

## RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE COINCIDENCE OF OPPOSITES

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*The author discusses a theology of religious pluralism in light of the Trinity-Christ relationship. As the Trinity is the paradigm for interpreting religious diversity from a Christian perspective, so the significance of Christ as mediating center of a relational God is explored. Bonaventure's coincidence of opposites helps break open the Christ mystery as one that engages plurality and difference. Based on this paradigm Christian life is to be lived as a center of unity and from a new depth of love.*

THE EMERGENCE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM in the 21st century is a characteristic of the new millennium. Although immigration has largely changed the religious landscape of many countries, our awareness of other religions has largely expanded through the development of technology. Ewert Cousins has identified this new period of consciousness as a “second axial period.” The first axial period produced individual, self-reflective consciousness; the second is characterized by global consciousness.<sup>1</sup> The tribe is no longer the local community but the global community that can now be accessed immediately via television, Internet, satellite communication, and travel. Technology has fundamentally altered our view of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ewert H. Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century* (Rockport, Mass: Element, 1992) 4–10. The term “axial period” was first used by Karl Jaspers in 1949 to refer to the centuries between 800 B.C. and 200 B.C. when a new kind of thinking arose in the major areas of the world. He described this period as an “axial period” since “it gave birth to everything which, since then, [the human person] has been able to be” (Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1953] 1; see also 23, 27).

world and ourselves in the world. "For the first time since the appearance of human life on our planet," Cousins writes, "all of the tribes, all of the nations, all of the religions are beginning to share a common history."<sup>2</sup> In light of this second axial period Cousins has identified a new "complexified religious consciousness," an interrelatedness of religious centers of consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Religious pluralism reflects the complexified religious consciousness of the second axial period insofar as awareness of religious diversity has reached a new level of convergence.

Diana Eck describes four aspects of religious pluralism that help clarify the meaning of this term. First, she says, "pluralism is not diversity alone, but *the energetic engagement with diversity*. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies." Second, "pluralism is not just tolerance, but *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity." "In a world of religious pluralism, ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly and breeds fear." Third, "pluralism is not relativism, but *the encounter of commitments*." By this Eck means "holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another." Fourth, she observes, pluralism is *based on dialogue* which means speaking and listening to one another, crossing the threshold and entering into the other's religious world and returning home again, enriched by the engagement.<sup>4</sup> Dialogue means genuine conversation, sitting down at table together and meeting one another eye to eye.

For Christians, the existence of religious pluralism creates a boundary of critical distance around Christian doctrine primarily because it challenges the principal belief in Christ as absolute savior. Is Christ uniquely savior or not? Can a person be saved in a religion outside Christianity? Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christian" made famous the problem at hand. For Rahner, adherents of other religions can be viewed as "anonymous Christians" because they receive grace that ultimately derives from Christ himself even though they remain ignorant of this fact. Rahner opposed a "dialectical theology" which posits a sharp distinction between the revelation of Christianity and the unbelief and humanly constructed character that permeates the other religions. He established his transcendental anthropology in an implicit, human existential search for God. Those who

<sup>2</sup> Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century* 7–10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 73. See also Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Activation of Energy*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970) 30–31, 101–3.

<sup>4</sup> Diana L. Eck, "What Is Pluralism?" The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, [http://www.pluralism.org/pluralism/what\\_is\\_pluralism.php](http://www.pluralism.org/pluralism/what_is_pluralism.php) (accessed July 17, 2009).

follow their consciences, according to Rahner, live lives of salvific faith—not mere belief—made possible by God’s self offer in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

If the claim of absolute savior has become problematic in the second axial period, the problem of absolute salvation is compounded by insights from contemporary sciences (such as quantum physics) that describe the universe as evolutionary and interconnected. What does salvation mean in an evolutionary universe with a history of about 14 billion years and a future of perhaps 100 trillion years?<sup>6</sup> Is it feasible to use the category of absoluteness in a universe whose physical makeup includes a quantum world of numerous possibilities and openness to new patterns of order? If the universe is an amazing network of possibilities, does a plurality of religions indicate a plurality of salvations, as Mark Heim suggests, or do all religions ultimately dissolve into the same salvific end?<sup>7</sup> I will argue here that religious pluralism is intrinsic to a Christian understanding of a triune God and gives new meaning to Christian discipleship in the 21st century. To support this thesis I will first examine the Trinity as divine plurality and explore the place of Christ in relation to divine pluralism using Bonaventure’s coincidence of opposites. I will then draw out the implications of “Christ the coincidence of opposites” in light of world religions, using a paradigm of religious pluralism proposed by Raimundo Panikkar. Finally I will examine the implications of the coincidence of opposites for Christian life today.

### TRINITY: THE GOD OF PLURALITY

In his book *The Depth of The Riches*, Mark Heim claims that Christian communion with the triune God as the religious end makes Trinity central to the Christian understanding of religious diversity.<sup>8</sup> The plurality of the

<sup>5</sup> Karl Rahner, “Anonymous Christians,” in *Theological Investigations* 6 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969) 115–34. For a detailed discussion of this concept see Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000) 143–49. See also Harvey D. Egan, S.J., “A Rahnerian Response to *Dominus Jesus*,” *Australian eJournal of Theology* 2 (February 2004), [http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt\\_2/Harvey\\_Egan.htm](http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_2/Harvey_Egan.htm) (accessed July 17, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> For a succinct history of the universe see Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2006) 8–14. According to a recent article in *Scientific American*, the universe is expanding at such an increasing rate that we will eventually lose sight of the Big Bang. The authors suggest that the universe will continue to expand for about 100 trillion more years and will ultimately collapse into a black hole. See Lawrence M. Krauss and Robert J. Scherrer, “The End of Cosmology?” *Scientific American* 298.3 (March 2008) 47–53.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion on exclusivist and pluralist views of salvation see S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001) 126.

Trinity is the personal, fecund, communicative nature of the Trinity: three divine Persons in a communion of love. The Trinity, therefore, represents the Christian context for interpreting religious pluralism; it is Christianity's "pluralistic theology."<sup>9</sup> If the Trinity is fecund and pluralistic, Heim claims, Jesus Christ can be neither an exhaustive source for knowledge of God nor the exclusive act of God's salvific power.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the Trinity is unavoidably Christocentric: God's triune nature arose historically from faith in Jesus Christ. The personal character of God, therefore, requires particularity as its deepest mode of revelation. The fullness of God's mystery, however, is never grasped by us; it is hidden in the divine source (the Father), overflows in Christ beyond our measure to receive it, and is continually active in all of creation through the Spirit.<sup>11</sup> What Heim points out is that the fecundity of God cannot be outstripped by a single human person; yet, it is precisely *the* human person, Jesus Christ, who reveals God to be Trinity and hence personal, communicative, and fecund.

The renewal of Trinitarian theology as Being in communion has illumined relationality as the ultimate nature of Being itself. God's ultimate reality cannot be located in substance (what it is in itself) but only in personhood: what God is toward another. God is the mystery of persons in communion.<sup>12</sup> The movement away from God as substantial Being (from which Trinity is derived) to God as Being in communion (Trinity) sheds new light on the meaning of Christ. Gavin D'Costa writes: "The Trinity safeguards against an exclusive particularism (Christomonism) and a pluralist universalism (theocentrism) in that it stipulates against an exclusive identification of God and Jesus, as well as against a non-identification of God and Jesus."<sup>13</sup> The understanding of God as personal, fecund, and relational means that God can be decisively revealed in Christ, but God can also be elsewhere than Christ.<sup>14</sup> The question is, how do we understand the significance of Christ in relation to a God who is personal, fecund, and relational? Although contemporary Trinitarian theology has opened up a new way of viewing religious pluralism, the relationship between Trinity and Christ is unclear, especially in light of pluralism. How do we understand the meaning of Christ as the revelation of God

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.133.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 134.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1985); Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God," *Modern Theology* 19 (2003) 363–71.

<sup>13</sup> Gavin D'Costa, "Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Plurality," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990) 18.

<sup>14</sup> Heim, *Depth of the Riches* 131.

who embraces different religious ends, as Heim suggests? How do we hold up a Christology high enough to fit a God of Trinitarian self-communicative love yet not so high that it cannot fit within a wider economy of God's action? To address these questions, I will draw upon one of the most creative medieval minds, the Franciscan theologian Bonaventure (d. 1274), who brought together opposing realities into a structure of meaning known as the coincidence of opposites. Bonaventure was a contemporary of Thomas Aquinas but differed from Aquinas in his unified view of the symbolic and the Scholastic. The significance of all theology, for Bonaventure, is searching the depths and bringing hidden things to light. He began his career, like Aquinas, as a university professor who wrote within the theological mainstream of his time. After his election as minister general of the Franciscan order, however, Bonaventure relinquished his academic career for a position of leadership within the order. His transition from an academic life into leadership is reflected in the development of his Christology. His Christ mysticism develops especially in his spiritual writings which, in my view, bear the weight of his originality as a theologian.

Although one might see Bonaventure as an unlikely dialogue partner for my discussion on religious pluralism, especially since he wrote vehemently against pagan philosophy and its influence on Christian thought, still his was an integrative and ecumenical mind that aimed to unite the best of Eastern and Western theology in a Christian synthesis.<sup>15</sup> Bonaventure is a helpful guide to understanding Christ in light of religious pluralism, primarily because his insights on Christ are integrally related to his theology of the Trinity. His focus on Christ as the coincidence of opposites can help illumine the Christ mystery in this new axial period.

### BONAVENTURE'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

In his introduction to Bonaventure's *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of Christ*, Zachary Hayes writes: "One cannot read the works of Bonaventure for long without sensing that the mystery of the Trinity pervades the whole of his vision of reality. . . . In Bonaventure's thought the Trinity and Christology are inseparably intertwined. It is the mystery of Christ that leads us to the Trinity; and the Trinitarian concept of God is developed as

<sup>15</sup> Bonaventure's synthesis of Eastern and Western thought with roots both in the Greek Fathers and Augustine is shown especially in his Trinitarian theology. See Ewert H. Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1978) 44. For a good introduction to Bonaventure see Christopher Cullen, *Bonaventure* (New York: Oxford, 1006) 3–22. According to Cullen, Bonaventure was invited to the Council of Lyons in 1274 by Pope Gregory X and "made singular contributions that helped with its central purpose, namely, reunification with the Greek Church of the East" (14).

a function of Christology.”<sup>16</sup> Bonaventure’s understanding of the integral relationship between Trinity and Christ is not simply a Platonic notion of the divine Word but relates more fundamentally to the idea that “God could not communicate being to the finite if he were not supremely communicative in himself.”<sup>17</sup> Hence Trinity is fundamental for the existence of Christ, and Christ is the principal symbol of Trinitarian life.

The twin poles of Bonaventure’s theology, formed by the Trinity and Christ, are so integrally related that one cannot be thought of without the other.<sup>18</sup> His Trinitarian theology relies on two major sources: Pseudo-Dionysius and Richard of St. Victor. Following Dionysius, Bonaventure considered God’s principal name to be Good, as Jesus said: “No one is good but God alone” (Lk 18:19).<sup>19</sup> Richard states that the highest good is love, and love is personal and communicative.<sup>20</sup> Bonaventure, therefore, uses the notion of self-diffusive goodness and personal love to distinguish the persons of the Trinity as a communion of persons-in-love. The Father is the source or fountain fullness of infinite goodness because the Father is primal, unoriginate, and hence self-diffusive.<sup>21</sup> The Son is that person eternally generated by the Father’s self-diffusive goodness (*per modum naturae*), the total personal expression of the Father, and thus Word and

<sup>16</sup> Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., introduction to *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, vol. 3, *Works of Saint Bonaventure*, ed. George Marcil, O.F.M. (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1979) 30–31.

<sup>17</sup> Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., “Christology and Metaphysics in the Thought of Bonaventure,” *Journal of Religion* 58 (Supplement 1978) 82–95, at 91. On the integral relationship between spirituality and theology in Bonaventure’s thought see Ilia Delio, O.S.F., “Theology, Spirituality, and Christ the Center: Bonaventure’s Synthesis,” in *The Bonaventure Handbook*, ed. J. A. Wayne Hellmann and Jay Hammond (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on Bonaventure’s Trinitarian theology see Ilia Delio, O.S.F., *Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to His Life, Thought, and Writings* (New York: New City, 2001) 39–53; Ewert H. Cousins, “The Two Poles of Bonaventure’s Thought,” in *Sancta Bonaventura 1274–2974*, 5 vols., ed. Jacques-Guy Bougerol (Grottaferatta; Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1974) 4:153–76.

<sup>19</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* 4.1 (PG 3.694). For an excellent discussion of the tradition of the good see Ewert H. Cousins, “The Notion of the Person in the *De Trinitate* of Richard of St. Victor” (Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1966).

<sup>20</sup> Richard of St. Victor, *De trinitate* 3.14–19 (PL 196.924–27).

<sup>21</sup> Bonaventure *I. Sent.* d. 27, p.1, a. un., q. 2, ad 3 (1:470) (The critical edition of Bonaventure’s *Commentaria in quator libros sententiarum* used here is found in the *Opera Omnia*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 10 vols. [Quaracchi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882–1902]. Latin texts of *Sententiae commentaries* [*Sent.*] are indicated by volume and page number in parentheses. Texts other than the *Sententiae commentaries* are identified by title with volume and page number also listed in parentheses). See Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* 42 n. 51.

Image of the Father.<sup>22</sup> The Word is the complete expression of the mystery of God in one who, while God, is other than the Father.<sup>23</sup> The Spirit proceeds from Father and Son in an act of loving volition (*per modum voluntatis*) on the part of Father and Son.<sup>24</sup> The Spirit is that freedom-in-love between the Father and Son, who perfects their love in a holy and eternal union.

Bonaventure maintains that the relationship between the Father and Son united by the Spirit is the basis of all other relations. The Father, the fountain fullness of love, is always moving toward the Son/Word in the self-communication of love, and the Son eternally loves the Father in the Spirit. Although the doctrine of exemplarity refers to the relations between God and creation, the basis of this doctrine is the relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit. Since God exists only as Trinity, exemplarity refers to the entire Trinity; however, the mystery of the Trinity is reflected in the mystery of the Second Person, the divine Word. Insofar as the one Word is the expression of the entire inner-Trinitarian structure of God, “that which is created is an expression of the Word which bears within itself the imprint of the Trinity.”<sup>25</sup> Hence the entire Trinity is focused in an exemplary way in the Word.

Bonaventure emphasized the title “Word” for the Second Divine Person because it signifies a “complex network of relations which the Son bears to the Father, to creation, to humans and to revelation.”<sup>26</sup> As the expression of the necessary immanent fruitfulness of God, the generation of the Son is simultaneously the expression of the possible free communication of being to the nondivine. Hayes writes: “As the Father’s self-expression, the Word is the openness of the Father to the other in all its forms. The second person is God precisely as expressive being. . . . God’s being as self-communicative love gives expression to its entire fruitfulness in the generation of the Son, so that in generating the Son, the Father speaks one Word immanent to himself in which is expressed the possibility of creation.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Bonaventure, *I. Sent.* d. 5, a. 1, q. 2, resp. (1:115); *I. Sent.* d. 2, a. un., q. 4, fund 2 (1:56); Ilija Delio, O.S.F., “Theology, Metaphysics and the Centrality of Christ,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 256–60.

<sup>23</sup> Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., commentary on “Sermon II on the Nativity of the Lord,” in *What Manner of Man? Sermons on Christ by St. Bonaventure*, trans., intro, commentary by Zachary Hayes, O.F.M. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1989) 80 n. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Bonaventure, *I. Sent.* d. 6, a. un., q. 2, resp. (1:128).

<sup>25</sup> Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., “Incarnation and Creation in the Theology of St. Bonaventure,” in *Studies Honoring Ignatius Brady, Friar Minor*, ed. Romano Stephen Almagno, O.F.M., and Conrad Harkins, O.F.M. (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1976) 314; Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* 48.

<sup>26</sup> Bonaventure, *Commentarius in Joannes* 1, 6, q. 1 (6:247); Hayes, “Incarnation and Creation” 314; Hayes, “Christology and Metaphysics” 90.

<sup>27</sup> Hayes, “Incarnation and Creation” 314.



Because there is a Word in God, creation can exist as an external Word; because there is an absolute otherness, there can be a relative otherness. When God creates, he does so only in and through the Word of his own otherness, so that whatever created reality exists appears as the external otherness that is placed through the immanent otherness. Creation is co-spoken in the eternal Word but as a free act of divine expression. Creation therefore possesses in its inner constitution a relation to the uncreated Word.<sup>28</sup> It is caught up in the mystery of the generation of the Word from the Father and is generated out of the fecundity of God's love, which is the Spirit.

Although Bonaventure saw no absolute necessity for an incarnation of the Word, he did discern congruity between the mode of incarnation (the divine Word) and the mystery of creation.<sup>29</sup> By "congruity" Bonaventure meant a "factual, positive inner relation between the inner divine reality of the Word, the extra divine reality of the Word and the reality of the Incarnation."<sup>30</sup> According to Bonaventure, the Incarnation is primarily a mystery of relation.<sup>31</sup> God's creative action places the created human nature of Jesus in a unique relation to the divine. Hayes writes: "So intense is this relation that the history of Jesus of Nazareth is what the inner Word of God becomes when it is most fully spoken into that which is ontologically other than itself, that is, the human nature of Jesus."<sup>32</sup> The humanity of Jesus is the fullest and most perfect external Word that gives expression to the inner, eternal Word as its perfect content.<sup>33</sup> Thus the Word holds a middle place between the Father and the world, and it is through the Son that the Father communicates to the world at all levels. It is precisely as Word and center that the Son is the exemplar of all creation. While at one level, the whole of the Trinity is exemplary with respect to the world, at another level the mystery of exemplarity is concentrated in a unique way in the Son, for the triune structure of God himself is expressed in him.<sup>34</sup> Thus as the Word is the inner self-expression of God, the created order is the external expression of the inner Word. The created universe, therefore, possesses in its inner constitution a relation to the uncreated Word. Since the Word, in turn, is the expression of the inner-Trinitarian structure of God, that which is created as an expression of the Word bears the imprint of the Trinity as well.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 315.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 311.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Bonaventure, *III. Sent.* d. 1, a. 1, q. 1, ad 1 (3:10) ; ad 3 (3:10–11) ; *III. Sent.* d. 1, a. 1, q. 2, ad 2 (3:13) ; ad 4 (3:13) ; ad 6 (3:13).

<sup>32</sup> Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., "The Meaning of *Convenientia* in the Metaphysics of St. Bonaventure," *Franciscan Studies* 34 (1974) 94.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>34</sup> Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaëmeron (Hex.)* 9, 2 (5:373) ; 3, 7 (5:344).

<sup>35</sup> Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure* (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1992) 60.



In studying Bonaventure's texts, Hayes found that the intrinsic relationship between incarnation and creation is essential to understanding Bonaventure's cosmic Christology. Hayes notes that the doctrine of Incarnation from Alexander of Hales to Scotus, including Bonaventure, "did not limit the discussion of the meaning of Christ to the reality of the cross" but expanded it to the widest possible horizon. What these theologians did, Hayes writes, is to "perceive the possible relations between the story of Jesus and the larger picture of the world."<sup>36</sup> They saw that the incarnation is not an isolated event but integral to the possibility of creation itself; one is inconceivable without the other. Because of the integral relationship between creation and incarnation, Franciscan theologians held that "a world without Christ is an incomplete world," that is, the whole world is structured Christologically.<sup>37</sup> Christ is not accidental to creation or an intrusion but the inner ground of creation and its goal. Duns Scotus (d. 1309) claimed that the incarnation is not due to sin but to the free, absolute love of God. Since perfect love cannot will anything less than the perfection of love, Christ would have come in the highest glory in creation even if there were no sin and thus no need for redemption.<sup>38</sup> Christ is first in God's intention to love. Bonaventure held a middle position between Anselm's satisfaction theory and Scotus' primacy of Christ. While his Scholastic writings reflect the doctrine of satisfaction, seminal insights on the primacy of Christ can be found in, among other writings, the third book of commentary on the *Sentences* (*Commentaria in quator libros sententiarum*), as well as in his *Reductione artium ad theologiam*, *Sermo II natiuitatis*, and in his first *collatio* of the *Hexaëmeron*.<sup>39</sup> Evident in the

<sup>36</sup> Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., "Christ, Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity," *Cord: A Franciscan Spiritual Review* 46 (1996) 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Mary Beth Ingham, C.S.J., "John Duns Scotus: An Integrated Vision," in *The History of Franciscan Theology*, ed. Kenan B. Osborne, O.F.M. (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1994) 219–22. For Scotus, the mutuality between God and human persons realized in the incarnation is grounded in the very nature of God as love. The divine initiative of love has as its primary object that creature capable of receiving the fullest measure of God's goodness and glory and who, in turn, could respond in the fullest measure. He writes: "First, God wills good for himself as the end of all things; second, he wills that another be good for him. This is the moment of predestination." See also Ilia Delio, *Christ in Evolution* (New York: Orbis, 2008) 53–65.

<sup>39</sup> Scholars have been divided over Bonaventure's position on the primacy of Christ, but as Hayes writes, "a closer reading of Bonaventure shows that what he rejected is not the doctrine of absolute predestination as such, but any understanding of the divine decree which would involve a necessity *ab extra*" (Zachary Hayes, *Hidden Center* 190 n. 129). Even in his Scholastic works, Bonaventure holds together cosmic perfection and redemption through the incarnate Word, a position he maintains throughout his career.

development of Bonaventure's Christology is an attraction to the primacy of Christ.

Bonaventure's theological synthesis is a "congruent" relationship between incarnation and creation. Zachary Hayes, following Alexander Gerken, indicates that Bonaventure saw the incarnation as the highest work of creation while carefully avoiding any necessity on the part of God. He clearly viewed sin as embedded in historical reality; however, he did not limit the mystery of Christ to sin;<sup>40</sup> Christ cannot be willed by God simply because of sin.<sup>41</sup> The incarnation is not a sort of afterthought on the part of God. Rather, from eternity, God included the possibility of a fall of the human race and therefore structured the human person with a view to redemption. As the consummation of the created order, the incarnation is willed for its own sake and not for a lesser good such as redemption from sin.<sup>42</sup> It is not sin that is the cause of the incarnation, but simply the excess love and mercy of God.<sup>43</sup>

By reversing the order of sin and incarnation, Bonaventure shifted the reason for salvation from sin-centered (without denying sin) to love-centered by discovering Christ at the heart of the cosmos. Christ is not ordered to us, Bonaventure said, but we to Christ.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Christ does not save us *from* the world; rather, Christ is the reason *for* the world. All creation has its source and goal in the fruitful creative love of God. According to Bonaventure—and in Hayes's words:

<sup>40</sup> Alexander Gerken, O.F.M., *Théologie du Verbe: La relation entre l'incarnation et la création selon S. Bonaventure*, trans. Jacqueline Gréal (Paris: Éditions Franciscaines, 1970) 311, writes: "L'incarnation est en harmonie avec l'oeuvre de Dieu parce qu'elle représente l'achèvement et la conclusion de toute oeuvre de Dieu, qui est le somme insurpassable de la création" (The incarnation is in accordance with God's work because it represents the achievement and conclusion of God's entire work and is the unsurpassable sum of creation).

<sup>41</sup> Hayes, "Christ, Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity" 6.

<sup>42</sup> Hayes, "Meaning of *Convenientia*" 94.

<sup>43</sup> Cited in Hayes, *Hidden Center* 189; Bonaventure, *III. Sent.* d. 1, a. 2, q. 2, ad 5 (3:26–27).

<sup>44</sup> Bonaventure, *III. Sentences* d. 32, q. 5, ad 3 (3:706). Zachary Hayes notes how Bonaventure distinguishes between the motive and reason for the incarnation. He writes: "The redemptive function is not simply added to the incarnation; for the actual incarnation is thoroughly shaped by its redemptive function. While the incarnation bears its own inner *ratio*, the soteriological dimension appears as the *ratio inducens*, a term which points to the actuality of a fallen history and holds open the possibility that an incarnation, willed for its own sake as the highest revelation of the love of God, can in fact enter into history as a redemptive act. So it is that, while the incarnation is in fact a redemptive mystery, it fulfills other functions in the world as well; above all, it is the perfection of the universe" (*Hidden Center* 190 n. 129).

The deepest truth about the created world is that it has within itself the potential to become, through God's grace, something of what has already come to be in the mystery of Christ. What happened between God and the world in Jesus Christ points to the future of the cosmos. It is a future that involves the radical transformation of created reality through the unitive power of God's creative love.<sup>45</sup>

### THE COINCIDENCE OF OPPOSITES

The congruent relation between God and creation through the divine Word plays out in a particular way in Bonaventure's use of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, a structure of thought that governs his theology. The doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum* refers to the interpenetration, interdependence, and unification of opposites in which the coexistence of opposites is the basis of true unity. According to Cousins, the *coincidentia oppositorum* is the hermeneutic of Bonaventure's theology, the logic of his vision and, as such, is the way Bonaventure understood reality and, in particular, the reality of Christ.<sup>46</sup>

Bonaventure's coincidence of opposites is rooted in the Trinity, centered in Christ, and manifested in creation. His dialectical style of thought begins with the primacy of the Father. The First Divine Person is unbegotten, without origin; hence the Father is first and most fecund.<sup>47</sup> The Father's unbegottenness and fecundity are mutually complementary opposites that cannot be formally reduced one to the other. The Father is generative because he is unbegotten: a coincidence of silence and expressiveness, emptiness and fullness. Because of this dialectical nature of the Father, God is an incomprehensible mystery that cannot be grasped. The Second Divine Person, the Son/Word is also a coincidence of opposites because the Son/Word is the center of the Trinity, the beloved Word/Image of the Father, and together with the Father the source and breath of the Spirit. The Son therefore is a coincidence of receptivity and generativity. The divine Spirit is a coincidence of opposites insofar as the Spirit is breathed forth in a communion of love between the Father and Son and breathes forth life in creation; hence the Spirit is life-giving breath exhaled by God and inhaled by creation.

Although the coincidence of opposites can be identified for each of the divine Persons who are distinguished by relations of origin, the center of the coincidence of opposites is the divine Word. The Word is the center of the Trinity and thus mediates the opposites of the Father and Spirit, providing the basis of perfect order within the Trinity.<sup>48</sup> The Word,

<sup>45</sup> Hayes, "Christ, Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity" 12.

<sup>46</sup> Cousins, *Coincidence of Opposites* 9.

<sup>47</sup> Bonaventure, *I. Sent.* d. 27, p.1, a. un., q. 2, ad 3 (1:470).

<sup>48</sup> A. J. Wayne Hellman, O.F.M. Conv., *Ordo: Untersuchung eines Grundgedankens in der Theologie Bonaventuras* (Munich: Schönningh, 1974) 47–92.

however, is also the center between the Father and creation. It is in the Word that the fecundity of the Father finds its perfect image; and it is from the Word that all creation flows; and it is to the Word, as exemplar, that creation reflects back and returns.<sup>49</sup> The centrality of the Word means that the Trinity is focused in the Word in an exemplary way.<sup>50</sup> The Word is the *Ars patris*, the expressive love of the Father, who with the Father breathes forth love in the Spirit. Thus where there is the divine Word there is the Father and Spirit. In the birth of Jesus Christ, Bonaventure states, the whole Trinity gives witness of itself: the Father gives witness to himself as the power of the incarnation, the Son as the expressed Word, and the Holy Spirit as the loving bond between God and creation.<sup>51</sup> Since the incarnation is the work of the Trinity, without the Trinity the incarnation cannot be understood.<sup>52</sup> In his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* Bonaventure explores the mystery of the Trinity in relation to the person of Christ through the coincidence of opposites:

If, therefore, you can behold with your mind's eye the purity of goodness . . . then you can see that through the highest communicability of the good, there must be a Trinity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, . . . and if you are amazed because the divine Being is both first and last, eternal and most present . . . look at the Mercy Seat and wonder that in him there is joined the first principle with the last, God with man . . . the most simple with the most composite, the most actual with the one who suffered supremely and died, the most perfect and immense with the lowly, the supreme and all-inclusive one with a composite individual distinct from others, that is, the man Jesus Christ.<sup>53</sup>

The union and differentiation that distinguishes the Trinity as a coincidence of opposites is also the heart of the mystery of Christ. What is striking about the coincidence of opposites as it marks the mystery of Christ is that it is the mystery of the *crucified* Christ, symbolized by the "Mercy Seat," which is the place of atonement and reconciliation with God.<sup>54</sup> Bonaventure writes:

<sup>49</sup> Cousins, "Two Poles of St. Bonaventure's Theology" 161.

<sup>50</sup> Bonaventure, *Hex.* 9.2 (5:373); *Hex.* 3.7 (5:344).

<sup>51</sup> Bonaventure, *Sermo* 4 (5:546b); *Sermo* 1.8 (5:536).

<sup>52</sup> In his *Breviloquium* Bonaventure states that "the Incarnation is a work of the Trinity through which took place the assumption of the flesh by the Godhead and the union of the Godhead with the flesh" (Engl. trans. Dominic V. Monti, O.F.M., *Breviloquium*, vol. 9 of *Works of St. Bonaventure* [New York: Franciscan Institute, 2005] 135).

<sup>53</sup> Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (hereafter *Itin.*) 6.2.4–5 (5:310–311); Engl. trans. Ewert H. Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis* (New York: Paulist, 1978) 103, 106–7.

<sup>54</sup> Bonaventure's symbolism in the *Itinerarium* is based on the Jewish Temple, since Jesus Christ fulfills the promise of the Old Testament. His elaborate symbolism in this text is discussed by Cousins in the *Coincidence of Opposites* (86). For a

Look at the Mercy Seat and wonder that in Christ personal union exists with a trinity of substances and a duality of natures. . . . If an image is an expressed likeness, when our mind contemplates in Christ the Son of God . . . it sees united the first and last, the highest and the lowest, the circumference and the center, the Alpha and the Omega, the caused and the cause, the Creator and the creature.<sup>55</sup>

In light of the *Itinerarium* Cousins has identified three types of coincidence of opposites: cosmological, soteriological, and mystical. That is, Christ joins together the opposites of eternal and temporal, death and life, human and divine, beginning and end.<sup>56</sup> In the incarnate hypostatic union, the macrocosm is joined with the microcosm, the maximum with the minimum, God and human. By uniting maximum and minimum, macrocosm and microcosm, "Christ is seen as the form of the universe, the model on which it is created, the goal of divinization, and the way by which all things are transformed in God."<sup>57</sup> Bonaventure's coincidence of opposites is a way of describing Christ as the symbol of all reality.

For Bonaventure, the coincidence of opposites is ultimately grounded in the centrality of Christ. While opposites can be identified in each of the trinitarian Persons, it is the centrality of the divine Word as the coincidence of opposites that unifies and particularizes divine love. Christ is the Word incarnate, the personal expression of the Father's fecund love, the Word that exists between the Father and Spirit in the Trinity and between the Father and creation through the life-giving Spirit. Christ, the coincidence of opposites, eternally mediates the generativity and receptivity of love. Because the movement of self-emptying love begins in the self-gift of the Father, Bonaventure indicates that the cross of kenotic love is already in the heart of God before it is in the heart of creation. Christ crucified is the mystery of God's love in the world leading us into the very heart of the mystery of God. In his *Soliloquy* Bonaventure writes: "O soul, return, for Jesus Christ is calling you with hands outstretched on the cross; return for the whole abyss of the Trinity stands ready for your coming."<sup>58</sup> Christ crucified symbolizes the mystery of the Trinity by which God's life is

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detailed discussion of the Temple and other symbols in the *Itinerarium*, see Sister Lillian Turney, "The Symbolism of the Temple in St. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1968).

<sup>55</sup> Bonaventure, *Itin.* 6.7 (5:312); Cousins, *Bonaventure* 108–9.

<sup>56</sup> Cousins, *Coincidence of Opposites* 148; on the types and implications of the coincidence of opposites see 199–208.

<sup>57</sup> Ewert H. Cousins, "The Coincidence of Opposites in the Christology of Saint Bonaventure," *Franciscan Studies* 28 (1968) 41.

<sup>58</sup> Bonaventure, *Soliloquium de quatuor mentalibus exercitiis* 1.38 (8:41); "Soliloquy on the Four Spiritual Exercises," in *St. Bonaventure: Opuscula Second Series*, vol. 3 of *The Works of Bonaventure*, trans. José de Vinck, (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild, 1966) 69.

completely communicated to another and united with the other as beloved in a *perichoresis* of love.<sup>59</sup>

The relationship between the Trinity and Christ crucified, which Bonaventure highlights, underscores the relationship between plurality and unity. What Bonaventure grasped theologically is that without opposites there is no Christ. Stating this more positively, for Christ to exist there must be opposites, the silent expressiveness of the Father and the unitive love of the Spirit. Hence the coincidence of opposites is another way of speaking about Christ. Jesus Christ is the incarnation of opposites. When the Word becomes flesh, God humbly bends down as the One who unites opposites in creation; Jesus Christ mediates divine trinitarian love in creation. Bonaventure describes the centrality of Christ in view of the perfection of love and the ordering of love between persons. He indicates that without Christ crucified, the true coincidence of opposites, there is no real order of love in creation because there is no real relation between the One and the Many. Christ is the One in whom opposites are mutually affirmed as complementary opposites; that is, the very center of division is the very center of union. Christ is the center of unity in love.

### THE COINCIDENCE OF OPPOSITES AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The notion of Christ as a coincidence of opposites holds import for the second axial period marked by religious pluralism and interrelatedness. Bonaventure's integral relationship between the Trinity and Christ speaks of a God-world relationship that is grounded in love and relationality. God communicates Godself to us as God is in Godself—a plurality of persons in a communion of love. Heim states: "For the Christian, salvation is not passing beyond the Spirit to the Son or the Son to the Father. Salvation is participation in the divine life that is the communion among the three persons."<sup>60</sup> Bonaventure's integration of Trinity and Christ means that salvation is not of Jesus alone but of the Trinity; it is the Trinity who saves us. Thus Bonaventure advised believers to "contemplate the Trinity itself and the humanity of Christ."<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> The term *perichoresis* was first used by the eighth-century theologian, John Damascene, who said that the Divine Persons of the Trinity are not only related to one another but mutually inhere in one another and draw life from one another. Bonaventure was influenced by the idea of *perichoresis* but used the Latin *circuminessio* instead, meaning that the Divine Persons "move around one another" in a communion of love. See Delio, *Simply Bonaventure* 41.

<sup>60</sup> Heim, *Depth of the Riches* 132.

<sup>61</sup> Bonaventure, *De perfectione vitae ad sorores* 5.10 (8:120); Engl. trans. José de Vinck, "On the Perfection of Life, Addressed to Sisters," in *St. Bonaventure: Mystical Opuscula*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Bonaventure* (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild, 1960) 238.

The relationship between the Trinity and salvation is attracting new attention today in light of religious pluralism. Panikkar has developed a theology of world religions that finds meaning in view of the Trinity which, he states, offers a “dazzling, almost blinding revelation of the fullness of the divine mystery.”<sup>62</sup> Panikkar describes three aspects of the divinity and three corresponding forms of spirituality that correspond to the Trinity: (1) the silent, apophatic dimension of divinity, which he relates to the Father, since the Father expresses himself only through the Son and of himself has no word or expression; (2) the personalistic dimension of divinity, which he relates to the Son, since the Son, through whom creation, redemption, and glorification flow, is the personal mediator between God and the human person; and (3) the immanent dimension of divinity which Panikkar relates to the Spirit, since the Spirit is the union of the Father and the Son.<sup>63</sup> According to Panikkar’s trinitarian model of world religions, the apophatic spirituality of the Father is similar to the Buddhist experience of nirvana and the experience of apophatic silence through negation of the word, thought, or logos. The personalist spirituality of the Son has its roots in Yahweh’s revelation to the Jews and, from the Christian perspective, in its completion in the person of Christ. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are religions of the word, since they claim to have received a personal revelation from the divinity in words, images, and concepts. The Jew and Muslim see ultimate reality expressed in the word of God; the Christian sees it expressed in the person of Christ, the personal, incarnate Word of the Father. The immanent spirituality of the Spirit has its resonance in the advaitic Hindu doctrine of the nonduality of the self and the Absolute.<sup>64</sup> As Cousins notes, “the advaitic Hindu seeks undifferentiated union with the Absolute which is the work of the Spirit, leading one to union.”<sup>65</sup> A trinitarian theology of world religions not only makes credible a

<sup>62</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973) 55. Panikkar is familiar with Bonaventure’s thought, as he indicates in his book *Christophany*. In his discussion of Christ as symbol of the whole of reality, for example, Panikkar draws upon Bonaventure’s description of Christ as the coincidence of opposites, found in the *Itinerarium* (6.5). This text sums up Panikkar’s insight into Christ as the divinization of the whole universe. That is, the whole universe is called to share the trinitarian *perichoresis* in and through Christ. See Raimundo Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man*, trans. Alfred DiLascia (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2004) 17–48.

<sup>63</sup> Panikkar, *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* 46–55; Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century* 81.

<sup>64</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, “Toward an Ecumenical Theandric Spirituality,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 5 (1968) 522–33; Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century* 81–82. See also Heim, *Depth of the Riches* 148–56.

<sup>65</sup> Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century* 82.



Christian understanding of God (as triune) but—using Bonaventure’s Trinity-Christ paradigm—it also illumines the significance of Christ.

If Christ *is* the coincidence of opposites and, as such, incarnates trinitarian love, then the *fullness* of Christ cannot exist without a diversity of religious experiences. That is, for the fullness of Christ to be realized, there *must be* religious opposites that embody within them the opposites of the Trinity: silence and expressiveness, emptiness and fullness. Christ stands as symbol of religious pluralism precisely as the One who both unites and distinguishes religious differences. Without the opposites of the Father and Spirit, the generativity and receptivity of love, there is no Christ. Similarly, without the incarnate emptiness and silence of the Buddhist or the unitive love of the Hindu, the Trinity is not fully realized in history; hence neither is Christ. Although Jews and Muslims adhere to the word of God, we Christians follow the Word incarnate. We are centered not only in the divine Word of the Father but in the Word who mediates the opposites of trinitarian love.<sup>66</sup> Thus our religious end is not simply a unitive end with God but an end centered in Christ the coincidence of opposites. As Christians, therefore, we are called to live in the heart of reconciling love.

I would maintain with Panikkar and Heim that the Trinity is Christianity’s pluralistic theology; the Trinity is Creator, Redeemer, Savior and hence at work in all religions. As Panikkar points out, each divine Person has particular appropriations; thus each divine Person has particular divine expressions or relates to particular religious expressions in creation, without denying that the Spirit is at work throughout the whole of religious experience. Gerald O’Collins notes: “Since these religions contain elements of truth and goodness (Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*) and the Spirit of God is mysteriously but powerfully present to them, adherents of these religions can reach salvation by following the ways proposed to them.”<sup>67</sup> We can further this insight by saying that salvation is of the Trinity with its multiple religious ends. To say that the Trinity saves, therefore, is to say that there is no particular end of salvation that is not in some way related to another end, just as there is no one trinitarian Person without the other two Persons. Thus, while Heim speaks of “religious ends” and “salvations,” there is really only one salvation that belongs to the whole Trinity

<sup>66</sup> Terrence Madigan has suggested that the theme of “mediation” might be helpful for understanding the various approaches to the theology of religions. See Terrence Madigan, “For Us and For our Salvation”: The Notion of Salvation History in the Contemporary Theology of Religions,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64 (1999) 339–48.

<sup>67</sup> Gerald O’Collins, “Jacques Dupuis: His Person and His Work,” in *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, ed. Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003) 27.

and hence to the whole of creation. Salvation, which is of God, must be of the whole and not exclusively of one part of creation or of one Person or of one particular end. The idea that salvation must be of the whole person or of the whole creation in relation to the whole God relates to the idea that the whole Trinity is in every religion and every religion in some way relates to the whole Trinity.

If the physical universe reflects God, it tells us that reality is thoroughly interrelated.<sup>68</sup> The interrelated, pluralistic God—Trinity—is the ground of the interrelated, pluralistic universe. Quantum physics tells us that the universe on the subatomic level is strange and nonlocal. The whole universe is a network of time- and space-transcending interconnection.<sup>69</sup> Just as in the physical universe no one part exists or functions independently of others, so too in the spiritual universe, I suggest, no one person can be saved apart from others. Since we are embodied spiritual beings, it is difficult to maintain a claim of salvation exclusively for one person or one religion. Each religion may have its own particular religious end, but each end has a relation to every other end and therefore to the whole. As divine Word, Christ is the absolute coincidence of opposites. Thus, where there is a coincidence of opposites, there is Christ, and where there is Christ, there is the fullness of salvation. I would suggest that salvation is pneumatically pluralistic and unitively Christic. Each religion participates in the salvation of the whole creation in its own particular way insofar as it participates in the Trinity. In other words, we will either be saved together or we will not be saved at all. If we maintain that Christ is central to salvation, then we must view Christ in relation to the Trinity as the reconciliation of opposites, the One who mutually affirms opposites. Christ is the icon of all salvation, the divinization of the entire universe. My intent is not to

<sup>68</sup> There is an abundance of literature today on the new science and interrelatedness. For example, string theory is a unified theory that describes nature's forces within a single, coherent framework (see Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory* [New York: Vintage, 1999]); "implicate order" refers to a unified order in the universe whereby all things are internally related (see David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* [New York: Routledge, 1980]); "quantum entanglement" or "unmediated action at a distance" means that events can link up with one another without crossing space, without decay, and without delay (see Amir Aczel, *Entanglement: The Greatest Mystery of Physics* [New York: Basic, 2002]). See also Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (New York: Bantam 1984); Ervin Laszlo, *Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything* (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Laszlo, *Science and the Akashic Field* 31. Philosopher Ken Wilbur states that all reality is composed of holons, or whole/parts. He writes: "A *holon* is a whole that is part of other wholes. . . . Reality is composed of neither wholes nor parts, but of whole/parts or holons" (Wilbur, *A Theory of Everything* [Boston: Shambhala, 2000] 40).

dissolve the Christian claim of finality (God's absolute salvation in Christ) but to revisit the role of Christian salvation in light of religious pluralism, for the claim of absoluteness rests on *faith* in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

What Bonaventure's coincidence of opposites helps us understand is that Christ is the personal center of a personalizing universe.<sup>70</sup> Bonaventure clearly maintains that Jesus is the Christ—truly God—but we must also say that Christ is more than Jesus. Christ is the divine Word through whom all creation finds its source and goal. It is the flow of love through the Spirit that makes possible the receptivity of the Word in response to the Father's overflowing love. The integral relationship between the Trinity and Christ helps us realize the *fullness* of Christ as the coincidence of *religious* opposites.<sup>71</sup> If the totality of the triune God is revealed in Christ and the divine influence of this Word of God extends to the entire universe and all peoples, then no one is excluded from the divine Word or the influence of divine grace. As Bonaventure states, "God's center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere."<sup>72</sup> Thus God communicates Godself absolutely in the person of Jesus Christ but Jesus Christ does not exhaust the self-communicative love of God. Heim writes: "The Trinity teaches us that Jesus Christ cannot be an exhaustive or exclusive source for knowledge of God nor the exhaustive and exclusive act of God to

<sup>70</sup> Although Bonaventure does not describe Christ in this manner, his writings certainly undergird this idea. The notion that Christ is the personal center of a personalizing universe belongs to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin—see his *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) 262, 271, 290; Teilhard, *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Javonovich, 1971) 175; Timothy Jamison, "The Personalized Universe of Teilhard de Chardin," in *There Shall Be One Christ*, ed. Michael Meilach (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1968) 26.

<sup>71</sup> Jacques Dupuis also highlighted the essential relationship between the Incarnation and the Trinity: "The incarnation is unintelligible without the Trinity" ("Trinitarian Christology as a Model for Theology of Religious Pluralism," in *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Lovaniensium 152, ed. Terrence Merrigan and Jacques Haers [Leuven: University, 2000] 96). In her discussion of Dupuis's Christology, Mara Brecht describes his position on Christ and Trinity in a way that mirrors Bonaventure: "Dupuis asserts that we must always maintain the personal identity between Jesus Christ and the Word of God, for Jesus is 'no other person than the Word of God made human.' The 'intratrinitarian relationship' is brought into human form through Jesus. . . . Though Dupuis has a rather lofty metaphysical starting point, it ultimately leads to an entirely human conclusion. Jesus is a member of the Trinity; more important, however, Jesus 'humanizes' the Trinity, creating an unambiguous bond between humanity and God" (Brecht, "The Humanity of Christ: Jacques Dupuis' Christology and Religious Pluralism," *Horizons* 35 (2008) 64.

<sup>72</sup> Bonaventure, *Itin.* 5.8 (5:305); Cousins, *Bonaventure* 100.

save us. . . . The scope of divine activity in all of religious history widens in proportion to the decisiveness of God's self-revelation in Christ."<sup>73</sup> Jesus Christ is the ground by which we can be open to other faiths because Christ is a coincidence of opposites, a mystery of relationships.<sup>74</sup> The meaning of Christ is the incarnation of trinitarian love, the plurality and diversity of persons in a *perichoresis* of love. If beauty is the order of love that flows from self-gift, then the beauty of Christ is in the diversity of religious ends.

### CHRISTIAN LIFE AND THE COINCIDENCE OF OPPOSITES

While the integral relationship between the Trinity and Christ allows a new understanding of Christ in view of world religions, it also puts a new emphasis on the meaning of being Christian. It is the Christian claim alone that the Word became incarnate, suffered, died, and was resurrected. Egan writes: "Christians must take seriously that resurrection has not been predicated of any historical figure with any degree of credibility other than Jesus of Nazareth. Exclusive and singular, indeed, is this salvific activity of God in whom one finds the Father's 'yes' to the human situation."<sup>75</sup> Bonaventure too sees the crucified and glorified Christ as the fullness of God's self-expression and the center to God.<sup>76</sup> The Christian is to image the Crucified One by living in the spirit of crucified love. It is this love that models trinitarian love: the infinite depth of the Father's love expressed in an overflow of personal love through the gift of the Spirit. The Christian who comes to know God through union with Christ lives in the dynamic, communicative love of the Trinity, which forms the heart of Christian life. It is faith in God's saving act of love in Jesus Christ that renders the Christian claim of salvation absolute. If God reveals Godself absolutely in Jesus Christ, and if God is love, then discipleship must follow accordingly. Being Christian cannot be empty words or mere rhetoric; it is not a series of logical arguments. The Word made flesh is an act and has meaning as an act of divine love only in the absolute claim of discipleship. Being Christian is "doing Christ"; it is living in the dynamic flow of love that is generative, receptive, and unitive. D'Costa states that "a Christocentric trinitarianism

<sup>73</sup> Heim, *Depth of the Riches* 134.

<sup>74</sup> This idea is also maintained by Panikkar (*Christophany* 162) who writes: "Christ's reality is not exhausted with Jesus's historicity." The idea that the Second Divine Person who appears in Jesus is not exhausted by historical appearance is in continuity with a long Christian tradition of Logos-theology. See Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983) 190.

<sup>75</sup> Egan, "A Rahnerian Response" 4.

<sup>76</sup> See Bonaventure *Itin.* prol. 3 (5:295). "Via autem non est nisi per ardentissimum amorem crucifixi" (There is no other path than through the most burning love of the Crucified).

discloses loving relationship as the proper mode of being. Hence love of neighbor . . . is an imperative for Christians.”<sup>77</sup> He writes: “The normativity of Christ implies the normativity of crucified self-giving love, and this prescribes the *mode* of relationship with those of other traditions.”<sup>78</sup> Relationships of self-giving love must support dialogue and common work for the good of God’s reign.

To live in the spirit of cruciform love as Christian in the midst of religious pluralism is to be a center of mediation, a coincidence of opposites. The particularity of Christ that separates Christians from non-Christians must be the center of union. Simone Weil describes the existence of separateness in a world that is characterized by the existence of intermediaries that lead from one to the other and hence to God. Using the example of two prisoners separated by an adjoining wall, she wrote: “The wall is the thing which separates them but it is also their means of communication.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Christian life seen through the lens of its trinitarian ground is an intermediary life. If Christ separates Christians from non-Christians, then Christ is also the basis of unity, the “adjoining wall” of love uniting what is separated. Christ is love incarnate, the divine embrace of differences in a unity of relationship that does not reduce one to the other. Where there is love, there is distinction of persons, and this is the basis of union. Christian life is to be lived in the midst of plurality from a new depth of unifying love.

In an age of religious pluralism, Bonaventure’s insight to the mystery of Christ as a coincidence of opposites gives new meaning to the centrality of Christ, the One who incarnates trinitarian love. His is a unified view of God and creation through the mystery of the divine Word incarnate. Humanity has a distinct and fundamental role in the salvation of the world, although salvation is larger than humanity alone because it includes the entire creation. While salvation is the healing of sin, it is more than redemption from sin. We are called to participate in life-giving relationships that reflect a God of generous love. Sin is the rejection of our identity as part of an interdependent world in which God’s power as creative source expresses itself through shared power with other creatures.<sup>80</sup> It is the refusal to accept responsibility for those to whom we are connected; thus, it is the refusal to accept the “other” of relationship (the “Thou”) as the one who addresses us, discloses our responsibility and calls us into

<sup>77</sup> D’Costa, “Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Plurality” 19.

<sup>78</sup> Heim, *Depth of the Riches* 127 (Heim here quoting D’Costa, “Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Plurality” 20, mistakenly has “implies” for “involves”).

<sup>79</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Arthur Wills (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1997) 132.

<sup>80</sup> Jane Kopas, *Sacred Identity: Exploring a Theology of a Person* (New York: Paulist, 1994) 103.

question.<sup>81</sup> The overcoming of sin is “the overcoming of all those obstacles” that stand in the way of God’s creative aim, which is the fullest possible sharing of life and love between God and creation.<sup>82</sup>

Bonaventure’s doctrine of “redemption-completion” does not negate sin; rather, sin is placed in the larger context of cosmic completion. According to Hayes, “the creative and sustaining principle of all created reality is not a mystery of arbitrariness, nor a mystery of domination and control. Rather, . . . it is a mystery of orderly love.”<sup>83</sup> The human person, as a union of matter and spirit, is the one in whom the created order finds a personal consciousness and a personal voice with which to give conscious praise to God.<sup>84</sup> Thus our active participation in the Christ mystery is necessary if Christ is truly the aim of the universe: for Christians through the generosity of selfless love and for other religions, in the way that they can best live out the fullness of their beliefs. In light of Bonaventure’s theology, Hayes claims that “what happened between God and the world in Christ points to the future of the cosmos. It is a future that involves the radical transformation of created reality through the unitive power of God’s love.”<sup>85</sup> This universe, therefore, has a destiny; the world will not be destroyed; rather, “it will be brought to the conclusion which God intends for it from the beginning, which is anticipated in the mystery of the Incarnate Word and glorified Christ.”<sup>86</sup> That is why “a cosmos without Christ is a cosmos without a head. It is like an arch without its keystone. It simply does not hold together.”<sup>87</sup> Christ is the purpose of this universe and, as exemplar of creation, the model of what is intended for this universe, that is, union and transformation in God.

“Doing Christ” in the new millenium is not converting others but converting oneself; it is not a dialogue of words but a dialogue of life, a dialogue of lived experience. It is deepening one’s spiritual life in the rich depths of God’s spiritual love. It is from this depth that theology must flow in the new millenium. Christian love is self-involving love, a love that requires all that we have and are. To live in union with Christ is to extend oneself to the margins, to bear witness to God’s love in the poor and weak, to embrace the stranger. To be a Christian is to be a mediator of opposites, to be willing to stand in between what is separated and to join

<sup>81</sup> See Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1997) 175; Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham, 2001) 64–66.

<sup>82</sup> See Hayes, “Christ, the Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity” 9.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>84</sup> Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., “Christology-Cosmology,” in *Franciscan Leadership in Ministry*, ed. Anthony Carrozzo, Vincent Cushing, and Kenneth Himes, *Spirit and Life* 7 (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1997) 41–58, at 52.

<sup>85</sup> Hayes, “Christ, Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity” 12.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

together what is apart. Miroslav Volf reminds us that the Eucharist is the *crucified* body of Christ, the body that has refused to remain a self-enclosed singularity but has opened itself up so that others can freely partake of it.<sup>88</sup> Far from being one against the many, the significance of Christ crucified is the self-giving of the one for the many. Because Christ unites different bodies into one body through his suffering on the cross, the surrender of the Crucified through self-giving love is the basis of true Christian community.<sup>89</sup> It is *this* love, crucified love, that is salvific.

In an age of religious pluralism, Christ must be a lived reality if Christianity is to be credible. Christians must assume their role as mediators of reconciling love, aware that other religions share in the fullness of the Christ mystery because they share in the mystery of God's saving grace. If salvation is centered on love, not sin, on healing and wholeness, not power, and if salvation is the aim of the universe, who can be excluded? To make salvation an exclusive, individual achievement is to miss the significance of Christ as the unitive center of love, the goal of an evolutionary universe. Salvation is participation in something more than ourselves by our coming to be ourselves, and this means finding the center of love within us in order to reconcile opposites among us. Can we return to the source of our lives and take the words to heart, "*Do this* in memory of me"? We would do well to contemplate the incarnate Word anew in our lives and in the heart of the cosmos. Do we see the plurality of God's love in our midst? In an evolutionary universe, we are really only at the beginning of the Christ mystery.<sup>90</sup> How we "do Christ" in this millennium will influence the unfolding of trinitarian love in millennia beyond.

## CONCLUSION

As we enter the second axial period, new methods and resources of theology are needed because of a new level of complexified religious consciousness. I have focused on Bonaventure's coincidence of opposites to help break open the meaning of Christ in the second axial period. If opposites are indeed the meaning of Christ, and if Christ is the divine Word through whom all things come into existence, then from a Christian

<sup>88</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 47.

<sup>89</sup> Ilia Delio, O.S.F., *Crucified Love: Bonaventure's Mysticism of the Crucified Christ* (Quincy, Ill.: Franciscan, 1998) 125–62.

<sup>90</sup> Heim writes: "What was revealed in the particularity of Jesus Christ has in fact not yet been fully specified. Even the historical Jesus has not yet been fully revealed to us. . . . Until the full work of the incarnate Word is put in the full context of the participation of the Spirit and the Father in that work, and in the context of God's other work in the world, the understanding of the incarnation will be partial at best" (Heim, *Depth of the Riches* 136).



perspective it is difficult to maintain that other religions are outside the Christ mystery.<sup>91</sup> In light of the coincidence of opposites I suggest that Christianity is not separate from but central to the existence of world religions. That is, the fullness of Christ includes the diversity of religious experiences insofar as the divine Word expresses the silent depths of the Father and with the Father breathes forth the love of the Spirit. The symbol of Christ as love unto death for the sake of life, however, places a demand on Christians. If dialogue is the source of religious unity in the second axial period, then Christians must be engaged in dialogue because the Word is the center of the Trinity. Christian speech must be a dialogue of love not a dialectic of logic; a text of selfless love that bears witness to an incarnate Savior, the type of love that mediates opposites and reconciles differences. Although interreligious dialogue is taking place throughout the world, it is not a self-evident marker of Christian life today, despite the fact that we are becoming increasingly globalized. What prevents us from taking up this challenge? In my view, we have a static, extrinsic view of the Trinity. Rahner observed that, because of a deficient notion of the Trinity, the dogma could be removed from official church teaching, and it would make no real difference in the life of the faithful.<sup>92</sup> Failure to teach or preach the integral relationship between the Trinity and Christ has led to an unhealthy Christomonism and hence to an exclusive Christocentrism.

In this age of pluralism theologians continue to ask whether non-Christians are saved. But I wonder if this is the right or most fruitful question. The Franciscan position on the primacy of Christ means that the whole universe is created with a view toward the fullness of God's love. Sin is not the reason for Christ; the reason is God's excess love and mercy. Is the question, *Who* is saved? an adequate one in view of the primacy of love? Or should we ask, Does our faith make us better lovers of God? Are we willing to lay down our lives for God's love and reign? If Christ is indeed the aim of the universe, then a deepening of reconciling love must be our main concern. In this new age of consciousness, "doing Christ" by living in Christ is the only credible witness to the truth we profess. As we continue to "do Christ" in an evolutionary universe, Christology must engage religious pluralism not as an extrinsic phenomenon but as intrinsic to the mystery of God's fecundity and to God's own meaning and identity. With billions of years before us in a dynamic and expanding universe, the Christ mystery is only beginning to unfold in its richness.

<sup>91</sup> This idea does not preclude the idea that "doing Christ" in other religions may take place under names known in those religions or, as Avery Dulles writes, "the symbols and myths of other religions may point to the one whom Christians recognize as the Christ" (Dulles, *Models of Revelation* 190).

<sup>92</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 11.