

## Special Report: Dialogue between König and Dupuis

*Following is a transcript of a dialogue between Cardinal Franz König, archbishop of Vienna, and Fr. Jacques Dupuis, the Belgian Jesuit theologian. The dialogue took place in Vienna, Austria, July 16, 2003.*

*The dialogue was recorded and translated by Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, the correspondent in Austria for the international Catholic weekly *The Tablet*.*

*For more about this dialouge, read “**Writer witnessed conversation between cardinal and censured theologian**” in the March 21, 2008, issue of *National Catholic Reporter*.*

### **Koenig-Dupuis Interview**

**Dupuis:** As we were saying at coffee just now, it is so important to consider interreligious dialogue in the Asian context. The big question is how to proclaim Jesus Christ in a country like India today. Once you start talking about *proclaiming* — I mean using the actual word “proclaim” — that somehow suggests an obligation to tell everyone that Jesus Christ is the only universal savior and that the people you are proclaiming to must convert to Christianity. In Asia, the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences prefers to use the word “evangelize.” But some members of the hierarchy — and Rome — often use “evangelization” to mean “proclamation.” One must make it quite clear that evangelization is *not* mere proclamation. Evangelization first of all means bearing Christian witness. Secondly it means involvement for justice in the world and the liberation of people from unjust practices. Then, thirdly, comes interreligious dialogue — and finally — that is fourth in order of importance, as laid down by the Secretariat for Non-Christians — comes proclamation. In the Indian context what is most important is involvement for human liberation and interreligious dialogue. Thus, one cannot immediately say evangelization is proclamation.

That is why John Paul II’s words were dangerous when he came to Delhi to publish the exhortation on the Church in Asia after the Rome synod on the subject. You remember — he recalled that the first millennium had been that of the evangelization of Europe, the second of Africa and America and the third millennium would be the evangelization of Asia — and of India. By referring to the evangelization of Africa and America he conjured up memories of just how those two continents were evangelized — evangelization as missionizing in the colonial sense. In the Indian context one must make clear, as I have just done, that what is important is involvement in human liberation and interreligious dialogue — and that proclamation comes last. Talking of “the evangelization of Asia” as if it was similar to the evangelization of America and Africa is a very dangerous way of speaking in India.

**Koenig:** Of course — exceedingly dangerous. One must never forget the burden of history — in this case the colonial burden. ... It’s like the word “missionaries.” To many Asians, Africans and Latin Americans the very word recalls white European missionaries forcefully converting thousands of indigenous people by immediately and often very superficially baptizing them.

**Dupuis:** The present Indian government — the BJP — is against Christianity — very strongly against it. Last January [2003] I had to go to Bangkok [Thailand] for a congress of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate — the all-Asia congress. On the way back I stopped in Calcutta [India] to visit my province. So before I left Rome I had to apply for a visa to enter India. They made me

produce an official document from the university authorities of the Gregorian stating that during the 10 days of my stay in India I would only visit Calcutta and Delhi and would not indulge in any religious activities.

**Koenig:** I find that very sad — India is a democracy ...

**D:** This is something completely new. And it is directed by the central government in India and shows how anti-Christian their present attitude is. When I asked my provincial in Calcutta if it would be possible for me — now that I have nothing more to do at the Gregorian — to come back to Calcutta and stay in my province, he said, “Forget about it! You’ll never get permission to stay — not ever again.” And that although I’d lived in India for 36 years! They just won’t give me permission to go back. They have become very suspicious, you see. And so as soon as you speak of proclamation they see it as proselytism. Proclamation has become a very bad word for them. One thing you could perhaps mention in the article, Your Eminence, is the importance of interreligious dialogue in this context. Genuine interreligious dialogue, that is, without any ulterior motives, is the only way to make contact.

**K:** The thing is that the word dialogue has become so hackneyed, burnt out as it were. It seems to be a catchword these days. I think one would have to explain very carefully what genuine dialogue involves. It is a matter of getting closer to the truth by asking one another questions and by diminishing false truths.

**D:** Does everyone in Rome want that kind of dialogue?

**K:** They should since the Second Vatican Council. The church used to be far too afraid of questions and therefore — especially in the hundred or so years before Vatican II — one-sidedly emphasized norms and regulations and failed to appreciate the dynamism of genuine questions and seeking new approaches to ancient truths. It thought it had a fixed answer ready for everything and questions were therefore unnecessary.

**D:** That sometimes still seems to apply ...

**K:** The council changed all that. We no longer — less today than ever — believe that there is no truth outside the church — we have become a little more humble. God alone is the final truth. We seek God’s truth in our fellow human beings — who are all his creatures — through dialogue.

**D:** Please, you must write on all this.

**K:** Did the pope [John Paul II] just a fortnight ago — when he met the Indian bishops in Rome — did he mention this problem of using the word “proclaim”?

**D:** He again insisted on *proclaiming* Jesus Christ. Bishop [Joseph Robert] Rodericks who is bishop emeritus of Jamshedpur — he’s a Jesuit and a dear friend of mine — came to see me when the Indian bishops were in Rome and he told me about their meeting with Cardinal [Joseph] Ratzinger and their meeting with the pope. And he said they both insisted on *proclaiming* Jesus Christ.

And Rodericks said to the Holy Father, “Yes, Holy Father, but you must see this in the Indian context, you cannot proclaim straight away — directly as it were. You have to make your message acceptable through Christian witness first — to begin with.”

**K:** Of course.

**D:** And secondly through dialogue. And dialogue presupposes a positive, open theology.

**K:** Naturally.

**D:** Dialogue must be theologically founded. An open theology of dialogue must recognize the real values — the elements of divine truth and grace — which are found in the other religious traditions, and that is where the [congregation] is still very much behind the times.

**K:** Isn't the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples also involved?

**D:** Of course. The prefect, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, was one of the cardinals who denounced my book.

**K:** Tomko, of course, has a very Western approach to all this.

**D:** Take the first Assisi meeting in 1986. The pope [John Paul II], Cardinal [Roger] Etchegaray and all those responsible insisted that they went to Assisi together to pray, but they emphasized afterward, "We did not pray together." Praying together with non-Christians — really praying together, that is — was not possible, it was said. At the second meeting in Assisi they prayed separately — even more separately in 2002 than in 1986. I devote the last chapter of my book *Christianity and the Religions* — the one I dedicated to you — to interreligious prayer, and in this last chapter I explain what the official position in Rome was in 1986 at the time of the first Assisi meeting. Then I quote the Indian bishops' conference's document on dialogue in which the Indian bishops say praying together is not only possible but an obligation. So where is the truth? The Indian bishops are surely also a part of the world episcopate, aren't they?

**K:** What page is that? I have the book here.

**D:** The chapter begins on Page 236. ... Oh, I see you've read the book very thoroughly — look at all these notes in the margins!

**K:** I think the English word is "devoured" — I devoured both your books. Interreligious dialogue has always fascinated me — right back to my student years before I was ordained. And now it has become one of the most important issues in the third millennium. Could we perhaps take Assisi — the 1986 meeting — as a starting point in the article and begin by pointing out that there are lot of things behind Assisi?

**D:** The 1986 Assisi meeting was most important but ...

**K:** Cardinal Ratzinger was against it.

**D.** Yes, Cardinal Ratzinger was against it. But I just want to go back to what the Indian bishops said ... The bishops say: "A third form of dialogue goes to the deepest levels of religious life and consists in sharing in prayer and contemplation. The purpose of such common prayer is primarily the corporate worship of the God of all who has created us to be one large family. We are called to worship God not only individually but also in community, and since in a very real and fundamental manner we are one with the whole of humanity, it is not only our right but our duty to worship him together with others."

And "with others" means very clearly also with non-Christians. Now when the pope talks of evangelizing in India it must first be made clear that he primarily means interreligious dialogue. But in the [congregation's] declaration *Dominus Iesus*, at the end, when they speak of interreligious dialogue they still pooh-pooh it, as it were — they don't make much of it. If you remember, the last part of *Dominus Iesus* says something to the effect that while interreligious dialogue is part of the church's evangelizing mission, the church must be primarily committed to proclaiming the truth — and there we are again with the chief emphasis on proclamation.

**K:** But what sense would dialogue have then? Genuine dialogue must be honest. There must be no ulterior motives. Of course each partner has an aim. It's not meant to be a pointless chat, after all. The aim is to convince one's partner of the soundness of one's arguments. But the opposite also applies. One must equally be prepared to allow oneself to be convinced of the soundness of one's partner's arguments — one must want to gain an insight into them. Dialogue is not an attempt to persuade or convert — the aim is to get to know your partner and why he or she believes what they do.

**D:** But for Rome the all-important thing is proclamation. And they quote Pope Paul VI who in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* does say that evangelizing is essentially proclaiming and that if there is no proclamation there is no evangelization.

**K:** My impression is that at the beginning Pope John Paul II was very close to your position but that later he gradually allowed himself to be corrected by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

**D:** Yes, yes. This pope has played a very important role in stressing the travels of the Holy Spirit — the universal travels of the Holy Spirit ...

**K:** Yes, I see it that way too ...

**D:** ...not only in the religious life of individual Christians...

**K:** but also in communities...

**D:** and also in cultures and in other religions. He believes the Holy Spirit is present in Hinduism...

**K:** Yes...

**D:** and in Islam and Buddhism.

**K:** Yes.

**D:** My question is **what is the Holy Spirit doing there?** Is this not what the council meant when it spoke of those elements of truth and grace in other religions?

**K:** Yes, that is the point ...

**Pongratz-Lippitt:** Are there no cardinals in Rome who think like you?

**D:** That's a good question. Personally I have very few contacts with cardinals. The one I know is Cardinal Francis Arinze because I was consultant of the Secretariat for Non-Christians for 10 years. My own impression of Cardinal Arinze is that he an extremely nice man, very kind, but theologically — well he is not a theologian and he would *never, never* (strongly emphasized) disagree with Cardinal Ratzinger! Never!

As far as my order is concerned, the Jesuit order — my father general has always been on my side from the very beginning. Thank God I had him — otherwise I don't know what I would have done or what would have become of me.

**K:** Couldn't we mention the Jesuits — the great ideas they have and their activities in this field — how they have now taken up your ideas and that they are now a big issue for them? Father general told me when I spoke to him about you that the Jesuits would try to press on in your direction — very carefully at the beginning — but that they wanted to discuss your problems. Do you feel that they are waiting — as it were?

**D:** They are careful and wouldn't take risks. That is the mentality of many of them. It's sad because theologians must be able to publish. We do have freedom of speech — or don't we? But to go back to your question as to whether there were cardinals in the Vatican who were on my side. I can tell you that father general once told me, "You know there are more people in the Vatican on your side than you think — but they can't say so openly. Even important people."

**K:** He is quite right. That is so.

**D:** Even important people in the Vatican, however, cannot contradict the CDF, you see. I can only tell you that I have no contacts on high — no cardinal phoned me to say, "I am with you on this." All I know is what Father General told me — that there were more people on my side than I realized. But to get back to your article — I think you could emphasize the Asian context, especially the Indian context and the importance of interreligious dialogue as the constitutive element of the church's evangelizing mission. As far as the theology of dialogue is concerned, the answer obviously is an open theology of dialogue which recognizes the divine values present

in other religious traditions and that even as Christians and as Catholics our faith can be enriched by entering into interreligious dialogue — which is the whole point and context of my book.

**K:** We could highlight certain chapters in your new book — I'm thinking particularly of Chapter 9 on dialogue and Chapter 10 on prayer.

**D:** And go into what has already been published in the way of important documents such as “Dialogue and Mission” issued by the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions in 1984 which — in no. 13 — actually spells out the mission of the Church — that is, witness, involvement in justice, dialogue and — only finally — proclamation. While in *Dominus Iesus* when towards the end they come to speak about interreligious dialogue, they make mighty little of it and concentrate entirely on proclamation. In the Indian context that just won't do. Some years ago, you know, Cardinal Tomko gave the keynote address at the beginning of a full assembly of the FABC, and he said – not in these exact words but in the equivalent, “You Asian bishops are not doing your job because there are no or very few conversions to Christianity in Asia.” The Asian bishops took this very badly indeed and reacted very strongly – with the result that next morning Cardinal Tomko immediately took the plane back to Rome. You see it's this obsession that evangelization is proclamation and means baptising. But this is not according to certain official documents, which give a much broader view of the church's mission.

**K:** What you're saying is *most* important. Which chapter in your second book do you consider the best — or condenses the whole problem best? The beginning and the end perhaps?

**D:** That is difficult to say. Certainly the question of dialogue — that is Chapter 9 of *Christianity and the Religions*, but possibly also the second last chapter of the previous book — *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* — Chapter 14, where I explain how dialogue is evangelization and go into the theology of dialogue. I'll find it for you. Goodness — what a huge wad of notes. Are these yours, Your Eminence?

**K:** Of course. I always make notes when I read anything that interests me as much as this — only you won't be able to read most if it as I still often use the shorthand I learned as a student. I'm probably one of the few people left alive who still uses it!

**D:** It's Page 366 and following. That's where I discuss the document “Dialogue and Proclamation,” but also the important contribution Pope John Paul II has made through his constant affirmation of the presence and action of the Spirit of God among the members of other religions and of course at Assisi where he laid down the theological foundation for inter-religious dialogue.

**K:** Fr. Rahner called the idea of dialogue and religion the supernatural existential, you remember.

**D:** Yes, of course. I was actually much inspired by Rahner – although I go beyond him.

**K:** If I said religion belongs to or is a part of human existence — would you say that was the same as what Rahner says when he talks of a/the supernatural existential?

**D:** I think so. Rahner's “existential” means that man is already always in Creation itself ...

**K:** Of course that is already the second step of the explanation.

**D:** That means — and I develop that also — that salvation history doesn't start with Abraham. It starts with Creation. And throughout human history God has been *seeking* [strongly emphasized] the human beings he created and therefore there is Divine Revelation — the Divine Act of Salvation — throughout human history. But of course this line is not accepted by everybody.

**K:** In the end — if I accept your ideal — it gives a lot of positive aspects to the Christian religion — I mean Christianity comes out in a very positive light?

**D:** Of course.

**K:** It's not a dangerous ... well, it could be a dangerous subject ... but on the other hand it is an enrichment of cultural dialogue.

**D:** And it is the Christian message which should make us develop this positive and open attitude instead of presenting the Christian faith as a sort of closed faith — closed within itself as “the only true religion” and so on.

**K:** And all this is a very important question for Europe. What is the meaning of Revelation — what is the meaning of religion? The European way of practising religion — of religious belief — has undergone so many changes over the ages.

**D:** Yes. And you know one thing strikes me ... I've been giving lectures everywhere and presenting in so many countries what I've written about and what I believe — and everywhere I've seen how happy people are to discover a way of presenting the faith that makes sense to them because it is open and they can breathe — instead of being told that outside the church there is no salvation.

**K:** Always that idea of fighting against others ...

**D:** Yes. Unfortunately there is no doubt that the Church is moving backward at the moment. *Dominus Iesus* is a big step back. They [the congregation] say that Revelation in Jesus Christ is complete, final, definitive and all the rest — but that is *impossible* [voice rising] — the New Testament says that God will be fully revealed at the end of time.

**K:** Yes.

**D:** What is true is that Revelation in Jesus Christ is unsurpassed and unsurpassable as Divine Revelation in history ...

**K:** Yes.

**D:** But the full, definitive Revelation of God — according to the New Testament — will be at the end of the world. So how can they [the congregation] say what they say?

**K:** They study books — not reality.

**D:** They want to say “absolute,” “definitive” and all the rest because they don't want to accept that Revelation may be found outside Christianity. They want it to be exclusive and not outside the church.

**K:** That is a very important aspect. Of course we have to accept that Revelation in Jesus Christ is finished but the thing is have we understood it all correctly? We must go on discussing this extensively and continue to try and clear up points that are not yet clear. As I see it, although Divine Revelation is finished, isn't there perhaps a possibility that some people may yet get special, personal, new insights — a mixture of Revelation and interpretation, a sort of inspiration? We believe in the activity of the Holy Spirit — and I'm inclined to think that the Holy Father agrees with me in this but does not say so to the [congregation] — we believe in the activity of the Holy Spirit in the whole world and that all the world religions are trying to find answers to the final questions. Perhaps human insights and the Holy Spirit working together, as it were, will reveal a new approach. Cardinal Ratzinger and most theologians in Rome are Westernized, they don't know enough about Asia or about the Asian or Indian mentality. But do the Hindus — at the moment — want dialogue?

**D:** One thing is obvious at the moment — the Hindus are on the defensive. They fear that dialogue is perhaps just a sort of way round to try and convert them to Christianity. At all the interreligious meetings I have attended recently you sense this fear at the beginning, namely that dialogue might be being used as a way round for conversions, but once they realize that you are intent on open dialogue, open to their own religious traditions, then the atmosphere changes and they are most interested. I was recently at a meeting in Sicily about 100 kilometers from Palermo

between Christian, Muslim and Jewish scholars. As soon as they heard that Christianity was open to admitting that there is something in their religions — in the Quran for instance — or as the pope [John Paul II] said so clearly recently that the Covenant of God is Moses' Covenant — their fears disappeared. We must first of all stress how important it is to define dialogue as the expression of the church's mission in a context like the Asian context, and secondly underline the open theology of religion. That is what I've been trying to do. If we take this attitude towards interreligious dialogue there is no question whatsoever of diminishing the Mystery of Jesus Christ — but it must be understood correctly, and not as excluding that God and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are also present and active outside the boundaries of the church. That is of course what the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is not prepared to accept.

**K:** Are there theologians from the Eastern world in the [congregation]? My fear is that they are all Western.

**D:** That is true. The bulk are Western. The result is that these matters are then discussed by people who all think alike. And the different theological schools of thought in the world are not represented. So it's not surprising things are dealt with as they are in the [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith].

**K:** Was there no contact before Cardinal Tomko went to India to address the [Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences]? No contact with Indian bishops or with the Jesuits at de Nobili College in Pune for instance?

**D:** Absolutely none. The Indian bishops are rejected — like Indian theologians and like Fr Dupuis! I think one could say this goes for many Asian bishops and certainly theologians. You remember the *Lineamenta* the Vatican published — in English and French I think it was — before the synod on Asia. It was quite a thick booklet ... it more or less said that the Asian church must make greater efforts to evangelize. And you remember how the Japanese bishops completely rejected it [the *Lineamenta*] and efforts by the Vatican to lay down the rules.

**K:** I remember and I remember very clearly how it immediately reminded me of what happened when the Second Vatican Council first opened ... a group of us reacted in exactly the same way when the curia tried to lay down the rules for the council. For me what the Japanese bishops said was a worrying déjà vu experience 30 or so years after Vatican II. Very sad. The next pope must work on the collegiality issue — you can't just ignore the opinion of the Asian bishops before an Asian synod. I feel the history of the religions of mankind is a European product, a European way of thinking, of exploring. In recent centuries it has often reflected a tension between the Christian religion and science and the concept has changed as a result of the Christian religion's stance against science. So we must go back to the natural situation — man trying to find answers to the last big questions —

**D:** *Nostra Aetate* No.1 puts that very nicely, doesn't it? It shows how all religions ask those decisive questions about man and the meaning of life, and so on.

**K:** Would you say that the European history of what is called the science of religions in the European concept between science and religion has in any way changed the natural position? Would you accept that view in India?

**D:** Yes, I think one would. And to this must be added the fact that over the centuries, there was an increasing tendency to exclusiveness — Christianity as the *only* true religion, and so on. In a sense this started with Constantine — once Christianity was not only accepted in the Empire but became the religion of the state. Now the Vatican II document on religious liberty did *not* use that expression — that Christianity is the only true religion. Wouldn't it be possible to state clearly and without ambiguity what is unique and new and original in Christianity without

having to use exclusivist expressions such as “the only true religion”? That phrase sounds as if we have the monopoly and that is not true. Even with Revelation in Jesus Christ.

**K:** That was always the case in Europe. The Vatican II text that states that human beings are always looking for answers to the final questions could be our starting point.

**D:** It is very important to take what Pope John Paul II has said about the universal presence of the Holy Spirit very seriously. The conclusion follows that there must be salvific values in other religions.

**K:** That is an essential point that we must bring in.

**D:** Fr. O’Collins, my dear friend and mentor, asked in a *Tablet* letter whether condemning Fr. Dupuis didn’t actually amount to condemning Pope John Paul II. I, naturally, consider this a very appropriate question, as to a certain extent it is surely true ... if you take John Paul II’s very strong affirmation of the Holy Spirit seriously, then dialogue must be open. When in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* [1990] the pope says that the two elements — dialogue and proclamation — must retain their distinctiveness and should not be manipulated, that surely means that dialogue cannot be reduced to an instrument for proclamation as Cardinal Tomko would seem to see it.

**K:** Dialogue must be open. Fear is always a bad counsellor. An open attitude and not a closed mentality will help to give new depths to the Christian message. We could quote St Paul’s Letter to the Romans Chapter 2.

**D:** I do hope that what I’ve said will help you write the article. I’ll send you my reactions when you send me the final version.

**K:** And I’ll phone the Jesuit Fr. Waldenfels in Bonn. He is a very good man. I know him well.

**D:** His article in *Stimmen der Zeit* about my case was very good. He’s a specialist in the field.

**K:** He spent a long time in Japan. I got the Waldenfels article in *Stimmen der Zeit* out last night and marked the page ... [Gets it]. Here it is. Could you translate the paragraph I’ve marked, please, Mrs Pongratz?

**Pongratz-Lippitt:** Waldenfels says, “Is it not possible that 50 years ago theologians were more courageous than they are nowadays? He quotes Gottlieb Söhngen, a teacher of Ratzinger, writing on a future Chinese theology: “The Chinese and other eastern Asians will have to analyze Western Christian theology from their far eastern point of view and not end up with a 50 percent Western and 50 percent Eastern mixture, which resembles a sort of chicken goulash. They will have to produce a new essence of Christian theology — namely a far eastern theological view whose far eastern characteristics will really strike us hard so that we won’t know what day it is — for the very reason that since the Greek philosophers, the eyes and ears of Western thinkers have developed differently.”

**D:** It shows how well Waldenfels knows the situation in Asia. That is what so many curia cardinals lack — they have no experience of living in the reality of the non-Christian world. Cardinal Tomko, Cardinal Bertone, Cardinal Ratzinger — what do they know about India? Have they ever even studied any of the great works of other religions — with the exception of the Old Testament, which is not another religion but our elder brother as it were? Have they ever gone into Hindu religious literature in any detail? Quite apart from having entered into dialogue with Hindu religious leaders? It underlines the unfairness of *Dominus Iesus*.

**K:** I don’t think *Dominus Iesus* was carefully enough prepared. Cardinal Ratzinger admitted that when he said the [congregation] had not been prepared for the worldwide reactions. Before you compose a document like that you have to take so much into consideration — particularly the language and the tone. Words like “deficient” for other religions, which are derived from the

Latin but have taken on a pejorative meaning in modern English, for instance. And, of course, it has a lot to do with psychology. You must consider who will read the Vatican document.

Theologians shouldn't address general audiences and *Dominus Iesus* was certainly intended for a general audience — for bishops, theologians and for Catholics in general.

I think it's time for a glass of wine — we've had a long day. And don't worry, I'll do my best to write on all this.

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