of the millenium.

Vicente Marasigan, S.J.


The theology of mission and evangelization has occupied center stage in recent months in many church circles. Within a six-month period two significant documents on world mission have appeared: John Paul II’s encyclical Redemptoris Missio and the collaborative document Dialogue and Proclamation (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples).

The Asian questions and agenda in mission receive clear presentation in these two documents. A particularly important focus centers around the theology of religions, interreligious dialogue, and the role and place of Jesus Christ vis-a-vis diverse world faith traditions.

In this vast area of contemporary mission theology, Jacques Dupuis’ work Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions stands as a beacon among recent books on crucial mission issues. Also available in French (Desclée) and Italian (Cittadella), this masterpiece treats several of the same topics discussed in Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation. Dupuis, a master of clarity and precision, always presents a closely reasoned theological exposé of core questions facing the missionary Church in the 1990s.

Dupuis is a well-known figure in missiology. Currently professor at the Gregorian University in Rome, he has 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. As a missionary to Asia, he has been immersed in the religious pluralism of India for over 30 years. This wide range of experience and expertise is constructively reflected in his treatment of diverse areas of mission theology.

Dupuis’ book has as its purpose: “to elucidate, from and in faith, the mutual relationships between Jesus Christ and the religious traditions of humanity” (p. 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” (p. 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” (p. 201).

This seminal work divides 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 that any theology of religion must confront.

Next, an entire chapter presents the experience of the “Hindu-Christian” Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda). This is followed by a pivotal chapter which carefully raises the foundational questions surrounding “Which Christian Theology of Religions?” The stage has been set for an enlightening, perceptive discussion of Jesus Christ’s role within the world’s faith-traditions for, as Dupuis asserts, “the Christological problem constitutes the nub of this debate” (p. 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 (again with precision and depth) 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. This simple narrative of topic areas is most inadequate to capture the scope of Dupuis’ work.

A book review by nature is a brief critical introduction to one work of an author. Dupuis’ book exceeds 300 pages — how does a reviewer capture his key insights in only several hundred words? One acceptable response to this conundrum is to employ the author’s own words to elucidate topics and to attract potential readers.

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” (p. 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” (p. 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’s definitive revelation and the absolute Savior. On the other side, the door is open to a sincere acknowledgment 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” (p. 109).

Dupuis elaborates a clear and basic position on the debated relationship between theocentrism and Christocentrism. He asks if a theocentrism that is not at the same time christocentric can be a Christian theocentrism. He answers negatively, noting (p. 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 passé, the christocentric and theocentric perspective (both adjectives at once) seems surely to be the only way open.

No mission theology today is complete without an integrated christology and pneumatology. 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” (p. 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” (p. 152). Any faithful interreligious encounter needs a well-founded “pneumatological Christology” (p. 192). Readers will find this central missiological theme (and many more) well presented by Dupuis.

As one finishes this demanding, closely written work, one feels that the entire question (Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions) has been openly and adequately explored with great depth and nuance. I know of no other book available 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 — which is particularly important and welcomed with congratulations and sincere gratitude.

James H. Kroeger, M.M.


Rainier Ibsana, a faculty member of the Ateneo de Manila philosophy department, has prepared and edited a very useful collection of the writings of Quentin Lauer, S.J. The latter is professor emeritus of philosophy at Fordham University and was the mentor of Dr. Ibsana’s work there a few years ago.

The book contains the editor’s introduction, ten writings of Fr. Lauer, a list of all the latter’s publications and a short biography of the author. The editor’s introduction is a helpful guide to the contents of the book.

All the writings in this collection are of value for students and teachers of philosophy and for the general searcher for wisdom. In the first one “What is Philosophy?” Fr. Lauer wants not to define philosophy but to show that it includes a variety of flexible methods, such as learning from the experience of geniuses of the past. These men and women experienced life and the world with an alluring excellence of rationality and vision in a way that can enlighten later students. Their excellence is “a sort of witness to the capacity of human experience at its best” (p. 4).

Philosophy is a way of life rather than a body of knowledge, an attitude of questioning and searching for the truth about that reality which the human person is, about our surroundings and about “what else must be” if these are to make sense. That truth will be derived from experiences “pondered profoundly” that the greats of the past share with ourselves (p. 12). And if thinkers and teachers of our time try to do what the greats of the past have done, we may even contribute to the further growth of philosophy (p. 13).

“Humanism and Human Dignity” is appearing for the first time. The article stresses the excellence of the human, and makes it clear that human authenticity is something that we must reach by what we do. Furthermore, an education is less authentically humanistic by ignoring