

## *Book Review*

### *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions.*

Jacques Dupuis, S.J.

Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991, pp. xi, 301. \$39.95 Cloth:  
\$18.95 paperbound.

Reviewed by James Kroeger, M.M.

In the vast field of contemporary mission theology, Jacques Dupuis' work, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, stands out as singularly important and relevant. Dupuis, a master of clarity and precision, always presents a closely reasoned theological explication of core questions facing the missionary Church in the 1990's.

Dupuis is currently professor at the Gregorian University in Rome. He has also served as consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue as well as to the Commission on Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. A missionary to Asia for over 30 years Dupuis is well conversant with the religious pluralism of the Orient, especially India.

Dupuis' book has as its purpose: "to elucidate, from and in faith, the mutual relationship between Jesus Christ and the religious traditions of humanity" (2). Dupuis' method is resolutely theological and sees all theology as "faith in search of understanding"--*fides quaerens intellectum*. He notes: "We begin with faith, then, and there we remain at every step" (5). These quotes express the author's conviction that "A Christian theology of religions begins with Christian faith and develops each successive step in the same faith" (201).

This seminal work is divided into two broad sections. Part I traces the encounter of Jesus Christ with the Hindu tradition; the thought and experience of several Indians are presented: Gandhi, K.S. Sen, S. Radhakrishnan, Akhilananda, M.C. Parekh, and B. Upadhyaya. Dupuis elaborates various Christological models that emerge from this Neo-Hinduism encounter as "stepping-stones" to dialogue with the Christian tradition. His approach creatively and inductively contextualizes the questions confronting any theology of religion.

An entire chapter presents the experience of the "Hindu-Christian" Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux (Swami Abhishik-

tananda). Another chapter, and this one is pivotal, raises the foundational questions surrounding "Which Christian Theology of Religions"? At this point Dupuis has set the stage for an informed, perceptive discussion of Jesus Christ's role within the world's faith-traditions for, as he asserts, "the Christological problem constitutes the nub of this debate" (110).

Part II entitled "Christ, One and Universal" addresses the christological, theological, and missiological problems raised by today's religious pluralism and the praxis of interreligious dialogue. Topics presented include: multiple divine covenants, salvation without the gospel, the economy of the Spirit, the unicity and universality of Jesus Christ, and dialogue in the Church's mission and theology.

Dupuis' insights can perhaps be best communicated by using his words. On the subject of Christocentrism in theology and faith, Dupuis writes: "Jesus Christ, his person and his work, are at the center of Christian faith.... For the Christian, however, it is the mystery of Jesus Christ himself, and not just his message that is at the very center of faith" (93). Catholic faith holds that "in Jesus, God effected a self-manifestation in a manner that is decisive and can be neither surpassed nor repeated....[Yet] this uniqueness and universality are not exclusive, but inclusive; not closed, but open; not sectarian, but cosmic" (92).

Commenting on the range of theological stances vis-a-vis world religions, Dupuis notes that "the inclusivistic position alone is capable of holding together and harmonizing the two axioms of Christian faith that are obligatory for any Christian theology of religions. On the one side, Jesus Christ is clearly asserted to be God; definitive revelation and the absolute Savior. On the other, the door is open to a sincere acknowledgement of divine manifestations in the history of humanity in various cultures and of efficacious 'elements of grace' to be found in other religious traditions, elements that are salvific for their members" (109).

Dupuis elaborates a clear and basic position on the debated relationship between theocentrism and Christocentrism. He asks whether a theocentrism that is not also christocentric can really be Christian. His answer is negative and he notes (110):

"Jesus Christ is at the center because God, not human beings or Christianity, has placed him there. It follows that,

in Christian theology, christocentrism and theocentrism cannot be mutually opposed as different perspectives between which a choice must be made. Christian theology is *theocentric qua christocentric, and vice versa*. Far from being passe, the christocentric *and* theocentric perspective (both adjectives at once) seems surely to be the only way."

No mission theology today is complete without an integrated christology and pneumatology (theology of the Holy Spirit). Dupuis rightly observes that "these two perspectives, the Christological and the pneumatological, are inseparable in the Christian mystery.... It would be erroneous, then, to set christocentrism and pneumatology in mutual opposition" (153). While affirming that "the christic mystery is at the center of Christian faith," mission today with members of other religions concomitantly "consists of discovering, in their religious life, the active presence and life-giving influence of the Holy Spirit" (152). Any faithful interreligious encounter needs a well-founded "pneumatological Christology" (192).

This book requires careful reading and reflection. It is demanding but rewarding. It would be difficult indeed to find another book that so completely addresses contemporary christological questions vis-a-vis the world's faith traditions.

Dupuis' contribution is Volume 18 in the Orbis FAITH MEETS FAITH series on interreligious dialogue. In the considered opinion of this writer, the phrase "the best of the series" can appropriately be applied to Dupuis' work--*Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*.

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FRENCH EDITION; *Jesus-Christ à la rencontre des religions*. Paris: Desclée., 1989, 345 p.

ITALIAN EDITION: *Gesù Cristo incontro alle religioni*. Assisi: Citadella Ed. 1989, 376 p.

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Erratum: In the last issue of *Tripod* the names of the Sisters in the photo in the Book Review section should have read: Sr. Jane Marie Farrell and Sr. Anne Stango. We thank the author for calling this to our attention.