

Clarifications Required by the Book
Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue
by Reverend Peter C. Phan

Committee on Doctrine
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

1. The development of a theology of religious pluralism, that is, a theology that "seeks to investigate, in the light of Christian faith, the significance of the plurality of religious traditions in God's plan for humanity,"¹ is an important task given the exigencies of religious dialogue in our globalized world. The importance of such theological investigation makes it all the more critical that it be carried out in a way that upholds the truth of Catholic doctrine, keeping in proper order a variety of truths that pertain to the Christian faith and to the legitimate integrity of other religions.

2. In his book, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*,² Reverend Peter C. Phan, who currently holds the Ellacuria Chair of Catholic Social Thought in the Department of Theology at Georgetown University, has taken up the task of addressing the cultural concerns and theological questions surrounding the diversity of religions. The way the book addresses some theological issues, however, raises serious concerns.

3. In the light of these concerns, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith asked the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to conduct an evaluation of *Being Religious Interreligiously*. After examining this book, the Committee on Doctrine invited Father Phan to respond regarding statements in his book. Since Father Phan did not provide the needed

¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Notification on the Book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J. (24 January 2001) (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html), Preface.

² Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 2004).

clarifications, and since the ambiguities in the book concern matters that are central to the faith, the Committee on Doctrine decided to issue a statement that would both identify problematic aspects of the book and provide a positive restatement of Catholic teaching on the relevant points.

4. This statement will address three areas of concern: i) Jesus Christ as the unique and universal Savior of all humankind; ii) the salvific significance of non-Christian religions; iii) the Church as the unique and universal instrument of salvation. Even though this book contains other areas of concern, we concluded that the above mentioned were the most serious and so have focused our attention upon them.

I. JESUS CHRIST AS THE UNIQUE AND UNIVERSAL SAVIOR OF ALL HUMANKIND

5. It is true that the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is affirmed at some points in *Being Religious Interreligiously*. According to the book, Christ can be described as uniquely constitutive of salvation "because the Christ-event belongs to and is the climax of God's plan of salvation Jesus' 'constitutive uniqueness' means that he and only he 'opens access to God for all people.'"³ At other points, however, the term "unique" is rejected or else accepted with confusing qualifications.

6. *Being Religious Interreligiously* describes Jesus as "unique" with the qualification that this uniqueness is not only "constitutive" but also "relational."⁴ As "relational" (in the sense which the book gives this term) Christ's uniqueness is not exclusive or absolute, since he is not the only revealer and savior in God's plan of salvation. Christ, according the book, has a unique

³ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 66; see p. 144. The quotation is from Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1998), p. 387.

⁴ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 66; see p. 144. The author notes that these expressions are borrowed from Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, p. 283 (see Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 144 n. 14).

role, but this role is "related" to other figures who also have a place in God's plan. Christ "may be said to be the 'one mediator' and the other savior figures and non-Christian religions participating mediators" since, "insofar as they mediate God's salvation to their followers, [they] do so through the power of the Logos and the Spirit."⁵

7. *Being Religious Interreligiously* specifies that the way that such savior figures and religions participate in the salvation brought about by Christ prevents these non-Christian religions from being reduced to Christianity.⁶ What they offer is truly different.⁷ The book characterizes this difference as one of complementarity:

In this context it is useful to recall that Jesus did not and could not reveal everything to his disciples and that it is the Holy Spirit who will lead them to 'the complete truth' (Jn 16:12-13). It is quite possible that the Holy Spirit will lead the church to the complete truth by means of a dialogue with other religions in which the Spirit is actively present.⁸

8. While at some points the book affirms the uniqueness of Christ with these qualifications, at another point in the book the use of the term "unique" is entirely rejected. "[O]ne may question the usefulness of words such as *unique*, *absolute*, and even *universal* to describe the role of Jesus as savior today."⁹ Although such terms may have served at one time, "words are unavoidably embedded in socio-political and cultural contexts, and the contexts in which these words were used were, in many parts of the world, often tainted by colonialist imperialism, economic exploitation, political domination, and religious marginalization."¹⁰ From this the

⁵ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 67.

⁶ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, pp. 66, 144.

⁷ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 65; see also p. 67 n. 20.

⁸ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 144-45; see pp. 65 and 67.

⁹ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 143.

¹⁰ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 143.

book concludes that the terms "unique," "absolute," and "universal" "have outlived their usefulness and should be jettisoned and replaced by other, theologically more adequate equivalents."¹¹

9. Since, at the very least, the use in the book of certain terms in an equivocal manner opens the text up to significant ambiguity and since a fair reading of the book could leave readers in considerable confusion as to the proper understanding of the uniqueness of Christ, it is necessary to recall some essential elements of Church teaching. The crux of the issue is that *Being Religious Interreligiously* does not express adequately and accurately the Church's teaching.

10. In its declaration *Dominus Iesus*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith directly addresses the kind of ambiguities that are found in *Being Religious Interreligiously*. It warns against any misunderstanding of Jesus and of his work of salvation. It states:

In contemporary theological reflection there often emerges an approach to Jesus of Nazareth that considers him a particular, finite, historical figure, who reveals the divine not in an exclusive way, but in a way complementary with other revelatory and salvific figures. The Infinite, the Absolute, the Ultimate Mystery of God would thus manifest itself to humanity in many ways and in many historical figures: Jesus of Nazareth would be one of these.¹²

Against such a misrepresentation, *Dominus Iesus* declares: "These theses are in profound conflict with the Christian faith. The doctrine of faith must be *firmly believed* which proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, and he alone, is the Son and the Word of the Father."¹³

11. It has always been the faith of the Church that Jesus is the eternal Son of God incarnate as man. The union of humanity and divinity that takes place in Jesus Christ is by its very nature

¹¹ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 144.

¹² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus: Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (6 August 2000) (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html), no. 9.

¹³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, no. 10.

unique and unrepeatable. The person who is the eternal Son of God is the very same person who is Jesus Christ.¹⁴ Because humanity and divinity are united in the person of the Son of God, he brings together humanity and divinity in a way that can have no parallel in any other figure in history.

12. In the Church's teaching, Jesus is not merely preeminent among many savior figures. As the Son of God incarnate, Jesus reveals to humanity the fullness of divine truth. “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). The Gospel of John also professes: “No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him” (Jn 1:18. See also Mt 11:27; Acts 14:16; Heb 1:1-2). *Dominus Iesus* is very clear on this Gospel truth:

[I]t is necessary above all to reassert the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ. In fact, it must be firmly believed that, in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, who is ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (Jn 14:6), the full revelation of divine truth is given.¹⁵

13. Moreover, Jesus Christ, as the Son of God incarnate, is God the Father’s definitive and universal means of salvation. Only Jesus’ sacrificial death makes possible the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of sinful humanity with God.¹⁶ By his Resurrection he conquered death and restored life. Through him the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church at Pentecost. Only by being united to Christ's risen humanity, which is itself united to his divinity, can we share in the divine life through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and be transformed into adopted

¹⁴ See Council of Chalcedon, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum ed Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, ed. H. Denzinger and P. Hünermann, 39th ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2001), nos. 301-2, and Second Council of Constantinople, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, no. 424. See also, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 461-69.

¹⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, no. 5.

¹⁶ See Council of Trent, Decree on Justification (*De justificatione*), *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, no. 1529; Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), no. 5, and Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*), no. 22; See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 613-14.

sons and daughters of the Father (see Rom 8:14-17). The Father's eternal plan of salvation culminates in Jesus Christ, his only Son.

In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him, as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth (Eph 1:7-10).

14. Because of who Jesus is and what he has done and continues to do as the Risen Lord, the Church, from her earliest days, has proclaimed: "There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12). This does not mean that members of other religions cannot possibly be saved, but it does mean that their salvation is always accomplished in some way through Christ.

No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ's one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey toward God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.¹⁷

15. *Dominus Iesus* affirms this singular salvific role of Jesus Christ. "[O]ne can say and must say that Jesus Christ has a significance and a value for the human race and its history, which are unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute."¹⁸ In the light of this, *Dominus Iesus* concludes that "the theory of the limited, incomplete, or imperfect character

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate (*Redemptoris Missio*) (http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0219/_P3.HTM), no. 5. See also Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html), no. 29: "From this mystery of unity it follows that all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit. Christians know this through their faith, while others remain unaware that Jesus Christ is the source of their salvation. The mystery of salvation reaches out to them, in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ. Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their saviour."

¹⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, no. 15.

of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that found in other religions, is contrary to the Church's faith."¹⁹ It also asserts that "those solutions that propose a salvific action of God beyond the unique mediation of Christ would be contrary to Christian and Catholic faith."²⁰ Rather, it must be "*firmly believed* as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once and for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God."²¹

II. THE SALVIFIC SIGNIFICANCE OF NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

16. The Church affirms that non-Christian religions do in fact possess certain elements of truth. Every human being possesses an innate desire to know God, who is the common end and origin of the human race.²² Those searching for God in other religions have established ways of living and formulated teachings that "often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."²³ The Church regards these elements of goodness and truth found in other religions as a preparation for the Gospel.²⁴

¹⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, no. 6.

²⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, no. 14.

²¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, no. 14.

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 842.

²³ Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) (www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html), no. 2. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 842.

²⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "The Catholic Church recognizes in other religions that search, among shadows and images, for the God who is unknown yet near since he gives life and breath to all things and wants all men to be saved. Thus, the Church considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as 'a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life'" (no. 843). The Catechism is here quoting Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), no. 16. It also refers to Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*), no. 2, and Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), no. 53.

17. *Being Religious Interreligiously*, however, rejects this teaching as an insufficient recognition of the salvific significance of non-Christian religions in themselves: The book defends the view that "the non-Christian religions possess an autonomous function in the history of salvation, different from that of Christianity," and that "they cannot be reduced to Christianity in terms of preparation and fulfillment."²⁵ The book asserts:

Religious pluralism . . . is not just a matter of fact but also a matter of principle. That is, non-Christian religions may be seen as part of the plan of divine providence and endowed with a particular role in the history of salvation. They are not merely a "preparation" for, "stepping stones" toward, or "seeds" of Christianity and destined to be "fulfilled" by it. Rather, they have their own autonomy and their proper roles as ways of salvation, at least for their adherents.²⁶

The book contrasts what it sees as the Second Vatican Council's deliberate decision to refrain "from affirming that these religions as such function as ways of salvation in a manner analogous, let alone parallel, to Christianity," with the position of certain contemporary theologians, among whom the author includes himself. These theologians believe that it is necessary to go beyond the Council's position and to assert "that these religions may be said to be ways of salvation and that religious pluralism is part of God's providential plan."²⁷

18. The book's use of the terms "ways of salvation" and "autonomy" contains serious ambiguities. On the one hand, the autonomy of these ways of salvation is not portrayed as absolute; the salvation of non-Christians remains somehow "related" to Christ. According to the book, the Christ-event is "the definitive realization of God's plan of salvation" and its "definitive point."²⁸ On the other hand, the nature of this relation remains obscure. The book makes the

²⁵ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 144.

²⁶ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, pp. 65-66; see p. 143.

²⁷ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. xxiii; see pp. 139-40.

²⁸ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 144.

perplexing claim that "Autonomy and relatedness are not mutually contradictory but grow in direct proportion to each other."²⁹ This claim is seriously undercut, however, by the fact that the autonomy attributed to non-Christian religions is such as to call into question the very idea of Christian mission to members of such religions.

19. The book affirms in the introduction that the assertion that God has positively willed non-Christian religions as alternative ways of salvation as part of his providential plan of salvation "brings with it far-reaching and radical consequences for the practice of Christian mission and raises the thorny questions regarding conversion and baptism as the primary goals of evangelization."³⁰ The book reasons that if in fact God has positively willed the existence of the non-Christian religions as ways of salvation, then the very goal itself of universal conversion to Christianity is misguided. "Indeed, if religious pluralism belongs to divine providence and is not just the fruit of human sinfulness, then it may not and must not be abolished by converting all the followers of non-Christian religions, at least during our common journey in history."³¹

20. Since the book as a whole is based on the idea that religious pluralism is indeed a positively-willed part of the divine plan, the reader is led to conclude that there is some kind of moral obligation for the Church to refrain from calling people to conversion to Christ and to membership in his Church. According to the book, religious pluralism "may not and must not be abolished" by conversion to Christianity. The implication is that to continue the Christian mission to members of non-Christian religions would be contrary to God's purpose in history. Such a conclusion, instead of being a "theologically more adequate equivalent" of Church

²⁹ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 144; see p. 66.

³⁰ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. xxiii.

³¹ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. xxiii.

teaching, is in fact an alteration that blurs Church teaching. At this point the autonomy of non-Christian religions has eclipsed their relatedness to Jesus Christ.

21. This call for an end to Christian mission is in conflict with the Church's commission, given to her by Christ himself: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."³² Moreover, if one accepts that Jesus Christ is in fact the one affirmed by Christian faith as the eternal Son of God made man, through whom the universe was created and by whose death and resurrection the human race has the possibility of attaining eternal life, then it is incoherent to argue that it would somehow be better if certain people were not told this truth.

22. The Church's evangelizing mission is not an imposition of power but an expression of love for the whole world. The very fact that other religions do not possess the fullness of the Father's truth revealed in Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Father's love that is poured out in the Holy Spirit ought to compel Christians, in their love for all men and women, to share their faith with others. To offer others the gift of Jesus Christ is to offer them the greatest and most valuable of all gifts, for he is the Father's merciful gift to all. Thus there is no necessary conflict between showing respect for other religions and fulfilling Christ's command to proclaim the Gospel to all the nations.³³

23. The fact that *Being Religious Interreligiously* can envisage an end to Christian mission points to a distortion in its methodology as a work of Christian theology, a distortion rooted in its

³² Mt 28:18-20. See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), no. 17, and Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*), no. 1; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 849; Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 14.

³³ See Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*), no. 2; Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate (*Redemptoris Missio*), no. 55.

persistent downplaying of the singularity of Jesus Christ as savior of the world. To begin with, the very terms used to describe non-Christian religions as divinely-willed "ways of salvation" that are "autonomous" from Christianity imply a perspective that is somehow beyond that of Christian faith, indeed, that enables one to judge what is of "religious" salvific value in a given religion.

24. Christian theology, however, is founded upon supernatural revelation accepted in faith, not simply upon a natural capacity of the human person to obtain knowledge of God. The Christian theologian, having first embraced the truths of revelation as found within the biblical proclamation and the Church's doctrinal tradition, strives to come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of what God has revealed. For the Christian theologian, the significance and validity of other religious beliefs can only be evaluated from within this faith perspective. Christian revelation demands that the salvific value of any religious truth must be scrutinized and assessed ultimately in the light of the Gospel itself.³⁴ There is no judge or arbiter that is superior to it.

25. The book distances itself from the claim that all religions can be reduced to a common core of religious experience that could serve as the basis for the construction of a universal theology of religion.³⁵ Nevertheless, much of the language in the book implies that its basic perspective is not specifically Christian, but a more universal "religious" perspective, one that is somehow higher than that of any particular religion. In addition to the use of the terms "ways of

³⁴ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian* (24 May 1990) (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19900524_theologian-vocation_en.html), no. 10. The Congregation points out that elements taken from any source of knowledge apart from Christian revelation are subject to a discernment for which Christian revelation serves as the final criterion: "The ultimate normative principle for such discernment is revealed doctrine which itself must furnish the criteria for the evaluation of these elements and conceptual tools and not *vice versa*."

³⁵ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 98; see pp. 90-91 and pp. 119-20.

salvation" and "autonomous," another example of this seemingly higher perspective would be the positive portrayal of "multiple religious belonging," which is described as "not only possible but also desirable."³⁶ *Being Religious Interreligiously* derives its title from this phenomenon.³⁷

26. Another example of the tendency toward a universal religious perspective would be the discussion of the ways in which religions "complement" and even "correct" one another. "Not only are the non-Christian religions complemented by Christianity, but Christianity is complemented by the other religions. In other words, the process of complementation, enrichment, and even correction is *two-way* or reciprocal."³⁸ Although the book claims that this "reciprocal relationship" does not endanger the faith of the Church, at the very least the affirmation of a process of complementation and correction implies the existence of someone above the Christian faith who is able to judge that such a process has in fact occurred.

III. THE CHURCH AS THE UNIQUE AND UNIVERSAL INSTRUMENT OF SALVATION

27. Although *Being Religious Interreligiously* does not adequately uphold Jesus' singular and universal significance, it does maintain that one can and should present the claim for the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ in the context of interreligious dialogue, at least in a qualified form.³⁹ As for the Church, however, it argues that the claim for her uniqueness and universality "should be abandoned altogether."⁴⁰ With regard to this claim, the book notes that

what arouses much skepticism and even outrage is that a human institution such as the Christian church, with a history of light and darkness, a mixture of good and evil, claims

³⁶ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 67.

³⁷ See Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 78.

³⁸ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 66; see also p. 144.

³⁹ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 91.

⁴⁰ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 100. The book stresses the distinction between Christ and the Church, between Jesus and Christianity (pp. 92-98).

to be the exclusive vessel of divine grace while there is plenty of evidence that other religious institutions, no less than the church, have been instrumental in achieving good (and, of course, evil as well).⁴¹

While it is not clear whether or not this passage represents precisely the position of the author, the reasons that are in fact given for abandonment of the claim for the uniqueness and universality of the Church all concern the same issue: the humanness of the Church and her historical entanglement with sin and injustice.⁴²

28. The Church, however, is not simply an institution like other institutions. It is true that the Church is composed of human beings and, in this sense, she is a human institution. However, Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, in accordance with his Father's will, instituted the Church through his life, death and resurrection. At Pentecost Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, the promise of his Father, upon the disciples and from that moment the Spirit became the source of the Church's life and holiness.⁴³ The Church depends upon the presence of the Spirit, who is at work in her. Thus, the Church is also a divine institution.⁴⁴

29. The book is certainly correct when it points out that members of the Church, through the course of history, have sinned and that the credibility of Christian witness to the world has suffered greatly from this. Nevertheless, the holiness of the Church is not simply defined by the holiness (or sinfulness) of her members but by the holiness of her Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is supremely holy and the source of the Church's holiness in that he imbues the Church with

⁴¹ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 95.

⁴² Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, p. 100-1.

⁴³ See Lk 24:49; Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), no. 4; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 731 & 739.

⁴⁴ See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 758-69.

his Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ This Spirit is active in the continual preaching of the Gospel which calls Christian men and women to an ever deeper conversion to holiness. Similarly, it is through the holiness of the sacraments, instituted by Christ, that the members of the Church are cleansed of sin and made holy, especially through the Sacraments of Penance and of the Eucharist.

30. According to the Second Vatican Council, the Church as the messianic people of God is "a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, charity and truth, it is also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth."⁴⁶ The Church is the indispensable "universal sacrament of salvation" that has been instituted by Christ himself and that continues to be sustained by him:

Christ, having been lifted up from the earth has drawn all to Himself. Rising from the dead He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is continually active in the world that He might lead men to the Church and through it join them to Himself and that He might make them partakers of His glorious life by nourishing them with His own Body and Blood.⁴⁷

31. Because the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, whatever grace is offered to individuals in whatever various circumstances, including non-Christians, must be seen in relationship to the Church, for she is always united to Jesus Christ, the source of all grace and holiness.⁴⁸ Since all grace flows from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through his Church, "it

⁴⁵ See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 823-29.

⁴⁶ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) (www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), no. 9.

⁴⁷ See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), no. 48.

⁴⁸ See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), no. 48; Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes*), no. 2; Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate (*Redemptoris Missio*), no. 10, and Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, no. 20.

is clear that it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as *one way* of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her.”⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

32. 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. Therefore we bishops as teachers of the faith are obliged to take action that will help ensure that the singularity of Jesus and the Church be perceived in all clarity and the universal salvific significance of what he has accomplished be acknowledged in the fullness of truth.

Most Rev. William E. Lori (Chairman)
Bishop of Bridgeport

Most Rev. Leonard P. Blair
Bishop of Toledo

Most Rev. José H. Gomez
Archbishop of San Antonio

Most Rev. Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester

Most Rev. Arthur J. Serratelli
Bishop of Paterson

Most Rev. Allen H. Vigneron
Bishop of Oakland

Most Rev. Donald W. Wuerl
Archbishop of Washington

⁴⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, no. 21.