various events of history are manifestations of the divinity (Hierophanies). Storms manifested God's anger and man's dependence liable to be overwhelmed by them. The stability of the

rocks symbolized eternity in comparison with the flow of time. The cycle of seasons represented the goodness of God towards whom people's hearts can be turned by interior grace. Paul and Barnabas at Lystra said: "We bring you the good news that you should turn from these vain things to the living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are in them... God did not leave himself without testimony, bestowing blessings, giving rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness..." (Acts 14.7ff). "Filling your hearts with gladness" means that God illumined the Gentiles interiorly, helping them to grasp their inner meaning. Again Paul's words to the Athenians: "It is God who gives everything, including life and breath to every one. From one single stock he not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but he decreed how long each nation should flourish and what the boundaries of its territory should be. And he did this so that all nations might seek the deity, and by feeling their way towards him, succeed in finding him. Yet in fact he is not far from any one us, since it is in him that we live, and move, and exist, as indeed some of your own writers have said: 'We are all his Children'" (Acts 17.24-28).

There is mention also of persons outside the line of Patriarch of the Old Testament who lived in holiness; e.g., Melchisedech, according to him Christ was said to be priest, not according to Abraham or Aaron. The Priest-King Melchisedech (a cananite name) worships the Most High God, El-Elyon, even before the levitical priesthood. He is represented as a figure of the Messiah who is both king and priest (Ps 110.4). The application to Christ's priesthood is worked out in Heb 7. He did not belong to the chosen people. Also Job and the queen Sheba (Mt 12.42) were outside the fold of the chosen people. Some Gentile individuals were endowed with prophetic gifts and empowered to proclaim the truth and set things in order among the disordered situation. There were sacraments chosen by men through the interior inspiration of grace which were not sacraments of the New Law, because grace did not pass through them for they were mere signs, not causes of grace.

They merely designated the subject on whom grace was conferred. Prophetic teaching and the visible signs (sacraments) were mediations which were preparatory to the visible mediation of the teaching and sacraments of the Redeemer Jesus Christ. In this 'natural order' there was a

simple revelation of the inscrutable mystery of a God who is and who is a rewarder, i.e., who is beneficent to those who seek him. But there was idolatry for most people and pantheism in the case of intellectuals, because forces of evil tended to distort the rites and sacraments and the recognition of God in the hierophanies. God was not denied but was associated with the things of this world and his transcendence was lost sight of. Primitive monotheism became polytheism. The rites of initiation became cruel, immoral and perverse, and sometimes totally magical.

In the New Testament the notion of unity opened out into that of the Trinity and the notion of God's providence for mankind opened out into that of the incarnation and redemption. God is so beneficent to men that he sent his Son Jesus to die for them on the Cross. Grace is Christian by anticipation whether in the context of the Gentile world or in the case of the chosen people of the Mosaic Law. "Pain and suffering will come to every human being who employs himself in evil – Jews first, but Greeks as well; renown, honour and peace will come to everyone who does good – Jews first but Greeks as well. God has no favourites" (Rom 2.9-11). The presence of grace was affirmed among both Jews and Gentiles whom Christ was to make a single people in his Church, according to Paul, a people sealed by his blood (Eph 2.13-18).

The presence of the Trinity in other Religions: an Ecumenical perspective

The crucial issue in the theology of religions is the presence of God and his Spirit and the saving work of Christ outside the Church. In the Nairobi meeting there was a deep division among Christians. The syncretism that implies the idea that Christ speaks equally through all religions has to be rejected. The action of the Holy Spirit beyond the bounds of the Christian community has to be recognized, since it is the basis of dialogue which is a means of achieving a deeper understanding of the newness of the Gospel message. It is necessary to discover what Christ is doing in other religions through sharing common human aspirations and cooperation in meeting human need. A theology of dialogue has to be Christo-centric, evaluating all concepts and attitudes critically in the light of Christ in order to communicate the truth and meaning of the Gospel. (See Reflections on the fifth WCC Assembly based on reports of some of the Catholic observers, SPCU, *Information Service*, n. 30 (1976), pp.2ff).

The Christian faith, in ‘the only history which has ever really come about’, the incarnation of the Son of the Father, breaks the cycle of everlasting return, gives meaning to time and preserves the reality of the person at the heart of union with God. Confident in the Holy Spirit’s action which overflows the bounds of the Christian community, dialogue with other religions is fostered in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the newness of the Gospel and of the fullness of revelation. Thus we can show the adherents of other religions the salvific truth of God’s love which fulfils itself in Jesus Christ²⁶.

God is present in the world as its Creator, Sustainer and Lord of history who rules all things as Loving Father. The presence of Christ in the world is a consequence of the continuity of God’s action in creation and redemption. The continuity of God’s action in creation and redemption is found in the Covenant he made in the Old Testament with Israel and renewed and transformed in the New Testament with all humanity. In the New Testament “the new creation” (2 Cor 5.17) is seen as the restoration and completion of the purposes of the Creator. Christ is the Redeemer of the whole world. Through the Spirit he is at work in creation and redemption. As the presence in the world of the risen Christ, the Spirit affirms and manifests the resurrection and effects the new creation. Christ, the Lord of all and active in creation, points to God the Father who in the Spirit leads and guides history. It is in this context that we have to understand the active presence of the Triune God in other religions²⁷.

The Presence of Christ in other Religions

Jesus Christ is the Lord and Saviour not only for Christians but for all humanity. The Church’s calling to witness in word and life to God’s saving work in Christ is fundamental to her being. God’s saving work in Christ is not restricted to Christians but extends also to non-Christian communities and the whole created order. The Church is commissioned

²⁶ See: “Charles Moeller’s General report on Nairobi Assembly”, SPCU, *Information Service*, n. 27, 1975, p. 11.

²⁷ See: “Consultations between the SPCU and the World Alliance of the Reformed Churches”, *Information Service*, n. 35, 1977, “The Presence of Christ in Church and World”, nn. 41ff.

to preach the Gospel to all men, in the hope that all may come to know God revealed in Christ²⁸.

In Christ “the complete being of the Godhead dwells embodied” (Col 2.9). All Christians testify that the salvation accomplished by Christ in his death and resurrection is bestowed on and effectively appropriated by humanity in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the holy sacraments through the Holy Spirit²⁹. Jesus Christ is the one witness of God, true and faithful (Rev 3.14;1.5). The witness he gave to the Father through his life was sealed by his death on the cross. His death evidenced total dedication to the witness he bore; it was the testimony he gave to himself as “the truth that liberates” (Jn 8.32). Through his death and resurrection he breathed forth his Spirit to animate his followers and to draw them together in the community of witness, his mystical body which is his Church³⁰.

Though it is true that Christ’s presence in the Church places her in a special relationship to the world, an “ecclesiological monopoly” on the presence of Christ and the conclusions that follow from it are exegetically untenable. The presence of Christ in the world is a consequence of the continuity of God’s act in creation and redemption. The universality of the lordship of Christ (Eph 1.21f) extends to the whole humanity. “There is no dichotomy between the Christians’ personal response to the Christ they find in the Church and their corporate response along with others, Christians and non-Christians alike, to the Christ who confronts them with the world. To participate in the divine life by grace is to participate in God’s love for the world which he has created and which, with the help of responsible people, he is re-creating”³¹. This does not mean that the Church and other religions are put in parallel as ways of salvation, Christ working in other religions independently of his Church.

The Fifth Assembly of the WCC at Nairobi states: “Jesus Christ came to loose the bonds of sin and death, to free from oppression and the lim-

²⁸ See: “Report of the Joint Commission between R.C. and the World Methodist Council”, SPCU, *Information Service*, n. 34, 1977, n. 11.

²⁹ Cfr. “All under one Christ”, RC and Lutheran Joint Commission report, SPCU, *Information Service*, n. 44, 1980, n. 15.

³⁰ See: WCC and RC Joint Working Group on common witness, SPCU, *Information Service*, n. 44, 1980, n. 17.

³¹ Cfr. *The Presence of Christ in Church and World*, op. cit., n. 5.

itation of our mortal condition every man and woman in their individual lives, in their life in society, and in their membership in the human family as a whole". Jesus Christ is the source and center of communion for all who are Christians, their only and firm hope of being able "to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Basis WCC), to be "a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium* 9)³².

It is interesting to see that the themes of Nairobi ("Jesus Christ Frees and Unites") and of the Holy Year (Renewal and Reconciliation) are similar and are brought to bear on the General Assembly of WCC. Who is Jesus Christ who frees and unites? The previous Assemblies had emphasized Jesus Christ as the Hope, as the Light, as the One who makes things anew. Nairobi directs us to Jesus as the Liberator and Jesus as the unifier. Jesus Christ brings liberation in our personal lives. He liberates us also in our social life. He frees us from the false security of colour, sex, class situation, citizenship and nationality. He effects in us a conversion to make the concerns of others our own, thus making us to know Christ as Lord of the universe and the Cross as salvation for all. He frees us for the struggle to work for the poor and dispossessed. Jesus came that all may be one. A new awareness of responsibility for world evangelization³³. True evangelism is total and integrated: the whole Gospel for the whole man and for the whole of humankind.

In this Assembly (Nairobi) a distinction was made between bad syncretism and Christ-centred syncretism; the former would mix together the various beliefs and the latter which would assimilate the spiritual values of other religions (M.M. Thomas). Evangelization should use the values of the Gospel and of the spirit of Jesus Christ so that these too can transform all cultures and be incarnated in them, and so that through the cultures there may be achieved a single community. Unity in diversity will then become possible. These cultures in which the Gospel becomes alive and effective also undergo changes, because Christ judges, affirms, changes and completes cultures (Ibid. p. 10).

³² See: "The Firth Assembly of the WCC", SPCU, *Information Service*, n. 30, 1976, p. 1.

³³ Cfr. "The International Congress on world evangelization at Lausanne", in 1974, and "The Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops on Evangelization", in 1974.

