MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THEOLOGY AND CHURCH

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[The author first examines the growing phenomenon of multiple religious belonging by outlining the theology of religions known as "inclusive pluralism" which serves as its theological underpinning. Next he offers a composite sketch of multiple religious belonging on the basis of concrete experiences of well-known Christian practitioners of multiple religious belonging. He concludes by offering several suggestions regarding the theological education of future church ministers in a religiously plural world.]

A telling sign of the time is reflected in the response by a recent American college graduate who, when asked about her religious identity, answered with an easy laugh: "Methodist. Taoist, Native American. Quaker, Russian Orthodox, and Jew."[1] Whether her "multiple religious belonging" or "hyphenated religious identity" is a thoughtful and coherent response to the contemporary situation of religious pluralism or a self-indulgent, free-floating, cafeteria-style potpourri of mutually incompatible spiritualities, there is no doubt that multiple religious belonging is no longer rare in the West. This phenomenon brings serious challenges as well as enriching opportunities not only to Christian identity but also to inter-religious dialogue and Christian mission in general.[2]

In this article I first examine the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging and its underlying theological presuppositions. Secondly. I delin-

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[1] Diane Winston, "Campuses Are a Bellwether for Society's Religious Revival," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 44 (January 16, 1998) A60.

[2] On the implications of multiple religious belonging for Catholic identity, see Peter C. Phan, "To Be Catholic or Not to Be: Is It Still the Question? Catholic Identity and Religious Education Today," *Horizons* 25 (1998) 159-89.

eate some of the features that have accompanied such multiple religious belonging that would make it fruitful for contemporary church life. Finally, I highlight a few implications that multiple religious belonging has for theological education [3]

MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING AND THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Before examining the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging and its undergirding theological principles, it would be helpful to state briefly what is meant by this expression. The phenomenon does not refer simply to the process known today as inculturation whereby the gospel, or more concretely, a particular form of Christianity–usually the Western one and not some pure, acultural Christianity (which of course does not exist)– encounters a particular group of people, assumes their language and culture as its modes of self-realization and expression, transforming, and when necessary, correcting them, with Christian beliefs and values, and at the same time is enriched in turn by them. Such a process, explicitly endorsed by the Roman magisterium in our days, is unavoidable and should not be considered as controversial, at least in principle. Historically, it has been taking place in different ways ever since Christianity moved out of its Jewish matrix into the Hellenistic, Roman, and Teutonic worlds, or into what is commonly designated by the general term of "the Western world." Today this process of inculturation is extended, as a matter of principle, to cultures other than Western, in particular African and Asian. In this sense, one may and must be both Christian and Vietnamese or whatever cultural group one belongs to. In other words, a person needs not and must not renounce his or her cultural identity and traditions upon becoming a Christian.

Nor does multiple religious belonging refer to interreligious dialogue in which one engages not only in theological discussion with the followers of other religions but also in sharing life with them in an open and neighborly spirit, collaborating with them in works for integral development and liberation, and participating in religious experiences of prayer and contemplation.[4] Indeed, interreligious dialogue, even in the last form, may militate against multiple religious belonging since as a matter of methodology it

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[3] Among recent literature on multiple religious belonging, one work deserves particular mention *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002); henceforth, *Many Mansions*

[4] For this fourfold dialogue of life, action, theological exchange, and religious experience, see The Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation* no. 42 (May 19, 1991) The English text is available in *Redemption and Dialogue Reading*

requires that participants in interfaith dialogue preserve their distinctive religious doctrines and practices, and that they and show how these are not only similar to but different from those of other faiths.

Going beyond inculturation and interreligious dialogue, albeit intimately related to these two activities, multiple religious belonging or hyphenated religious identity refers to the fact that some Christians believe that it is possible and even necessary not only to accept in theory this or that doctrine or practice of other religions and to incorporate them, perhaps in a modified form, into Christianity but also to adopt and live the beliefs, moral rules, rituals, and monastic practices of religious traditions other than those of Christianity, perhaps even in the midst of the community of the devotees of other religions.

The question about multiple religious belonging is twofold. First, is it required that one abandon altogether the practice of one's former religion when becoming a Christian, supposing that one was a devotee of such religion, and if not, why not, and to what purposes? Secondly, if one is already a Christian, is it theologically possible for one to adopt the beliefs and practices of other religions in one's life? In other words, as Catherine Cornille expresses it, "[a] heightened and widespread consciousness of religious pluralism has presently left the religious person with the choice not only of *which* religion, but also of *how many* religions she or he might belong to. More and more individuals confess to being partly Jewish and partly Buddhist, or partly Christian and partly Hindu, or fully Christian and fully Buddhist."[5]

Two further remarks on multiple religious belonging are in order. First, it may be helpful to distinguish, as Claude Jeffré does, between "multiple belonging" and "double belonging."[6] In contrast to the latter, which is the fruit of a paradigmatic shift in the theology of religions and of inculturation, the former is a contemporary, postmodern form of syncretism in which a person looks upon various religions as a supermarket from which, like a consumer, one selects at one's discretion and pleasure whatever myth and doctrine, ethical practice and ritual, and meditation and healing technique that best suit the temperament and needs of one's body and mind, without regard to their truth values and mutual compatibilities.

While such a spirituality must be respected as a possibly serious personal quest for meaning in a secular world and a challenging question to the continuing relevance and credibility of Christianity as a religion, it must be

Redemptoris Missio *and Dialogue and Proclamation,* ed. William Burrows (Mary-knoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993).

[5] Catherine Cornille, "Introduction· The Dynamics of Multiple Belonging," in *Many Mansions* 1.

[6] See Claude Jeffré, "Double Belonging and the Originality of Christianity as a Religion," in *Many Mansions* 93–94

admitted that too often this New Age movement represents a symptom of unbridled consumerism, excessive individualism, and the loss of the collective memory that are characteristic of modernity and its twin, globalization. Though I use in this article the two expressions "multiple belonging" and "double belonging" interchangeably, I reject as incompatible with the Christian faith the kind of New Age syncretism that I have described, which has justly been called "believing without belonging" (Grace Davie), "nebulous esoteric mysticism" (Françoise Champion), and "Nietzschean neo-paganism" (Claude Geffré).

Secondly, multiple religious belonging emerges as a theological *problem* only in religions that demand an absolute and exclusive commitment on the part of their adherents to their founders and/or faiths. This seems to be the case with the "Religions of the Book," namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three religions consider themselves not only mutually incompatible but also irreconcilable with any other religion whatsoever, so that "conversion" to any one of them is often celebrated with an external ritual signaling a total abjuration of all previous religious allegiances.

Not so with most other religions, particularly in Asia. In Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, multiple religious belonging is a rule rather than an exception, at least on the popular level. Indeed, the very expression "multiple religious belonging" as understood in the West, that is, as two or more memberships in particular systems of beliefs and practices within bounded communities, is a misnomer in Asia where religions are considered not as mutually exclusive religious organizations but as having specialized functions responding, according to a division of labor as it were, to the different needs and circumstances in the course of a person's life. Such is the case, for instance, with Shinto and Buddhism in Japan.[7] Thus, not rarely do Asian people go to pray and worship in pagodas, temples, and shrines, without much consid-

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[7] See Jan Van Bragt, "Multiple Religious Belonging of the Japanese People," in *Many Mansions* 7–19 Van Bragt shows that "for most Japanese in history the allegiance to the Buddhist-Shinto conglomerate – and thus, in a sense, to both Buddhism and Shinto–did not have to be accompanied by a sense of multiple belonging. The composite religious system in which they were born and which served equally the legitimation of the political system and the social integration of the nation did not present them with a real choice entailing the rejecting of an alternative If choice there was, it was rather in the sense of the possibility of different *specializations* on the basis of the acceptance of the system as a whole" (13) This does not mean that in Japan there has been no religious movement with exclusivist claims. For example, as Van Bragt notes, the school of Nichiren (1222–1282) insists on the sole worship of the perennial Buddha Sakyamuni, as embodied in the Lotus Sutra, and on the sole practice of the *daikimu*, that is, the recitation of the title of the Lotus Sutra, "*Namu myoho renge kyo*," while the True Pure Land school of Shinran (1173–1262) chooses the Buddha Amida as the exclusive object of worship and reliance and advocates the *nembutsu*, that is, the recitation of

eration given to what religion these sacred places belong to, but depending on whether the local deity or spirit is reputed to grant a favor tailored to one's particular needs and circumstances. Furthermore, at times, a religion which is not by nature exclusive only becomes so as a reaction to the claims of superiority made by Christianity, as it happened to Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 19th century, and then the relationship between the two religions becomes that of competition rather than peaceful co-existence.[8]

In sum, according to Catherine Cornille, "a rough-and-ready axiom" in matters of religious belonging can be formulated as follows: "[T]he more encompassing a religion's claim to efficacy and truth, the more problematic the possibility of multiple religious belonging. Conversely, it thus seems that the idea of belonging to more than one religion can be tolerated only when and where a religion has accepted the complementarity of religions."[9]

The question then arises as to whether there is a theology of religions that justifies the possibility of multiple religious belonging for Christians. Such a theology must on the one hand maintain the "uniqueness" and "universality" of Jesus Christ as savior and the "singularity" of Christianity, as these truths are confessed by the Christian faith, and on the other hand offer an acceptable account for the complementarity and convergence of all religions, including Christianity.[10] It is neither necessary nor possible to give a detailed exposition of such a theology here. Suffice it to say that for

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Amida's name (*Namu Amida Butsu*) as the only practice leading to salvation (see 13–15).

   [8] See Elisabeth J. Harris, "Double Belonging in Sri Lanka: Illusion or Liberating Path?" in *Many Mansions* 76–80. Harris points out that Protestant missionaries to Sri Lanka in the 19th century found that dual religious belonging posed no problem to the native Buddhists for whom "being half Christian and half Buddhist is far better than being either decidedly Christian or Buddhist" (77). It was only after Buddhism was attacked by Protestant missionaries as nihilistic atheism and as a false religion that Sri Lankan Buddhists decreed that one could not be Buddhist and Christian at the same time. This Buddhist Revival became known as "Protestant Buddhism" because it was a protest against Christianity and appropriated from Protestant Christianity several of its forms and practices, in particular its claim of superiority and exclusivism: "Buddhism was pictured by later revivalists as irretrievably different from Christianity and irrevocably superior to it because of its non-theistic nature, its compatibility with science, its rationality, its optimism, and its ethics, each assertion being a direct challenge to one of the accusations made by the missionaries" (80).

   [9] Cornille, "Introduction: The Dynamics of Multiple Belonging," in *Many Mansions* 2.

   [10] The terms *uniqueness, universality,* and *singularity* are placed in quotation marks here because they need to be interpreted carefully so as not to connote exclusivism. I discuss this later.

Christians the possibility of a hyphenated religious identity would seem to depend on the acceptability of at least the following ten assertions.[11]

(1) Jesus is the unique and universal savior does not exclude the possibility of non-Christians being saved.[12]

(2) This fact does not exclude the possibility of non-Christian religions functioning as "ways of salvation" insofar as they contain "elements of truth and of grace."[13]

(3) These two possibilities are realized by the activities of both the Logos and the Holy Spirit. The Logos, though identical with Jesus of Nazareth, is

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[11] One helpful presentation of contemporary theologies of religions is Paul Knitter. *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002). Knitter divides them into four models which he labels "replacement," "fulfillment," "mutuality," and "acceptance." The first three models correspond roughly to the older, more common categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, popularized by Alan Race. The lines of the theology of religions I present here crisscross over the last three models described by Knitter and have much in common with Jacques Dupuis's *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N Y.: Orbis, 1977) and his *Christianity and the Religions. From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002) For a brief and lucid summary of his view, with particular application to the issue of multiple religious belonging, see Jacques Dupuis, "Christianity and Religions: Complementarity and Convergence." in *Many Mansions* 61–75.

[12] The possibility of salvation for non-Christian believers and non-believers, with requisite conditions, is explicitly affirmed by Vatican II in its dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* no 16

[13] Vatican II's decree *Ad gentes* no 9 Whether Vatican II affirmed that non-Christian religions are "ways of salvation" is a matter of debate. Karl Rahner and Gavin D'Costa held that Vatican II left the issue open, whereas for Bishop Piero Rossano, who for years worked in what was then called the Secretariat for Non-Christians, Vatican II did affirm that salvation reaches men and women in and through their religions, and not in spite of them. It may be noted that Karl Rahner himself subscribed to this opinion. His basic argument is that humans are historical, embodied, and social beings and are necessarily conditioned and influenced by their environments, among which religions play a key role. If Christians need the embodiments of God's grace in sacraments to be saved, so do non-Christians and these embodiments are found in their religions. Two recent statements of the magisterium deserve special notice. Pope John Paul II declares that the Holy Spirit is present "not only in individuals but also in society and history, peoples, cultures, and religions" (*Redemptoris missio* no. 28). The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* says that because of "the active presence of God through his Word" and "the universal presence of the Spirit" not only in persons outside the Church but also in their religions, it is "in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions .. that the members of other religions correspond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation" (no 29) It must be pointed out that the theory that non-Christian religions are "ways of salvation" cannot yet be taught as Christian doctrine but it is at least a *sententia communis* and *theologice certa*, and certainly not *temeraria* and *scandalosa*. For a recent discussion of the meaning of theological notes, see Harold E Ernst. "The Theological Notes and the Interpretation of Doctrine," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002) 813–25

not exhaustively embodied in Jesus of Nazareth who was spatially and temporally limited and therefore could not exhaustively express the divine saving reality in his human words and deeds. There is a "distinction-in-identity" or "identity-in-distinction" between the unincarnate (*asarkos*) Logos and Jesus Christ. Hence, the activities of the Logos, though insepa-rable from those of Jesus, are also distinct from and go beyond Jesus' activities, both before and after the Incarnation.[14]

(4) In addition, the Holy Spirit, though intimately united with the Logos, is distinct from him and operates salvifically beyond him and "blows where he wills" (John 3: 8). Thus, God's saving presence through God's Word and Spirit is not limited to the Judeo-Christian history but is extended to the whole human history and may be seen especially in the sacred books, rituals, moral teachings, and spiritual practices of all religions. In this way, what the Holy Spirit says and does may be truly different from, though not contradictory to, what the Logos says and does, and what the Logos and the Spirit do and say in non-Christian religions may be truly different from, though not contradictory to, what Jesus did and said.[15]

(5) Religious pluralism then is not just a matter of fact but also a matter of principle.[16] That is to say, non-Christian religions may be seen as part of the plan of divine Providence and endowed with a particular role in the history of salvation. They are not merely a "preparation" for, "stepping

[14] This thesis is not the same as the one rejected by *Dominus Iesus*, the Decla-ration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (August 2000), namely, "the theory of the limited, incomplete, or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that found in other religions" (no. 6). It does not claim "the truth about God cannot be grasped and manifested in its globality and completeness by any historical religion, neither by Christianity nor by Jesus Christ" (no. 6). Rather it says that God, being Absolute Mystery, cannot by definition be exhaustively manifested and grasped by any human and therefore finite means, be these means used by Jesus or Christianity or any other religion. Otherwise the God who is revealed by Jesus or Christianity or any other religion would not be God but an idol. This point seems to be conceded by *Dominus Iesus* itself when it says that "they ["the words, deeds, and entire historical event of Jesus"] possess in themselves the definitiveness and completeness of the revelation of God's salvific ways, *even if the depth of the divine mystery in itself remains transcendent and inexhaustible*" (no 6, emphasis mine). For a critical evaluation of *Dominus Iesus*, see *Sic et Non· Encountering Dominus Iesus,* ed. Stephen J. Pope and Charles Hefling (Maryknoll, N Y.· Orbis, 2002) which also contains the English text of the declaration.

[15] Dupuis suggests that both a trinitarian Christology and a Spirit Christology are needed to explicate the mutual complementarity and convergence among all reli-gions.

[16] It is to be noted that the expression "matter of fact" (de facto) and "matter of principle" (de iure) are not used in the sense rejected by *Dominus Iesus* no. 4. Here by "matter of principle" is simply meant the intrinsic value of non-Christian reli-gions as ways of salvation in the one plan of God. It does not question any of the Christian claims listed in no. 4 of the declaration.

stones" toward, or "seeds" of Christianity and destined to be "fulfilled" by it. Rather they have their own autonomy and their proper role as ways of salvation, at least for their adherents.

(6) This autonomy of non-Christian religions detracts nothing from either the role of Jesus as the unique and universal savior or that of the Christian Church as the sacrament of Christ's salvation. On the one hand, Christ's uniqueness is not exclusive or absolute but *constitutive* and *relational*.[17] That is to say, because the Christ event belongs to and is the climax of God's plan of salvation, Christ is uniquely constitutive of salvation. Jesus' "constitutive uniqueness" means that he and only he "opens access to God for all people."[18] Moreover, because the non-Christian religions themselves are a part of God's plan of salvation of which Christ is the culminating point, Christ and the non-Christian religions are related to one another. On the other hand, because the non-Christian religions possess an autonomous function in the history of salvation, different from that of Christianity, they and Christianity cannot be reduced to each other. However, being ways of salvation in God's plan, they are related to each other. Autonomy and relatedness are not mutually contradictory.

(7) There is then a reciprocal relationship between Christianity and the other religions. Not only are the non-Christian religions complemented by Christianity, but also Christianity is complemented by other religions. In other words, the process of complementation, enrichment, and even correction is two-way or reciprocal. This reciprocity in no way endangers the faith confession that the Church has received from Christ the fullness of revelation, since it is one thing to receive a perfect and unsurpassable gift, and quite another to understand it fully and to live it completely. It is therefore only in dialogue with other religions that Christianity can come to a fuller realization of its own identity and mission and a better understanding of the unique revelation that it has received from Christ, and vice versa, other religions can achieve their full potential only in dialogue with each other and with Christianity.[19]

(8) Furthermore, despite the fact that Christian faith proclaims that Jesus Christ is the fullness of revelation and the unique and universal savior,

[17] *Dominus Iesus* makes a confusing statement which on the one hand recognizes the inclusiveness of Christ's saving work and on the other hand affirms that "Jesus Christ has a significance and a value for the human race and its history, which are unique and singular, proper to him alone, *exclusive*, universal, and absolute (no 15, emphasis mine). How can Jesus' significance and value be inclusive and exclusive at the same time?

[18] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology* 387

[19] This proposition is not contrary to the statement of *Dominus Iesus*: "It would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as *one way* of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the Church toward the eschatological kingdom of God" (no 21) The complementarity

there is also a reciprocal relationship between him and other "savior figures" and non-Christian religions, since Jesus' uniqueness is not absolute but relational. In this sense, Jesus' revelation and salvation are also "complemented" by God's self-revelation and redemption manifested in other savior figures and non-Christian religions. In this context it is useful to remember that Jesus did not and could not reveal everything to his disciples and that it is the Holy Spirit that will lead them to "the complete truth" (John 16:12–13). There is nothing to prevent one from thinking that the Holy Spirit will lead the Church to the complete truth through the dialogue with other religions in which he is actively present.[20]

(9) From what has been said about the Christian claim that Jesus is the unique and universal savior and the Church as the sacrament of salvation it is clear that the complementarity between them and other savior figures and religions, though complementary, is, to use Dupuis's expression, "*asymmetrical.*"[21] This asymmetry is required by the claim of the Christian faith that Jesus is the Logos made flesh and represents the climax or the decisive moment of God's dealings with humankind. What this asymmetry intends to affirm is that according to the Christian faith, Jesus mediates God's gift salvation to humanity in an overt, explicit, and fully visible way, which is now continued in Christianity, whereas other savior figures and religions, insofar as they mediate God's salvation to their followers, do so through the power of the Logos and the Spirit. In this sense, Jesus may be said to the "one mediator," and the other savior figures and non-Christian religions are participating mediators or "participated mediations."[22]

(10) Lastly, because of the saving presence of the Logos and the Holy Spirit in non-Christian religions, their sacred scriptures, prayers and rituals, moral practices, ascetical and monastic traditions can be a source of inspiration and spiritual enrichment for Christians. Consequently, they may and perhaps should be made use of, at least by Christians who are prepared for

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asserted here is placed in the context of the "asymmetrical" nature of the relationship between Christianity and the other religions as explained in thesis 8 below.

[20] Of course, this thesis does not affirm that there are two different "economies of salvation," that of Christ and that of the Spirit, which *Dominus Iesus* rightly rejects (see nos. 9–12). But affirming "the unicity of the salvific economy willed by the One and Triune God" (no. 11) does not prevent one from saying that Jesus and the Spirit can and do work in different ways and in different times and places.

[21] Dupuis, "Christianity and Religions," in *Many Mansions* 65 and his *Christianity and the Religions* 257–58.

[22] The language of "participated mediation" is used in John Paul II's *Redemptoris missio* no. 5: "Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his." For further reflections on mediated participation, see Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions* 163–94.

this kind of interreligious belonging.[23] To this possibility I turn in my next reflections.

THE DYNAMICS OF MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING

Given this model of theology of religions – the model of "inclusive pluralism"[24] – which is gaining widespread acceptance. it is not difficult to see why multiple religious belonging is not only possible but also desirable. If non-Christian religions contain "elements of truth and of grace" and if they may be considered ways of salvation from whose doctrinal teachings. sacred texts, moral practices, monastic traditions, and rituals and worship Christianity can and should benefit through dialogue, then there should be no theological objection and canonical censure against someone wishing to be a Christian and at same time to follow some doctrinal teachings and religious practices, let's say of Buddhism or Confucianism or Hinduism, as long as these are not patently contradictory to Christian faith and morals. Whether that person should describe himself or herself a Buddhist. or Confucian, or Hindu Christian, with Buddhist, Confucian, or Hindu functioning as a qualifier modifying the primary Christian identity, rather than the other way round, is a matter that I will later address.

Before elaborating on the dynamics of multiple religious belonging and on its challenges and opportunities for the Church, three observations are in order. First, it must be acknowledged that historically, double religious belonging was the common form of life of the earliest Christians. As is evidenced from the Book of Acts, they maintained both their newfound faith in the lordship of the Risen Christ and their inherited Jewish beliefs and practices: "They went to the temple area together every day. while in their homes they broke bread" (Acts 3: 46). Apparently, such double religious belonging did not cause any anxious soul-searching and theological qualms. It was only when some people came from Judea to Antioch with the teaching that unless circumcision is practiced, salvation is impossible (see Acts 15:1) that the problem of being a Jew and a Christian at the same time was broached. But even the so-called council of Jerusalem did not rule out the possibility of a Jewish Christian/Christian Jew continuing to practice Judaism: it only refused to impose the Mosaic law on the Gentile Christians. It is only toward the end of the first century that for a number of reasons, both theological and non-theological. Christianity had to define

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[23] On the possibility of interreligious prayer, that is, not simply "being together to pray" (each with his or her own prayer) but also "praying together" (with a common prayer), see Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions* 236–52.

[24] "Inclusive pluralism" or "pluralistic inclusivism" is the expression used by Dupuis to describe his own theology of religions

itself as a religious entity distinct and separate from and even superior to Judaism. In turn, Judaism rejected its younger sibling as an acceptable sect within itself. Then the possibility of being both Jew and Christian at the same time was a less likely option, and as converts to Christianity came almost exclusively from the Greco-Roman world, that option vanished.

In hindsight, the disappearance of Jewish Christianity/Christian Judaism proved to be a tragic loss to both Judaism and Christianity, as the subsequent history of bitter hatred and the "teaching of contempt" – mainly on the part of Christianity – is a sad proof. Perhaps a retrieval of the earliest form of Christianity, prior to the mutual condemnation and diatribe between Judaism and Christianity, will prove helpful in delineating a possible form of double religious identity not only between Judaism and Christianity but also in general.[25]

Secondly, in this article I will leave aside the efforts of non-Christians to acknowledge the moral excellence of Jesus and the relevance of his teachings for their lives either without a personal commitment to him, e.g., Mohandas K Gandhi (1869–1948)[26] and the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–)[27] or with a personal commitment to Christ but without accepting the Church, e.g., Keshub Chunder Sen (1838–1884),[28] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975),[29] and Swami Akhilananda (1894–

[25] On Jewish Christianity, the best evidence is the *Pseudo-Clementines*, a fourth-century work with second-century sources.

[26] See Mohandas Gandhi, *Christian Missions* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing, 1941); *The Message of Jesus Christ* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, 1963). It is well known that Gandhi was much impressed by Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

[27] See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead, 1995). He writes: "Jesus is not only our Lord, but He is also our Father, our Teacher, our Brother, and our Self" (44). However, he objects to John Paul II's statement that "Christ is absolutely original and absolutely unique": "The idea behind the statement, however, is the notion that Christianity provides the only way of salvation and all other religious traditions are of no use. This attitude excludes dialogue and fosters religious intolerance and discrimination" (193). For an introduction to Thich Nhat Hanh, see Sister Annabel Laity, "If You Want Peace, You Can Have Peace," in *Thich Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001) 1–16.

[28] See Keshub Chunder Sen, *Lectures in India*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1901–1904). Keshub had a deep personal feeling for Christ and sometimes called himself *Jesus Das* (slave of Jesus), though he never converted. In his famous lecture "That Marvelous Mystery – The Trinity" (1882) Keshub gave an original interpretation of the Trinity, which is however basically modalist.

[29] See Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926); *An Idealist View of Life* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932); and *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1939).

1962).[30] since these are not, strictly speaking, instances of multiple religious belonging. Nor will I consider the attempts of converts from non-Christian religions to Christianity to retain their former religious identity, e.g.. Manilal C. Parekh (1885–1967)[31] and Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861–1907),[32] since even in these cases there was only a weak or highly critical association with Christianity as an institution.[33] Rather. in discussing the dynamics of multiple religious belonging I focus on the efforts of Christians to "go over" to other religions while keeping and even deepening their Christian identity. To cite the famous self-describing words of Raimundo Panikkar: "I 'left' as a Christian, 'found myself' a Hindu, and I 'return' as a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian."[34]

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[30] See Swami Akhilananda, *The Hindu View of Christ* (New York Philosophical Library, 1949). For Akhilananda. Christ is primarily an *avatara*, that is, an utterly illuminated soul with a full awareness of its divinity and therefore realizing in his life the two great aphorisms of Hinduism: *Aham brahmasmi* ("I am the Brahman") and *Tattvamasi* ("You are That [the Brahman])."

[31] See M. C. Parekh, *A Hindu's Portrait of Jesus* (Rajkot Gujarat. 1953) Parekh came under the influence of Keshub Chunder Sen and was baptized in the Anglican Church in Bombay in 1918 For him, Jesus announced a spiritual rather than secular kingdom and now dwells in us in spirit, binding us to God A Hindu can have such a spiritual experience while remaining a Hindu, without a need to become a Christian

[32] Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, whose birth name is Bhavani Charan Bannerjee. was first baptized into the Anglican Church in 1891 but later became a Roman Catholic He espoused a high Christology, confessing that Jesus is the very Incarnation of God, and not just an *avatar*. He promoted the use of the philosophy of Sankara to express the Christian faith, the recognition of the Vedas as the Indian Old Testament, and the establishment of an Indian monastic order. He edited a journal. *Sophia*, to disseminate his proposals. In 1902 he went to the Vatican to promote his views. but was unsuccessful. After his return, he moved away from an active contact with the Church and became more active in the national movement for political freedom See B. Animananda. *The Blade. Life and Work of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya* (Calcutta: Roy and Son, 1947)

[33] For the acknowledgment of Christ by the Indian Renaissance or Neo-Hinduism, see M M. Thomas. *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London. SCM. 1969) and Stanley Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1974). Dupuis discerns six different types of Christologies among these figures of the Indian Renaissance the *ethical* model of Jesus as the perfect symbol of non-violence (M. Gandhi). the *devotional* model of Jesus as the perfect union between humanity and God (K. C Sen), the *philosophical* model of Jesus as the highest stage of humanity's evolution toward its self-realization (S. Radhakrishnan); the *theological* model of Jesus as an *avatara* or a manifestation of the supreme *Brahman* (Swami Akhilananda); the *ascetical* model of Jesus as the extraordinary *yogi* (M Parekh); and the *mystical* model of Jesus as a *guru* and friend. See his *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* (Maryknoll. N.Y. Orbis. 1991) 18–45

[34] Raimundo Panikkar. *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York Paulist. 1978) 2

Thirdly, a productive way to discuss the dynamics of multiple religious belonging is not to start from an abstract consideration of the doctrinal compatibility or lack of it between the various doctrines and practices of Christianity and those of other religions nor from sociological and psychological investigations of the phenomenon of double religious identity, useful though these may be. Rather, as Jacques Dupuis has pointed out, a fruitful method would be to reflect "on the concrete experience of the pioneers who have relentlessly endeavored to combine in their own life their Christian commitment and another faith experience."[35]

Space does not permit a detailed recounting of the experiences of these Christian pioneers of multiple religious belonging among whom the names of individuals such as French Benedictine Henri Le Saux, also known as Swami Abhishiktananda (1910–1973),[36] German-Japanese Jesuit Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle (1898–1990),[37] American Cistercian Thomas Merton (1915–1968),[38] English Benedictine Bede Griffiths (1906–1993),[39] Spanish-Indian priest Raimundo Panikkar (1918–),[40] and more recently, Sri Lan-

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[35] Dupuis, "Christianity and Religions," in *Many Mansions* 69.

[36] The following works by Abhishiktananda may be noted: *Prayer* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1972); *Guru and Disciple* (London SPCK, 1974), *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974; rev. ed. 1984); *Hindu-Christian Meeting-Point* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1976); *The Secret of Arunachala* (Delhi ISPCK, 1979); *Intériorité et révélation· Essais théologiques* (Sisteron: Éditions Présence, 1982); *The Eyes of Light* (Denville, N.J.. Dimension Books, 1983); *The Further Shore* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1984); *La montée au fond du coeur: Le journal intime du moine chrétien-sannyasi hindou* (Paris: Oeil, 1986)

[37] Enomiya-Lassalle's most famous book is *Zen – Weg zur Erleuchtung Einfuhrung und Anleitung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Taschenbuch, 1992 [1960]). On Enomiya-Lassalle, see Werner G. Jeanrond, "Belonging or Identity? Christian Faith in a Multi-Religious World," in *Many Mansions* 111–15 and Ursula Baartz, *Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle: Ein Leben zwischen den Welten* (Zurich: Benziger, 1998).

[38] Among Merton's numerous works, see *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1975); *Thoughts on the East* (New York. New Directions, 1995).

[39] Bede Griffiths's important books include. *The Golden String* (Springfield, Ill. Templegate, 1954 and 1980); *Vedanta and Christian Faith* (Los Angeles: Dawn Horse, 1973); *Return to the Center* (London: Collins, 1976); *The Marriage of East and West· A Sequel to the Golden String* (Springfield, Ill. Templegate, 1982); *The Cosmic Revelation· The Hindu Way to God* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1985); *Christ in India* (New York: Scribner, 1967); *A New Vision of Reality. Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith* (London: Collins, 1989)

[40] Of Panikkar's numerous publications, see *Religionen und die Religion* (Munich: Huber, 1965); *L'homme qui devient Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1969); *Le mystère du culte dans l'hindouisme et le christianisme* (Paris: Cerf, 1970); *Salvation in Christ. Concreteness and Universality. The Supername* (Santa Barbara: University of California, 1972); *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (New York: Orbis.

kan Oblate Michael Rodrigo (1927–1987),[41] and Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris (1934–)[42] figure prominently. The religions that these practitioners of double religious belonging attempted to learn from and practice are predominantly Hinduism (Abhishiktananda and Griffiths), Zen Buddhism (Enomiya-Lassalle and Merton), and Theravada Buddhism (Rodrigo and Pieris) As we have already seen, Panikkar attempted to be Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu at the same time. Of course, they did not espouse the same method of interreligious sharing and the measure in which each immersed himself in these religions varied widely.

I am attempting here to create a composite sketch out of these divergent experiences of multiple religious belonging and to discern therein the challenges and opportunities that it poses for the Church. My intention is not to derive from these experiences some kind of a normative pattern to serve as a model for an ideal multiple religious identity. Despite their variety and richness, these experiences, as I noted later, are still too limited and even narrow to accommodate the wide-ranging and diverse forms of multiple religious belonging available today.

(1) The first common element in these experiences of multiple religious belonging is that they did not originate in some kind of uncertainty about Christian identity or spiritual crisis or even discontent with the Catholic Church, much less in the ignorance of the Christian tradition. On the

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1973): *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York. Paulist, 1978), *Myth, Faith, and Hermeneutics. Cross-Cultural Studies* (New York Paulist, 1979); *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, rev. ed (Maryknoll, N Y Orbis, 1981), *The Silence of God The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll, N.Y Orbis, 1989): *The Cosmotheandric Experience· Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll, N Y.. Orbis, 1993) For a critical study of Panikkar, see *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, N Y. Orbis, 1996).

[41] See Michael Rodrigo, "Fr Mike and His Thought," vol 1. "The Moral Passover from Selfishness to Selflessness in Christianity and the Other Religions in Sri Lanka," ed. Sr. Milburga Fernando. *Logos* [Sri Lanka] 27/3 (September 1988) i–iv [introduction] and 1–114, vol. 2, "Life in All Its Fullness," *Logos* 27/4 (1988) 1–99; Michael Rodrigo. "Tissues of Life and Death Selected Poems of Fr. Michael Rodrigo O.M.I., Introduction and editorial comment by Elizabeth Harris." *Quest* [Sri Lanka] 95 (April 1988) 1–88

[42] See Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N Y : Orbis, 1988); *Love Meets Wisdom· A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.. Orbis, 1988), *Fire and Water· Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (Maryknoll, N.Y : Orbis, 1996); *God's Reign for God's Poor· A Return to the Jesus Formula. A Critical Evaluation of Contemporary Reformulations of the Mission Manifestation in Roman Catholic Theology in Recent Jesuit Documents* (Kelaniya, Sri Lanka: Tulana Research Centre, 1999); *Mysticism of Service: A Short Treatise on Spirituality with a Pauline-Ignatian Focus on the Prayer-Life of Christian Activists* (Kelaniya· Tulana Research Centre, 2000) On Rodrigo and Pieris. see Elisabeth J. Harris, "Double Belonging in Sri Lanka· Illusion or Liberating Path?" in *Many Mansions* 76–92

contrary, all of the protagonists were well versed in Christian tradition and several of them held doctorates in theology and were also prolific authors.[43]

Furthermore, none of them went in search of the spiritual riches of non-Christian religions because of their doubt about the unique and universal role of Christ as the savior understood inclusively as has already been explained.[44] Rather, they all were deeply committed to Jesus Christ as the person in whom God's salvation was mediated to them. Nor did they reject the Church as an institution in which this divine salvation is sacramentalized, even if some of them, in particular Pieris, were critical of some of the Church's teachings and practices.[45] Indeed, their love and loyalty to the Church was unquestioned, and out of this love and loyalty they undertook interreligious sharing in order to enrich the Church with the spiritual resources of other religions and in this way help it achieve its full self-realization. In sum, their religious quest was deeply rooted in their Christian faith, and indeed, it was their Christian conviction that revelation and salvation, brought about by Jesus, is somehow present in other religious traditions, that set them in their journey of multiple religious belonging.

(2) Because of this fundamental and prior commitment to the Christian faith, it would seem that the primary identity of these practitioners of double belonging is Christian (with the possible exception of Panikkar). In other words, they were Hindu or Buddhist Christians, with "Christian"

[43] This is in stark contrast to a great number of contemporary young Catholics who appear to be innocent of an accurate knowledge of even the basic beliefs of the Christian faith. Professors of theology in Catholic colleges and universities can readily testify to this lamentable condition.

[44] A statement by Abhishiktananda may be taken as representative: "Willy-nilly, I am profoundly attached to Christ Jesus, and hence to ecclesial *koinônia*. It is in him that 'mystery' has discovered itself to me since my awakening to myself and to the world. It is under his *image*, his *symbol*, that I know God, and that I know myself and the world of men. . . For me, Jesus is my *Sadguru* [true Guru]. It is in him that God has appeared to me." See Le Saux, *La montée au fond du coeur*, July 24, 1970, 385, quoted by Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* 7–80. Again, this is much at variance with the attitude of a majority of people who dapple in various religions because they believe that all religions express the same core religious experiences or are simply different paths to the same goal of self-realization.

[45] A statement by Griffiths may be taken as representative: "For the divine mystery can only be approached by faith, and the dogmas and sacraments of the Church are the walls in which the gate of faith, which is 'heaven's gate,' is to be found. The moment we attempt to enter ourselves, to do without the Church, we shut ourselves out of the City. But when we learn to accept the dogmas and sacraments of the Church, then we can enter by faith into the heart of the mystery; we can pass through the sign to the thing signified, through the image to the reality" (*The Golden String* 186). Once more, this ecclesial dimension is contrary to the "believing without belonging" posture that sociologists of religion have noted among a number of contemporary practitioners of multiple religious belonging in the West.

functioning as a substantive and other religious specifications as a qualifier, rather than the reverse. This is due to the fact that none of them was a convert from a non-Christian faith to Christianity but was "born" Christian to begin with, though some of them, e.g., Griffiths and Merton, "rediscovered" Christianity after a period of staying away from it.

This is not to deny the possibility that converts from other religions may also define themselves primarily as Christian and secondarily as Hindu or Buddhist or Confucian or whatever. However, it is often the case that when conversions occur not as the result of a deep personal choice but because of non-religious factors (e.g., marriage or tribal allegiance), and where religion is deeply intertwined with culture, as is true of most Asian religions,[46] many converts would define themselves and more importantly, think and behave primarily as Hindu, or Buddhist, or Confucian or whatever, and only secondarily as Christian.

Furthermore, the question of the primacy of one religious tradition over another is not a matter that is settled once and for all but continually fluctuates, depending on the circumstances. Some of the authors already mentioned were more Christian when they lived in or returned to the West, while being more Hindu or Buddhist when they lived in Asia. Or, they tended to represent the Christian tradition when in dialogue with non-Christians, and vice versa, they appeared more Hindu and Buddhist when explaining their experiences to Christians Sometimes, it is simply a matter of mutual complementarity. Joseph S. O'Leary mentions a fascinating case of the late Winston and Jocelyn King: they meditated together every morning, he as a Buddhist Christian, she as a Christian Buddhist.[47] Above all, as I later explain, the double identity is an irreducible and unresolvable ten-

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[46] Claude Geffré has offered a forceful reminder of this fact "We are familiar enough with the official discourses proclaiming a plural identity simultaneously both fully Christian and wholly Indian, Chinese, or Japanese. But what would the Indian identity consist of outside of Hinduism? What would comprise the Chinese identity without the complex religious mixture of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism? What is the Japanese identity apart from Zen Buddhism and the Shinto tradition?" ("Double Belonging and the Originality of Christianity as a Religion," in *Many Religions* 96) While fully agreeing with Geffré's remark on the inextricable union between religion and culture, especially in Asia, and hence on the person's identity as comprising both religion and culture, I would resist identifying the Indian identity with Hinduism because this fails to recognize the presence of other religions in these countries and their oppression by the religion of the majority

[47] See Joseph S. O'Leary, "Toward a Buddhist Interpretation of Christian Truth," in *Many Mansions* 29 Perhaps this fluctuation in religious identity may be illustrated by a comparison with holding two passports or speaking two different languages. One is born a citizen of a country (one's primary nationality), but by acquiring another passport one also acquires a secondary nationality and a set of other rights and privileges that one may or must exercise (e g , vote) depending where one lives. Similarly, if a person is multilingual, one language may be con-

sion that must be held together throughout a person's life until, in the evocative words of Abhishiktananda, "dawn may arise."[48]

(3) While insisting that their interreligious sharing must occur predominantly in the areas of ethical and monastic practices and prayer and even mysticism, none of these pioneers belittled the necessity of an intellectual mastery of the intricate doctrines and histories of non-Christian religions. Indeed, several of them were highly competent in the classical languages of these religions and intimately familiar with their sacred texts and even held doctorates in Hinduism and Buddhism (e.g., Rodrigo and Pieris). Many if not all of them were authoritative exponents of these religions, recognized as such by their Hindu and Buddhist peers.[49] Needless to say, without this hard and patient intellectual work, multiple religious belonging runs the risk of shallowness and trendiness.

(4) In spite of their academic achievements, one common thread that links these pioneers of multiple religious belonging is their emphasis on the absolute necessity of what Panikkar calls the "intrareligious dialogue,"[50] or what Pieris terms *"communicatio in sacris"* or "to be baptized by its [the Church's] precursors in the Jordan of Asian religion."[51] By this is meant a personal, interior experience of the encounter of two or more religious traditions, and allowing them to interact, while remaining fundamentally open to the unexpected and unforeseeable personal transformation such an encounter may produce. In other words, the interreligious dialogue must go beyond the theological exchange of concepts and beyond the efforts at inculturating the Christian faith in the philosophical and religious categories of the culture to which the gospel is proclaimed, important and necessary though these two activities may be.

To achieve this intrareligious dialogue one needs, as it were, to step into the shoes of a devotee of another religion and to try to acquire as far as possible the same religious experience of that devotee, most often in a monastic setting. To do so, however, the guidance of a master of that religious tradition is necessary. Abhishiktananda required the direction of

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sidered as one's "mother tongue" (one's primary linguistic competence), which one speaks with greater fluency, while, if one lives abroad, one is constrained to speak a "foreign language" (one's secondary linguistic competence), which, if one's sojourn is long enough, one may know better and speak with greater fluency than one's mother tongue.

[48] On December 5, 1970, Swami Abhishiktananda noted: "The best thing is, I think, to hold, even if in extreme tension, these two forms of a unique 'faith,' till dawn may arise" (*Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948–73) of Swami Abhishiktananda (dom Henri Le Saux)* [Delhi: ISPCK, 1998] 19).

[49] This intellectual competence also seems to be lacking in many contemporary Western practitioners of multiple religious belonging.

[50] See Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1978).

[51] Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* 41.

Sri Ramana Maharshi and Swami Gnanananda, and Pieris prostrated him-
self at the feet of a learned Buddhist monk begging him to accept him as
his disciple and to be admitted into the Buddhist monastery.

(5) This religious experience in terms of the teachings, rituals, prayers,
and spiritual and monastic practices of a non-Christian religion and not in
terms of those of the Christian tradition – while faithfully carrying out
those of the Christian tradition at the same time – is, needless to say,
profoundly unsettling and even threatening and remains ultimately inex-
pressible. Here a reference, albeit very brief, to the *advaita* experience of
Abhishiktananda can be illuminating.[52] Jacques Dupuis has summarized
the *advaita* or non-duality mystical experience as follows:

> *Advaita* experience may be described, it would seem. as an entry, or better as
> assumption, into the knowledge that the Absolute has of itself, and thus as a view
> of reality literally from the viewpoint of the Absolute. From the special viewpoint
> of this absolute awareness, all duality (*dvaita*) vanishes, since the Absolute alone is
> absolute, is One-without-a-second (*ekam advitiyam*). From this viewpoint the uni-
> verse, and history have no absolute meaning (*paramartha*); their existence pertains
> to the domain of the relative (*vyavahara*), God's *lila* (God's play in creation). At
> the awakening of the experience of *advaita*, the ontological density of the finite seer
> itself vanishes. The awakening of absolute awareness leaves no room for a subjec-
> tive awareness of self as a finite subject of cognition: there remains only the *aham*-
> ("I") awareness of the Absolute in the epiphenomenon of the body (*satiram*):
> *Aham brahmasmi*. The experience of *advaita* thus implies a radical disappearance
> of all that is not the Absolute .... What abides is the awakening of the one who
> knows to the subjective consciousness of the Absolute itself. And it is not an
> objective knowledge of the Absolute by a finite me. In the process of illumination
> the human "me" gives way to the divine *Aham*. Such is the radical demand of
> *advaita*.[53]

This *advaita* experience, which implies the supreme renunciation of oneself
and the even more radical renunciation of the divine "Thou" encountered
in prayer, seems to run counter to the Christian doctrines of the tri-
personal God, creation, and prayer, and would make the double belonging
to Christianity and Hinduism problematic if not impossible. As he noted in
his journal, Abhishiktananda acutely experienced the antinomy between
the Hindu and the Christian conceptions of reality and the painful push-
and-pull of his double identity as a Hindu-Christian monk. He lived this
anguish for nearly 25 years, never fully able to reconcile the two apparently
opposing conceptions on the theoretical levels. He counseled acceptance of
the unresolvable tension without attempting at harmonizing them: "It is

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[52] For a detailed study of this experience, see Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the En-
counter of World Religions* 69–81 and his "Christianity and Religions," in *Many
Mansions* 69–72.
[53] Dupuis, "Christianity and Religions," in *Many Mansions* 70.

still best, I think, to hold, even in extreme tension, these two forms of a single 'faith,' until the dawn appears."[54]

And yet this inability to reconcile theologically the *advaita* experience with various Christian doctrines did not diminish Abhishiktananda's certitude of the reality and validity of his experience, as he noted, not without enthusiasm: "The experience of the *Upanishads* is true – I *know*!"[55] Hence, multiple religious belonging or double religious identity is by no means a facile compromise or a painless feat of intellectual balancing between two opposing worldviews and ways of life. Rather it is a lived drama of tension, never fully resolved on the theoretical level, but affirmed at the existential plane, a continuing quest for harmony amid dissonance, ever elusive, provisional, and unfinished, to be heard fully only on the "Other Shore."

(6) In a manner concomitant with the intrareligious dialogue of the encounter of religions within oneself and the interreligious dialogue of sharing prayer and religious experiences with followers of other religions, multiple religious belonging must also be expressed in mutual collaboration among various religions for the defense and emancipation of the poor and the marginalized. Without a deep commitment to and struggle for justice, withdrawal into ashrams for prayer and contemplation and interreligious dialogue run the risk of spiritual escapism and bourgeois leisure life.

Aloysius Pieris is perhaps the most vocal proponent of a double baptism for the Church in Asia: baptism by its precursors in the Jordan of Asian religion, and by oppressive systems on the cross of Asian poverty. For Pieris, every religion is composed of three elements: core experience, collective memory, and interpretation. For example, Christianity and Buddhism originated both from a core experience, that is, Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God and the enlightenment of the Buddha respectively. Pieris calls the former "agape," the latter "gnosis." The collective memory of each religion is made up of narratives, sacred texts, liturgy, songs, drama, and structural organization. The interpretation is constituted by the way in which the core experience is understood, explained, and transmitted throughout the history of each religion. Interreligious dialogue, which is not a luxury but a necessity, must be carried out on all the three elements, because the language of love ("agape") and that of wisdom ("gnosis") need each other to achieve their fullness.

According to Pieris, each religion constitutes a unique and unrepeatable identity but various religions can be seen as representing mutually corrective instincts of the human spirit and therefore must be brought into dialogue with one another. Thus, agape and gnosis, though pointing to differ-

[54] See n. 48 above.
[55] Le Saux, *La montée au fond du coeur*, May 11, 1972, 425, quoted by Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* 73.

ent core experiences, are mutually complementary because neither is in itself an adequate medium to experience or to express our experiences of the Divine.

Because of irreducible differences among religions, the goal of such dialogue is neither syncretism nor synthesis but "symbiosis."[56] Syncretism and synthesis violate the unique identity of each religion. Pieris is opposed to the way many postmodern religious seekers pick and choose elements of various religions to suit their personal needs and to create a new religious entity unrecognizable to the followers of religions from which these elements are selected. By contrast, "symbiosis" is a movement in which members of different religious traditions live and work together in "basic human communities" (and not just "base Christian communities"), especially in favor and with the poor, and in the process are taught by the "other" more about what is unique and significant in their own faith. In other words, Buddhists, through collaborating with Christians, learn more about what is uniquely valuable in Buddhist "gnosis," while Christians will learn more about what is uniquely valuable in Christian "agape." In so doing, both Buddhists and Christians must be joined together by a common commitment to the poor, a sensitivity to the "Unspoken Speaker," that is, to the Spirit that is not tied down to any dogma, rite, or law, and to the Word that is uttered beyond the confines of any religious organization and hierarchy.[57]

From this analysis of the dynamics of multiple religious belonging as exhibited by some key pioneers in multiple religious belonging, it is clear that this phenomenon both poses challenges and offers opportunities for the Church. While it has been made more acceptable by recent theologies of religions, its practice by people, especially the young, who do not possess the necessary qualifications that were present, to an eminent degree, in those pioneers, can easily lead to the "nebulous esoteric mysticism" and "Nietzschean neo-paganism" that we have been warned against.[58] Among those qualifications especially important are a deep commitment to Jesus as the "unique" and "universal" Savior (as interpreted inclusively), a firm rootedness in the Christian community, a competent knowledge of the

[56] See A. Pieris. *Fire and Water* 154–61.

[57] Ibid. 133

[58] *Dominus Iesus* warns against the following dangers of interreligious encounter: "the difficulty in understanding and accepting the presence of definitive and eschatological events in history, the metaphysical emptying of the historical incarnation of the Eternal Logos, reduced to a mere appearing of God in history, the eclecticism of those who, in theological research, uncritically absorb ideas from a variety of philosophical and theological contexts without regard for consistency, systematic connection, or compatibility with Christian truth; finally, the tendency to read and to interpret Sacred Scripture outside the tradition and magisterium of the Church" (no 4)

doctrinal and religious traditions of both Christianity and the non-Christian religions, docility to the guidance of a trustworthy teacher/director, a genuine and sincere quest for communion with God, and an effective commitment to the work for justice.

Needless to say, how to make these conditions widely accessible is a challenging task. However, given the significant rise of multiple religious belonging in the West (not to mention the emergence of new religious movements and sects), particularly among youth, the need to make multiple religious belonging spiritually fruitful, both for the individual and the Church, is more urgent than ever. In the last part of this article I propose seven modest suggestions as to how education for multiple religious belonging can be at least begun.

Multiple religious belonging not only poses challenges but offers opportunities as well. We have already seen how pioneers in multiple religious belonging have enriched our understanding of Christianity itself. Among its many benefits, John B. Cobb, Jr. highlights the opportunity for reconciliation between Christianity and other religions, in particular Judaism, Islam, and the religion of Native Americans. For him, multiple religious belonging may be a useful means to purge Christianity of its long-lasting anti-Judaism, its crimes against Islam, and its injustices against Native Americans.[59]

Joseph S. O'Leary, while recognizing the validity of the warnings of *Dominus Iesus* against the dangers of interreligious encounter, argues that these dangers, even though unavoidable, are salutary, at least with regard to Buddhism: "The encounter of Christianity and Buddhism of its very nature puts a question mark against definitive eschatological events, demands a less substantialist ontology of the Incarnation, sets up a play of ideas that cannot be reduced to systematic connections, and uncovers meanings in scripture that are thinly represented in traditional church teaching."[60]

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[59] See John B. Cobb. Jr., "Multiple Religious Belonging and Reconciliation," in *Many Mansions* 20–28. Nevertheless. Cobb frankly acknowledges that "I do not see multiple religious belonging as the primary way into the future. The primary way is the transformation of the particular religious traditions, at least in the Christian case, through their new encounter with other traditions" (27). He admits however that multiple belongers can contribute to this transformation.

[60] O'Leary, "Toward a Buddhist Interpretation of Christian Truth," in *Many Mansions* 30. In O'Leary's view, the contribution of Buddhism to Christianity is not in terms of this or that doctrine but in the way it helps cure the "sickness" of Christianity: "One way in which Buddhism may fall within the divine plan is as a pharmacopeia of antidotes for the sickness of religion ... . Buddhism tempers the elements of fixation, irrationality, emotivity, and violence in Christian thinking and presents a peaceful, reasonable, wholesome mode of being present religiously to

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING

One of the conditions for fruitful multiple religious belonging is a competent knowledge of the doctrines and practices of non-Christian religions. In his most recent book, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Paul Knitter wishes to ring two bells: an alarm bell and an invitation bell, the former to alert Americans to the fact of religious pluralism in their midst, and the latter to urge them to take that fact seriously, not only de facto but also de iure, that is, to inquire into its possible significance for Christianity. The two bells need to be heeded because, in our present age, religious people have, in Knitter's felicitous phrase, "to be religious interreligiously."[61]

(1) First, there is an urgent need to sensitize Catholic candidates for ordained ministry to the fact of religious diversity. Initially this call seems to be a redundancy, yet it is very much needed. Not a few seminaries are located far from urban centers, often shielded not only from racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity but also from religious diversity. Furthermore, seminary faculty and candidates to the ministerial priesthood tend to focus their concerns on the training for pastoral ministry to parishes, a ministry not addressed to non-Catholics, let alone non-Christians. There is also the added fact, often acknowledged *sub rosa* by seminary faculty, that there is a disturbing number of "conservative" and downright "right-wing" seminarians who would create trouble for the institution if there is any consideration about the "uniqueness" and "universality" of Christ as savior in the inclusive sense, or about non-Christian religions as possible "ways of salvation."

(2) A cursory examination of the academic program offered in Catholic seminaries shows that little if any attention is devoted to missiology and interreligious dialogue. The lion's share of theological courses is given to basic courses in Catholic doctrine, often because candidates who come to the seminary do not always possess the requisite undergraduate training in philosophy and theology, and therefore require additional study of the Catholic tradition. And, if truth be told, few seminary professors are well equipped to teach courses in non-Christian religions. Courses on interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism are at best offered as electives and not rarely are looked upon with suspicion. The Vatican's investigation of theological works on religious pluralism such as Jacques Dupuis's *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* and Roger Haight's *Jesus the*

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the contemporary world . ... In an age when religious fundamentalism and sectarian strife are more virulent than ever, the healing critique of Buddhism has perhaps a more central role to play than the classical dogma of Christianity, at least at the forefront of history, whatever the ultimate shape of 'the divine plan of salvation'" (41–42)

[61] Knitter. *Introducing Theologies of Religions* xi

Symbol of God as well as certain statements in *Dominus Iesus* may discourage explorations.

(3) Yet theological education for religious pluralism and multiple religious belonging is more urgent than ever. To begin with, not only awareness to racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity must be raised, and to this effect, courses on Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian-American theologies should be made available, but also at least a course on religious pluralism should be made mandatory for ministerial students who should be required to read, though not necessarily agree with, important works on the subject.[62]

(4) Besides readings on theologies of religions, there is also the need to show how Catholic theology today must and can be studied from an interreligious perspective. This is the emerging "Comparative Theology" – not as an alternative to the theology of religions – but as a way of better understanding one's own Christian theology through a deeper understanding of others. One tries not only to understand non-Christian religions through the Christian lens (Christian theology of religions) but also to understand Christian faith through the non-Christian lens (comparative theology).[63] Concrete examples of comparative theology, though still few, should be offered as possible models for theologizing in the context of religious pluralism.[64]

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[62] Besides Dupuis's work already mentioned above, I also recommend his latest book, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002). For a magisterial and even-handed introduction to the theologies of religions, Paul Knitter's *Introducing Theologies of Religions* is also recommended. Needless to say, documents of the magisterium must also form required readings, especially the various documents of Pope John Paul II and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

[63] On comparative theology, see John Renard, "Comparative Theology: Definition and Method," *Religious Studies and Theology* 17 (1998) 3–18; Francis Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany: SUNY, 1993); and his, *Seeing Through Texts* (Albany: SUNY, 1996); also by Clooney, "Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books (1989–1995)," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 521–50; James Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Paulist, 1999); "A Universal Religious Experience? Comparative Theology as an Alternative to a Theology of Religions," *Horizons* 22 (1995) 67–87; Peter C. Phan, "Doing Theology in the Context of Mission: Lessons from Alexandre de Rhodes," *Gregorianum* 81 (2000) 723–49; his "Doing Theology in the Context of Cultural and Religious Pluralism: An Asian Perspective," *Louvain Studies* 27 (2002) 39–68; and the June 2003 issue of *Theological Studies* devoted to the interface between Christianity and other living faiths.

[64] See, for instance, Francis Clooney, "God for Us: Multiple Religious Identities as a Human and Divine Prospect," in *Many Mansions* 44–60; John Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahayana Reading* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989); Keenan, *The Gospel of Mark: A Mahayana Reading* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995); Peter C. Phan, "The Christ of Asia: An Essay on Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor,"

(5) Theological studies should not be divorced from spirituality. Consequently, theological reflections on religious pluralism should be accompanied by multifaith worship and prayer in which sacred scriptures as well as prayers and rituals of non-Christian religions are used not as substitute for, but as a complement to the Christian Bible, prayers, and rituals. Furthermore, students should also be introduced to non-Christian monastic practices and meditation techniques to enrich their spiritual lives.[65]

(6) Theological studies and spirituality should not be divorced from work with and for the poor and the marginalized. Interreligious dialogue in the forms of sharing life and collaborating with people of non-Christian faiths should be strongly encouraged. Nothing can change a person's negative view about the possibility of salvation outside Christianity and about the positive values of non-Christian religions more quickly and effectively than an actual and prolonged encounter with non-Christians who are prayerful and holy, not rarely more so than Christians themselves. Interreligious dialogue is never carried out with religions as such but with flesh-and-blood believers and practitioners of other faiths.

(7) This leads to my last suggestion which has been eloquently and convincingly made by James Fredericks who proposes that Christians who are engaged in interreligious dialogue and comparative theology should develop not only love (*agape*) but also friendship (*philia*) with non-Christians.[66] Love is a command of Jesus and is obligatory for all Christians; it is unconditional and must be given to all, one's enemies included. By contrast, friendship is optional and preferential; it is bestowed only on persons with whom one feels a certain attraction because of their admirable and pleasing qualities or because of mutual interests. Thus, Christians may become friends with non-Christians because of the beauty and value of their beliefs and practices

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Studia missionalia 45 (1996) 25–55; Phan, "Mary in Vietnamese Piety and Theology: A Contemporary Perspective," *Ephemerides mariologicae* 51 (2001) 457–71; David Burrell. *Knowing the Unknowable God. Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1986); Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1993); Donald Mitchell, *Spirituality and Emptiness* (New York: Paulist, 1991), Leo D. Lefebure, *The Buddha and the Christ: Explorations in Buddhist and Christian Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993); David Carpenter, *Revelation, History, and the Dialogue of Religions: A Comparative Study of Bhartrhari and Bonaventure* (Maryknoll, N Y: Orbis. 1995); John Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Albany: SUNY, 1994).

[65] For a helpful work on how to make use of Zen meditation in the Christian and Ignatian context, see Kakichi Kadowaki, *Zen and the Bible*, trans. Joan Rieck (Maryknoll, N Y. Orbis, 2002. originally published in Japanese in 1977).

[66] See Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths* 173–77

Furthermore, friends are at first strangers. Strangers are initially always strange and foreign and threatening to our sense of belonging and familiarity. By accepting the stranger as friend, we allow his or her "otherness" to confront us radically, challenging us with stories we have never heard, questions we have never raised, beliefs we have never entertained, and practices we have never imagined. By welcoming and learning to appreciate these new religious realities, we gradually adopt them as our own because our friends have them and share them with us, and thus we begin to acquire, perhaps without being aware of it, multiple religious belonging or double religious identity.

A final word of caution: Multiple religious belonging is not for the fainthearted and the dilettante. Practitioners of multiple religious belonging such as those we have discussed face a demanding vocation, a special call to holiness which up until now God has granted to only a few. It is not unlike martyrdom. Ultimately, it is not something one looks for or demands at will. Rather it is a gift to be received in fear and trembling and in gratitude and joy.[67]