

Vatican II and the Religions: A Review Essay

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IN HIS NEW BOOK, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*,¹ the Australian theologian Gerald O'Collins, S.J., addresses the questions regarding the universal scope of God's plan of salvation mediated through the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the salvific state of non-Christians and the irreligious, and, correspondingly, the significance of other religions in the history of redemption. He addressed these questions in an earlier book, *Salvation for All: God's Other Peoples*,² but the crucial difference in this new book—the earlier one focused on the major biblical testimony—is that he now turns to justify theologically his position in the pertinent documents of Vatican II (Constitutions: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Dei Verbum*; *Gaudium et Spes*; Decree: *Ad Gentes*; and Declaration: *Nostra Aetate*) and the papal magisterium of John Paul II (*Redemptor Hominis*, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, *Redemptoris Missio*).³ O'Collins's position is well

¹ Gerald O'Collins, S.J., *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For an overview of this book, see Gerald O'Collins, "The Second Vatican Council on other living faiths," *Pacifica, Australasian Theological Studies*, 26.2 (June 2013): 155–170.

² Ibid., *Salvation for All: God's Other Peoples* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). For a Review Symposium of this book consisting of Peter C. Phan, Francis X. Clooney, S.J., Catherine Cornille, and Paul J. Griffiths, with a Response by O'Collins's, see *Horizons* 36.1 (Spring 2009): 121–142.

³ Also, Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), is a significant theological source for O'Collins' position, but I shall refrain from discussing Dupuis' work in this limited article review. O'Collins acted as advocate for Dupuis during the inves-

summarized by him in the following set of questions and answers:

How can Christians profess and proclaim faith in Jesus Christ as the one redeemer of all humankind, and at the same time recognize the Spirit at work in the world's religions and cultures—as was done by John Paul II? . . . As revealer and redeemer, Jesus is unique and universal, but in practice the visible paths to salvation have remained many. What might the various religious traditions mean in the divine plan to save the whole of humanity? . . . (a) Can the adherents of the other religions be saved? (b) If one answers yes, do the elements of truth and grace found in these religions mean that their adherents can be saved, not despite, but through these elements? (c) If one again answers yes, do these religions enjoy a positive meaning in God's one plan of salvation for all human beings—or in the language of the Letter to the Ephesians—in the one “recapitulation” of all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10)?⁴

O'Collins's affirmative response to these questions makes clear that his theology of religious pluralism is an inclusivist one, in sum, “inclusive pluralism” à la Jacques Dupuis.⁵ This position attempts to balance various things: one, God's salvation for all people is based upon the person and work of Jesus Christ; two, the saving significance of his person and work is in some sense also available through his Spirit to non-Christians, and even the irreligious, just as they are, so there is no need for them to be explicitly converted to Christ; and three, Christ's saving significance is

tigation of Dupuis' works by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This investigation involved conversations with the CDF that began in the spring of 1998 and ended with a “notification” published by the CDF on the Vatican website in January 2001. For O'Collins's account of the person and work of Jacques Dupuis, see “Jacques Dupuis, *His Person and Work*,” in *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, ed. Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 18–29.

⁴ O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 182–183.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 185–188. Dupuis responds as follows to the question what is meant by inclusive pluralism. “It is intended, as I have explained repeatedly, to combine two fundamental affirmations which, though apparently contradictory, must be seen as complementary (cf. *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 95): ‘the universal constitutive character of the Christ event in the order of salvation and the saving significance of the religious traditions in a plurality of principle of the religious traditions within the one manifold plan of God for humankind’” (“‘Christianity and the Religions’ Revisited,” in *Louvain Studies* 28 [2003]: 363–383, and at 369–370).

universal, constitutive, and decisive in God's one divine plan of salvation for humanity, but other religions can be accepted positively as part of this saving plan.⁶ In other words, a Moslem *qua* Moslem can be saved; a Buddhist *qua* Buddhist can be saved; a Hindu *qua* Hindu can be saved; a Jew *qua* Jew can be saved; and so forth.

To be accurate, O'Collins is not a religious pluralist *simpliciter*. He will claim that Christ is the decisive cause of the salvation of all men and so if they are saved they are saved in some sense because of Christ. Furthermore, he does not allege that the other religions "are equally effective at putting people in contact with God" or acknowledge "them to be complete and clear ways, equivalent to what God offers through Jesus Christ and the community called into being by the Holy Spirit."⁷ Still, O'Collins holds that these other religions "provide ways to know God and be saved," even though "the community founded by Christ offers decisively fuller knowledge of God and richer means for salvation."⁸

For my purpose in this article review, the most significant claim made by O'Collins that I shall examine is that "inclusive pluralism" may be justified by the teachings of Vatican II and John Paul II. Of course, O'Collins understands that neither of these sources expressly claims that the other religions as such have saving significance as ways of revelation and salvation. Still, O'Collins insists that since these other religions are based in some sense on the person and work of Christ, they must be seen then as mediators that participate in the universal presence of Christ, who is the one, universal mediator, and his Holy Spirit.⁹ Thus, according to O'Collins, the trajectory of thought expressed in these documents and in the writings of this pope move in the direction of "inclusive pluralism." I will refute this claim. This article is therefore structured as follows.

First, I tease out O'Collins' hermeneutic concern about doctrinal development from several remarks he makes about Vatican Council teaching about other religions. In this connection, I provide an internal criticism of his interpretation of certain council documents and encyclicals. Second, O'Collins's positive estimation of the salvific state of non-Christians is dependent on his doctrine of revelation. His thesis is

⁶ Ibid., 185–194.

⁷ Ibid., 163.

⁸ Ibid., 164. Does this mean that O'Collins thinks the theist who has not embraced Christ and the Church and the non-theist who has not embraced God is, objectively speaking, in a gravely deficient situation with respect to their salvation? I return to this question in the last section of this article.

⁹ Ibid., 179.

that salvation is given with the reception of revelation. His account of revelation is, arguably, inconsistent with the Catholic tradition's teaching on revelation, and hence deserves criticism. Also deserving of criticism, in this connection, is the absence of a theology of sin in O'Collins's theology of other religions, and hence a consideration of inadequate responses to God's revelation as due to, and therefore instances of, human sinfulness. In the third place, I challenge O'Collins's apparent assumption that Christians and non-Christians have a universally shared reference to the same God, and hence a common agreement, not just in word but in concept, when they say they believe in God. I will conclude, in the fourth place, with the implication of his view for the necessity of the Church's missionary mandate. O'Collins asks, "How then should we conceive the relationship of the Church to 'religious others' and her role in their path to salvation?"¹⁰

Doctrinal Development and Levels of Authoritative Doctrinal Teaching

Doctrinal development and magisterial authority play a normative role in Catholic theology, and hence surely in new areas of exploration such as a Catholic theology of religions. The teaching office ("magisterium") of the Church is entrusted with the responsibility authoritatively to transmit the deposit of faith. The magisterium has exercised its teaching authority whereby different levels of authority and their corresponding degrees of assent are expressed in theological notes or qualifications of Christian doctrine. Pared down for my purpose here, three theological notes¹¹ are especially important when considering the question of the development of doctrine.¹² Briefly, level one is about doctrines of the faith—i.e., *de fide*—that "the Church proposes as divinely and formally revealed and, as such, as irreformable." They are primary objects of infallibility. The necessity of the Church as a means of salvation is a prime example of such a doctrine. Level two doctrines of faith and morals are also infallibly taught as logically and historically connected with revelation. "They are necessary for faithfully keeping and expounding the deposit of

¹⁰ Ibid., 164.

¹¹ For a clarifying treatment of these theological notes, see "Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the *Professio Fidei*," Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, June 29, 1998.

¹² I am following Gavin D'Costa's brief summary in chapter 1 of his book, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14–15, 30–36.

faith.” These doctrines are secondary objects of infallibility. Level three teachings pertain to doctrines authoritatively but non-definitively taught by the magisterium. In sum, as Gavin D’Costa rightly states, “When a Council teaches anything at levels 1–3, it would be very difficult to say that this teaching can be contradicted or is in error; although there is room for discussing the precise object of the teaching.”¹³ I shall return below to consider whether O’Collins contradicts Vatican II’s teaching that “the Church is necessary for salvation” in his reflections on the relation between the Kingdom of God and the Church and, additionally, the salvific state of non-Christians. For now, I turn to discuss briefly O’Collins’s hermeneutical concern in interpreting Vatican II.

The issue of doctrinal development appears clearly in the following remarks of O’Collins. He writes: “Interpreting, receiving, and implementing the teaching of Vatican II continues, and some of that work goes beyond what the bishops explicitly intended to convey through the sixteen texts they approved.”¹⁴ O’Collins affirms here the necessity of attending to the literal sense of these texts, namely, the sense intended by the body of authors and expressed in language. He adds, “But we should also allow for a plus value that goes beyond original meanings but without opposing them. In new and often greatly changed contexts, conciliar texts can communicate to their later readers more than their original authors ever consciously knew or meant.”¹⁵ Clearly, O’Collins holds the texts of Vatican II on other religions to possess authority for his own reflections, but does his theology of other religions contradict or reject authoritative doctrinal teachings.

O’Collins gives a criterion of testing authentic development, namely, reflections may go beyond the original sense of the Vatican II texts, “but without opposing them.”¹⁶ Although he doesn’t say, I think we can surmise that *opposing* the texts of Vatican II on its authoritative teachings regarding the other religions would at least involve contradicting or rejecting them. O’Collins says very little about doctrinal development beyond this point.¹⁷ In my judgment, applying this criterion for authentic development means that the affirmations of faith have a determin-

¹³ D’Costa, *Vatican II*, 15.

¹⁴ O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, vii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vii.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ A recent article of O’Collins, “Does Vatican II Represent Continuity or Discontinuity?” (*Theological Studies* 73 [2012]: 768–794), does not add anything to the question of authentic and inauthentic doctrinal development.

able content of truth so that the truth itself never changes even if the various linguistic and conceptual ways change in which that truth is expressed. Thus, the same divine truths could be expressed in different ways, but not in ways that are opposed to each other, that is, in fundamentally contradictory ways. The distinction, therefore, between form and content, context and content, in short, unchanging truth and its formulations is precisely what St. John XXIII is getting at in the following famous statement at the opening of Vatican II: “The deposit or the truths of faith, contained in our sacred teaching, are one thing, while the mode in which they are enunciated, keeping the same meaning and the same judgment [*‘eodem sensu eademque sententia’*], is another.”¹⁸ In short, doctrinal development must be commensurate with the truth of revelation, with the fundamental creedal and doctrinal affirmations of faith—that is, levels 1–3.

In conclusion of this section and in preparation for the next, I identify five important doctrinal teachings regarding non-Christian religions in Vatican II documents. Gavin D’Costa helpfully summarizes these teachings:

First, the necessity of the Church for salvation is a *de fide* teaching and contextualized at the Council by the recognition that there are many outside the Church who have not heard the gospel through no fault of their own. This contextualization, called “invincible ignorance,” helped Catholic theology move into a new and interesting space. It can view non-Christians in terms of the positive teachings and practices they advance, rather than in terms of the rejection of the true faith. Second, the Council teaches that mission should be undertaken towards all peoples, religious or secular, except other Christians. The Council established a doctrinal heart to missiology which is based on the intra-trinitarian missions within God. There are no exceptions to the universal mandate of mission. . . . Third, Aquinas’s key concept of *ordinantur* . . . was used to designate all non-Christians. This usage sees in the positive elements within the religions an orientation (*ordinantur*) towards the Gospel. All the non-Christian religions, in varying ways, belong to the “People of God” in potentiality. This potentiality is actualized on earth through supernatural faith in Christ and by baptism. . . . Fourth, [the Council uses] the traditional category of *praeparatio*

¹⁸ Ioannes XXIII, “Allocutio habita d. 11 oct. 1962, in initio Concilii,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 54 (1962), §796, and for this quote, §792.

evangelica. It indicates that the best elements in the religion serve as a preparation for the gospel. . . . Fifth, sin and Satan have a strong grip over people who have not accepted Christ manifested in the objective reality of the non-Christian religions and cultures. Objectively, as a whole, they are in error, despite the many truths to be found in them. The only response to sin is to preach Christ, who redeems the sins of the world. This teaching does not take back what has been said about the positive elements that act as a preparation for Christ, but contextualizes these elements within the dramatic framework of the history of salvation.¹⁹

These five teachings—that is, one, the necessity of the Church as a means of salvation and the corresponding notion of invincible ignorance; two, the universal necessity of the Church’s missionary mandate; three, the category of *ordinantur* to describe the other religions’ relation to the Church; four, that these other religions can be *praeparatio evangelica* to the Catholic faith; and five, sin and Satan—will guide my discussion of O’Collins’s attempt to ground his theology of religions in Vatican II and the papal magisterium of John Paul II.

Interpreting Vatican II and John Paul II

O’Collins’s reflections on other religions emphasize “considerable discontinuity,” “dramatic change,” indeed, a “massive shift in the official doctrine and practice of the Catholic Church,” even while affirming continuity and tradition—e.g., faith in the Trinity and baptism.²⁰ The crux of his claim is found in his interpretation of the clear change in stance the Church has taken in regard to the Council of Florence’s teaching in its 1442 Decree for the Copts: “[The Holy Roman Church] firmly believes, professes, and preaches that ‘none of those who are outside the Church, not only pagans’, but also Jews, heretics, or schismatics can become sharers of eternal life, but they will go into the eternal fire ‘that was prepared for the devil and his angels’ [Mt 25:41] unless, before the end of their life, they are joined to her.’”²¹ Vatican II, argues O’Collins, teaches that the possibility of salvation may be found outside the visible

¹⁹ D’Costa, *Vatican II*, 4, 59–61.

²⁰ O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 202–204.

²¹ Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, ed. Peter Hünemann, and Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash for the English edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), §1351.

boundaries of the Church. This possibility of salvation pertains to Jews and Muslims. This raises the question whether O'Collins means to say that there is a doctrinal discontinuity regarding authoritative doctrinal teachings. In my judgment, his theology of other religions does oppose authoritative doctrinal teaching, in particular, the teaching regarding the necessity of the Church as a means of salvation. According to *Lumen Gentium*, §1, the Church is not only a sign but also an instrument of salvation. This teaching is reiterated in *Dominus Iesus* §18. Most recently, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith states, "it must be firmly believed that the Church is a sign and instrument of salvation for all people."²² A major contributing factor to O'Collins's opposition to this teaching is his failure to recognize the general significance of invincible ignorance²³ in *Lumen Gentium*, §16.

Rather than seeing that invincible ignorance is repeated twice in that passage because it applies to both theists and non-theists, that is, Jews and Moslems as well as religious seekers in general, O'Collins puts the invincibly ignorant person in a separate category of its own, distinguishing this category from Jews, Moslems, other believers in God, and even the irreligious. In *Lumen Gentium*, §16, theists—Jews and Moslems—are referred to as those "who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church," and non-theists are "those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God." In sum, invincible ignorance pertains therefore to those who have a lack in their theism, namely, being without Christ and the Church, and those who have a greater lack in their non-theism, namely, those without God. O'Collins misses out on this important application of invincible ignorance under certain conditions because he assumes that the knowledge Jews and Moslems have as mere theists, and others

²² CDF's Notification on Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, §6.

²³ According to St. Thomas Aquinas, invincible ignorance is not sinful. "It is evident that whoever neglects to have or do what he ought to have or do, commits a sin of omission. Wherefore through negligence, ignorance of what one is bound to know, is a sin; whereas it is imputed as a sin to man, if he fails to know what he is unable to know. Consequently ignorance of such like things is called 'invincible', because it cannot be overcome by study. For this reason such like ignorance, not being voluntary, since it is not in our power to be rid of it, is not a sin: wherefore it is evident that no invincible ignorance is a sin. On the other hand, vincible ignorance is a sin, if it be about matters one is bound to know; but not, if it be about things one is not bound to know" (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 76, a. 2).

as religious seekers, is such that it is not only in some sense revelatory of God but also possesses “saving efficacy.”²⁴ I will return to O’Collins’s view of revelation and salvation below.

For now, I want to emphasize the point that invincible ignorance qualifies, but doesn’t undermine, in practice the *de fide* doctrinal teaching of the necessity of the Church as a means of salvation. Although I cannot fully argue the point here, it is crucial to see that whenever the Council texts speak about the possibility of salvation for non-Christians it always assumes the conditions of invincible ignorance.²⁵ O’Collins misses out on this point in his reading of *Lumen Gentium*, §16, but also in *Ad Gentes*, §7. In fact, in the latter passage an explicit coupling is made between the necessity of the Church as a means of salvation and the invincibly ignorant, a point that O’Collins overlooks and which leads him to misinterpret Hebrews 11:6 by losing sight of the fact that the Church interprets this passage with respect to those who are inculpably ignorant.²⁶ In the words of *Ad Gentes*, §7: “Therefore, though God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please Him (Heb 11:6), [because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him] yet a necessity lies upon the Church (cf. 1 Cor 9:16), and at the same time a sacred duty, to preach the gospel. Hence missionary activity today as always retains its power and necessity.” This coupling not only occurs in the Council texts but also in the papal teaching of St. John Paul II.

Although the notion of invincible ignorance does not appear in John Paul’s 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, he does emphasize the necessity of the Church’s missionary mandate with conversion to the Gospel as its main aim. He also emphasizes the necessity of faith and baptism, echoing *Lumen Gentium*, §14, and hence of the necessary role of the

²⁴ O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 73–75.

²⁵ Invincible ignorance is not the cause of saving grace; only Jesus Christ is the full and sufficient cause of our salvation. *Lumen Gentium* 16 speaks twice of those who through no fault of their own (“the invincibly ignorant”) do not know the Gospel of Christ, describing certain criteria to determine whether such persons are not culpably ignorant, criteria such as “sincerely seeking God,” and being “moved by grace,” which presupposes that they have positively responded to God’s offer of grace. It is important to understand that “a condition that must be fulfilled to avoid culpability, is in no sense a *cause* of salvation” (Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside of the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002], 77).

²⁶ O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 119.

Church as a means of salvation. Except for stating that the *possibility* of salvation in Christ is offered to all, not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church, he says nothing else about the conditions under which it is possible for them to be saved. The notion of invincible ignorance, however, does figure prominently in a series of his nine general audience talks.²⁷ He says, "Doubtless we must believe in the existence of hidden ways in God's plan of salvation for those who, through no fault of their own, cannot enter the Church. Nevertheless, one cannot, in the name of these ways, slow down or abandon missionary activity."²⁸ Here, too, invincible ignorance does not undermine the *de fide* teaching regarding the necessity of the Church as a means of salvation, but it only qualifies its application in practice. As D'Costa puts it, "Holding the coupling tensions together is necessary for retaining the integrity of the two truths concerned."²⁹ O'Collins uncouples the two from each other and hence is unable to sustain the integrity of this *de fide* teaching.

Vatican II is, then, not doctrinally discontinuous with the hard core doctrinal teaching of the Council of Florence cited above; indeed, it reiterated that teaching in *Lumen Gentium*, §14. D'Costa makes the right distinction here between the hard core doctrine and its application that is lost in O'Collins's view. D'Costa states, "Florence assumed that 'Jews' wilfully rejected the gospel, as most Christians assumed at the time. Florence was applying the right dogma in the wrong way. They were wrong in a prudential judgment. Only those who know in their hearts and minds that the Church is necessary for salvation are lost if they reject Christ's Church. This has the disturbing consequence that Catholic theologians are the most likely group to be 'lost'. Doctrinal development within very different historical contexts better explains what was going on than doctrinal discontinuity."³⁰

There is another factor that contributes to O'Collins's undermining of the necessity of the Church as a means of salvation. I have in mind his interpretation of the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God in *Lumen Gentium* and *Redemptoris Missio*. Briefly, he is right that these texts distinguish, but do not separate, the Church

²⁷ John Paul II, "To the Ends of the Earth," *Missionary Catechesis of Pope John Paul II*, General Audience Talks, April 5–June 21, 1995.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, May 10, 1995.

²⁹ D'Costa, *Vatican II*, 62.

³⁰ Gavin D'Costa, Review of G. O'Collins, S.J., *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, forthcoming, received by email May 22, 2014.

and the Kingdom of God, that the Kingdom of God is as broad as the whole creation, involving the “manifestation and the realization of God’s plan of salvation in all its fullness,” as John Paul puts it.³¹ In all its fullness, arguably, refers to the restoration or renewal of creation in the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. As the Pontifical Council for Culture also states in its document “Toward a Pastoral Approach to Culture,” “[This] approach gives rise to a Christian cultural project which gives Christ, the Redeemer of man, center of the universe and of history (cf. *Redemptor hominis*, §1) the scope of completely renewing the lives of men ‘by opening the vast fields of culture to His saving power’.”³² O’Collins emphasizes, in this connection, that the “Church serves the Kingdom and *not vice versa*” (emphasis added).³³ He makes the same point later in the chapter devoted to Jacques Dupuis’s contribution to the theology of religions. He asks, “What then is the necessity of the Church for the salvation of all human beings?”³⁴ His response, “one should follow Dupuis (and before him John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*) in recognizing that the reign of God is the decisive point of reference. The Church exists for the kingdom and at its service, and *not vice versa*.”³⁵

Whether O’Collins is right about Dupuis is not my concern in this article. But he is wrong about John Paul II. Although it is true that John Paul affirms the point that the Church serves the Kingdom of God, he doesn’t draw the conclusion that is implied by O’Collins, namely, that the Kingdom of God does not serve the Church. Indeed, John Paul II issues a word of caution here because views like O’Collins that emphasize the primacy of the kingdom may end up, according to John Paul “either leaving very little room for the Church or undervaluing the Church in reaction to a presumed ‘ecclesiocentrism’ of the past, and because they consider the Church herself only a sign, for that matter a sign not without ambiguity.”³⁶ Thus, according to John Paul, the redemptive purpose of the Kingdom of God, as far as humanity is concerned, *is* the Church. Briefly, says John Paul, “Christ endowed the Church, his body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of salvation.”³⁷ This fullness of the Church “confers upon her a specific and necessary role,” as well as

³¹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter, 1990, §15.

³² §6; the quote within the quote is from John Paul II, *Homily of the enthronement Mass*, 22 October 1978, *L’Osservatore Romano*.

³³ O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 71.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 195.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, §17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, §18.

a “special connection with the Kingdom of God and Christ, which she ‘has the mission of announcing and inaugurating among all people’.”³⁸ Therefore, humanity has no other goal than to belong to this Church, the Body of Christ, in which all is fulfilled (see Eph 1:22–23).

Thus, it is true that the Kingdom of God is broader than the Church and the Church is in service to God. But the Church’s “specific and necessary role,” adds John Paul, her “special connection with the Kingdom of God and of Christ” is “seen especially in her preaching, which is call to conversion.”³⁹ Furthermore, John Paul continues, “It is true that the inchoate reality of the kingdom of can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live ‘gospel values’ and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8).”⁴⁰ However, John Paul emphasizes that the universal significance of the Church as the seed, sign, and instrument of salvation must be brought out as clearly as possible. His reason for this emphasis is that the “temporal dimension of the kingdom remains incomplete unless it is related to the kingdom of Christ present *in the Church* [emphasis added] and straining towards eschatological fullness.”⁴¹ Therefore, *pace* O’Collins, not only does the Church serve the Kingdom, but the Kingdom serves the Church in so far as humanity has no other goal than this Church, the Body of Christ, in which all is fulfilled.

Furthermore, O’Collins makes much of Aquinas’s reflections on the universal headship of Christ, that is, his role as head of the human race, in order to claim that Christ has saving significance “not [only] as the head of the Church but as the head of all human beings.”⁴² He makes clear that this universal headship chiefly means that the other religions are oriented or ordered in varying degrees to Christ’s Church and hence, while not yet actually belonging to it, “belong to it at least ‘potentially’.”⁴³ Still, he separates the universal headship of Christ over all humanity from the Church and then claims that “principally it is not the Church but the ‘power of Christ’ [as head of all humanity] that will bring them salvation and the means for salvation.”⁴⁴ This claim undermines

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., §20.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 30, 73, 157.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 31.

the *de fide* doctrine regarding the necessity of the Church as a means of salvation. Besides, for all of O'Collins' appeal to John Paul II, the latter holds in *Dominum et Vivificantem* that the Church is the new reborn humanity in Christ. He writes, "Christ is in his humanity endowed with personhood by the Word in the hypostatic union. And at the same time, with the mystery of the Incarnation there opens in a new way *the source of this divine life in the history of mankind*: [emphasis added] the Holy Spirit. The Word, 'the first born of all creation', became 'the first-born among many brethren' [Rom 8:29]."⁴⁵ Significantly, he adds, "And thus he also becomes the head of the Body which is the Church, which will be born on the Cross and revealed on the day of Pentecost—and in the Church, he becomes the head of humanity: [emphasis added] of the people of every nation, every race, every country and culture, every language and continent, all called to salvation."⁴⁶ Since the Church is the new reborn humanity in Christ, the Kingdom of God serves the Church by virtue of humanity having no other goal than indwelling in this Church, the Body of Christ, in which all is fulfilled with Christ as its head.

Doctrine of Divine Revelation

There are several features in O'Collins's doctrine of revelation that stand out as particularly relevant to his theology of religions. First, the reception of revelation is as such salvific for the recipient. "Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) witnesses repeatedly to the way God's activity in being revealed to human beings remains inextricably intertwined with the divine activity in saving or redeeming them. As this document puts it, the history (or 'economy') of revelation is the history of salvation, and vice versa. Over and over again *Dei Verbum* moves between revelation and salvation as inseparable and almost equivalent realities."⁴⁷ Summarily stated, "We may not raise the question of salvation without raising that of revelation, and vice versa."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, Encyclical Letter, May 30, 1986, §52.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Earlier in this encyclical he writes, "*Humanity, subjected to sin* in the descendants of the first Adam, in Jesus Christ [the new Adam] became *perfectly subjected to God* and united to him, and at the same time full of compassion towards men. Thus there is a *new humanity*, which in Jesus Christ through the suffering of the Cross has returned [humanity] to the love which was betrayed by Adam through sin. This new humanity is discovered precisely in the divine source of the original outpouring of gifts: in the Spirit, who 'searches . . . the depths of God' [1 Cor 2:10] and is himself love and gift" (§40).

⁴⁷ O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 75n23.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 81. See also 99, 100, 113. See also, Gerald O'Collins, S.J., "Vatican II's

Second, there is a correlation between revelation and the human response of faith that “can take place among those who follow ‘other religions’.”⁴⁹ In short, “God’s self-revelation reaches all people and human beings, no matter who they are and where they are, can and should respond with faith.”⁵⁰ Since the reception of revelation is itself salvific, the recipient must have responded in faith: “Apropos of Islam, *Lumen Gentium* confidently stated that, together with Christians, Muslims ‘acknowledge the Creator’ and ‘adore the one, merciful God’, who will come in judgment at the last day (LG 16). How can this be the case, unless God has been revealed to them and they have responded in faith?”⁵¹

Third, the distinction between “a supernatural revelation granted by God and a merely natural knowledge resulting from a human search [through the channel of human reason] is totally unacceptable” because it fails “to recognize everything as supernatural or coming through the gracious initiative of God. . . . Hence all divine self-revelation, wherever and whenever it occurs, must accordingly be deemed supernatural in its purpose and nature. In the world in which we live, all events of God’s self-disclosure are supernatural or aimed to gift human beings with unmerited grace here and with glory hereafter.”⁵²

O’Collins claims, “All [humans] receive something of the divine self-revelation. . . . The light of God’s revelation, in some true sense, reaches everyone.”⁵³ Although O’Collins’s thesis is true, he misunderstands the nature of that revelation and its corresponding responses. O’Collins does not attend to the important distinction between God’s general revelation, or creation revelation,⁵⁴ and his special revelation.

Regarding the former, God reveals himself to all men at all times and all places in and through the works of creation, and hence this “revelation is not limited to certain people, places, or times, but is truly

Constitution on Divine revelation *Dei Verbum*,” in *The Pastoral Review*, March/April 2013.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 118.

⁵¹ Ibid., 160.

⁵² Ibid., xi.

⁵³ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁴ For an exceptional theological treatment of the theme of creation revelation, see Francis Martin, “Revelation as Disclosure: Creation,” in *Wisdom and Holiness, Science and Scholarship*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 205–247.

general.”⁵⁵ In this connection, we should note what St. Paul writes in Romans 1 and 2, and St. Luke in Acts 17, namely, that God makes himself known to all men through his attributes, such as his power and majesty and his will, by means of the things that he has made as well as through conscience (“the law written on the heart”). In short, general revelation is God’s revelation of himself in and through the works of creation. Regarding special revelation, God reveals himself in the history of redemption, a salvation history that is accomplished through indissolubly connected words and deeds, a verbal and historical revelation, culminating in the person and work of Christ who is both the mediator and fullness of revelation. Both revelations are supernatural in origin and both ultimately are addressed to all men, constituting objective revelations. As De Ridder and Van Woudenberg state, “They are dissimilar in that the former is ubiquitous—it comes to us through conditions that are present at all times and places—whereas the latter is spatiotemporally limited—it comes to us through historical events at special times and places and then through the testimony of others about these events.”⁵⁶ They are also dissimilar in that the former is, on the one hand, an imperfect, incomplete revelation, and hence by its very nature is not salvific; special revelation is, on the other hand, salvific in nature because in that revelation the fullness of God is revealed.

O’Collins rejects this distinction between general and special revelation, because he claims that it suggests that general revelation is, as I noted above, a “merely natural knowledge of God resulting from a human search,” or knowledge acquired merely through “the channel of human reason,” rather than a supernatural self-revelation of God. But he is mistaken to think that natural theology is the same as general revelation. O’Collins confuses general revelation and natural theology. In all fairness to O’Collins, his confusion is a consequence of an unquestioning acceptance of the dominant interpretation of Vatican I. We can understand why Vatican I’s main concern at the start of Chapter 2 of the *Constitutio dogmatica de fide catholica* is, in opposition to fideism and rationalism, to affirm man’s natural ability to grasp this revelation, that is,

⁵⁵ Jeroen de Ridder and René van Woudenberg, “Referring to, Believing in, and Worshipping the Same God: A Reformed View,” *Faith and Philosophy* 31.1 (2014): 46–67, and at 47. Although these authors refer to their view as Reformed, since they are not expressly dealing with the question of the fate of the unevangelized or invincibly ignorant, what they argue is, in my judgment, a Catholic view as well.

⁵⁶ De Ridder and Van Woudenberg, “Referring to, Believing in, and Worshipping the Same God: A Reformed View,” 50.

as Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it, “the subjective, creaturely presupposition for perceiving it.”⁵⁷ Given this concern, it is understandable why, as Balthasar also remarks, “this [creation] revelation is not at all named or described as such.”⁵⁸ Still, he adds, “The passage from Paul (Rom 1:20) cited by the Council frequently speaks in this context—from which it cannot be disengaged—of an act of revelation. . . . Certainly it was not part of the intention of the Council to thematize this side of the problem. But the *Acta* [et decreta sacrorum Conciliorum recentiorum] speak nonetheless of an act of revelation by God. Catholic dogmatics recognizes this. . . . Thus we may say that the ‘inferential’ ascent of thought to the Creator is always borne by the Creator’s prior decision to reveal himself in this nature itself.”⁵⁹ Balthasar is not alone in his view that Vatican I presupposes God’s self-revelation in creation as the basis for the natural knowledge of God. More recently, Wolfhart Pannenberg has written in agreement with this point and in disagreement with Karl Barth who criticized “the council statement for suggesting that the knowledge of God is a possibility at our disposal, for [Barth] found here a violation of his basic principle that God can be known only by God.” Pannenberg writes: “Unlike Paul, the council did not in fact expressly present the knowledge of God from the works of creation as a result of divine self-declaration. On the other hand it was obviously not the intention of the council to rule out this basis of the knowledge or to introduce division into the concept of God [as Creator and Redeemer] as Barth believed. . . . Insofar as it is a matter of stating the fact of a knowledge of God from the works of creation by the light of human reason, we cannot contradict the council statement from the NT so long as it is presupposed that this fact has its basis in God himself, who made himself known to us in his deity from creation.”⁶⁰

Pace O’Collins, then, God’s general revelation of himself in and through the works of creation is an act of God by which he communicates himself to all men at all times and all place, and hence this act of revelation by God is the condition for the possibility of the natural knowledge of God. The theistic knowledge of God affirmed in the other religions by *Lumen Gentium* is made possible by general revelation.

⁵⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992 [1951]), 309–310.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Band I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 86, and 75–76. (ET: *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, 75).

But it doesn't follow from this act of general revelation that the latter is itself salvific by virtue of its acceptance. This, too, is the view of Jean Danielou in his work, *God and the Ways of Knowing*, which O'Collins unfairly criticizes for "ruling out revelation occurring anywhere but in biblical history."⁶¹ O'Collins adds, "The religions express the human desire to God, but only that human desire. They do not mediate any revelation."⁶² But this judgment is mistaken. Danielou distinguishes between natural revelation, creational revelation, "cosmic revelation," as he typically calls it, from not only natural theology but also faith's knowledge of God disclosed by special revelation.⁶³ Natural reason can acquire knowledge of some of the contents of God's general revelation. Furthermore, throughout his book O'Collins cites *Nostra Aetate*, §2 that speaks of those things in other religions that are "true and holy" and reflecting a "ray of that Truth, which enlightens all human beings." O'Collins comments, "Even if the text included no explicit [biblical] reference, it obviously echoed the language of the Johannine prologue about the Word being 'the light of human beings' (John 1:4), 'the true light that enlightens everyone' (John 1:9)."⁶⁴ Because of the source of truth being Christ centered, O'Collins thinks that this implies the rejection of the natural/supernatural scheme of things. But Avery Cardinal Dulles disagrees. The reference to ray of divine truth "could mean [special] revelation, but since Christ as the eternal Logos is the source of truth, both natural and revelation, the reference could be simply to philosophical truth obtainable by the right use of reason."⁶⁵ In *Fides et Ratio*, §34, St. John Paul II agrees with Dulles' point. He explains:

This truth, which God reveals to us in Jesus Christ, is not opposed to the truths which philosophy perceives. On the contrary, the two modes of knowledge lead to truth in all its fullness. The unity of truth is a fundamental premise of human reasoning, as the principle of non-contradiction makes clear. Revelation renders this unity certain, showing that the God of creation is also the God of

⁶¹ O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 58.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Jean Danielou, *God and the Ways of Knowing*, trans. Walter Roberts (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), chapter 1 (general revelation), chapter 2 (natural theology), and chapter 3 (faith's knowledge of God disclosed in revelation), 13–138.

⁶⁴ O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 15, 79.

⁶⁵ Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., "World Religions and the New Millennium," in *Many and Diverse Ways*, 3–12.

salvation history. It is the one and the same God who establishes and guarantees the intelligibility and reasonableness of the natural order of things upon which scientists confidently depend, and who reveals himself as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This unity of truth, natural and revealed, is embodied in a living and personal way in Christ, as the Apostle reminds us: "Truth is in Jesus" (cf. *Eph* 4:21; *Col* 1:15–20). He is the *eternal Word* in whom all things were created, and he is the *incarnate Word* who in his entire person reveals the Father (cf. *Jn* 1:14, 18). What human reason seeks "without knowing it" (cf. *Acts* 17:23) can be found only through Christ: what is revealed in him is "the full truth" (cf. *Jn* 1:14–16) of everything which was created in him and through him and which therefore in him finds its fulfilment (cf. *Col* 1:17).

Moreover, O'Collins is, in general, mistaken to think that Vatican II leaves behind Vatican I's distinction between a natural/supernatural scheme of things and the corresponding twofold order of knowledge, of faith and reason, distinct in the objects and means of acquiring that knowledge. This distinction is reaffirmed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§31–35) and again in John Paul II's 1998 Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (§8–9). In particular, *Dei Verbum*, §6 expressly affirms Vatican I's teaching regarding the natural knowledge of God. The difference between these two Councils on the statement regarding the natural knowledge of God is that *Dei Verbum* sets general revelation and the capacity of natural reason to acquire some knowledge of God in the framework of salvation history. This difference makes clear that natural theology is necessarily *a posteriori*, rather than *a priori*, a "second moment" within the dynamic of *fides quarens intellectum*. In this context, *Dei Verbum*, §6 underscores—the teaching of Augustine, Aquinas, and Vatican I—the epistemic availability of the natural knowledge of God in and through the testimony of biblical special revelation. The import of this epistemic availability is that this testimony is a sure and more direct source of knowledge than general revelation via natural theological reasoning. The noetic influences of sin suppress and impede the functioning of natural reason capacity to acquire knowledge of God through general revelation. Therefore, as *Dei Verbum*, §6 puts it, "It is to be ascribed to this divine revelation that such truths among things divine that of themselves are not beyond human reason can, even in the present condition of mankind, be known by everyone with facility, with firm certitude, and with no admixture of error."

If we consider the human response to God's general or cosmic reve-

lation, that is, the personal appropriation of the objective realities that bear witness to God's existence and attributes, O'Collins assumes that the response of theists, such as is found in *Lumen Gentium*, §16, to God's general revelation is not only adequate but even salvific. God's general revelation is, indeed, disclosed to all men at all times and places because God has not left himself without witness in and through the created world (Acts 14:17), and hence it is in this sense that "revelation is a universal reality."⁶⁶ And so while theistic religions enjoy some knowledge of God derived from general revelation, derived from elements of goodness, truth and beauty found in these cultures and religions, it follows neither that this knowledge is adequate or salvific. For example, Islam's true beliefs in the "one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind" (*Lumen Gentium*, §16), does not suddenly turn it into a salvific religion. In fact, *Lumen Gentium*, §16 states that the Church looks upon "whatever good or truth is found among them . . . as a preparation for the gospel."

O'Collins repeatedly says that "revelation and salvation are inseparable and almost equivalent realities."⁶⁷ This statement is unclear. I think he means that the purpose of revelation is salvific. If so, I think we must say that this salvific purpose is *not* always realized. Revelation necessarily includes both an objective dimension and a subjective dimension. Regarding the former, it refers to God's self-revelation in action and word, culminating in the formation of an objective deposit of faith as integral to the history of redemption. Regarding the latter, it refers to the act of God's self-presence, indeed the act of God's revealing himself in a living subject, by the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling man to respond in faith to the reality of revelation. It isn't that O'Collins ignores the distinction itself between these two dimensions and the corresponding idea that an individual must respond in faith to God's self-revelation in order to receive salvation.⁶⁸ Rather, it is that the distinction itself plays almost no role at all in his theology of religions regarding the salvific state of non-Christians. This is because he presupposes salvation optimism in the response rate, as it were, of non-Christians to God's self-revelation. This claim inexplicably overlooks the testimony of the biblical revelation that tells us of inadequate responses—resistance—to revelation and that such response is due to human sinfulness.

Yes, as *Lumen Gentium*, §16 says, it is the case that grace plays a role

⁶⁶ O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 59.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 75n23.

⁶⁸ O'Collins, "Vatican II's Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*."

in aiding human responses both to God's general revelation and the totality of his special revelation,⁶⁹ that this grace is a prevenient grace, which is a divine initiative that precedes, prepares, enables, and assists the individual's response to God's revelation,⁷⁰ preparing him for the fullness of truth of the gospel of Christ. But *Lumen Gentium*, §16 also speaks of the widely realized possibility of inadequately responding to God's general revelation. In other words, the salvific purpose of divine revelation is not always realized. O'Collins inexplicably ignores the passage that refers to that very point—"rather often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become caught up in futile reasoning and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator (cf. Romans 1:21-25)."⁷¹ *Lumen Gentium* justifies this widely realized

⁶⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §158.

⁷⁰ Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Decree on Justification, Chapters V and VI; see also, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2001.

⁷¹ For a critical analysis of the implications for evangelization of the widespread failure to acknowledge the central importance of the last three sentences of *Lumen Gentium* §16, see Ralph Martin, *Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II actually Teaches and its Implications for Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012). O'Collins has recently given an entirely unfair review of Martin's book (*Pacifica* 27.1 [2014]: 111–113). He claims that "Martin ignores much important teaching in other Vatican II documents, reduces the import of *Lumen Gentium* 16 to its last three sentences, and misinterprets them as supporting his view that most of those who do not hear the gospel cannot be saved" (112). O'Collins's summary is a distortion of what Martin actually does in the first hundred pages of his book. Here is how Martin summarizes his approach. "First, LG 16 will be situated within the overall context of Vatican II, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, and the 'triptych' of LG 14, 15, and 16, with some attention to 13 and 17 as well. The history of the development of the final conciliar text and the most significant commentaries, early and recent, on LG will be consulted with a view to articulating what the consensus of the most important commentators is regarding the text in question. Second, the doctrinal background needed to understand correctly what the Council is teaching will be examined, particularly that doctrinal development that is referenced in the important footnotes of LG 16. Third, the scriptural foundation claimed for the teaching of LG 16 in its explicit citations of Romans 1 and Mark 16, and its implicit citation of Romans 2, will be examined in the light of contemporary Scripture scholarship" (xii–xiii). Martin's book was recently described by two well-known Catholic missiologists of the Catholic Theological Union, Stephen B. Bevans, S.V.D and Roger P. Schroeder, S.V.D., as "one of the most significant books on mission to appear in 2012" ("Evangelization and the Tenor of Vatican II: A Review Essay," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 37.2 [2013]: 94–95). They add, "Ralph Martin's book is a powerful one, and a timely reminder in many ways of human sinfulness and the healing power of the

possibility by referring us to St. Paul in Romans 1:21-22 to provide biblical warrant for that inadequate response that the biblical text takes to be a consequence of man's sinful *resistance* to God's general revelation. Because O'Collins overlooks the widely realized possibility of resistance and deception, in short, as O'Costa puts it, "the damage of sin and the activity of Satan," he fails to see the "natural bridge [that] is now built between *Lumen Gentium* 16 and 17, the latter which teaches the necessity of mission."⁷² And a necessity of the Church's missionary mandate that is later developed in the Council document *Ad Gentes*.

Appealing to the work of the Holy Spirit outside the visible boundaries of the Church, as O'Collins does, will not help his position. The Holy Spirit is the source of all that is revealed by God as the true, good, and beautiful outside the visible boundaries of the Church in various religions around the world. But again, O'Collins assumes that the response to that general revelation yields not only knowledge but salvation. He claims that with this understanding of the Spirit's work he is standing in the trajectory of John Paul's thought as expressed in *Dominum et Vivificantem*. And yet, inexplicably, O'Collins ignores John Paul's emphasis that the "marvelous 'condescension' of the Spirit *meets with resistance and opposition* in our human reality."⁷³ The pope adds, "Unfortunately, the resistance to the Holy Spirit which Saint Paul emphasizes in the *interior and subjective dimension* as tension, struggle and rebellion taking place in the human heart finds in every period of history and especially in the modern era its *external dimension*, which takes concrete form as the content of culture and civilization, as a *philosophical system, an ideology, a program* for action and for the shaping of human behavior."⁷⁴ No wonder *Ad Gentes* §9 takes the Church's missionary activity to involve a "purg[ing] of evil associations [of] every element of truth and grace which is found among peoples." No wonder that *Lumen Gentium*, §16-17 speak of "deceptions by the Evil One" at work in a man's resistance to God's prevenient grace as well as that the gospel "snatches them [non-Christians] from the

Gospel. It is clearly, passionately, and honestly written. It is a book that deserves to be read by missiologists and mission practitioners" (95). It was also positively reviewed by Gavin D'Costa, "Who gets in, and who is kept out," Review of Stephen Bullivant, *The Salvation of Atheists and Catholic Dogmatic Theology*, and Ralph Martin, *Will Many be Saved?* in *The Tablet*, February 2, 2013, 20.

⁷² D'Costa, *Vatican II*, 109. I will return to this very point in the last section of this article when I consider the question, "What becomes of the universal necessity of the Church's missionary activity in O'Collins's theology of religions?"

⁷³ John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 55, 56, and 47.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

slavery of error and of idols” and the “confusion of the devil.” Indeed, *Ad Gentium*, §9 speaks of the fragments of truth and grace to be found among the nations that the gospel “frees from all taint of evil and restores [the truth] to Christ its maker, who overthrows the devil’s domain and wards off the manifold malice of vice.”⁷⁵ My criticism of O’Collins at this point is not that he fails to take note of these passages.⁷⁶ He does, but only in passing and without playing any role at all in his account of the human response to God’s revelation.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, May 19, 1991, states in this connection: “To say that the other religious traditions include elements of grace does not imply that everything in them is the result of grace. For sin has been at work in the world, and so religious traditions, notwithstanding their positive values, reflect the limitations of the human spirit, sometimes inclined to choose evil” (§31).

⁷⁶ O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* This approach also informs O’Collins’s approach to the Sacred Scriptures resulting in his treatment of just the “positive” passages in them and not the “negative” ones critical of non-biblical religions. I agree with Paul J. Griffiths judgment of O’Collins’s earlier book *Salvation for All* that the latter “jettisons some essential elements of the scriptural witness” because his biblical hermeneutic “shows a deep desire to avoid looking at and commenting upon the fact that some among the prophets and founders [of other religions] may have been agents of absence, advocates of lack, entrepreneurs of evil” (“Review Symposium,” 135–136). This judgment applies to this new work. We find in O’Collins’s work an echo of Jacques Dupuis’ work, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Dupuis acknowledges “the Old Testament’s unambiguous condemnation of idolatrous practices among the nations and the inanity, or even the inexistence, of the false gods they venerate . . . as . . . an unequivocal basis for a negative theological evaluation of the traditions concerned. . . . In the new situation, however, which today’s search for mutual comprehension and openness to dialogue have created, it seems fair for a theological account of the Bible’s evaluation of the religions of the nations to allow such positive elements to stand out as are liable to provide in a new context a valid foundation for a more generous theological evaluation of the other religious traditions of the world. An attempt is made here to bring forward some of the biblical data capable of providing a valid basis for such a positive evaluation” (30). Joseph Ratzinger argues that there is a “sharp criticism of false gods . . . in evidence and that is alive in the tradition of the [Old Testament] prophets from the very beginning,” and hence “a decided rejection” (*Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, translated by Henry Taylor [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003], 20–21). In his 1968 *Introduction to Christianity* (139), he argues that there is a parallel “between the philosophers’ criticism of the myths in Greece and the prophets’ criticism of the gods in Israel.” In short, “the prophetic and Wisdom literature cultivated [the] demythologization of the divine powers in favor of the one and only God” (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990; 2nd ed., 2004).

So, O'Collins is right that there is no salvation without the knowledge of divine revelation, but the converse does not follow, as he insists through his book, namely, no revelation without salvation.⁷⁸ It doesn't follow because revelation does not always realize its salvific purpose in a man's response. *Gaudium et Spes*, §22 speaks of the possibility of salvation regarding the fate of the unevangelized, that is, "for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way." The footnote at the end of this sentence refers us back to *Lumen Gentium*, §16: to the non-theists that are "those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace." It is, then, in the context of the invincibly ignorant that we must understand the rest of *Gaudium et Spes*, §22: "For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God alone, in the paschal mystery." Thus, the Council holds that "God calls men to be participants in his grace; by what means and with what effect is not here stated."⁷⁹ So the calling that this passage refers to is about the offer of grace, not its efficacy and finality. O'Collins pays absolutely no attention to that difference. Suppose that O'Collins is right that "[a]long with love [involved in the church's praying for others], its Eucharistic setting forms a second, characteristic feature of the Church's prayer for 'the others' [for the whole human race] and its power to communicate 'truth and grace'."⁸⁰ Again, these features of the Church's life as instruments of grace are not automatically salvific; that grace must be received in faith. So it's about the offer of grace, not its efficacy and finality. But the import of this difference for the question regarding the fate of the unevangelized cannot be ignored. Again, passages like *Gaudium et Spes*, §22 refer to the invincibly ignorant and they speak of a possibility, not the probability or certainty of the actual salvation of the unevangelized.

Early in his book O'Collins explicitly states that "*Lumen Gentium* raised and left open the question" of the fate of the unevangelized.⁸¹ In fact, he says that "the Council does not expressly speak [of other religions as] 'ways of revelation and salvation'."⁸² But later on in the book

⁷⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁹ Mikka Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 85.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 165.

⁸¹ Ibid., 74.

⁸² Ibid., 163. In an interview that Zenit News did with Ilaria Morali, professor

he says that *Lumen Gentium* “presented positively the eternal prospects of those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ.”⁸³ Finally, even later in the book he writes, “according to what we have *gleaned* [emphasis added] from the Vatican II documents, official Catholic teaching *acknowledges* [emphasis added] the living, personal relationship between these ‘others’ and God, mediated by the One who is the Truth of God in person.”⁸⁴ Respectfully, this is verbal sleight of hand. This alleged “acknowledgement” or “positive presentation” is O’Collins’ conclusion not the teaching of the Church at Vatican II. Despite his protest to the contrary,⁸⁵ he was right the first time that the question of the fate of the unevangelized is left open because Vatican II documents refer to the offer of grace to the unevangelized, the invincibly ignorant who have failed to respond to the gospel, but not this offer’s saving efficacy and finality.⁸⁶

We don’t have the full picture yet. *Dei Verbum* teaches that the economy of special revelation, which is realized in words and deeds, culminates in Jesus Christ, who is both the mediator and fullness of revelation.

of theology at the Gregorian University, Rome, she responds to the question whether Vatican II referred to other religions as “ways of salvation” by saying, “In regard to a judgment on the role of religions the Council spoke of ‘evangelical preparations’ in relation to ‘something good and authentic’ that can be found in persons and at times in religious initiatives. In no page is explicit mention made of religions as ways of salvation” (“Misunderstandings about Interreligious Dialogue (Part 1),” January 14, 2005. See her essay, “Salvation, Religions, and Dialogue in the Roman Magisterium,” in *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study*, ed. K.J. Beker & Ilaria Morality, et al. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

⁸³ Ibid., 130.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 163.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁶ I fully agree with Gavin D’Costa, who in his recent review of O’Collins’ book wrote: “O’Collins surely moves too quickly from what were ‘silences’ in the Council on certain questions, to alleged necessary ‘implications’, to saying the Council taught ‘X’. Take for example his claim that LG 16 taught that ‘Islam is in some sense a way of revelation and salvation for Muslims.’ (83). The three key periti involved (Congar in general, Anawati and Caspar in particular on the single sentence on Islam), did not intend this or understand it to mean this. Likewise, the debates in the aula by the Fathers and the three redacted drafts of LG 16 in response to the debates show no intention to even imply this. And the *relatio* to the final version of LG 16 says the text is not speaking about Islam, but Muslim people. The Council made monumental steps forwards in recognizing truth and holiness amongst Muslims. It is not clear it implied or went so far as O’Collins suggests” (forthcoming review, Gavin D’Costa, email May 22, 2014).

In this light, we must say that the “Christian faith is the appropriate response to both God’s general revelation and the totality of [his] special revelation.”⁸⁷ The Christian faith, therefore, reveals the one true God, and hence worshipping anything other than this God is idolatry. If this is true, and given the references in *Lumen Gentium*, §16 and *Ad Gentes*, §9 to, in sum, sin and Satan, we can understand why Vatican II does not speak of other religions as ways of salvation and as hence as part of God’s plan of salvation. God’s grace may reach individuals *despite* but not *through* their religion—a point that O’Collins consistently denies. Thus, *pace* O’Collins, the possibility of the salvation of the invincibly ignorant is related to this individual and his knowledge,⁸⁸ the seeds of the Word containing elements of the true and the good, but not as related in and through the following of his religion.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ De Ridder and Van Woudenberg, “Referring to, Believing in, and Worshipping the Same God: A Reformed View,” 50.

⁸⁸ *Dialogue and Proclamation* distinguishes between the individual and his religious tradition: “The fruits of the Spirit of God in the personal life of individuals, whether Christian or otherwise, are easily discernible (cf. Gal 5:22–23). To identify in other religious traditions elements of grace capable of sustaining the positive response of their members to God’s invitation is much more difficult. It requires a discernment for which criteria have to be established” (§30).

⁸⁹ O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 162. O’Collins uses the Areopagus Address of St. Paul recorded in Acts 17:22–31 to showcase his claim “that God is no ‘stranger’.” He explains, “As Luke portrays matters, Paul does not aim at introducing into the cultural and religious context of Athens a ‘foreign’ or alien deity.” But O’Collins’ claim seems way off the exegetical mark. The immediate reaction of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers to Paul’s message (verse 17) did not suggest that it resonated with their own experience. Indeed, they spoke of him as “babbler,” one setting forth strange or foreign gods (verse 18), to be speaking new teaching (verse 19). “And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.’” Furthermore, their interest in Paul’s message was in something *new*. “For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (verses 19–21). O’Collins continues to explain St. Paul’s address, “Even if hitherto not *explicitly* [emphasis added] known, ‘the God Unknown’ has already been present among the Athenians. Paul gives a face and a name to the divine Anonymous One: it is the man Jesus who God has raised from the dead and authorized to be the judge of everyone at the end of world history” (12). When Paul says that he is going to proclaim to them “the One whom [they] worship without knowing” (verse 23), is he speaking of the object of worship as being as such unknown, or is he characterizing the worshippers themselves as without knowledge, that is, ignorant? Regardless, I am having trouble seeing

The Same God?

O'Collins assumes that the theistic religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—worship the same God. “Obviously,” according to him, “the adherents of [Judaism and Islam] these religions do not know and profess the full range of revealed truths that Christians do. In the case of Islam, Muslims share some of these revealed truths, accepting, for instance, the divine judgment to come.”⁹⁰ He adds, “Apropos of Islam, *Lumen Gentium*, confidently stated that, together with Christians, Muslims ‘acknowledge the Creator’ and ‘adore the one, merciful God’, who will come in judgment at the last day (*LG*, 16).”⁹¹ *Nostra Aetate*, §3 fills out this description by stating, “They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men.” By virtue of these truths, O'Collins insists that adherents of Islam have a saving *knowledge* of God. Muslims believe and worship the one God, the Creator, the Judge, and Merciful being. And thus they can be saved *through* their religion not despite it, according to O'Collins. No salvation without the knowledge of revelation.⁹² But O'Collins's claim raises the important question whether Christianity and Islam refer to the same God they worship and, if so, how.⁹³

Consider the doctrine of God's unicity that both Christians and Muslims share. Is mere agreement that there is only one God sufficient for describing his identity? Even if they do refer to the same God in worship, that doesn't mean that they share the same beliefs about this one God. Their rejection of the Trinity counts as a fundamentally mistaken belief, according to Christians, about God's basic nature. Does this fundamental mistake undermine reference to God because the Muslim's

how O'Collins can claim (9) that Paul is making explicit something they already know implicitly given their ignorance in either sense.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 163.

⁹¹ Ibid., 160.

⁹² Ibid., 81.

⁹³ I am following here Alyssa Pitstick, “Do Jews, Christians, and Muslims Worship the Same God? Or When Witnesses Conflict: One God of Abraham but Three Abrahamic Religions?” Public Lecture, Socratic Club, Gonzaga University, Friday, February 15, 2013. Page references in the footnotes are to the unpublished copy of the lecture I received from the author. Also very helpful to me for addressing this question is De Ridder and Van Woudenberg, “Referring to, Believing in, and Worshipping the Same God: A Reformed View,” 54–67. I am grateful to Gavin D'Costa for a stimulating exchange on the question addressed in the text, and for referring me to Peter Geach, “On Worshipping the Right God,” in *God and the Soul* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 100–116.

Unitarian doctrine of God reflects “a sufficiently erroneous thought of a God [that] will simply fail to relate to the true and living God at all [?]”⁹⁴

It is not possible in this article to give this question the attention it deserves. Suffice it to note that both Jesuit priest and Islamologist Samir Khalil Samir⁹⁵ and St. John Paul II⁹⁶ have responded, in a qualified sense, positively to the question whether Christians and Muslims worship, and hence refer to, the same God. Both Christians and Muslims share agreement on a subset of essential characterizations of God’s basic nature, such as monotheism,⁹⁷ affirming God as the Creator, and the theology of creation entailed by that description. Still, they don’t ignore the fundamentally mistaken beliefs of Muslims regarding the Trinity, the deity of Christ, his atoning work, and so forth. Fr. Samir, for one, underscores this difference: “It is true [that] Muslims worship [the] one and merciful God. However, this sentence suggests that the two conceptions of God are equal. Yet in Christianity God is the Trinity in its essence, plurality united by love.”⁹⁸ It is easy to see why some have argued that Christians and Muslims cannot believe in and worship the same God ultimately when the uniquely identifying description of God’s basic nature leaves out his Trinitarian nature or the deity of Christ. Someone may object that what the Qur’an views as Jesus cannot be shown to be a rejection of a proper doctrine of the Incarnation, for it shows no proper knowledge of that doctrine.⁹⁹ Although I cannot fully argue the point here, Islam is a Unitarian religion regarding its doctrine of God, and hence the Qur’an doesn’t merely reject misconceptions and hence heterodox Christians’ doctrines of the Trinity, but the doctrine of the Trinity itself because it

⁹⁴ Geach, “On Worshipping the Right God,” 111.

⁹⁵ Samir Khali Samir, S.J., *111 Questions on Islam and the West: A Series of Interviews conducted by Giorgio Paolucci and Cammile Eid*, ed., rev., and trans. Wafik Masry, S.J., co-translator, Claudia Castellani (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 202. Idem, “Pope Francis and his invitation to dialogue with Islam,” 12/19/2013, AsiaNews.it. Online: <https://www.asianews.it/view4print.php?1=en&art=29858>.

⁹⁶ John Paul II, “General Audience of Wednesday, May 5, 1999, § 2–3. Idem, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 92–93.

⁹⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, Encyclical Letter, August 6, 1964, “Then we have those worshipers who adhere to other monotheistic systems of religion, especially the Moslem religion. We do well to admire these people for all that is good and true in their worship of God” (§107).

⁹⁸ Samir Khali Samir, S.J., “Pope Francis and his invitation to dialogue with Islam.”

⁹⁹ Gavin D’Costa, e-mail message to author.

denies the divinity of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁰

Alyssa Pitstick summarizes the kind of argument supporting the claim that Christians and Muslims cannot believe in and worship the same God. She writes, "When I as a Christian call God 'the Creator', I do not thereby exclude His other name of 'Trinity'; on the contrary, I assume it, for I could equally well call God, 'the Creator Trinity.' In other words, though I may consider God now under one aspect and then another, I am always considering God Himself, and so my concept is always of God Himself, that is, of the One who is both Creator and Trinity." One might add here that the concept of the Trinity includes the divinity of Christ. Pitstick continues: "Similarly, the Muslim in referring to the 'Creator' does not exclude that the Creator is the one whose prophet is Mohammed; on the contrary, he means that very one. So not all the names Muslims and Christians use to identify or point to God coincide, taken singly or compositely."¹⁰¹

I don't think I can follow Pitstick all the way here in her conclusion. For one thing, it denies the very point made by *Lumen Gentium*, §16, namely, that Christians and Muslims "adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind." For another, taken singly, that is, as isolated concepts, the term unicity when predicated formally of the subject God is such that it affirms monotheism and logically excludes polytheism. So Christians and Muslims are referring to the same thing when they say God is one. Similarly, taken singly the term creator when predicated formally of the subject God logically excludes a state of affairs where pantheism¹⁰² or naturalism are true. Here, too, Christians

¹⁰⁰ Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 14, 124, 127–148. Despite my objection, Volf does give an excellent defense of the dogma of the Trinity against Moslem objections, 136–139.

¹⁰¹ Pitstick, "Do Jews, Christians, and Muslims Worship the Same God?," 6–7.

¹⁰² Still, given that Islam is a Unitarian religion it may not so easily escape falling into pantheism. Fr. Roch Kereszty helped me to see this point. Briefly, Islam understands the unity of God in such terms that it excludes any plurality of persons in God. In Christianity, God is the Trinity in its essence, plurality united by love. For Islam its Unitarianism may result in the slide to pantheism: if God's supreme perfection consists in love, then, without a creation His supreme perfection would not be realized. That is, He would not be loving unless He creates those whom He intends to love. Thus, love would be something that God *does*, not that which He *is*, describing God's activity but not His essence. "Consequently," as Fr. Kereszty rightly notes, "God would not be perfect without a creation." This would mean that "creation cannot logically be perceived as a gratuitous, free act of God, but as necessitated by God's divine perfection. If, then, God is not perfect without creation, creation becomes a necessary

and Muslims are referring to the same God when they speak of God as the Creator. These formal predicates about God are such that they are necessary even if insufficient for describing the identity of God.¹⁰³ So Christians and Muslims have partially overlapping beliefs about God's basic nature as one and as creator. With this conclusion we can honor the intent of *Lumen Gentium*, §16 and *Nostra Aetate*, §2 which speak of Christians and Muslims adoring the same God.¹⁰⁴

But we don't have the full picture yet. That Christians and Muslims refer to the same God in their respective worship—given the shared beliefs they have about God's basic nature—doesn't mean to deny that there are fundamentally different and hence incompatible beliefs about God between them. For example, as Ridder and Van Woudenberg rightly note, "no characterization of God that leaves out, say, the doctrine of the trinity or the unique role of Christ will be acceptable to orthodox Christians. At the same time, that very characterization will be unacceptable to both adherents of Judaism and Muslims."¹⁰⁵ Returning to Pitstick's argument, if we take composite names, however, Pitstick is

complement to God, which logically leads to a pantheistic system" (Roch A. Kereszty, O.Cist., *Christianity among other Religions* [Staten Island: Alba House, 2006], 123–124).

¹⁰³ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says what is essential about the Trinity after affirming that the Trinity is One: "*The divine persons are really distinct from one another. 'God is one but not solitary. . . . The divine Unity is Triune'*" (no. 254). That dogma affirms that "God is one but not solitary," for he himself exists in the communion of three divine persons eternally united in being, relationship, and love. No adequate relationship can exist in one unipersonal being, and the triune relationship is constitutive for God Himself. "The Father *gives*, the Son obediently *receives*, and the Holy Spirit *proceeds* from both of them," as Timothy George puts it (*Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002], 82).

¹⁰⁴ John Paul II agrees, "We Christians joyfully recognize the religious values we have in common with Islam. Today I would like to repeat what I said to young Muslims some years ago in Casablanca: "We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, [and] the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection" (*Insegnamenti*, VIII/2, [1985], p. 497). The patrimony of revealed texts in the Bible speaks unanimously of the oneness of God. Jesus himself reaffirms it, making Israel's profession his own: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Mk 12:29; cf. Dt 6:4–5). This oneness is also affirmed in the words of praise that spring from the heart of the Apostle Paul: "To the king of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 *Tm* 1:17)" (General Audience, May 5, 1999, §2).

¹⁰⁵ "Referring to, Believing in, and Worshipping the Same God: A Reformed View," 65–66.

certainly correct that there cannot be conceptual agreement about God between Christians and Muslims. Different names mutually exclude each other, and hence they cannot actually refer to the same thing because there is conceptual disagreement. That is precisely Pitstick's conclusion: "Christians deny that God's definitive prophet was Mohammed and Muslims deny Allah is Trinitarian, so both by positive expression and [logical] exclusion, there cannot be conceptual agreement."¹⁰⁶ This follows from the understanding that words are signs of our concepts of things. Thus, "mutually exclusive identities cannot belong to one thing. So different concepts point to things different in reality."¹⁰⁷ Significantly, the disagreement here between Christians and Muslims is not merely about the formal attributes of God, such as the Creator is the one who sent the prophet Mohammed; rather it is about the material subject. "Christians cannot agree that God sent Mohammed, since Mohammed's doctrine denies the Trinitarian nature of God and the divinity of Jesus."¹⁰⁸ And so, Christians and Muslims "are not talking about the same thing, the same subject, the same being."¹⁰⁹ Pitstick thinks that the fundamentally mistaken belief of Muslims about God undermines reference. But is that so in a *complete* sense? At one level there is partial overlap in the description of God's nature by Muslims and Christians. But if we ask the question, "Is the Father of Jesus the God of Mohammed?" then the answer must be negative at another level. Christians and Muslims do not agree on the ultimate object of belief.

¹⁰⁶ Pitstick, "Do Jews, Christians, and Muslims Worship the Same God?," 6–7, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Pitstick rightly argues that this conclusion doesn't hold for Judaism. "Since Christianity understands Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God's revelation to the Jews and their ancestors, from the Christian perspective Jews and Christians believe in the identical God. Judaism as such does not deny that Jesus is the Son of God, as Islam does. That is, the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of the Law and the Prophets, does not positively deny that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah—and I am taking it that modern Judaism sees itself as standing in continuity with the faith that runs from Abraham through the Prophets." She adds: "Although contemporary Jews may deny that the Trinitarian God revealed in Jesus is the God of Abraham, I think this denial is illogical from both a religious and a philosophical standpoint: from a religious one, because there is no doctrine in pre-Christian Judaism that says God is not trinitarian—there is only the positive belief that God is one. From a philosophical standpoint, it is illogical, because one can show with human reason that it is not impossible for the one God to be Trinitarian. In other words, Jews are not compelled either by faith or by their reason to conclude that the Trinity is not the God of Abraham" (10).

But does that mean that Muslims do not take hold of the true God at all? In other words, given the mutually exclusive identities of God regarding the ultimate object of belief, does the incompatibility in question reflect not only different concepts but also point to different things in reality? I don't think so. I'm siding here with St. John Paul II. He clearly argues for similarity and difference here, that is, for a yes/but, and this must be held in tension. Regarding the similarity, he says:

We know that in the light of the full Revelation in Christ, this mysterious oneness [of the Trinity] cannot be reduced to a numerical unity. The Christian mystery leads us to contemplate in God's substantial unity the persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: each possesses the divine substance whole and indivisible, but each is distinct from the other by virtue of their reciprocal relations. Their relations in no way compromise the oneness of God, as the Fourth Lateran Council explains (1215): "Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature. . . . It does not generate, is not begotten and does not proceed" (DS 804). The Christian doctrine on the Trinity, confirmed by the Councils, explicitly rejects any form of "tritheism" or "polytheism." In this sense, i.e., with reference to the one divine substance, there is significant correspondence between Christianity and Islam.

And as to the difference, he crucially adds:

However, this correspondence must not let us forget the difference between the two religions. We know that the unity of God is expressed in the mystery of the three divine Persons. Indeed, since he is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8), God has always been a Father who gives his whole self in begetting the Son, and both are united in a communion of love which is the Holy Spirit. This distinction and compenetration (*perichoresis*) of the three divine Persons is not something added to their unity but is its most profound and characteristic expression. On the other hand, we should not forget that the Trinitarian monotheism distinctive of Christianity is a mystery inaccessible to human reason, which is nevertheless called to accept the revelation of God's inmost nature (cf. CCC, n. 237).¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ John Paul II, General Audience, Wednesday, May 5, 1999, §2–3. Given this passage, Miroslav Volf cannot say without significant qualification that "John Paul II unambiguously affirms that Muslims and Christians worship the same

Let me conclude this section by reiterating that even if Muslims refer to the same God, that doesn't make Islam a salvific religion. Furthermore, interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims must recognize that incompatibility at the level of the ultimate object of belief.¹¹¹

This conclusion dovetails with the proposal of *Dialogue and Proclamation* and its call for interreligious apologetics:¹¹² "An open and positive approach to other religious traditions cannot overlook the *contradictions* which may exist between them and Christian revelation. It must, where necessary, recognize that there is *incompatibility* between some fundamental elements of the Christian religion and some aspects of such traditions."¹¹³ In this context, I see the relevance of O'Collins's claim, "When Christians enquire about the truth claims of other faiths, they will need to assess the truth claims of their own faith."¹¹⁴ O'Collins recognizes this aspect of inter-religious dialogue in passing, encouraging Christians and the adherents of other religions to engage in mutual questioning and challenges¹¹⁵ so that they both can "deepen their religious commitment,"

God" (*Allah: A Christian Response*, 80).

¹¹¹ St. John Paul II sharply states that the Qur'ān has a reductionist revelation of God: "Whoever knows the Old and New Testaments, and then reads the Quran, clearly sees the process *by which it completely reduces Divine Revelation*. It is impossible not to note the movement away from what God said about Himself. First in the Old Testament through the prophets, and then finally in the New Testament through His Son. In Islam all the richness of God's self-revelation, which constitutes the heritage of the Old and New Testaments, has definitely been set aside." He adds, "Some of the most beautiful names in the human language are given to the God of the Quran, but He is ultimately a God outside of the world, a God who is *only Majesty, never Emmanuel, God-with-us. Islam is not a religion of redemption*. There is no room for the Cross and the Resurrection. Jesus is mentioned, but only as a prophet who prepares for the last prophet, Muhammad. There is also mention of Mary, His Virgin Mother, but the tragedy of redemption is completely absent. For this reason not only the theology but also the anthropology of Islam is very distant from Christianity" (*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 92–93; italics added).

¹¹² On the legitimacy and, indeed, necessity of interreligious apologetics, see Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994); idem, "Why We Need Interreligious Polemics," *First Things*, June 1994.

¹¹³ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, §31.

¹¹⁴ O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 198.

¹¹⁵ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, "This means that, while entering with an open mind into dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions, Christians may have also to challenge them in a peaceful spirit with regard to the content of their belief. But Christians too must allow themselves to be questioned. Notwithstanding the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, the way Chris-

“respond with increasing sincerity to God’s personal call,” and undergo “a deeper conversion towards God.”¹¹⁶

But *Dialogue and Proclamation* distinguishes this sense of conversion to which O’Collins is referring here, namely, “a general movement towards God” from the more particular sense of conversion where we are engaged in a “dialogue of salvation” that refers “to a change of religious adherence, and particularly to embracing the Christian faith.”¹¹⁷ O’Collins refers to the former but not the latter. I am not surprised. He gives lip service to the important claim that “‘dialogue does not replace proclamation’, and proclamation remains driven by ‘a deep love for the Lord Jesus’ and the desire to share him with others’.”¹¹⁸ But what is proclaimed is unclear. The clearest content of proclamation is stated by him earlier in the book: “The world-wide community of the Church offers its most precious gift to the entire world: faith in Jesus Christ as our light and our life, now and forever.”¹¹⁹ In contrast, *Dialogue and Proclamation* is much clearer and richer in content:

Proclamation is the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church. This proclamation can be solemn and public, as for instance on the day of Pentecost (cf. *Ac* 2:5–41), or a simple private conversation (cf. *Ac* 8:30–38). It leads naturally to catechesis which aims at deepening this faith. Proclamation is the foundation, center, and summit of evangelization (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 27).¹²⁰

O’Collins makes no reference to evangelizing others by inviting them, as the above passage states, “to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church.” In fact, O’Collins adds to his minimalist sense of proclamation the point that the “norm for dialogue and proclamation always remains Jesus Christ and *never the Church*” (emphasis added).¹²¹

tians sometimes understand their religion and practice it may be in need of purification” (§32).

¹¹⁶ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, §40. Cf. O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 200.

¹¹⁷ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, §11.

¹¹⁸ O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 200.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹²⁰ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, §10.

¹²¹ O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 201.

But it is hard to make sense of this separation between Jesus and the Church in light of Catholic teaching regarding the *de fide* doctrine of necessity of the Church as a means of salvation. Consider *Lumen Gentium*, §14: “Basing itself upon Sacred Scripture and tradition, it [this sacred Synod] teaches that the Church, now sojourning on earth as an exile is necessary for salvation. For Christ, made present to us in His Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and the unique way of salvation. In explicit terms He Himself affirmed the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5) and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through baptism as through a door men enter the Church.” Indeed, it is hard to make sense of separating Jesus and the Church given O’Collins’s own claim that “the community founded by Christ offers decisively fuller knowledge of God and richer means for salvation.”¹²² Again, most important, it is hard to make sense of this separation given the missiological context of *Lumen Gentium*, §16–17 and *Ad Gentes*, §1–9 that “assumes this [context] and reaffirms that the Church must conduct mission to all religions mentioned in *Lumen Gentium*, 16.”¹²³ The Church is not only a sign but an instrument of salvation, as *Lumen Gentium*, §1 teaches.

Indeed, following *Lumen Gentium*, §14, *Ad Gentes*, §7 teaches that “all must be converted to Him as He is made known by the Church’s preaching. All must be incorporated into Him by baptism, and into the Church which is His body. For Christ Himself ‘in explicit terms . . . affirmed the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5) and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through baptism as through a door men enter the Church.’” This, too, is the teaching of John Paul II: “The proclamation of the Word of God has *Christian conversion* as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith. Conversion is a gift of God, a work of the Blessed Trinity. It is the Spirit who opens people’s hearts so that they can believe in Christ and ‘confess him’” (cf. 1 Cor 12:3); of those who draw near to him through faith Jesus says: ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him’ (Jn 6:44).”¹²⁴ Indeed, John Paul II’s teaching is rooted in Jesus’s commands: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19) . And “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all

¹²² Ibid., 164.

¹²³ D’Costa, *Vatican II*, 82. D’Costa repeats this crucial point, “It is important . . . to note that *Lumen Gentium* 16–17 was composed with mission in mind and that *Ad Gentes* was a further commentary on *Lumen Gentium*” (82).

¹²⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, §46–47.

creation” (Mk 16:15). And in this respect, *pace* O’Collins, the Church is at the center of God’s plan of salvation, according to John Paul. As John Paul II states, “In Baptism, in fact, we are born anew to the life of God’s children, united to Jesus Christ and anointed in the Holy Spirit. Baptism is not simply a seal of conversion, and a kind of external sign indicating conversion and attesting to it. Rather, it is the sacrament which signifies and effects rebirth from the Spirit, establishes real and unbreakable bonds with the Blessed Trinity, and makes us members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church.”¹²⁵ I want to wrap up my article review of O’Collins’s book with the question regarding the universal necessity of the Church’s missionary activity

The Universal Necessity of the Church’s Missionary Activity

In his review of O’Collins’s book, we can well understand why James Heft poses the right question about O’Collins’s theology of religions: “Once it is assumed that other believers can be saved through their own religions, how robust can the Christian’s proclamation of the ‘decisive’ revelation of God in Christ be?”¹²⁶ O’Collins would probably respond to this question by assuring us that his position is not alleging that all religions “are *equally effective* [emphasis added] at putting people in contact with God, or acknowledging them to be *complete and clear ways, equivalent* [emphasis added] to what God offers through Jesus Christ and the community called into being by the Holy Spirit.”¹²⁷ Does this mean that O’Collins agrees with Pope Paul VI, St. John Paul II, and *Dominus Iesus* regarding the impact of this difference that he is pointing out here?

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), Paul VI finds the motivation for evangelization “in the fact that the religion of Jesus, which [the Church] proclaims through evangelization, *objectively* places man in relation with the plan of God, with his living presence and with his [saving] action; she thus causes an encounter with the mystery of divine paternity that bends over towards humanity.”¹²⁸ The pope adds, “Our religion effectively establishes with God an authentic and living relationship which the other religions do *not* succeed in doing, even though they have as it were, their arms stretched out towards heaven. This is why the Church keeps her missionary spirit alive, and even wishes to

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ James Heft, S.M., Review of *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, in *Theological Studies* 75.1 (2014): 194–195, and at 195.

¹²⁷ O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 163.

¹²⁸ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §53.

intensify it in the moment of history in which we are living.”¹²⁹ John Paul II emphasizes this very point of his predecessor in more exact terms describing the objective situation of those who do not know Christ: “Whoever does not know Christ, even through no fault of his own, is in a state of darkness and spiritual hunger, often with negative repercussions at the cultural and moral level. The Church’s missionary work can provide him with the resources for the full development of Christ’s saving grace, by offering full and conscious adherence to the message of faith and active participation in Church life through the sacraments.”¹³⁰ *Dominus Iesus* also addresses this matter: “If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.”¹³¹

There is no evidence in this book that O’Collins thinks the theist who has not embraced Christ and the Church and the non-theist who has not embraced God is, objectively speaking, in a gravely deficient situation with respect to their salvation, as suggested above by the two popes and the CDF document. Indeed, quite the opposite for O’Collins. All men are saved in Christ whether or not they respond to the Gospel: “Through the Spirit all people, *no matter* [emphasis added] whether they follow some faith or no faith, can be joined, albeit mysteriously, to the crucified and risen Jesus.”¹³² He adds, “Neither *Lumen Gentium* nor any other Vatican II document alleges that people must be aware of Christ’s revealing and saving activity for it to have its appropriate [salvific] effect.”¹³³ In fact, O’Collins assures us that “surely their knowing, in one way or another, the divine mystery happens in and through following their religion.”¹³⁴ Thus, the Church is not necessary as a means of salvation to evangelize and to call all non-Christians to conversion.

Let me conclude by saying that in order to address the question of the fate of the unevangelized, the following points must be kept in mind. Gavin D’Costa describes them admirably well:

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ John Paul II, “Christ, Way of Salvation for All,” General Audience, May 31, 1995, in “To the Ends of the Earth,” *Missionary Catechesis of Pope John Paul II*, §31–32.

¹³¹ *Dominus Iesus*, §22.

¹³² O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council*, 159.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 162.

(a) The Council texts always assume that the world religions operate under the condition of invincible ignorance when speaking of them positively as in *Lumen Gentium* 16; (b) the doctrine of invincible ignorance is always found as a qualifying clause to NCMS [i.e., the necessity of the Church as a means of salvation]; (c) invincible ignorance relates to justice: it is not the cause of saving grace; (d) those in invincible grace who die outside of the visible community of the Church *might* be saved: how they are saved and how many are saved is not addressed by the Council.¹³⁵

Invincible ignorance qualifies and contextualizes the *de fide* teaching of the necessity of the Church for salvation. The notion of invincible ignorance helps to block drawing the implication from the Church's necessity that all non-Christians are damned. Rather than following the path of O'Collins that oppose this *de fide* teaching—an opposition that violates his own test for authentic doctrinal development—"the organic development of doctrine is necessary to grasp the truth of the doctrine."¹³⁶

Perhaps the most unfortunate thing in this book is that there is nothing in it that invites "the Church to *renew her missionary commitment*," as St. John Paul II describes the purpose of his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*. The pope explains: "The present document has as its goal an interior renewal of faith and Christian life. For missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!* It is in commitment to the Church's universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support."¹³⁷ We urgently need more studies that will address the question of the fate of the unevangelized in concert with the teachings of Vatican II and its implications for evangelization and the permanent validity and necessity of the Church's missionary mandate.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ D'Costa, *Vatican II*, 80.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, §2.

¹³⁸ An excellent beginning here is Ralph Martin, *Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II actually Teaches and its Implications for Evangelization*. Gavin D'Costa, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* gives an exceptionally clarifying and deep study of the theological framework informing Vatican II's teaching on other religions. I have learned much from both these books. I am grateful to Fr. Thomas G. Guarino for his comments on an earlier draft of this review article. I am particularly grateful to Gavin D'Costa for his comments.

