

QUAESTIONES DISPUTATAE  
A TRINITARIAN RESPONSE TO ISSUES RAISED  
BY PETER PHAN

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*The U.S. bishops and the Vatican have reacted critically to Peter Phan's recent book, *Being Religious Interreligiously*. This article attempts to address the contended issues from a trinitarian perspective. It argues that the traditional trinitarian theology of East and West, which is largely based on the Fourth Gospel, is unable to handle these issues satisfactorily, and that a new approach, inspired equally by the Synoptics, is needed. This approach, Rahnerian in character, emphasizes Pneumatology and climaxes in Spirit Christology.*

MOST PEOPLE INTERESTED IN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY are aware that a recent book by Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, was subjected to investigation by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and the Committee on Doctrine for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).<sup>1</sup> Now the Committee has issued a statement on behalf of the Conference identifying the most serious “problematic aspects of the book” and providing “a positive restatement of Catholic teaching on the relevant points.”<sup>2</sup> It is to be hoped that with this statement the affair as a doctrinal and pastoral issue will now be over, but

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<sup>1</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Committee on Doctrine, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (hereafter USCCB), Clarifications Required by the Book *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*, by Reverend Peter C. Phan—(December 7, 2007), no. 3, <http://www.usccb.org/dpp/StatementonBeingReligiousInterreligiously.pdf> (accessed September 15, 2008).

the specifically theological questions remain for continued reflection and discussion by theologians. The present article is a tentative first step in this direction.

With this work, Phan, a Vietnamese-American admirer and supporter of the theological vision of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, completes a trilogy on the Federation's avowed mission of pursuing a threefold dialogue, namely, with the Asian peoples (especially their poor), the Asian cultures, and the Asian religions. The last named of these is the subject of Phan's present book. Interreligious dialogue involving Christianity has to face squarely this religion's claim that "there is one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:5), along with the related issues of the salvific effectiveness of the non-Christian religions and the uniqueness of the church as "the universal sacrament of salvation."<sup>3</sup> Phan has not shirked these issues, and it was precisely his efforts in their regard that troubled the doctrinal authorities to the point of pursuing their newly completed investigation.

According to religion journalist John Allen in a recent report, the Roman observations run to 19 points, which Allen reduces to the six "most serious."<sup>4</sup> The Committee on Doctrine, on the other hand, made just three complaints, which coincide with the three named above. They were worded as follows: "the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the universality of his salvific mission," "the salvific significance of the non-Christian religions," and "the uniqueness of the church as the universal instrument of salvation." These complaints also provide the framework of the bishops' statement. Among the Roman observations there is one that to my mind—because of the trinitarian character of my response—is at least as important as those just mentioned, namely, that "[according to Phan] the Holy Spirit operates in a saving way in non-Christian religions independently of the Logos (meaning Christ as the Word of God)."<sup>5</sup> Although the Roman complaints range more widely than the U.S. ones, the latter can be seen as largely a restatement of the most important elements of the former (apart from the one I have noted). The single most important of them, and key to the others, is the first, the uniqueness of Christ, and accordingly, this is the one on which I will concentrate here.

My aim is to address the three U.S. complaints, with emphasis on the first, and to do so within a trinitarian context that takes due account of the

<sup>3</sup> See Vatican II's *Lumen gentium* no. 48, and *Gaudium et spes* no. 45.

<sup>4</sup> See John L. Allen Jr., "Why Is Fr. Peter Phan under Investigation?," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 14, 2007, <http://ncrcafe.org/node/1334> (accessed September 15, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

relationship between the third and second Persons of the Trinity. This the U.S. statement does not do. Rather than criticize Phan (even if some criticism will be unavoidable), my purpose will be to suggest a more viable approach to interreligious dialogue. For Phan's precise approach can hardly be considered viable in its present condition, as can be seen from the bishops' summary statement, "While *Being Religious Interreligiously* addresses a number of issues that are crucial in the life of the contemporary Church, it contains certain pervading ambiguities and equivocations that could easily confuse or mislead the faithful, as well as statements that, unless properly clarified, are not in accord with Catholic teaching."<sup>6</sup> Phan's concerns in his book are ones with which most theologians will sympathize, and official decisions made about them will be important for the future direction of the Church. The book was well received by Phan's peers, testimony to which is the commendatory review given it in this journal.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, I begin by looking at what Phan actually said on the theology of religions and ecclesiology; I continue by educing from my own trinitarian theology the elements relevant to the contested issues from Phan's theology; and I conclude by bringing these elements to bear on the said issues.

### PHAN'S THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS AND ECCLESIOLOGY

The first two complaints of the U.S. bishops center on Phan's theology of religions (as including Christianity) and the third on his ecclesiology. Hence the subject matter of this section. I start with Phan's theology of religions. Phan outlines this theology in two places in his book, chapters 4 and 9. I present each of these in turn, and then briefly summarize them, bearing in mind the nature and order of the bishops' complaints. This summary then serves as a convenient reference for the remainder of the article.

In chapter 4, "Multiple Religious Belonging," Phan considers the possibility, for a Christian, while remaining such, to belong simultaneously to one or more of the non-Christian religions. He is not at all averse to this possibility, but he lays down eight theological "assertions" or guarantees deemed necessary for its justification as a practice to be followed.<sup>8</sup> I now present them not in the context of multiple religious belonging, as he does, but as constituting a distinct theology of religions in their own right, which they do.

In point no. 1, Phan states the uncontested proposition that the fact "that Jesus is the unique and universal savior does not exclude the possibility of

<sup>6</sup> USCCB Committee on Doctrine, Clarifications Required no. 32.

<sup>7</sup> See review by Raymond Bucko, S.J., *Theological Studies* 66 (2005) 912–14.

<sup>8</sup> See Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* 64–67.

non-Christians being saved.”<sup>9</sup> Phan is on safe ground here, as this is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>10</sup> In no. 2, he asserts the possibility that non-Christian religions are ways of salvation insofar as they contain “elements of truth and grace” (a phrase borrowed from the council’s decree, *Ad gentes* no. 9). He goes on in no. 3 to point out that these possibilities are realized by the work of the Logos and the Holy Spirit. Given the created character of Jesus’ humanity, he says, the Logos could not have been exhaustively embodied in Jesus. This makes room for a certain imbalance between the activities of the Logos and those of Jesus, such that at least some of those of the Logos “are distinct from and go beyond Jesus’ activities, before, during, and after the incarnation.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise the Spirit “operates salvifically beyond” the Logos. “Thus, God’s saving presence through God’s Word and Spirit is not limited to Judeo-Christian history but is extended to the whole of human history and may be seen especially in the sacred books, rituals, moral teachings, and spiritual practices of all religions.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, no. 4 continues, the non-Christian religions need to be viewed positively, as part of God’s plan of salvation, and not merely as preparatory for Christianity and destined to be “fulfilled” by it. Rather, they are autonomous and are “ways of salvation, at least for their adherents.”<sup>13</sup>

This autonomy, no. 5 insists, does not contradict the uniqueness or universality of Christ’s salvific role. This is because Christ’s uniqueness is “constitutive” and “relational,” not exclusive or absolute. “Constitutive” here indicates that, in the words of Jacques Dupuis, who is invoked at this point, Christ “opens access to God for all people.” “Put in other words,” Dupuis goes on to say, “the humanity of Christ, God’s Son made flesh, is the sacrament of God’s universal will to save.”<sup>14</sup> “Relational,” on the other hand, expresses the necessary limitation imposed on the Logos by his insertion into history in the incarnation. “Relational” is here explained simply in terms of relatedness, that is to say, Christ and the non-Christian religions are related to each other in the one divine plan of salvation. No. 5 then continues by discerning a similar relatedness between Christianity and the non-Christian religions. “Autonomy and relatedness,” Phan concludes, “are not mutually contradictory.”<sup>15</sup> Operative here, without being stated, is a distinction between “relational” and “relative” borrowed by

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Principally in *Lumen gentium* no. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* 65.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 387.

<sup>15</sup> Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* 66.

Dupuis from Claude Geffré, where “relative” would militate against Christ’s constitutive uniqueness.<sup>16</sup> It would have been helpful had Phan explicitly stated and explained this distinction, but he has not done so. Because of its importance I will consider it more carefully in the final part of the article.

No. 6 draws the conclusion of a reciprocity and complementarity between Christianity and the other world religions, such that each finds fulfillment in dialogue with the others. The same kind of relationship is discerned in no. 7 for Christ and the savior figures of the other religions. Finally, no. 8 declares that the reciprocity between Christ and the church on the one hand and the other savior figures and their religions on the other is “asymmetrical,” because only in Christ is God incarnate. Thus God’s salvation is mediated to Christians by Christ, and to non-Christians by the other savior figures and religions “through the power of the Logos [the *Logos asarkos* (nonincarnate Logos)?] and the Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> Christ is the “one mediator,” while the other savior figures and religions are “participating” mediators.

Moving on from chapter 4, I now turn to chapter 9, which, from the perspective adopted in this article, is arguably the central chapter of Phan’s book. Titled “Jesus as the Universal Savior: God’s Eternal Covenant with the Jewish People,” it is devoted to a consideration of the relation of Christ as understood by Christians to Judaism and by extension to the other world religions. After an introductory paragraph, the first of three sections, “The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965),” is announced. This gives a useful overview of the council’s doctrine on the world religions, and delivers Phan’s judgment that “in spite of its positive evaluation of non-Christian religions in general and of Judaism in particular, Vatican II self-consciously refrains from affirming that these religions as such function as ways of salvation in a manner analogous, let alone parallel, to Christianity.”<sup>18</sup> The brief second section is titled “Jesus as the Universal, Unique, and Absolute Savior.” It contains a summary presentation of Paul Knitter’s taxonomy of Christian views of the relationship of Christianity to the non-Christian religions as “replacement,” “fulfillment,” “mutuality,” and “acceptance” respectively,<sup>19</sup> and ends with a summary of the Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, “On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* 388.

<sup>17</sup> Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* 67.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 139.

<sup>19</sup> See Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger,

After two introductory paragraphs the third section, “Christ and Christianity in View of the Continuing Validity of the Jewish Covenant,” presents Phan’s “elements of a post-supersessionist Christology” under ten points.<sup>21</sup> These will occupy me here, because they contain Phan’s theology of religions. Not surprisingly, they largely reproduce the eight points just discussed from chapter 4. The first point from chapter 9 repeats the first point from chapter 4, except that it restricts itself to relations between Christianity and Judaism. It rejects, as it should, any “replacement” understanding of the relationship of the first religion to the second. It does not commit itself to any particular positive understanding of this relationship, but is satisfied simply to say that the “two covenanted peoples of God . . . are allowed by God to exist side by side.”<sup>22</sup> The second point repeats the second point from chapter 4, except that where the latter is general, the former is specific: God has entered into multiple continuing covenants with his creation, with Christians (under the gospel), with the Jews (under the Law), with the whole human race (under Adam), and with the entire universe (under Noah). The third point repeats the thesis of chapter 4, point 3, that the Logos could not be, and was not, exhaustively embodied in Jesus, and hence has certain activities distinct from those of Jesus. The essential formulations here are verbally identical in both statements. Whereas the earlier formulation also included a statement about a certain independence of the Holy Spirit, in chapter 9 the corresponding statement, though briefer, stands in its own right and constitutes the fourth point. The fifth point, about religious pluralism, repeats chapter 4, point 4, and indeed verbatim.

The sixth point questions the wisdom of continuing to use the words “unique,” “absolute,” and “universal” in regard to Jesus and his role as savior, noting that these words are always interpreted within particular sociopolitical and cultural contexts. Repeating chapter 4, point 5, it prefers “constitutive” and “relational” for these functions, but casts no further light on their meaning. As I signaled when dealing with chapter 4, I will critically consider this point, which comes from Dupuis and Geffré, in the last part of my article. The seventh point, about reciprocity and complementarity between Christianity and the other religions, is a repetition of chapter 4, point 6, in almost exactly the same words. The eighth point repeats chapter 4, point 7, in asserting reciprocity and complementarity between Christ and the other savior figures.

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Prefect, *Dominus Iesus* (August 6, 2000), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html) (accessed September 15, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* 142–46.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 142.

The ninth point is without parallel in the eight points of chapter 4. Reverting to the relations between Christianity and Judaism, it notes that in light of the fact that both these religions are eschatological, each awaits a messiah. Jesus, the Christian messiah, will reappear in the “Second Coming” or *parousia*; the Jewish messiah, when he comes, will, presumably, be recognized by Jews in terms of what their Scriptures have said of him. Phan interprets the statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission that “for us [Christians] the One who is to come will have the traits of the Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us” as implying that “these two ways [of understanding the messiah] are distinct but do not contradict or eliminate each other.”<sup>23</sup> Point 10, also new and also restricting itself to relations between Christianity and Judaism, stresses that, in addition to the exchange of theological views, there needs also to be between these religions a “dialogue of life,” a “dialogue of action,” and a “dialogue of religious experience.”<sup>24</sup>

Phan’s second statement is thus concluded. I now propose to combine the two statements into a single formulation of Phan’s theology of religions, one restricted to essentials. It consists of five points ordered according to the nature and order of the first two of the bishops’ complaints:

- (1) As savior, Christ is both unique and universal, for, as Dupuis had said, the uniqueness of Christ is “constitutive” in the sense of “opening access to God for all human beings” and his universality “relational” in the sense of situating the Christ-event in relationship to God’s other self-manifestations in the single history of salvation.
- (2) Christianity and the non-Christian religions are autonomous ways of salvation.
- (3) These religions are all reciprocal and complementary.
- (4) The non-Christian religions should not be conceived as preparatory to Christianity or as fulfilled by it.
- (5) The Logos and the Holy Spirit, though uniquely present in Christianity, operate also outside and beyond it.

I now turn to the third complaint of the U.S. bishops, which centers on Phan’s ecclesiology and specifically his views “on the uniqueness of the church as the universal instrument of salvation.” The relevant material is found in the latter part of chapter 5. Significantly, this is outside Phan’s two formulations of his theology of religions, and therefore to his mind does not form part of this theology. He recognizes the complexity of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. On the one hand, he says, they are closely united: Christ is the head of the body that is the church; on the

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 145.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

other hand they are not simply identical: thus Christ is an individual person, whereas the church is a community of persons in relationship with him. It is the latter aspect, difference, that Phan emphasizes here. His conclusion is that “whereas the faith-claim of uniqueness and universality of one’s religious founder must be clearly maintained and defended, the empirical claim of uniqueness and universality of one’s institutional religion must be abandoned or at least extensively qualified in the context of interreligious dialogue.”<sup>25</sup> Phan argues for this position on theological, sociological, historical, and epistemological grounds. Obviously, the first of these sets will be the most important for purposes of this article, though I will make brief reference to the third as well.<sup>26</sup>

Phan provides two theological grounds for his position. The first is that in the teaching of Vatican II the church is the “sacrament” of Christ. As such, he concludes, the church cannot be identical with Christ. The second is that, unlike Christ, the church is not the object of Christian faith. “Christians,” he says, “do not believe in Christianity, much less worship it.”<sup>27</sup> He cites Rufinus and Faustus of Riez as well as the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, each on the Apostles’ Creed, as supporting his position that “the object of the theological virtue of faith can only be a divine reality, not a created thing, in this case, the church.”<sup>28</sup> The very visibility of the church militates against its being an object of faith. Its four marks are its “visible distinguishing characteristics . . . and not merely invisible realities to believe in. Consequently, there must be ways by which such marks can be empirically verified.”<sup>29</sup> When proposing historical grounds for his position, Phan laments the ill effects that overidentification of the church with Christ have had in the past. Thus the Christian claim that the church is “the exclusive vessel of divine grace” has caused “skepticism and even outrage.”<sup>30</sup> I reserve comment on this position of Phan’s until the last part of the article.

### TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY RELEVANT TO PHAN’S ISSUES

In this section I present the theology of what I call “the Spirit of Christ as entelechy” as an important element in a theology of the Trinity that can meet the challenge of the bishops’ first two complaints against Phan and assist in dealing with the third as well. I hope that in this way some of Phan’s deepest concerns, which I share, can be well served. Both the idea and the terminology of the Spirit of Christ as entelechy come from Karl

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 100.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.* 93–95.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 95.



Rahner's late article, "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions."<sup>31</sup> I developed the idea in a subsequent article of my own, "The Spirit of Christ as Entelechy."<sup>32</sup> Having acquired it, I have come to see it as the foundational thesis (in the *ordo doctrinae*) of the theology of the Trinity, Christology, and grace that I have elaborated over the course of my career. Its organizing power allows me to recognize this theology as one possible fulfillment of Rahner's prophetic words at the end of his life:

Perhaps an Eastern theology will one day reverse this perspective [which awarded hegemony to Christology]. Because of the universal salvific will of God and in legitimate respect for all the major world religions outside of Christianity, it may perhaps make a pneumatology, a teaching of the inmost, divinizing gift of grace for all human beings (as an offer to their freedom), the fundamental point of departure for its entire theology, and then attempt from this point—and this is something that might be achieved only with considerable effort—to gain a real and radical understanding of Christology. For a theology of this kind John 7:39 ("There was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified") will perhaps be less suitable and intelligible than scriptural passages which extol the universal salvific will of God, let the Spirit speak through all the prophets, and know that the Spirit has been poured out on all flesh.<sup>33</sup>

I now explain the idea of the Spirit of Christ as entelechy itself, present in summary form its scriptural foundation, and expand on it in the light of subsequent reflection and the demands of the present situation. Rahner expressed the idea—though not the terminology—in the following sentence: "Since the universal efficacy of the Spirit is directed from the beginning to the zenith of its historical mediation, which is the Christ event (or in other words the final cause of the mediation of the Spirit to the world), it can truly be said that this Spirit is everywhere and from the beginning the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the incarnate divine Logos."<sup>34</sup> The sense of the expression "Spirit of Christ" that emerges from this statement differs markedly from the normal one, which, as I wrote in my article, is what "we intend when we say that Christ is present no longer 'in the flesh'

<sup>31</sup> Karl Rahner, "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations* 17, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 39–50.

<sup>32</sup> David Coffey, "The Spirit of Christ as Entelechy," *Philosophy & Theology* 13 (2001) 363–98.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Rahner, "Aspects of European Theology," in *Theological Investigations* 21, trans. Hugh M. Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 78–98, at 97–98, slightly modified. The context shows that by "Eastern theology" Rahner meant a non-European, Christian (Catholic) theology, and that he included in "all the prophets" not only the prophets of Judaism and Christianity but those of other religions and perhaps even those of none.

<sup>34</sup> Rahner, "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions" 46. In my direct quotations from this article I have modified Kohl's translation as I have deemed necessary or advisable.

but ‘in the Spirit,’ or that after his death and resurrection he remains with his people in the Spirit whom he has sent and who mysteriously has become *his* and assumed *his* personality.”<sup>35</sup> I added that “this presence is experienced by believers in a variety of ways, but most palpably in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.” The difference between the two meanings is most clearly grasped in the difference of senders and the opposition of “direction” of the movement of the Spirit in each: in the normal (or traditional) meaning the Spirit, *sent by Christ*, moves from Christ, *to* the church and its individual members, while in the new meaning the Spirit, *sent by the Father*, moves *to* Christ.

For the newly acquired meaning of “Spirit of Christ” Rahner used the Aristotelian term “entelechy.” Etymologically, the word means “having” (the “ech” part) “perfection” (the “en-tel” part), thus denoting the perfection or completion of a thing. Rahner does not say what the term means for him (the words “determining principle” on p. 46 of his article are a gloss by the translator), but clearly it is not what Aristotle meant. For Aristotle it was “the realization or complete expression of some function.”<sup>36</sup> Rahner speaks of the Holy Spirit as “entelechy” when he says, “From the beginning this Spirit is always and everywhere the entelechy of the history of revelation and salvation.”<sup>37</sup> As is clear from the context, he is here using the term in the general sense of an “intrinsic tendency” within something, “by virtue of which it is oriented toward some goal.”<sup>38</sup> This is an acceptable usage in modern-day parlance, though it is far removed from Aristotle. It is the sense in which I too have used—and and am here using—the term.

Rahner makes no attempt to provide a direct biblical base for his concept. It is to this task that I now turn. The biblical text that most strikingly exhibits the theology of the Spirit of Christ as entelechy is 1 Peter 1:11 interpreted according to the generally accepted exegesis, in which the prophets of v. 10 are those of the Old Testament, and the oracles of v. 11 are the so-called messianic prophecies. The text, situated in its context, reads as follows:

[10] Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, [11] inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. [12] It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!

<sup>35</sup> Coffey, “The Spirit of Christ as Entelechy” 364.

<sup>36</sup> See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “entelechy.”

<sup>37</sup> Rahner, “Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions” 46.

<sup>38</sup> See John Russell, “Entelechy,” *Sacramentum Mundi* 2:232b.

This text is saying that, long before the birth of Jesus, the Holy Spirit prepared the people of Israel to bring him forth and through the prophetic writings to recognize him as the Messiah. In referring to the Spirit as "Spirit of Christ" in this context, the text provides an instance and a biblical foundation for what I mean by the expression "Spirit of Christ as entelechy." It is interesting to note that the text's second reference to the Spirit, in v. 12, is to the Spirit of Christ in the other sense, that is, the Spirit as sent by Christ from heaven after his resurrection and ascension.

With his theology of the Spirit of Christ as entelechy Rahner has made an important contribution to theology, with many ramifications. What is surprising is that it is not supported by his trinitarian theology. Rahner is happy to have the Spirit centered on Christ without there being any element corresponding to this in his theology of the Trinity in itself. The only theology of the Trinity that Rahner accepts is that in which the Father and the Son as one principle (the *Filioque*) breathe forth the Holy Spirit. There is no room here for the Father to bestow the Holy Spirit on the Son in the Trinity itself, as must be the case if the Spirit is to be the Spirit of Christ as entelechy. It is precisely this lacuna that my theology of the Trinity fills.

My view, which has its own theological precedents in Scripture and tradition, not to mention Aquinas,<sup>39</sup> is that the Holy Spirit proceeds as the mutual love of the Father and the Son.<sup>40</sup> Now mutual love has two components, namely, the personal love of each of the lovers for the other. Such is the case also in the Trinity; and because the Father precedes the Son (not in time, but in "nature"), the Father's love for the Son precedes and evokes the Son's love for the Father. When the Father generates the Son, the Father loves his Son, but at this point the Father's love is identified not with the Holy Spirit, who has not yet emerged, but with the Father himself. The Son, loved by the Father, returns his (the Son's) love to the Father. But this love, which under other circumstances would be identified as the Son himself, is now recognized to be the Holy Spirit, for at this point the love has become mutual, and thus is "objectivized" (to use John Cowburn's word<sup>41</sup>), transcending the personal loves that constitute it. Thus the Holy Spirit is breathed forth, still according to the *Filioque*, but with the latter grasped in a more developed way. And now each of the component loves, the Father's love for the Son and the Son's love for the Father, is to be identified as the same Holy Spirit. Because the Father's love for the Son

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 37, a. 1 ad 3.

<sup>40</sup> This has long been a central theme of my theological work, beginning with my first book, *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit* (Sydney: Catholic Institute of Sydney, 1979).

<sup>41</sup> See John Cowburn, *Love and the Person* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967) 295.

takes precedence over—and evokes—the Son’s love for the Father, the former provides the sense in which Augustine could say, as the Catholic Church does in its official doctrine, that the Holy Spirit proceeds “principally” (*principaliter*, by way of ultimate source) from the Father.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, with the *Filioque* established, it is permissible to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests on the Son (as the Eastern Orthodox do, but at the expense of the *Filioque*). Thus when the Father sends the Holy Spirit into the world, his work will be to bring about the incarnation of the Son and to lead to the Son incarnate, to incorporate into him as sons and daughters (in the Son), the human beings whom he engages on his mission. For if by right he rests on the Son in the Trinity itself, in his work in the world he will draw into union with the Son those in the world to whom he is sent. If the Son is the goal or “Treasurer” of the Spirit in the Trinity, he will also be the entelechy of the Spirit as sent by the Father into the world. And this legitimizes calling the Holy Spirit himself the entelechy of salvation history. It now makes sense to say, as Rahner does, that the incarnate Son is precisely the *immanent* end of the Holy Spirit in the economy. For how could the Son be this unless he were already the end or the goal of the Spirit in the Trinity itself? Rahner makes his claims for the Son and the Spirit in the economy without a supportive trinitarian theology; but I make them with the support of the mutual-love theology of the Trinity. It will now be obvious that this theology supplies the trinitarian links missing from Rahner.

Hitherto I have contrasted the two senses of “Spirit of Christ,” but now I want to show their continuity, for they constitute an instance of discontinuity in continuity, as, for example, does the crossing of a critical threshold in the process of evolution. In the case of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was not, at least initially, bestowed on a man already existing. According to Luke 1:35, the first bestowal of the Spirit on Jesus was that which brought him into existence as a human being, sanctified him, and constituted him Son of God. Later doctrine and theology rightly interpreted this as meaning that the object of the Spirit’s creative act was the *humanity* of Jesus (not a person in its own right) which thereby was united hypostatically to the Person of the preexistent Son of God of the immanent Trinity. This was the work of the Holy Spirit as entelechy, but the Spirit’s involvement did not stop there. As Jesus “increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor” (Luke 2:52), his entire activity was directed by the Spirit toward the Father in obedience and love,<sup>43</sup> and when it came time for him to die, he, “through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without blemish to

<sup>42</sup> Augustine, *De trinitate* 15.17.29.

<sup>43</sup> For biblical references see Coffey, “The Spirit of Christ as Entelechy” 365–66.

God" (Heb 9:14). In other words, his entire life and death was a Father-oriented project empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit.

Once the Spirit had established Jesus in existence as the Son of God incarnate, the Spirit began to be appropriated by Jesus as his own, for then he had become Jesus' love for the Father, and, as such, was the expression of who and what he was, *coram Deo*.<sup>44</sup> This process was necessitated by the very finiteness and the historical character of Jesus' humanity. The Spirit was the vehicle by which Jesus, having gone forth from the Father, returned to him in his life and death. These statements are all matched in the immanent Trinity: without prejudice to the *Filioque*, the Spirit proceeds from the Father to rest on the Son, after which he is returned to the Father by the Son as his (the Son's) own. Having gone forth from the Father, the Son returns to him in the power of the Spirit. Jesus' love for the Father, being, like all his acts, theandric, is at base human.<sup>45</sup> This means that it is subject to the law that love of God is at the same time love of neighbor. Thus, when through his death Jesus' love for the Father, which is the Spirit of Christ, reaches its zenith, it overflows as the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit of love upon the church, an outpouring that has never ceased. This is how the Spirit of Christ, no longer as entelechy but as poured out on his brothers and sisters by the risen Christ, is to be grasped: as the obverse of Jesus' love for the Father. The change from the Spirit of Christ as entelechy to outpoured Spirit of Christ is wrought deep in the person of Jesus as the nub of his historical existence, and marks the completion and perfection of the Holy Spirit as Spirit of Christ. In other words, the two meanings of "Spirit of Christ" are related: in the person of Jesus the Holy Spirit as entelechy is completed and perfected as outpoured Spirit.

The Holy Spirit relives this personal history to varying degrees in the life of every human being. All are affected by the Spirit of Christ as entelechy, who steers them toward Christ.<sup>46</sup> If by divine providence they encounter Christ in the ministry of the church and respond positively, for them the

<sup>44</sup> The basic trinitarian theology of this paragraph comes from my book, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford University, 1999), complemented by my article, "The Spirit of Christ as Entelechy." Here, however, I relate the two meanings of "Spirit of Christ" in a simpler and more forthright way than in the article, in which I had depended on Rahner for this point.

<sup>45</sup> See David Coffey, "The Theandric Nature of Christ," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 255–84.

<sup>46</sup> A sentence from John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris missio* no. 29 is pertinent here: "Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit 'so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things.'"

Spirit becomes the outpoured Spirit, the Spirit who sustains their faith-life in the church and brings them consciously with Christ to the Father, but his role as entelechy is not entirely transcended, for people constantly need to be brought to Christ anew and to deepen their union with him. A key point of Phan's that I endorse here is that in the incarnation the Son of God is subject to inevitable historical limitation. The outpoured Spirit, therefore, cannot reach everyone. Hence many people will never encounter Christ in the Spirit as outpoured. But if they welcome the Spirit of Christ as entelechy—and all have the opportunity for this—they embrace Christ in an implicit faith that makes them “anonymous Christians” in something like the Rahnerian sense. And this suffices, indeed more than suffices, for their justification and eventual salvation. In defending his theology of the anonymous Christian against his critics, Rahner pointed out that though the term itself may be open to objection (no one, however, has been able so far to suggest a suitable alternative), the reality is hard to avoid, given the official church teaching of both the necessity of a christological faith (in *some* sense) for salvation and the fact that non-Christians can be saved.<sup>47</sup>

To end this section, it will be opportune to remark that the mutual-love theology of the Trinity is no optional extra. It is a necessary development of the traditional trinitarian theology, whether of the East or the West. As Edward Schillebeeckx observed, the traditional theology is based entirely on the Fourth Gospel,<sup>48</sup> but the mutual-love theology, as I have frequently had occasion to point out, is based not only on John but on the Synoptic Spirit Christology, and particularly on the Third Gospel. In theologizing, it is risky to confine oneself to a single New Testament source. The traditional theology is fine as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough to solve the thorniest ecumenical and interreligious questions of the present time, namely, the *Filioque*,<sup>49</sup> the uniqueness of Christ, and the salvific validity of the non-Christian religions. For these it is necessary to range wider and invoke the mutual-love theology.

### APPLICATION OF THIS TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY TO PHAN'S ISSUES

My plan for this section is, first, to address the first two of the bishops' complaints as brought to bear on Phan's theology of religions, which I have summarized above under five points, and then to address the third as

<sup>47</sup> See Karl Rahner, “Observations on the Problem of the ‘Anonymous Christian,’” in *Theological Investigations* 14, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1976) 280–94, at 281–84.

<sup>48</sup> See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury, 1979) 570.

<sup>49</sup> For my position on this, see my article “The Roman ‘Clarification’ of the *Filioque*,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (1997) 255–84.

applying to his ecclesiology, which I have also presented above. Because the first two complaints are closely related in subject matter, I will consider them first together and then, for clarity, separate them. In their regard I hope to mediate between the two parties in a way acceptable to both.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, I cannot do this for the third—perhaps someone else will rise to the occasion. Operative throughout will be the theology of the Spirit of Christ as entelechy outlined in the second section.

The relationship between the first two points can be explained thus. The way the uniqueness of Christ's salvific role is understood will directly affect one's understanding of its universality and therefore the question of the autonomy of non-Christian religions. No Catholic will dispute that Christ's uniqueness resides fundamentally in the incarnation, but when this uniqueness is further specified, as, for example, by the term "constitutive," the understanding of the universality can change, according to how the term is defined. I begin, then, with my first summary point, about Christ's uniqueness as "constitutive." (I will deal with the second term, "relational," a little later.) Dupuis' definition of "constitutive," here adopted by Phan, is not sufficiently precise to convey the exact meaning required in this context. "Opening access to God for all human beings" could mean any number of things; it could mean, for example, as little as that Christ by his life and death merited salvation for all. This would be compatible with holding that some person other than Christ, though acting by virtue of Christ's merits, was the actual savior of non-Christians. Indeed it seems that this, or something like it, is what Phan has in mind when he says that "according to the Christian faith, Jesus mediates God's salvation to humanity in an overt, explicit, and fully visible way, which is now continued in Christianity, whereas other savior figures and religions, insofar as they mediate God's salvation to their followers, do so through the power of the Logos and the Spirit."<sup>51</sup> This is not what I understand by "constitutive," which is that Christ actually constitutes, that is, *is*, the savior of all who are saved, whether they be Christians or non-Christians. For what is salvation other than participation in the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit? This means participation in Christ and admission to a share in his privileged relation to the Father. There is no room here, even in a subsidiary way, for a savior figure other than Christ.

This is not to say, to use Rahner's words, that the non-Christian savior figure or religion has "no positive influence at all on the supernatural event

<sup>50</sup> By "mediate" I do not mean "produce a compromise," which would likely meet with rejection by both parties. Rather, my hope is to propose a way in which Phan's theology might be modified to fulfill the requirements of doctrine without sacrificing either its integrity or its basic interreligious concerns.

<sup>51</sup> Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* 67.

of salvation in the individual non-Christian.”<sup>52</sup> If that were the case, Rahner continues, “the salvation event in a given individual would be seen in completely non-social and unhistorical terms.” But the elements of truth and grace contained in any given non-Christian religion exist ultimately and perfectly only in the historical person of Christ, who is therefore confessed in “anonymous” faith whenever these elements are affirmed and adhered to without qualification. Thus is provided the sense in which the non-Christian religions are ways of salvation: they are this in that they are ways *to* salvation, salvation being union with Christ. When they lead to salvation, they lead in fact to Christ, who is embraced sometimes consciously, but mostly unconsciously and “anonymously.” Phan’s disjunction of the Logos and the Spirit from Christ and Christianity, expressed above in a quotation, is incompatible with the theology of the Spirit of Christ as entelechy, for which I have argued here. (In my summary this disjunction stands as a point in its own right, namely, point 5.) My position on this issue is that the Holy Spirit is always and everywhere the Spirit of Christ at least as entelechy, in a way comparable to the Logos himself, who prior to the incarnation was not simply *asarkos* or nonincarnate, but always the *Logos incarnandus*, the Logos “destined for incarnation” in Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>53</sup>

I turn to “relational,” Phan’s second word for describing Christ’s uniqueness. The sense of this word, as I remarked earlier, depends on its distinction from “relative.” The distinction comes from Geffré, whose explanation Dupuis quoted:

Without compromising the absolute commitment inherent to faith, Christianity can be considered as a *relative* reality; not, however, in the sense in which “relative” is opposed to “absolute,” but in the sense of “relational.” The truth to which Christianity witnesses is neither exclusive nor inclusive of all other truth; it is related to all that is true in other religions.<sup>54</sup>

Geffré is clearly right in distinguishing these two meanings of “relative.” What he has done by means of this distinction is to opt for the meaning he intends, which he dubs “relational,” and reject the one he does not intend, which therefore remains “relative.” This is why, simplifying somewhat, I have described his move as a distinction of “relative” and “relational.” Hence I now need to ask whether it is correct to describe Christ’s revelation as “relational” in the defined sense. To endorse it would be to agree

<sup>52</sup> Rahner, *Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions* 41–42. Note the typographical error in the Kohl translation: it has “Christian” instead of “non-Christian.”

<sup>53</sup> See Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: the Role of Grace and Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (New York: Cambridge University, 2004) 94.

<sup>54</sup> Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* 388.



that Christ's revelation belongs to the species, or better, genus, of the revelations or bodies of doctrine of the religions of the world, for the alternative would be to claim Christian revelation as "absolute" in the sense Geffré rejected. The relation would arise from the "fact" that all religions belong to the same genus or species. I can answer this question only in reference to *Dominus Iesus*, the most recent official doctrinal statement on the theology of religions. This I now attempt.

*Dominus Iesus* accepts the view of Phan, Dupuis, and Geffré that the incarnation implies the incurring of a certain limitation on the revelation of Jesus, for the incarnation was undoubtedly a *kenosis*. Thus the document states that "the words, deeds, and entire historical event of Jesus" are "limited as human realities," while "the depth of the divine mystery in itself remains transcendent and inexhaustible."<sup>55</sup> But where Phan, depending on Dupuis, draws the conclusion that the Christian revelation is "relational" in the sense of "related to all other divine manifestations to humankind in one history of salvation,"<sup>56</sup> *Dominus Iesus* teaches that the totality of the components of Christian revelation "have nevertheless the divine Person of the Incarnate Word, 'true God and true man,' as their subject," and "for this reason, they possess in themselves the definitiveness and completeness of the revelation of God's salvific ways." It continues by rejecting the idea that "the truth about God is not abolished or reduced because it is spoken in human language; rather, it is unique, full, and complete, because he who speaks and acts is the Incarnate Son of God."<sup>57</sup>

It follows that it would be mistaken to characterize Christ's revelation purely in terms of one category, in this case the bodies of doctrine of the world religions. The uniqueness of Christ as incarnate Son of God imparts to his revelation a singular dialectical quality by which it must be at the same time limited *and* unlimited, or "absolute," to use Geffré's term. If this statement is not to be a contradiction, it must be a dialectic, that is, it must consist in a pair of opposing affirmations open to resolution. A resolution, I suggest, is foreshadowed in *Dominus Iesus* itself, for while it concedes that Christ's revelation is limited, it teaches at the same time that it is comprehensive in the sense of containing all that is *necessary for salvation*. It does *not* say that Christ's revelation contains all that is humanly knowable about God, but only all that must be known and professed for salvation. This is clear from the quotation above in its reference to "God's *salvific ways*" (my emphasis), and the idea is repeated a little later in the same article where it says that "faith requires us to profess that the Word made flesh, in his entire mystery from incarnation to glorification is the

<sup>55</sup> *Dominus Iesus* no. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* 388.

<sup>57</sup> *Dominus Iesus* no. 6.

source, participated but real, as well as the fulfillment of every *salvific* revelation of God to humanity” (my emphasis).<sup>58</sup> This is part of the mediation that I suggested earlier between Phan’s theology and the official position. It may be that I am simply repeating *Dominus Iesus*, but I believe that I am rendering it more explicit—and in a way Phan might find helpful.

In the “hierarchy of truths” the truths necessary for salvation—necessary, that is, in the sense that they must be believed at least implicitly—are the foundational ones that constitute the very essence of Christianity. They are traditionally listed as those concerning the existence, providence, and nature of God, including his trinitarian nature, and the incarnation and redemption wrought in Christ. In order to encompass the moral life to which Christians are called, I venture to suggest that the primacy of love of God as necessarily including love of neighbor, with the latter grasped as the determining factor in all other neighbor-related virtues, might be added to these. It will be noted that every one of these doctrines is intimately linked with the historical person of Jesus and the mission entrusted to him by the Father, and as such is unattainable by the other religions. However, these truths are implicitly affirmed by them inasmuch as they are contained *in nuce* in the profession of faith in the existence and providence of God, the minimum required by Hebrews 11:6, the text whose interpretation and application have dominated the historical discussion of this question.<sup>59</sup> If, in the case of a person untouched by any religion, even a simple commitment to follow one’s conscience suffices for salvation, as Vatican II teaches, how much more will the explicit affirmations of the world religions do so also, and in a way that fulfills the minimum requirements of Hebrews 11:6.

I can now deal briefly with points 2, 3, 4, and 5 of my summary. Point 2 addresses the question of the autonomy of the non-Christian religions. These religions may appear to their adherents as completely autonomous, but because they lack Christ and the necessary doctrines associated with him, Christians will see them as not at all autonomous. Admittedly, the Christian view, insofar as it is an expression of faith, is not subject to objective demonstration to adherents of other faiths. In regard to point 3,

<sup>58</sup> In this quotation I have altered the official English translation of the text, which has “the Word made flesh, in his entire mystery, who moves from incarnation to glorification, is the source,” the relevant words in the Latin being “*Verbum caro factum, in universo suo mysterio, ab incarnatione ad glorificationem, fontem esse*” (ibid.).

<sup>59</sup> For my survey and discussion of this question see my “The Salvation of the Unbeliever in St. Thomas Aquinas and Jacques Maritain,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 41 (1964) 179–98, 265–82, which, though dated, still, I believe, has something to offer.

on the reciprocity and complementarity of all the religions, there remains a qualified sense in which Christianity can be pronounced reciprocal and complementary in relationship with other religions, even though the latter cannot attain explicitly the truths essential for salvation. For inasmuch as these contain “elements of truth and grace,” and arise out of cultural backgrounds and kinds of religious experience different from those of Christianity, they are able, along with the latter, to contribute to the process of mutual enrichment for which interreligious dialogue offers the ideal opportunity.

Regarding point 4, on the question of fulfillment, if Christians believe that the other religions contain elements of saving truth and pertain to God’s plan for humanity, and that the uniqueness of the incarnation implies that Christ’s saving role, the climax of this plan, is directed to all human beings, it follows that for Christians these religions are preparatory, and fulfilled in Christianity, even though, obviously, this will not be the view of the adherents themselves. Likewise, the statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission should not be interpreted by Christians in the sense of two messiahs, one Jewish and one Christian. It means simply that when the Messiah comes again at the parousia he will be recognized as such by both religions. Jesus himself, who in his ministry made many modifications to the Jewish Law, declared, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mt 5:17). In the Christian view, therefore, the Jewish messiah must stand fulfilled in the person of Jesus. In God’s plan, as revealed in the Old and New Testaments, there are not two competing messiahs—there can be only one authentic Messiah.

Point 5, about Phan’s qualified disjunction of the Logos and the Holy Spirit from the person of Christ, is not addressed in the three U.S. complaints, even though it is key to the first two. I took it up in the second section above, on the Spirit of Christ as entelechy and the latter’s foundation in Scripture and trinitarian theology, and so I do not need to repeat the argument here. Its conclusion is that the Holy Spirit is always and everywhere the Spirit of Christ.

Having treated the first two complaints together, I must now separate them and say a word about each. Phan’s views on the uniqueness and universality of Christ’s saving mission, the subject of the first complaint, are traced to his understanding of the words “constitutive” and “relational” as descriptive of Christ’s uniqueness. In itself, “constitutive” is a suitable word to use in this context, but I have argued that Phan’s understanding of it is deficient and needs to be interpreted as meaning nothing less than that Christ actually *is* the salvation of all who are saved. The problem about “relational” is that it is defined in opposition to “absolute,” whereas I have

argued that in the case of Christ it is both. This is because Christ's revelation is at the same time limited and unlimited—limited in that Christ is human, unlimited in that he is the incarnate Son of God and that accordingly his revelation (and it alone) will contain all that is essential for salvation. My hope is that this suggestion will prove a way forward in the discussion that is bound to ensue. I realize, and have recognized, that my views as here expressed lead inexorably to Rahner's theology of "the anonymous Christian" (in fact, if not in name). I agree with Rahner's view, reported earlier, that the requirements of Christian faith appear to leave little room for an alternative.

The bishops' second complaint centered on Phan's understanding of the salvific effectiveness of the non-Christian religions. As I have shown, he claimed that in a qualified sense they are distinct ways of salvation, and that they are autonomous, reciprocal with and complementary to Christianity, and not to be perceived as preparatory to it or fulfilled by it. His qualification stemmed from his understanding of "constitutive" as characterizing Christ's salvific role, which I judged deficient. Accordingly, I argued that from a Christian perspective they are in fact preparatory to Christianity and fulfilled by it. They are ways of salvation not in the sense that they ever supplant Christ, but only in the sense that they can and sometimes do lead people to him, with the help of the Holy Spirit. They are not autonomous, because they do not have access to the truths necessary for salvation, knowledge of which is dependent on the historical event of Christ, but they can embrace these truths implicitly in at least the commitment to follow one's conscience, as Vatican II teaches—sometimes, of course, they go much further than this. They are reciprocal with and complementary to Christianity only in regard to those truths to which they have access via their own traditions.

On the bishops' third complaint, the ecclesiological issue, Phan's position depends on a certain separation of the church from the person of Christ. Certainly there is a distinction between the two: they are not identical in every respect. But Phan overstates the difference. I concentrate here on the second of the two theological grounds given for his position, namely, that the church, unlike Christ, is not the object of faith. His argument, supported by the authorities he quotes, is centered on the third article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." The argument is that in this list only the Holy Spirit is proposed as the direct object of faith. He expresses the matter thus: "The third article of the Creed intends to affirm faith in the Holy Spirit as the Spirit is in his inner reality and as the Spirit is active in the church, making it one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Thus, given the tripartite struc-

ture of the Creed, the church is not a separate object of faith but is included in faith in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>60</sup>

It is true that in the Apostles’ Creed the three who alone are declared to be those in whom Christians place their faith and trust, that is, their lives and eternal destiny, are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The other things in which they believe are included, as Phan says, in their faith in these three. But this does not mean that the church is declared *not* to be a direct object of faith. The Apostles’ Creed’s ambivalence on this matter cannot be interpreted as a negative judgment. In the Nicene (more properly, the Constantinopolitan) Creed, faith in the church appears to be explicitly asserted. Phan acknowledges the possibility of this, but lumps the two creeds together as though they were completely at one on this matter: they are not.<sup>61</sup> His references to Rufinus and other authorities apply only to the Apostles’ Creed, as can be seen by checking them. In the Constantinopolitan Creed, as distinct from the Apostles’ Creed, the construction *eis* followed by the accusative, meaning “in” as in “we believe in,” is used four times, and each time as an indicator of the recipient of faith, these four being the Father, the Son Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the church.<sup>62</sup> Admittedly, the church is included here only because of its connection with the Holy Spirit, but included it is. In English we have no way of expressing this exact meaning of “in,” and when we say we believe in God and that we believe in purgatory, we fail to realize that we are using “in” and consequently “believe” in different senses; but Greek and Latin (which uses *in* followed by the accusative) are well equipped to express this stronger sense.

Phan’s first argument is that in Vatican II the church is declared to be only the “sacrament” of Christ. But actually, this is an argument for my position rather than his. In this “strong” sense of “sacrament” it is the union between the created reality and a divine Person, a union constitutive of a distinct entity, whether it be Jesus Christ or the church, that justifies the placing of faith in it. This I have already intimated above. Of course, when one says one believes in, for example, the sacrament of matrimony, it is not the strong sense that is intended. It is necessary, therefore, to use discretion to make the right decision here, but Catholics do place their faith in the church as the living social organism that unfailingly (*ex opere op-*

<sup>60</sup> Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* 93–94.

<sup>61</sup> See *ibid.* 93, where Phan associates the two creeds, but quotes the Constantinopolitan, which alone of the two has “one, holy, catholic and apostolic,” and then proceeds with evidence based on the Apostles’ Creed alone.

<sup>62</sup> *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum, et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. Henricus Denzinger and Adolfus Schönmetzer, 33rd ed. (New York: Herder, 1965) no. 150.

*erato*) mediates the Holy Spirit and thus trinitarian life and salvation to them (provided they place no obstacle in the way). If I am not correct here, neither the Apostles' Creed nor the Constantinopolitan Creed should have professed, in the second article, faith in Jesus Christ: they should have said faith in "the Son" instead; but in fact both said faith in Christ, who is the Son of God *incarnate*. Phan, therefore, is incorrect in his judgment that genuine faith is only in "invisible realities" and not in their visible sacraments. I conclude, *pace* Phan here, that the church participates in Christ's own uniqueness and universality—and as such is "the universal sacrament of salvation." Most importantly—and here trinitarian theology comes once more into play—the church is the place where human beings, drawn by the Spirit of Christ as entelechy, fully and consciously encounter Christ in faith, Christ no longer "in the flesh" as in the time of his earthly ministry, but "in the Spirit" as a result of his resurrection and glorification. Thus human beings are brought into relationship with the Father.

Phan's lament that in the past the church has caused "skepticism and even outrage" by its claim to be "the exclusive instrument of divine grace" is irrelevant to the present situation, as no such claim is made now, and if it ever was (perhaps by *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), it would have to be judged, in the light of later development of doctrine, as unnuanced, but not simply as wrong. For even Vatican II, in proposing the possibility of salvation for non-Christians, did so in terms of their "relation" to the church.<sup>63</sup>

## CONCLUSION

If it seems to some readers that with this article I have only made interreligious dialogue more difficult if not impossible, allow me to conclude by quoting two passages from Phan's book that argue against this view. Phan is of the opinion that, if the adherents of a particular religion are convinced of the uniqueness and universality of its founder, they should be frank and open about it in interreligious dialogue. With Raimundo Panikkar, he strongly disapproves of any suppression of one's fundamental beliefs in this situation. Following Panikkar in using the Husserlian word *epoche* ("bracketing") for such suppression (though in a deliberate departure from Husserl's meaning), he labels this *epoche* a "sham," and quotes Panikkar to the effect that the practice of *epoche* in interreligious dialogue would be "psychologically impracticable, phenomenologically inappropriate, philosophically defective, theologically weak and religiously barren."<sup>64</sup> For the case of Christianity, I have extended Phan's stipulation, which he

<sup>63</sup> See *Lumen gentium* no. 16, first sentence.

<sup>64</sup> Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously* 92.

reserved to a religion's founder, to its representative social institution, the church. His principle, therefore, must be applied to it too.

What, then, is the purpose of interreligious dialogue? To quote Phan again, "The goal of theological interreligious dialogue is not to construe a universal theology of religion whose possibility is predicated upon a core religious experience. . . . Rather, the goal of the 'dialogue of theological exchange' is seeking understanding of the other faiths and one's own in the light of other faiths."<sup>65</sup>

In regard to the first of these quotations, I would be satisfied simply with saying that the practice of *epoche* (defined in Panikkar's sense) in interreligious dialogue would be dishonest, disrespectful to the partner, and ultimately counterproductive. As to the second, I concur with it wholeheartedly, as I do with so much of Phan's important book. Even just in bringing the concerns of the Asian church before the Anglophone theological readership, Peter Phan has provided a valuable service to the church at large. What I have tried to do here is to clarify, in the light of trinitarian theology, the deep convictions about Christ and the church that Catholics should take with them to the table of interreligious dialogue.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 98–99.