

The Church and the Power of Prayer for “the Others”

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This article critically examines the views of Jacques Dupuis, Gavin D’Costa, and Francis Sullivan on the church’s intercession for those of other living faiths or of no faith at all. After clarifying what the Scholastic terminology of “final” and “moral” causality means, it shows how 1 Timothy and Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy elucidate intercession for “others.” Here a rich tradition of philosophical-theological reflection on the efficacy of prayer can no longer be ignored. Finally, intercession for “others” is inspired by love for them, and brings the faithful to share in Christ’s priestly ministry for the whole world. In these ways, the article aspires to open up new themes for the theology of religions.

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WHAT do the church’s prayers of intercession achieve for those who are not baptized Christians? Does such intercession constitute the mediation of salvation in the proper sense of the word? These are key questions for those engaged in the theology of religions. Since Jacques Dupuis (1923–2004) helped to set the terms in which various theologians have answered these questions, we begin with him.

I. Jacques Dupuis on the Church’s Intercession

In the course of discussing “the necessity of the church,” Dupuis argued that, when praying for “the others,” the church exercises toward

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them “moral” and “final” causality but not “efficient” causality. The church is an effective instrument of salvation for its own members, and mediates salvation by proclaiming to them the word of God and providing them with the sacraments. But while the church intercedes for “the others,” especially in the eucharistic celebration, this prayer for “the others” does not belong to the efficient but rather to the moral order. Finality comes into play inasmuch as “the others” are “ordered” toward the church.¹

When presenting the church’s intercessory prayers for others, Dupuis cited liturgical texts,² but not the classic instruction from 1 Timothy about prayer being made for all human beings without exception: “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for everyone” (1 Tim 2:1). In the setting of 1 Timothy, the significance of this verse for the theology of religions is enhanced by two pieces of teaching that follow at once. First, God “desires everyone to be saved” (2:4; see 4:10); and, second, Jesus Christ is the “one mediator between God and humankind” and “gave himself as a ransom for all” (2:5). Dupuis repeatedly quoted or referred to 1 Timothy 2:4 and 5,³ but never cited 1 Timothy 2:1. Yet it was this verse that Vatican II recalled when restoring the Prayer of the Faithful: “By this prayer in which the people are to take part, intercessions are to be made for the holy church, for those who lead us politically, for those weighed down by various needs, *for all human beings and for the salvation of the entire world.*”⁴ Later, without explicitly referring to the liturgy, the council’s *Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis Humanae)* also quoted the same verse when urging all Catholics to pray for “the others” (DH 14).

¹ Jacques Dupuis, SJ, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 349–52. Dupuis repeated the same view, often in the same words, in *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 210–13.

² Dupuis quoted words from the Third Eucharistic Prayer (“Lord, may this sacrifice, which has made our peace with you, advance the salvation of all the world”) in both *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (350 n. 6) and *Christianity and the Religions* (210–11).

³ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 91, 102, 111, 186, 217, 263, 286, 288, 294, 307, 311, 347, 356. Although frequently citing 1 Timothy 2:5, Dupuis never went on to observe how, at the celebration of the Eucharist, the crucified and risen Christ continues to exercise his priestly ministry as mediator between God and humankind and to give himself eternally “as a ransom for all.”

⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)*, 53 (my emphasis). Here and elsewhere the translation is my own, made from the official Latin text of Vatican II’s sixteen documents (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/). Dupuis never appealed to the Prayer of the Faithful in either *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* or *Christianity and the Religions*.

What of the final and moral causality exercised by the church toward those who belong to other religious traditions? Let us examine first how in this context Dupuis understood final causality.⁵

Encouraged by some teaching from Pope Pius XII’s 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, Vatican II’s *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, and the theology of Yves Congar, Dupuis spoke of “the others” as being “ordered” or “oriented” toward the church through the graces they receive from God.⁶ To the extent that they receive these graces as a result of Christians praying for them (rather than as a result of the mediation of salvation available through their particular religion), the (hoped-for) purpose or goal of what happens is to orient them toward the church, and so toward becoming members of the church. In that sense, the prayers of the church for “the others” aim at their *preparatio evangelica*, or their being teleologically directed toward the future end of accepting the gospel and entering the church through faith and baptism. Like the Second Vatican Council,⁷ Dupuis discussed the theme of *preparatio evangelica*, but he did so only with reference to the possibility of “other” religions proving to be a preparation for the gospel.⁸ He did not think of the church’s intercession for “the others” as contributing to their being prepared to receive the gospel. Yet, if those prayers of intercession have the purpose and goal of orienting them toward the church, they belong, albeit mysteriously, to their *preparatio evangelica*. Unquestionably, what this preparation involves always goes beyond the church’s intercessory prayer. Nevertheless, to explain this prayer for “the

⁵ Traditional Scholastic theology, with which, at least in passing, Dupuis associated himself, appropriated Aristotle’s classification of causes, in which the final cause denoted the causality exercised by the goal or *telos* of some action; see Benedict M. Ashley, OP, “Final Causality,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 5:723–27. Much modern philosophy and science dismisses final or “teleological” reasoning and explanations. Wesley C. Salmon speaks for many when he writes: “A world in which teleological causation operates is not logically impossible, but our world does not seem, as a matter of fact, to be of such a kind” (*Scientific Explanation and the Causal Structure of the World* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984], 164).

⁶ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 348–51; Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 210–13. Neither Dupuis nor anyone else who picks up this language from Pius XII, Vatican II, and Congar reflects on the fact that to speak of “the others” being “ordered” or “oriented” toward the church implies some efficient causality being exercised on them by God.

⁷ On this theme in the Vatican II documents, see Gerald O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 77–79, 115–16.

⁸ Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 131, 134, 162–64; Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 46, 155.

others" in the light of final causality necessarily implies recognizing a particular contribution to their *preparatio evangelica*.

Second, Dupuis consciously borrowed "the terminology of scholastic theology" to argue that "where the church's intercession is concerned," the causality at work "seems to be of the moral rather than the efficient order."⁹ Setting the classifications "moral" and "efficient" over against each other does not, however, correspond to what Scholastic theology normally proposes. Allan Wolter, for instance, brings "moral causes" directly into his discussion of efficient causality and states that the "distinction between physical and moral causes reflects" an "extension of the notion of efficient causality as regards free agents. A physical cause produces an effect by its own direct action, either immediately or by way of some instrument. . . . A moral cause, however, usually refers to a person who by appeal, threat, or the like, induces a second person to act."¹⁰ This is to classify moral causality as a particular kind of efficient causality, which differs from physical causality by producing an effect through personal influence rather than through physical action.

Dupuis was concerned to distinguish between (a) the "instrumental efficient causality" exercised by the church for the benefit of its members through, for instance, the "instrumentality" of the sacraments, and (b) what the church does for "the others" through intercessory prayer. Yet attributing moral causality to the church's intercession leaves us *within* the area of efficient causality, even if this is a form of efficient causality exercised through personal influence rather than through the physical actions of the sacramental order.

In the light of this clarification, Dupuis' position must face these questions: How should he have interpreted in detail the moral causality exercised by the church's intercessory prayer? Does the church when engaged in that prayer enjoy (personal) influence over the ways in which God will act toward "the others"? Is such prayer even a necessary condition for God helping "the others" and doing for them things that would not otherwise be done for them? What would happen to "the others" if we the church as a whole did not pray for them as enjoined by 1 Timothy and Vatican II? These questions belong to a broader challenge: What is the impact of any form of petitionary and intercessory prayer? Should we conceive of it as

⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 211; here Dupuis repeated what he had already written in *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 350.

¹⁰ Allan Bernard Wolter, OFM, "Efficient Causality," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 5:98–102, at 99.

changing what God is going to do for any person or group of persons? We return to these questions below.

II. Francis Sullivan and Gavin D’Costa

In *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Dupuis repeatedly cited a 1992 book by Francis A. Sullivan.¹¹ The latter had proposed that in praying for all humanity, the church plays an “instrumental role in the salvation of the great many people” whom it “does not reach” with “word and sacrament.” The “priestly people” exercise this “mediating role” when offering the Eucharist “not only for the Christian faithful, but [also] for the salvation of the whole world.” Sullivan cited passages from the Third and Fourth Eucharistic Prayers that embody such prayers for the salvation of all humanity.¹² When making this case, he appealed to the Eucharist and the priestly role of all who participate, but said nothing about the powerful presence of Christ the High Priest. He quoted texts from the eucharistic liturgy, but did not recall either Vatican II’s restoration of the Prayer of the Faithful (which prescribed praying “for all human beings and for the salvation of the entire world”) or 1 Timothy 2:1, from which the council drew support when restoring the Prayer of the Faithful. Like Dupuis, Sullivan also never remarked that the church’s intercession for “the others” is motivated by love—a theme to which we will return below.

Writing five years after Sullivan, Dupuis, as we saw above, declined to recognize such instrumental causality at work when the church intercedes for all “the others,” and hence did not consider the church’s intercession for them to be true mediation in the proper sense of the word. Sullivan responded to Dupuis by modifying his position in the context of commenting on section 22 of *Dominus Iesus*, the declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF).¹³ Sullivan observed that the CDF did not clearly answer “the question whether the church exercises instrumental causality in the salvation of people whom it does not reach with its ministry.” He himself continued to speak of the church’s mediation but not of its instrumental role:

¹¹ Francis A. Sullivan, SJ, *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

¹² *Ibid.*, 158–59 (my emphasis). Dupuis showed that he was aware of Sullivan’s interpreting the church as “an instrument of salvation” for the whole world: Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 350; Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 210.

¹³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, section 22, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html; also AAS 92 (2000): 742–65, at 763: “God has willed that the church be an instrument for the salvation of the whole human race.”

“The mediation of the church in the salvation of those it does not reach can be seen in the fact that the church offers the Eucharistic sacrifice for the salvation of the whole world.”¹⁴

In his 2009 book, *Christianity and World Religions*, Gavin D’Costa spent some pages on the differences between Dupuis and Sullivan.¹⁵ Recalling Sullivan’s case (in 1992) for instrumental causality being at work when the church prays for all people, D’Costa cited against Dupuis paragraph 6 of the CDF’s 2001 notification on Dupuis’ *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*: “It must be firmly believed that the church is sign and instrument of salvation for all people.”¹⁶ But, as we have just seen, by 2002 Sullivan not only distanced himself from speaking of the church’s instrumental causality being exercised toward those whom “it does not reach with its ministry,” but also queried what the CDF had said about such causality in section 22 of *Dominus Iesus*.

D’Costa, after recalling that “the Eucharist is the eternal sacrifice of God’s self-giving love,”¹⁷ spent several pages on the bidding prayers for Good Friday, both those in use before Vatican II and the revised version published after the council. In either form, these prayers that “instrumentally bring about a reality” have “an efficacious power because they are the prayers of the church.” In similar words, he stated: “These prayers bring about an instrumental relation of efficacy to the unevangelized non-Christians.”¹⁸ Unlike Dupuis and Sullivan, D’Costa saw how the church’s bidding prayers prove relevant to the issue of its mediatory role for “the others.” Yet he limited himself to the Good Friday liturgy, and, like Dupuis and Sullivan, failed to note the significance of the Prayer of the Faithful reintroduced by the Second Vatican Council, and the New Testament text to which it appealed (1 Tim 2:1).

Moreover, if D’Costa wanted to borrow terminology of causality from Scholastic theology, he needed to respect the traditional distinction between physical and moral causes quoted above from Wolter. A physical, efficient cause, such as the sacrament of baptism, produces its effect

¹⁴ Francis A. Sullivan, “Introduction and Ecclesiological Issues,” in *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, ed. Stephen J. Pope and Charles Hefling (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 47–56, at 50–51.

¹⁵ Gavin D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 180–86.

¹⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Notification on the Book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*” (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997) by Father Jacques Dupuis, SJ, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html; *Origins* 30 (2001): 605–8.

¹⁷ D’Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 183.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 185–86.

instrumentally or as an instrument used by the principal minister, the invisible but truly present risen Christ acting with his Holy Spirit. The prayers of the community are, to be sure, a particular form of efficient causality, but they differ from physical causes, like baptism. As a moral cause, they produce their effect through personal appeal or influence rather than through physical action. They have a causal role, but it is not an instrumental one—if one to apply the classifications of Scholastic theology.

Finally, unlike Sullivan, D’Costa never mentioned the priestly quality of the people who participate in the Eucharist and pray for “the others.” Like Sullivan, he failed to invoke the presence and action at the Eucharist of Christ the High Priest. Like Dupuis, neither Sullivan nor D’Costa recognized the love that motivates the church’s intercession for “the others.” D’Costa, as we noted above, called the Eucharist “the eternal sacrifice of God’s self-giving love,” and referred in passing to the “love and mercy of God.”¹⁹ But, in examining the role or causality of intercessory prayer for “the others,” we are concerned directly with the church’s love for them, albeit love inspired by divine action.

III. Intercession for “the Others”

Evaluation of what Dupuis, Sullivan, and D’Costa proposed and failed to propose can open the way for some foundational reflection on the church’s intercessory prayer both for those who follow other faiths and for those who profess no religious faith at all. In the cause of clarity, intercessory prayer or asking on behalf of others should be distinguished from petitionary prayer or asking for ourselves. I say “distinguished,” since a sharp separation does not seem in order. Both intercession and petition take us into the mysterious interaction between the divine will and the will of human beings, as well as leaving us to grapple with such problems as that of unanswered prayer and with the question, if the omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good God already knows our needs and those of others, what is the point of either intercession for them or petition for ourselves? The teaching of the New Testament (notably the Lord’s Prayer) enjoins intercession for others (and petition for ourselves). But how can we understand and justify such intercession (and petition)? Here the theology of religions should be enriched by centuries of Christian reflection on prayer.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid., 183, 185. Obviously what the Eucharist presents is not precisely “the eternal sacrifice of God’s self-giving love,” but the eternal sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God’s self-giving love.

²⁰ On intercession and petition, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 83, a. 1–17; Peter R. Baelz, *Does God Answer Prayer?* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd,

We can begin with some less controversial propositions. First, the risen Christ continues his high priestly ministry of intercession for the world (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). This intercession asks for mercy and forgiveness, as well as being perhaps a plea for deliverance from hostile powers.²¹

Second, John's Gospel insists that disciples should pray to God in the name of Jesus: "The Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name" (John 15:16).²² The theme recurs in the following chapter: "If you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete" (John 16:23–24). This unqualified promise obviously leaves us with the question of seemingly unanswered prayers: what should Christians think of situations when they have prayed in the name of Jesus for themselves (petition) or for others (intercession) and not "received"? We will return to the "efficacy" of the prayer of intercession below. Here I wish to underline only that Christian intercession takes place "in the name of Jesus," the great Intercessor.

Third, "intercession is a way of loving others."²³ This straightforward statement from Richard Foster should be noncontroversial. Admittedly, when 1

1962); Baelz, *Prayer and Providence: A Background Study* (London: SCM Press, 1968); David Basinger, "Why Petition an Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Wholly Good God?," *Religious Studies* 19 (1983): 25–41; Vincent Brümmer, *What Are We Doing When We Pray? On Prayer and the Nature of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008); Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 179–201; Peter T. Geach, *God and the Soul* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969); Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion*, trans. Samuel McComb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958); Michael J. Murray, "Does God Respond to Petitionary Prayer?," in *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. VanArragon (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 242–55; Michael J. Murray and Kurt Meyers, "Ask and It Will Be Given to You," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 311–30; Maurice Nédoncelle, *The Nature and Use of Prayer*, trans. A. Manson (London: Burns & Oates, 1964); Origen, *Prayer*, trans. Rowan A. Greer, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 81–170; Dewi Zechanah Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981); Eleonore Stump, "Petitionary Prayer," in *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Michael J. Murray (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 353–66; Ceslaus Veleck, OP, "Appendix 3: Prayer," in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964–66) 39:259–61.

²¹ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 533; Christopher R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 366.

²² Where Matthew 7:7–8 and Luke 11:9–10 had simply promised, "Ask and it will be given to you," now such confident prayer is to be made "in the name of Jesus." In and through prayer, the disciples share in Jesus' loving relationship with the Father.

²³ Foster, *Prayer*, 191.

Timothy 2:1 and Vatican II’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* urge that intercessions be made for all human beings, they do not appeal explicitly to the motivation of love. Yet, whether they consciously articulate their reasons or not, Christians show that they care deeply about “the others” and their future destiny when they pray for them and their salvation. We will come back to the function of love in all such intercession below.

Fourth, “intercessory prayer is *priestly* ministry.”²⁴ Once again such a statement should not be controversial. All the baptized share in the dignity and responsibility of Christ’s triple office; they are all priests, prophets/teachers, and kings/shepherds. In particular, they express their priestly identity by joining themselves—above all at the celebration of the Eucharist—to the self-offering of Christ and his intercession for the whole world. This theme will also be taken up again below.

Fifth, Eleonore Stump describes the prayer of petition as “a request freely made to God for something *specific* believed to be good by those praying.”²⁵ In her article she uses to advantage the case of Monica praying for something specific, the conversion of her son Augustine.²⁶ (This is also a striking example of prayer being motivated by love—a theme that lay beyond the explicit scope of Stump’s article.) But should a description of prayer and of intercession press the notion of a request being made “for something specific”? This may or may not be the case. It makes perfect sense to speak of someone praying for the general spiritual well-being of his or her country. The classic New Testament text supporting the practice of intercession mixes the general with some specifics (e.g., a request for tolerant policies on the part of worldly authorities): “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, [and, specifically] for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we [Christians] may lead a quiet and peaceable life” (1 Tim 2:1-2). When restoring the Prayer of the Faithful, Vatican II’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* understood such intercession in general terms. Even when a specific group (“those who lead us politically”) is mentioned, the council did not prescribe any particulars but simply mandated: “Intercessions are to be made for the holy church, for those who lead us politically, for those weighed down by various needs, for all human beings and for the salvation of the whole world” (no. 53).

In the case of the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9–13), the opening three “you” petitions, which could equally well or even better be called “intercessions” that concern all humanity, remain very general: “May your name be made holy;

²⁴ Ibid. (my emphasis).

²⁵ Stump, “Petitionary Prayer,” 353 (my emphasis).

²⁶ Ibid., 361–63.

may your kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as in heaven." The first two of the four "we" requests exhibit a certain specificity: "Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." But the final two "we" requests remain rather general: "Do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one."

Sixth, if intercession exercises its own kind of efficient causality (see above), what changes does God bring about in "response" to such prayer? To begin with, making intercession for others and, in particular, for those who do not share Christian faith, signals some change (initiated and carried through by God) in those who join in such intercessions. Failure to intercede for "the others" involves a failure on the part of Christians to be changed and made holy in the way God wants. Putting matters positively, we can argue that the prayer of intercession for "the others" will prove unfailingly efficacious in changing those who pray, even when—and this seems to be normally the case—they are unable to identify any precise changes in those "others" that such prayer might have helped to effect. Interceding for "the others" has its necessary impact on those who intercede, through promoting their caring attitudes and shaping their loving selves.²⁷

Yet can we say that, without those prayers, God will not help "the others" and bring about their salvation? God "desires everyone to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4). But will God do that if Catholics and other Christians fail to intercede "for all human beings and for the salvation of the entire world" (SC 53)? Here we run up against what Saint Paul calls the "unsearchable judgments" and "inscrutable ways" of God (Rom 11:33). As Stump remarks, "We do not know which states of affairs are divinely determined to occur regardless of prayer." And yet, for all we know, any given case of change for the better in the others may be "one in which God would not have brought about the desired state of affairs" without the church interceding for it.²⁸

When reflecting on the mystery of divine providence for "the others," most Christians probably want to avoid two extremes. One extreme holds that God will never bestow needed blessings on "the others" unless the church intercedes for them. Christian intercession is necessary if they are to be saved. The other extreme holds that God would bestow the blessings anyway, even without being asked. Everything is divinely predetermined, with the freely made human prayer of Christians exercising no influence whatsoever on what happens to "the others."

²⁷ In *What Are We Doing When We Pray?*, Brümmer quotes Kierkegaard ("Prayer changes the one who offers it"), Aquinas, Augustine, and others to establish the impact of prayer on those who pray (26–27).

²⁸ Stump, "Petitionary Prayer," 357.

Let me suggest a middle ground. Somehow God works or also works through the mediation of our intercessory prayer rather than simply bringing about everything on his own. God wants to associate the baptized with the divine work of caring for all “the others.” Apropos of genuine love for one’s neighbor, Karl Rahner remarked that God is always “the ground” and “mysterious partner” of such love.²⁹ If this is so in general, this must be all the more so at the Eucharist, when the baptized join their prayers for “the others” with the efficacious prayers of Christ the High Priest, who lives forever interceding for all people. Christ is the cause and partner of such prayer.

Here the setting for the Prayer of the Faithful proves highly significant. The First Letter of Timothy did not, or at least did not explicitly, propose the setting of the Eucharist when urging that “intercessions” be made “for everyone” (1 Tim 2:1). But the Second Vatican Council, when retrieving this practice, stipulated expressly the celebration of the Eucharist as the context in which the prayer for all human beings should be practiced. This prayer of intercession, through belonging to the “liturgical celebration,” becomes “a work (*opus*) of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church.” The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* adds confidently that “no action of the Church” other than the liturgical celebration “equals its efficacy (*efficacitatem*)” (SC 7). Hence, inasmuch as the liturgical intercessions for “the others” relate so closely to the priestly ministry of Christ himself, we should expect a generous divine response. It would be strange if this were not the case. Through baptism the faithful already share in the priestly ministry of Christ. They exercise their priestly ministry in a preeminent way when they join with him even more closely in celebrating the Eucharist and praying for the salvation of the whole world.

This is not to say that it will ever be easy to identify in particular cases the impact of the church’s intercession for “the others.” Many other forces, both divine and human, can be at work in the history and situation of any specific group of “others.” Let us consider one example. In 1884 Pope Leo XIII introduced the so-called Leonine Prayers for recitation immediately after Mass; they remained in general use until 1964. After 1929, Pius XI prescribed that these prayers be said for the people of Russia so that they might have the “tranquillity and freedom to profess the faith.”³⁰ Were these prayers eventually answered through the events of 1989 and its aftermath? We might be cautious about what counts as an answer to the Leonine Prayers. Nevertheless, while being properly tentative about identifying the precise efficacy of these

²⁹ Karl Rahner, SJ, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych, SJ (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 309.

³⁰ Francis Adam Brunner, CSSR, “Leonine Prayers,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 8:500.

and other particular intercessions, we should not discount the efficacy of prayer for “the others,” especially in the context of a liturgical celebration.

IV. The Love That Inspires Intercession

We saw above how discussion of Christian intercessory prayer for “the others” has failed to reflect on love and its relevance. What part might love play here? What could be its relevance, “causal” and otherwise, to the discussion?

Over many centuries, philosophy, theology, biblical studies, literary studies, and other disciplines have offered a rich reflection on love.³¹ Let me retrieve some themes on love that illuminate the nature and power of praying for “the others.” First, love is inherently relational or, as many express matters nowadays, altruistic. This means that even before they move to help others and do so even at cost to themselves, those who love others accept, approve, wonder at, and rejoice in these others. They affirm these others for what they are in themselves, particular and mysteriously unique manifestations of reality and goodness. Medieval thought called this initial characteristic of love the “love of delight” (*amor complacentiae*). When the community of the baptized joins with Christ in praying for “the others,” it shares his fundamental approval of them for their unique, personal reality. Every one of these “others” enjoys intrinsic, incomparably different value for God and the risen Christ. Whether they are conscious of this or not, Christians who practice what 1 Timothy enjoins about praying for the salvation of everyone share with Christ his fundamental “love of delight” in each and every human being.

Second, such loving approval involves identifying with “the others” and making their interests our own. As “the love of benevolence” (*amor benevolentiae*), love reaches out to serve the interests of these “others,” advances their welfare because we love them, and does so, in particular, by our self-giving. The redemption of human beings involved nothing less than the self-gift of God’s Son in person and then the divine self-gift that was the sending of the Holy Spirit. In lovingly bestowing what is good and valuable, God came with the gift. All divine giving is self-giving, and so too is all

³¹ See the bibliography in Gerald O’Collins and Daniel Kendall, *The Bible for Theology: Ten Principles for the Theological Use of Scripture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 178–79. For further publications on love, see Werner G. Jeanron, *A Theology of Love* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 261–79; and Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), *passim*.

authentic human giving. The “agapeic” activity that flows in spontaneous abundance from the divine goodness communicates nothing less than the divine reality.

The intercessory prayer of Christians for “the others” entails an active concern for them that, in fact, participates in the self-giving of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. Truly, if mysteriously, the Son and the Spirit are present in all people and at work transforming their lives.³² Once again, praying for “the others,” whether Christians are conscious or not of what it entails, means nothing less than sharing in the universal “benevolent” love of God expressed and active in the “missions” of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such intercessory prayer lets the baptized enter into the effective divine love deployed for the ultimate welfare of all human beings. Thus the baptized become “participants” in a universal divine activity of love.

A third characteristic of love may seem to create difficulty if applied to the prayers of intercession for “the others.” Without a *reciprocity* that brings a lasting, mutual *union*, love remains radically incomplete and merely a kind of unilateral generosity. Love by its nature longs for community with “the others” and aims at establishing and maintaining a permanent relationship in mutual freedom.³³ Such reciprocity belongs essentially to Jesus’ call to discipleship. John’s Gospel associates love with the mutual relationship involved in following Jesus through life and until death (John 21:15–19). This reciprocal relationship lives itself out in a permanent loving union with him and in the fellowship of the Christian community. Paul’s letters testify to the reciprocated presence of divine love at the heart of this new community. The apostle reaches for the image of marriage when portraying the community’s graced and loving union with Christ (2 Cor 11:2; see Eph 5:25–32).

The prayer of intercession may bring the reciprocity and fellowship that is longed for when groups of “others” come to Christian faith and through baptism enter the church. But it is obvious that, in the case of many millions, such prayer may seemingly not be publicly answered and enjoy such a clear outcome. Nevertheless, the hidden but effective presence of Christ and his Holy Spirit in the life of every human being brings its fruit.³⁴ Even without knowing Christ and the Spirit, human beings can act in ways that respond to the divine promptings and reciprocate the redeeming love that they mysteriously experience.

³² I discuss in detail the universal presence and activity of the Son and the Spirit in O’Collins, *Salvation for All: God’s Other Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 214–29.

³³ O’Collins and Kendall, *The Bible for Theology*, 63–65.

³⁴ See O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 158–66.

To sum up, love inspires the intercessory prayer through which the faithful associate themselves with the saving love exercised toward all human beings by the risen Christ and his Spirit. They do this in a preeminent way at the celebration of the Eucharist, where they participate in Christ the High Priest's self-offering on behalf of all people.

V. Participating in the Priesthood of Christ

As was pointed out above, the priesthood of Christ has been neglected by those engaged in the theology of religions and, in particular, by those reflecting on the efficacy of Christian prayer of intercession for "the others."³⁵ That intercession is incorporated into the eternal ministry of Christ the High Priest. Above all in the Eucharist, the crucified and risen Jesus presents lovingly to the Father his self-offering on behalf of all people and draws into his self-offering the church's intercession for them.

A recent book by Garry Wills would undercut this picture by rejecting not only the validity of Christian priesthood but also the priestly identity of Jesus himself. To make his case, Wills argues that the Letter to the Hebrews went astray in recognizing the priesthood of Christ. "A polished writer" but "no profound thinker," the author of Hebrews produced "flimsy," "capricious," and even "fallacious" arguments when portraying Christ as "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."³⁶

One should take issue with Wills over various dubious claims: for instance, that among the books of the New Testament, Hebrews stands alone in recognizing Christ as priest. Without explicitly using the title, the Gospel of John implies that priesthood. In the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of Jesus, he fulfills the significance of several major festivals—above all, the Passover. The feeding of the five thousand and the discourse on the bread of life occur, as only John observes, at the time of the Passover (John 6:4). Andrew Lincoln writes: "As the true bread from heaven, Jesus fulfills what was signified not only by the manna of the exodus but also by the unleavened bread of the Passover, and Jesus' flesh and blood are now the food and drink of the true Passover meal."³⁷ Through his priestly self-gift, then, Jesus has replaced the Passover festival. This replacement motif in the Fourth Gospel expresses

³⁵ See further Gerald O'Collins, "The Priesthood of Christ and the Followers of Other Faiths," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 78 (2013): 262–78.

³⁶ Garry Wills, *Why Priests? A Failed Tradition* (New York: Viking, 2013), 107–15, 156. Failing to show historical sensitivity, Wills dismisses as "eccentric logic" (119, 120) what belonged to the first-century methods of biblical interpretation.

³⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to John* (London: Continuum, 2005), 76–77.

aspects of Jesus’ identity and function as both priest and victim, and is deployed through such items as Jesus replacing the Temple and its cult (2:13–22) and his being “the lamb of God” (1:29, 36), whose death occurs at the hour when the Passover lambs are being slaughtered (19:14, 31).³⁸

Wills maintains that the Last Supper was only “an eschatological meal like the other meals and feedings” in the Gospels; in the early church, he claims, there was “no re-enactment” of the Last Supper.³⁹ But we must take issue with this interpretation. While the evangelists understood the earlier “feedings” to prefigure the Last Supper, they never pictured Jesus as saying on those occasions “This is my body” and “This is my blood, poured out for all.” The Last Supper was “like” the other meals, but was also unlike them and went beyond them. As a sacrificial meal, the Last Supper implied priestly activity on the part of Jesus. Through the words and gestures of the “institution narrative,” Jesus offered a covenant sacrifice—a cultic, priestly act that he wanted to be continued in the community that he had begun to gather.⁴⁰ We know from Paul that this sacrificial meal was “re-enacted” in the Christian communities, when they celebrated “the covenant” sealed with the blood of Christ (1 Cor 11:23–26).⁴¹

Paul, along with the tradition he draws on, understands the death of Christ to be a sacrifice and does so with specific reference to the Day of Expiation (Rom 3:24–26). Later this same letter also anticipates Hebrews’ vision of priesthood by referring to the heavenly intercession of the crucified and risen Christ (Rom 8:34). Paul goes on to employ cultic, sacrificial language to picture the “priestly” existence that Christians are empowered to live (Rom 12:1). Wills remarks that Paul never calls himself a priest.⁴² But Paul does call himself a “liturgist/minister” in the “priestly service” of the gospel, offering his evangelization of the Gentiles as a form of worship or sacrifice (Rom 15:15–16).⁴³

The First Letter of Timothy famously states that “there is one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Hebrews also calls

³⁸ On the priesthood of Christ in John’s Gospel, see further Gerald O’Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24–26.

³⁹ Wills, *Why Priests?*, 17, 244.

⁴⁰ O’Collins and Jones, *Jesus Our Priest*, 19–24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 28–30.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴³ About the priestly ministry of Christ in which his followers share, Paul has much to say, and so too do 1 Peter and the book of Revelation; see O’Collins and Jones, *Jesus Our Priest*, 28–44. Wills simply ignores much of this testimony about Christians exercising a priestly ministry.

Christ “mediator,” and does so three times when it presents his priestly work as that of “the mediator of the new/better covenant” (Heb 8:6, 9:15, 12:24). Wills wants to undercut priestly implications by proposing to translate *mesitēs* as “guarantor,”⁴⁴ but the word is translated uniformly as “mediator” in current translations of the New Testament (e.g., the New American Bible, the New International Version, the New Jerusalem Bible, the New Revised Standard Version, and the Revised English Bible) as well as in such standard lexicons as the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG).⁴⁵

Wills rightly castigates the sins of clericalism that have seriously harmed the life of the church. But such a reformist agenda should not lead to the wholesale discrediting of the priesthood of Christ in which the baptized share. Wills has mounted his negative case at a time when many Catholics, now led by Pope Francis, have set themselves to regain and implement the full teaching of Vatican II. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the council proposed a liturgical reform that went hand in hand with a renewed sense of Christ’s priesthood: the liturgy “is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ.” Every liturgical celebration is nothing less than “an action of Christ the priest and of his body, which is the church” (SC 7). Later the same constitution vividly pictures Christ exercising his priestly ministry not only for and with members of the church who assemble for worship but also for and with the entire world. It states: “Jesus Christ, the High Priest of the New and Eternal Covenant, when he assumed a human nature, introduced into this land of exile the hymn that in heaven is sung throughout the ages. He unites the whole community of mankind with himself and associates it with him in singing the divine canticle of praise” (SC 83; my translation). When recalling the liturgical constitution and quoting several passages from it, Wills avoids such references to Christ’s role as high priest.⁴⁶ They would not suit his argument that Christ was a “non-priest.”

While Wills wants to demolish the notion of Christ’s priesthood, a Christian theologian from the Reformed tradition, Graham Redding, has been concerned to focus the eucharistic liturgy clearly on the mediatorial priesthood of Christ. He argues that unless Christ’s priesthood is properly appreciated, the liturgy remains confused and impoverished. That priesthood must be expressed liturgically if the public prayer of the church is to function as it should—through conscious participation in the eternal offering Christ

⁴⁴ Wills, *Why Priests?*, 266.

⁴⁵ *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.)

⁴⁶ Wills, *Why Priests?*, 60–65.

makes of himself (in the Spirit) to the Father. Where a proper doctrine of Christ’s priesthood is missing, worship can become more and more dependent on the talents and personality of the minister who leads the congregation in prayer.⁴⁷

Redding attends to the life of the church at prayer—and especially to a theme wonderfully developed by the late Thomas Torrance, namely, the need for conscious participation in the eternal self-offering of the risen and ascended Christ.⁴⁸ But Christ continues to exercise his priesthood not only for the baptized who assemble for worship but also for the wider world. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* reminds us, as we have seen above, that he functions as high priest for all human beings, many of whom may never even hear his name (SC 83). Through their prayers of intercession, especially at the Eucharist, the faithful join with the risen Christ in lovingly exercising their priestly ministry for those who follow “other” faiths or none at all.

VI. Conclusion

In taking up the views of Dupuis and then of D’Costa and Sullivan on the church’s intercession for “the others,” this article set out to clarify and correct the Scholastic terminology of “final” and “moral” causality introduced by Dupuis. It then moved to illustrating how 1 Timothy and Vatican II’s liturgical constitution elucidate the church’s intercession for “the others.” Here a long tradition of philosophical-theological reflection on the efficacy of prayer must also be allowed to make its contribution and no longer be ignored. Finally, when interpreting the power of intercession for “the others,” one must recognize how it is inspired by love and brings the faithful to share in Christ’s priestly ministry for the whole world. In these ways, this article has aspired to enrich the theology of religions.

Two themes expressed in the previous sentence are critical in summing up the central thrust of this article. My aim has been to move forward discussion among those who engage in the theology of religions, by introducing (1) the *priesthood* of Christ and (2) the force of intercessory prayer for “the others” as the *power of love*. I believe that here I have something new and important to say. Let me flag the two positions and challenge specialists in this area to respond critically to these questions: Do these ideas make a fresh contribution to the theology of religions, one that has not been previously developed? Do they take the discussion forward and open up new insights into the church’s

⁴⁷ Graham Redding, *Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ: In the Reformed Tradition* (London: T&T Clark, 2003).

⁴⁸ For details on Torrance, see O’Collins and Jones, *Jesus Our Priest*, 224–29.

intercessory prayer for those who follow other living faiths, as well as for those who practice no such faith at all?

As regards the first theme, a recent article of mine, "The Priesthood of Christ and Followers of Other Faiths,"⁴⁹ has so far drawn no reactions of which I am aware. It develops six systematic ways of thinking about the followers of other faiths, and indeed about all human beings, ways that draw inspiration from the *priesthood of Jesus Christ*. Like his kingship, that priesthood has no limits and will have no end. It throws much light on the situation and destiny of those who practice other faiths or practice none at all. Yet, so far as I know, in the theology of religions the universal priesthood of Christ has remained an untold story.

The theology of religions, I suggest, would be greatly enriched by incorporating a "sacerdotal principle" that would honor the priestly activity of Christ for the good of all human beings. Through his eternal self-offering on behalf of everyone (and not merely the baptized who gather for the Eucharist), he functions as high priest for all men and women of all places and times. As priest, Christ continues to express and actualize his saving love toward each and every human being.

Surely Christ's priestly intercession for all human beings has a key role to play when Christians ponder the situation of those who follow "other" paths or none at all? Unless we join Garry Wills in (mistakenly) querying the message of Hebrews about the priesthood of Christ, we should acknowledge its central place in what we might call "the Christology of religions."

Regarding the second theme, when the baptized faithful assemble to celebrate the Eucharist, whether they are fully aware of this or not, they are drawn into Christ's priestly self-offering, a self-offering on behalf of and for the benefit of all people. In particular, through the prayers of the faithful they lovingly join themselves to his intercession for the whole human race. That intercession and those prayers not only "order" (in various ways) all people toward the Body of Christ gathered in the eucharistic assembly but also make them truly, if mysteriously, present in that assembly.

This article can claim novelty by introducing the theme of *love* when reflecting on the church's intercessory prayers for "the others." Here, as elsewhere, love should be understood as a genuinely efficient cause. Even if we can only guess at their effects in the unfolding history of the human race, these prayers, inspired by love and embodying the power of love, enjoy their causal impact. The efficacy of prayer is drawn from the efficacy of love.

We can speak here of an "instrumental," efficient causality, provided we recognize how, supremely at the Eucharist, the faithful actively participate

⁴⁹ O'Collins, "The Priesthood of Christ and the Followers of Other Faiths."

in the loving activity of Christ. His priestly self-offering on behalf of all people identifies him as the principal efficient cause. By actively and lovingly drawing the baptized into his activity of universal intercession, he makes them his instruments in this “work of love,” the *opus redemptionis* understood as an efficacious *opus amoris*.

In short, this article puts two questions to those engaged in the theology of religions: Are my proposals about the priesthood of Christ and the power of love at work in the church’s intercessory prayer misguided? If that is the case, this should be demonstrated. Or are the two proposals sufficiently convincing that they should be taken up in the ongoing development of the theology of religions?