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Christian Theology of Religions

Gavin D'Costa

This entry examines the way Christian theology has responded to the challenge of non-Christian religions in the last century. Key topics central to this response have been ecclesiology, the use of scripture, Christology and trinitarian theology, revelation, mission, and dialogue. It is the application and exploration of these doctrines as they bear upon non-Christian religions that constitutes theology of religions. Theology of religions is contestably internal to the logic of Christian doctrines: it has asked questions about whether revelation is present in non-Christian religions, whether this 'revelation' is salvific or not, corrupted or not, or enough to damn or preserve the non-Christian. It has led to debates about the status of non-Christian religions and their value. It has led to discussions about the nature of the church and of mission. When non-Christians respond to these theologies, as is increasingly the case, it requires Christian theologians to refine, adapt, and develop their theories to take account of questions and difficulties; but the voice of non-Christians as such does not have dogmatic or doctrinal 'authority' within Christian discourse. All these theological claims are contested in the literature.

This entry examines inclusivism, exclusivism, pluralism, and particularism as Christian theological responses to non-Christian religions. It also introduces some later developments arising out of Christian theology of religions: comparative theology, scriptural reasoning, intercultural theology, and dual/multiple belonging. These have tended to move away from soteriocentric and truth questions, enquiring into forms of learning from engagement with non-Christians and the internal plurality that constitutes 'religious' identity. These new developments have an underlying theology (which can vary) and their focus is not always 'theological' in the way traditionally construed.

This entry is not primarily focused on the phenomenology of religions – that is, on an interest in the world religions in themselves and the scientific tools required for that task. Rather, it is centred on intra-Christian theological issues.

Keywords: Theology of religions, Interreligious dialogue, Inclusivism, Exclusivism, Pluralism, Particularism, Comparative theology, Scriptural reasoning, Intercultural theology, Dual/multiple belonging, Salvation

Table of contents

1 Christianity and religious pluralism

2 Differing theological responses

3 Pluralism

3.1 The unitary pluralism of John Hick

3.2 Criticisms of Hick's unitary pluralism

3.3 The pluriform pluralism of Raimundo Panikkar

3.4 Criticisms of Panikkar's pluriform pluralism

3.5 Ethical pluralism

4 Inclusivism

4.1 Karl Rahner's structural inclusivism

4.2 Criticisms of Rahner's structural inclusivism

4.3 Restrictivist inclusivism

5 Exclusivism

5.1 Restrictive access exclusivism

5.2 Universal access exclusivism

5.3 Particularist universal access exclusivism

5.4 Criticisms of universal access exclusivism

6 Non-soteriological responses to religion

6.1 Comparative theology

6.2 Criticisms of comparative theology

6.3 Scriptural reasoning

6.4 Intercultural theology and dual belonging

7 Christianity and Judaism – an example of the theology of religions applied to a specific engagement

7.1 Anti-Judaism within Christian culture

7.2 Removing anti-Judaism through theological and liturgical renewal in Roman Catholicism

1 Christianity and religious pluralism

Christianity was born into a religiously pluralist world. Throughout its history it developed in a religiously pluralist context. Sometimes Christians have been a persecuted minority (in Christianity's earliest days, and today especially in the Middle and Far East, in Asia and East Asia, and parts of Africa). At other times Christianity has been part of, or allied to, strong political powers: initially through Constantine (c. 274–337); in the Middle Ages through powerful princes, kings, popes, and bishops. More recently it has sometimes been associated with European expansionism and imperialism due to its missionary activities. The mandate, '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' (Matt 28:19) has always ensured an active engagement with world religions, with very different theological and socio-political attitudes to be found in Christianity's 2000-year history.

These theological and socio-political attitudes also range widely. From the mass enslavement of thousands of indigenous peoples in South America for not accepting the gospel (even though they knew no Latin, the language in which the gospel was preached to them) to the care of outcasts, the dying, and sick, and development of schools, colleges, hospitals, and infrastructures that were central in the independence movements of many colonized countries; from the partial conversion of whole continents or countries (the western Mediterranean world, southern America, and large swathes of Africa) to the attempted liquidation of the Jews in the Second World War. The relation between theology and politics is complicated and the causality sometimes obscure.

The Pew Research Center provides a helpful map of religious groups as of 2015:

Figure 1. "Christians are the largest religious group in 2015." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (4 April 2017) https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/ft_17-04-05_projectionsupdate_globalpop640px/

2 Differing theological responses

In Christian theology, there are differing responses to the existence of other religions. Eight types of response are examined in this article. The first three – exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism – are doctrinally oriented. *Exclusivism* holds that Christ (and the church) are required for salvation. *Pluralism*, its opposite, holds that all religions are equally salvific paths. *Inclusivism* holds that while Christ or Christianity is the true revelation/religion,

truth and salvation can be found outside of Christ/Christianity. Some would add a fourth category, *particularism*, which has itself led to a shift in the focus of theology of religions.

This leads to the final four responses examined in this article: comparative theology, scriptural reasoning, intercultural theology, and dual belonging. These clusters arise from less doctrinally oriented concerns, as well as critiques of the narrow focus on soteriological issues. They also arise because of a broader concern with the nature of 'religion'. They mark a move from the theology of *religions* to a theology of *religion*, recognizing that 'religion' is itself a deeply contested and complex phenomenon. This applies equally to the nature of Christianity, not just 'other religions'. This is markedly different from a more ancient tradition, 'theology of religion', which was concerned with explaining the origin of religion itself.

These new concerns engage with different questions: how to compare wisdom in the religions to attain a transformation of our own tradition; how to read scriptures together and learn together; and whether theology and cultural studies are distinguishable disciplines and thus require a particular historical location to be properly understood. Dual or multiple belonging raises the question of religious identity and whether there is any clear essentialist core to 'belonging' to one or more religions. It often questions the boundaries of the term 'religion'.

The eight types of response pose challenges to each other and are heuristic labels, each changing through their interaction with each other and the world's religions. To give a sense of granular difference when engaging with a particular religion, the article concludes with some specific issues raised when Christianity addresses Judaism.

Since the first three approaches (exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism) are basically focused on doctrinal questions, it may not be surprising to find that they share certain characteristics. *Exclusivism* – the most 'traditional' approach, given its long history – is found in more conservative Christian circles across differing denominations. *Pluralism*, the most recent and radical approach, is found amongst so-called 'progressive' or 'liberal' theologians. *Inclusivism* is found in those seeking to remain faithful to the doctrinal tradition while engaging more radically in a new appreciation of other religions. The later developments of scriptural reasoning, comparative theology, and intercultural theology have been more closely associated with pluralist and inclusivist theologies; but more recently, exclusivists have been entering into these pathways through their perceived sense that all such engagements are also opportunities for mission. This does not preclude Christians learning from non-Christian religions.

The following three sections give an account of these doctrinally-oriented responses, including some critiques of each position. This discussion begins in [section 3](#) with the minority position within Christianity (pluralism), in part because it has been so influential

within post-colonial, post-imperialist Western European culture. Pluralism is also marked as a reaction against the 'traditional' Christian view, exclusivism, which will be treated last ([section 5](#)). Between them, in [section 4](#), inclusivism marks a viewpoint emerging against exclusivism but keeping closer to orthodox Christian doctrine.

3 Pluralism

Pluralism comes in three varieties:

- (1) *Unitary pluralists* hold that all religions are, or can be, equal and valid paths to the one divine reality. 'Unitary' indicates a single unitary divine being behind the different plural religious phenomena.
- (2) *Pluriform pluralists* hold that all religions are, or can be, different paths to different plural divine realities.
- (3) *Ethical pluralists* hold that all religions are related to the divine inasmuch as they contain certain ethical codes and practices, and religions should not be judged according to the conceptual pictures of divine reality they profess.

All three varieties hold that Christ is one revelation among many different and equally important revelations; different religions can learn about the divine from each other; the days of religious imperialism and chauvinism are over, and mission should be understood in terms of dialogue; and that social and political change can arise through this new alliance. Pluralism is a very recent minority phenomenon within Christian circles.

3.1 The unitary pluralism of John Hick

John Hick (1922–2012), an English Presbyterian, initially argued that the traditional *solus Christus* teaching (salvation comes through faith in Christ alone) was incompatible with the Christian teaching of a God who desires to save all people. Here the biblical teaching of a God of love and mercy becomes central, at least in Hick's theocentric days (focusing on God, rather than Christ). Many millions had never heard of Christ through no fault of their own, both before and after the New Testament period – the 'inculpably ignorant'. In Hick's view, it is un-Christian to think that God would have 'ordained that men must be saved in such a way that only a small minority can in fact receive this salvation' (Hick 1977: 122). Hick argued that it was God, and not Christianity or Christ, toward whom all religions move and from whom they gain salvation. Hick therefore proposed a *theocentric* revolution away from the *Christocentric* and/or church-centred (*ecclesiocentric*) position that has dominated Christian history – which was an exclusivist position.

What then of Christ? Hick argued that the doctrine of the incarnation should be understood 'mythically' – as an expression of devotion and commitment by Christians, not as an ontological claim about the unique and exclusive action of God in this man, Jesus (Hick 1977: 165–177). Hick prioritized an all-loving God over the *solus Christus* principle. Hence

Hick's initial pluralism is unitary theism, not trinitarian or Christocentric. It might even be called theistic inclusivism, indicating the ragged edges of these models.

An important development in Hick's position came in response to the criticism that his theocentrism excluded non-theistic religions. Hick developed a Kantian distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal: between a divine noumenal reality 'that exists independently and outside man's perception of it', which he calls the 'Eternal One', and the phenomenal world, 'which is that world as it appears to our human consciousness', in effect the various human responses to the Eternal One (Hick 1989: 233–252). He found this distinction in Christian mystics and the apophatic tradition. The responses of the religions are viewed as including both theistic (e.g. Trinity, Yahweh, or Allah) and non-theistic (e.g. *nirvana* or Nirguna Brahman) conceptualities and images. To determine true from false images, Hick argues that by their ethical fruits we know true images: in acts of love and compassion towards all people and creation. This contrasts with, say, Nazi Christianity, which preached acts of hostility and destruction towards the Jews. By the fruits, one may identify true religions. In this way, Hick tries to overcome any underlying theistic essentialism or unitary pluralism. What unites both theistic and non-theistic representations is a deeper unitary reality, the noumenal Real, beyond theism and non-theism. It is this noumenal Real that forms the unitary pluralism of Hick.

Hick promotes this position as facilitating peaceful learning from each other and the end of a chauvinistic Christianity that came about through its association with power and its status as a majority religion.

Other unitary pluralists, who are mainly theistic, are the English Anglican Alan Race (2013); the Canadian Protestant Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962); the early work of the American Catholic Paul Knitter (1985); the American Catholic Jesuit Roger Haight (1999); and the German ex-Catholic, now Anglican, Perry Schmidt-Leukel (2017).

3.2 Criticisms of Hick's unitary pluralism

One question: does Hick's unitary pluralism privilege agnosticism? Hick cannot specify doctrinal criteria for the truthfulness of a religion, but only ethical criteria. Hick's sharp distinction between the noumenal Real and the phenomenal images, as with Kant, raises the question of whether there is any real relationship between the two. Hick is concerned to deprive any normative or ontological claim made by Christianity (or any other religion) as he insists there can be no real relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal: 'It follows from this distinction between the Real as it is in itself and as it is thought and experienced through our religious concepts that we cannot apply to the Real *an sich* [in itself] the characteristics encountered in its [various manifestations]' (Hick 1989: 246).

Ironically, in Hick's attempt to accommodate the world religions on an equal status within his pluralist outlook, critics argue he ultimately accommodates none of them as he can only accept them within his 'system' on his, rather than their own, terms (Griffiths and Lewis 1983; D'Costa 1996). This type of pluralism is in danger of failing in relation to its own goals: that is, granting truth and respect to all religions. Unitary pluralists have responses to these challenges (see Hick 2009; and Schmidt-Leukel 2017: esp. 165–169).

3.3 The pluriform pluralism of Raimundo Panikkar

The early work (1964) of the Roman Catholic theologian Raimundo Panikkar (1918–2010) represents inclusivism. However, later (Panikkar 1973) he develops what might be called *pluriform pluralism*. Panikkar (1987) argues Christianity must shift in its view of other religions and uses the motif of three rivers to symbolize this: the Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges. The Jordan represents Christianity in its earliest days, fighting for survival, with a traditional exclusivist outlook. The Tiber represents the eventual imperial expansion into an inclusivist outlook. The Ganges, today, requires a new baptism in Asian waters, a crossing over into pluralism that makes Panikkar denote himself a 'Christian-Hindu-Buddhist'.

How can he be all three and a Catholic priest? Panikkar's answer lies in the 'cosmotheandric' reality that underlies all things, in which the divine, the human, and the earthly are held together indivisibly yet distinctly. The Trinity is Christianity's way of framing this reality, but the reality of the Trinity is certainly not exclusive to Christian revelation. Panikkar draws on the Bible to ground this conception. Panikkar writes that it is 'simply an unwarranted overstatement to affirm that the trinitarian concept of the Ultimate, and with it the whole of reality, is an exclusive Christian insight of revelation' (Panikkar 1973: viii). This is an apparent inversion of Augustine's *vestigia trinitatis*, for Panikkar wants to say that Christianity itself has vestiges of this reality that is far greater and deeper than Christian revelation.

Panikkar's pluralism seems to value each of the great religious traditions as engaging with aspects of a pluriform divine reality. His own work shows his existential pilgrimage testifying to this reality. He sees the immensity of wisdom and goodness in all religions, as well as the dangers of short-sightedness in ignoring such wisdom.

Other pluriform pluralists include the American Baptist S. Mark Heim (2001) and the process theologians Methodist John B. Cobb (1982) and David Ray Griffin (2005: 3–66).

3.4 Criticisms of Panikkar's pluriform pluralism

Panikkar, it is argued, inadvertently prioritizes the transcendental Logos over the particularity of Jesus Christ, because for him the scandal of particularity belongs to the age of the river Jordan, not the Ganges (D'Costa 2009: 12–15). Of Jesus Christ, he says:

‘When I call this link between the finite and the infinite by the name of Christ, I am not presupposing its identification with Jesus of Nazareth’ (1981: 27). Panikkar disposes of the ecclesiocentric dimension of his early Christocentrism. There is no difficulty acknowledging the activity of the Logos in history, in creation for example, as found in John 1:1–3. However, it is problematic to sever the relationship between the eternal Logos and the incarnate Logos in Jesus Christ. John’s prologue arguably goes in the opposite direction to Panikkar, for the economy of revelation discloses the immanent relations within the divine reality. These relations are not known prior to revelation, such that it can be said that Jesus is one example of the link between the finite and infinite. Augustine, for example, would see vestiges that are anticipations of that reality known in the Trinity. Panikkar instead sees images of the different aspects of the divine reality of which the Christian Trinity is a vestige.

3.5 Ethical pluralism

Many Asian theologians, such as the Roman Catholics Aloysius Pieris (1988), Felix Wilfred (1991), D. S. Amalorpavadass (1978), and Samuel Rayan (1979), emphasize the imperialist and colonial patterns of exclusivism and inclusivism. They focus on the grinding poverty that besets their countries and the importance of all religions in removing and relieving this condition. This ethical base was seen above in Hick, although it does not play this political liberative role in his work. Some of these authors criticize the Western-oriented categories of the theology of religions debate as represented in this article. Others in the West have developed liberationist (Knitter 1987) and feminist forms of pluralism (Fletcher 2014; Ruether 1987), emphasizing the ethical commonality to be found in certain forms of religion, applying them to the ecological crisis as well as globalization and poverty.

The emphasis on liberation is important, but there are critical difficulties in these positions. One relates to the ontological underpinning of the ethical stance promoted – are these theologies simply underwriting ‘left’ politics (see Norman 1979)? Are these positions compatible with Chalcedonian orthodoxy regarding Christ and the Trinity? Increasingly, theologians from Africa and Asia challenge the patrimony of the Latin Western tradition and are returning to the Bible to do so.

4 Inclusivism

There are two types of inclusivism in the literature:

- (1) *Structural inclusivists* hold that Christ is the normative revelation of God, although salvation is possible outside of the explicit Christian church. In this view salvation is, or may be, available through other religions *per se*, but this salvation is always from Christ. This type of inclusivism contains the pluralist legitimization of other

religions as salvific structures while also holding to the exclusivist claims of the causal saving grace of Christ alone.

- (2) *Restrictivist inclusivists* likewise hold that Christ is the normative revelation of God, although salvation is possible outside of the explicit Christian church. This does not, however, give legitimation to other religions as possible or actual salvific structures. This is because Christ is ontologically the cause of all salvation, even though this would not necessarily require a full epistemological knowledge of Christ in this life. This draws on the biblical tradition of the holy ones of Israel being saved implicitly by Christ through their faith in the true God (1 Pet 4:6; Eph 4:9). This is *solus Christus* without the *fides ex auditu* (faith comes through hearing).

4.1 Karl Rahner's structural inclusivism

Karl Rahner (1904–1984) was a German Jesuit theologian. Rahner's theological anthropology shapes his brand of inclusivism, although he ultimately argues his case from two standpoints. Anthropologically, Rahner argues (1968) that the precondition of finite (categorical) knowledge is an unconditional openness to being (*Vorgriff*). This refers to an unthematic, pre-reflective awareness of God, who is infinite being. Throughout history humans have searched for a categorical disclosure of this hidden grace. In Jesus' total abandonment to God, his total 'yes' to God's will through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus is established as both the cause and culmination – and thus prime mediator – of grace. Christian revelation is the explicit expression of grace, which human beings experience implicitly in the depths of their being when, for example, they reach out through the power of grace in trusting love and self-sacrifice or in acts of hope and charity. Rahner balanced the *solus Christus* principle with the doctrine of the universal salvific will of God (citing 1 Tim 2:4), maintaining that Christ is the sole cause of salvation in the world, but that this salvific grace may be mediated through history without explicit knowledge of Christ.

His theological arguments (1966) for the same conclusion draw on the religion of ancient Israel, which Rahner calls a 'lawful religion' prior to the time of Christ. Rahner maintains that the religion of ancient Israel remains lawful for those who have never been confronted historically and existentially with the gospel – in effect, the inculpably ignorant. For Jews who have heard the gospel historically and existentially and rejected it, Judaism can no longer be judged 'lawful', and such people would be in a state of sin. However, by 'historically' and 'existentially', Rahner means that although a person might literally hear the gospel being preached historically, that person may not have been addressed existentially for all sorts of reasons (e.g. the preacher's life is dissolute and dishonest, so the hearer does not take the preaching seriously).

To return to the main argument: if ancient Israel had a 'lawful religion' prior to Christianity, could the same principle apply to other religions of the world prior to their adherents

being presented with the gospel? Rahner answers affirmatively. He argues that if salvific grace exists outside the visible church, as he believes it does in the history of Israel, in creation, and through conscience, then this grace is causally related to Christ (always and everywhere – as prime mediator) and to his church. Rahner argues that Christology and the doctrine of God cannot be separated from the church, as Christ is historically mediated through the church. This means that Rahner must reconcile membership of the church as a means of salvation and the possibility that salvific grace is mediated outside the historically tangible borders of the church. He does this by employing the traditional Catholic teachings regarding the *votum ecclesiae* and the related notion of implicit desire. The *votum ecclesiae* (a wish or desire to belong to the church) was understood to count as baptism when for good reason – e.g. being run over by a chariot on the way to baptism or being martyred before getting to the baptismal font – actual baptism could not be administered, but was desired (Rahner 1963).

Furthermore, given the socio-historical nature of human beings, Rahner argues that grace must be mediated historically and socially. The incarnation is paradigmatic of this necessary mediation. Hence, if and when non-Christians respond to grace, this grace must be normally mediated through the non-Christian's religion, however imperfectly. Hence, non-Christian religions may be 'lawful religions', analogously to ancient Israel. Rahner thus coins the terms 'anonymous Christian' (this refers to the source of saving grace that is responded to: Christ) and 'anonymous Christianity' (this refers to its dynamic orientation toward its definitive historical and social expression: the church).

Because God has already been active within the non-Christian religions, the Christian can be open to learning about God through their non-Christian partner. Furthermore, the Christian is free to engage in active social and political cooperation with non-Christians when appropriate. The structural inclusivist has a firm theological basis for fruitful dialogue. Given Rahner's notion that grace must seek to objectivize itself in history, mission is clearly important as in this view Christianity is the best expression of grace. Hence, Rahner is still able to affirm that Christianity is the one true religion, while at the same time holding that other religions may have a provisional salvific status.

Concerning whether non-Christian religions can provide provisional salvific structures and the possibility of salvation without explicit confession, Rahner answers that both are possible – the first to be corroborated by the history of religions, the second established through the analogy of implicit faith or *votum ecclesiae*. We see in Rahner the attempt to achieve certain goals of pluralists (social justice and cooperation, as well as learning from the phenomenological 'Other'), while maintaining a more traditional orthodoxy regarding the church, Christ, and the Trinity.

Rahner's influence in the Catholic world is far-reaching. He has also influenced evangelicals such as Clark Pinnock (1992).

4.2 Criticisms of Rahner's structural inclusivism

There are criticisms of Rahner's position. Hans Urs von Balthasar, a fellow Catholic, argues that Rahner's transcendental anthropology is in danger of conflating nature and grace, and reducing revelation to a predetermined anthropological system (Balthasar 1994). Balthasar is concerned that by viewing supernatural grace as part of the very nature of human action apart from revelation, Rahner minimizes both the transforming power of revelation and the character of sin and tragedy. To Balthasar, Rahner has an impoverished theology of the cross.

Second, with respect to his analogy of Israel as a lawful religion, Rahner fails to highlight that Israel has a unique status because it shares in the revelation given in the 'Old Testament'. No other religion has this grounding in revelation. Thus, the analogy breaks down because the main term, by definition, cannot be analogically applied. Rahner's notion of 'lawful religion' is problematic, for to allow any other religion such a status would require that it has an explicit covenantal relationship with the God revealed in Christ in the way that ancient Israel is in explicit covenanted relationship with God.

Rahner was always sure to emphasize the provisional status of other religions as salvific structures, fully recognizing that to do otherwise would posit another revelation alongside Christ's Trinity. The removal of this 'provisionality' in the work of the neo-Rahnerian, Jacques Dupuis (2001), is one reason Dupuis' book was questioned by his own church. Certainly, one might question the idea of other religions as provisional salvific structures altogether. This is not to say that other religions are in any way demonic, bad, or incapable of bringing adherents to a positive relationship with God; but within a certain doctrinal view they are not properly speaking 'revelation' and thus they cannot be a means to salvation. Peter Phan mirrors Dupuis' position, both in terms of regarding non-Christian religions as salvific and encountering friction with his church as a result of his doctrinal position (see Phan 2017).

Finally, Rahner's own work in other contexts shows that he holds that salvation *is* the explicit beatific vision, and in earlier writings he developed a complex notion of the pancosmic soul, a communal redemption process that takes place *after* death (see Rahner 1961). What is significant is Rahner's ambiguous position on this matter. In terms of the beatific vision, he seems to both require and not require explicit faith. If he allows that non-Christians might be saved in the full eschatological sense, he would have to then provide some explanation as to how someone cannot know, and yet can know at the same time, the triune God in the beatific vision.

None of these objections are definitive. None of these objections need indicate a negative attitude to other religions. The objections are based on tracing the contours of what scripture is understood to say: *as far as we know* the conditions of salvation require *solus Christus* (salvation through Christ alone), *fides ex auditu* (faith through hearing the gospel), and *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (the church as the means of salvation).

4.3 Restrictivist inclusivism

Restrictivist inclusivists hold that Christ is the normative revelation of God, the ontological and causal grounds of salvation; and that baptism is the normal means of salvation. However, they also hold that, because not all have had the opportunity to hear the gospel, a just God makes provision that all might freely accept or reject God through varying means: the natural law inscribed in the universe and in the heart through conscience, or the good, true, and beautiful elements within non-Christian religions. They do not accept that other religions *per se* can be salvific means (for reasons given above in the criticism of Rahner), but at their best are preparations for the gospel. Christ is ontologically and causally exclusive to salvation, not epistemologically.

This position is advanced by many Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, and Protestant theologians and is sometimes attributed to their respective ecclesial bodies. This position is subject to some of the criticisms advanced above against Rahner. Does final salvation require not only an ontological and causal, but also an epistemological, relationship to Christ? If the beatific vision requires explicit knowledge and enjoyment of the triune God, then it is not strictly correct to say that such non-Christians are saved *as non-Christians*. This is perfectly compatible with saying that these people are destined for salvation.

5 Exclusivism

There are two types of exclusivism:

- (1) *Restrictive access exclusivists* hold that God elected some people for salvation and others for damnation. Because God is exclusively revealed in Jesus Christ (*solus Christus*), we can at least tell that non-Christians (and varying numbers of Christians who are unfaithful – and destined to be so) are destined for damnation. This restricts the number of saved and damned based on God's election. This position draws on biblical texts that are downplayed by pluralists regarding God's judgement, the wrath of God, and the fall's erasure of human goodness.
- (2) *Universal access exclusivists* maintain that all people will have the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel. They hold that, because God is exclusively revealed in Christ, only those who profess Christ can be saved – those who hear the gospel (*fides ex auditu*) and confess it in their hearts. The major debate within this group is between those who insist that this opportunity to confess Christ must

take place for all human beings before death, and those who argue that this can take place at the time of death or after death. On this point, biblical texts are not very decisive. Augustine plays a vital role on this matter.

Some argue that exclusivist theology leads to racism, imperialism, and misogyny. Traces of this dark history cannot be denied, although the causal links are complex. However, there are persuasive arguments that much missionary work was not in fact pursued in tandem with empire-building but resisted it (see Stanley 1990). Further, many missionaries were central in developing respect and understanding for cultures, mainly because of the importance of translating the Bible into indigenous languages, thus enriching local cultures rather than denigrating them (Sanneh 2009). Lamin Sanneh (1987) criticizes the Western 'guilt complex' underlying much European theology, which fails to note this complex reciprocity. The issues here are complex and it is difficult to come to clear conclusions regarding the impact of missionary activity on different cultures. One may have to assess each Christian denomination in differing contexts to establish whether there are clear causal patterns.

The exclusivist position was mainstream Christian orthodoxy until the nineteenth century, although Origen and other universalist-inclined theologians need to be taken into account (see Ludlow 2000; and by contrast, McClymond 2018). Both forms of exclusivism are concerned with affirming two and/or three central insights. The first is that God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to bring salvation into the world and that this salvation is both judgment and mercy to all human beings who are deeply estranged from God. Salvation therefore comes from faith in Christ alone (*solus Christus*). Second, this salvation won by Christ is only available through faith in Christ, which comes from hearing the gospel preached in this life or the next (*fides ex auditu*) and requires repentance, baptism, and the embracing of a new life in Christ. This second axiom distinguishes exclusivists from inclusivists. Third, because Christ is the cause of salvation, the church must also be the means of salvation (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). This third view is more emphatically held by Catholics, although it is to be found among some Reformed theologians. There is an important difference between exclusivists that gives rise to restrictive access exclusivism and universal access exclusivism: for many restrictive access exclusivists, the doctrine of election and predestination often plays a key role. For an excellent philosophical defence of exclusivism, see Plantinga 1995.

5.1 Restrictive access exclusivism

Restrictive exclusivism is held mainly by strict Calvinists, but also by non-Calvinist evangelicals. One of the best exponents is Carl Henry (1991; see also Strange 2015). Restrictive exclusivism has the following differences from universal exclusivism. First, it holds that salvation is restricted to those who respond to the preaching of the gospel in this life, which is understood as a biblical stipulation. The concomitant is that those who

do not hear the gospel are lost. Clearly, there is a great urgency for mission, for it is the sole means to salvation. Second, Christ dies only for the elect, not for those destined for perdition. This is the distinctly Calvinist contribution. Third, neither of the above can be deemed to be incompatible with the justice and mercy of God, which is the typical objection introduced by pluralists: an all-loving God could not consign the majority of people to perdition through no fault of their own. Hick and others contend that this position contradicts God's mercy and justice.

Henry replies to this charge in three steps. First, God's justice is not compromised because justice requires that all be damned and none saved, given the fall and rebellion of humans. All are justly damned. Second, God's mercy is seen in Christ's death for the elect sinners, who deserve damnation but are saved. We should stand in awe and thanks at God's merciful, free, undeserved gift of his Son. Third, Henry says that the unevangelized are like the fallen angels, destined for damnation because of their rebellion.

There is a further defence on the matter of God's distributive justice, provided by a philosophical retrieval of the doctrine of God's 'middle knowledge' in the work of William Lane Craig (1989). Middle knowledge combines a strong view of God's omniscience and an indeterministic view of human freedom. According to this view, divine knowledge has the following characteristics. First, God knows all that *could* happen in any possible world. Second, this means that God knows what free persons will choose in any possible situation, without compromising their freedom. Third, God knows all that will happen in this world before it has happened. God simply knows all possible outcomes of every possible free choice. Middle knowledge allows God's omniscience to be 'expanded' without compromising human freedom.

Craig thus argues that God knows that some will reject the gospel, whatever their circumstances, even though they are truly free. If one claimed a good God could not damn a pre-Christian Amazonian who had never heard the gospel and sought to do the good, Craig responds that this man would never have accepted the gospel even if he had heard it, so it is just, not unjust, that he is damned: 'God in His providence has so arranged the world that anyone who would receive Christ has the opportunity to do so' (Craig 1989: 185; see Providence).

This makes for a clean type, but it should be noted that restrictive exclusivists shade into universal exclusivists at certain points because of various exceptions to the above position. Calvin, who is often seen as the quintessential restrictive exclusivist, in fact argues against the rigidity of the rules guiding this model as it would be a constraint on the freedom of God. He argues that the truly elect could be among the non-evangelized and, if this were the case, God would make sure that this person would receive the message of the gospel somehow (Sanders 1994: 57). Henry, for example, more significantly allows

that pious Jews before Christ and unbaptized children before the age of reason can also be saved: the first because they have belonged to the 'channel' of revealed religion; the second because 'they are embraced by covenant theology as members of the family of faith'. He argues that, 'Other communions hold that, just as children are counted guilty in Adam without volition of their own, so God accounts them justified in Christ without personal exercise of faith' (Henry 1991: 247; further arguments are provided by Shedd 1877: 249 and following).

It is important not to misunderstand restrictive exclusivists. None argue that God damns people against their will or that God damns people for any reason other than because God is just. Rather, what is at stake is a broad set of presuppositions involved in this basically Calvinist/Reformed starting point, established at the Synod of Dort (1618) and given the delightful mnemonic of TULIP found, for example, in James Packer (1983: 4). TULIP stands for the five fundamental points established at Dort:

- Total depravity (justly damned);
- Unconditional election (some mercifully saved);
- Limited atonement (Christ only dies for the elect);
- Irresistible grace (God's sovereignty is paramount);
- Preservation of the saints (his restricted saving will must be accomplished).

These points are challenged from within the Reformed fold. For example, Arminians emphasize human freedom and responsibility in what is called a 'libertarian' view of human freedom, which will not allow that God 'causes' human decisions. Further, the middle knowledge claims have been criticized for their curtailment of human freedom (a form of philosophical Arminianism), or because God denies himself such knowledge, or because there is nothing for God to know before a free decision is actually taken (see Hasker 1986; Adams 1977). For an assessment of these intra-Reformed/Calvinist debates, see Kärkkäinen (2003).

Roman Catholics (and others) often reject restrictive exclusivism on the basis of scripture, tradition, and the teachings of the magisterium. For example, according to 1 Tim 2:3–6: 'God our Saviour *wants everyone to be saved* and reach full knowledge of the truth. For there is only one God, and is only one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus, who sacrificed himself as a ransom for them *all*' (emphasis added). According to Luke 5:31–2, 'It is not those who are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the virtuous, but sinners to repentance'. These passages are read to imply that Christ's atonement is for all and is not limited. Reformed theologians protest that because universalism is false and God's will cannot be thwarted, these verses do not refer to 'all' meaning the damned, but 'all' meaning the elect.

Many of the early fathers, councils, and the magisterial tradition interpreted these verses otherwise. Ambrose certainly follows this line of thought. The Council of Orange in 529 excluded the possibility of God predestining anyone to evil (Denzinger 1955: 200). Pope Innocent X condemned as heresy the proposition that Christ suffered for the predestined only (Denzinger 1955: 1096), and Alexander VIII refused the assertion that Christ had sacrificed himself for the faithful alone (Denzinger 1955: 1294). The controversy against Jansenism consolidated this position. This alternative reading does not permit universalism, but it refuses to hold that God's love and mercy is restricted while allowing human freedom its tragic dimension. This does not mean that God's will to save all is thwarted, because God also wills men and women to choose him freely.

Both pluralists and some inclusivists reject this position as it refuses to take seriously the graced nature of God's creation, his implanting a search for God in every soul, and that sin does not totally disfigure this graced orientation (see Hick 1989; and Rahner 1968; 1966). They also challenge it because it refuses to engage with the importance of 'Otherness' that the world's religions represent.

5.2 Universal access exclusivism

This position is best defined through four rules – some or all of which are adopted by various universal exclusivists, and all of which can lead to optimistic or pessimistic outcomes regarding the majority of the unevangelized.

The first rule is that all people will have a chance to respond to the gospel and enter into salvation. This arises from the fact that not all have heard the gospel, but the *fides ex auditu* requires that all have this opportunity if salvation is to be available to them. This opportunity to respond may occur at the point of death (Catholic: Boros 1965), after death in a post-mortem state (Protestant: Lindbeck 1984; Davis 1990; Fackre 1995), after death through reincarnation as another person (Protestant: Jathanna 1981), or in 'purgatory' (Catholic: DiNoia 1992; D'Costa 2009).

The second rule relies on a 'middle knowledge' form of argument (Lake 1975). Because God's middle knowledge allows God to know who would and would not accept the gospel among the unevangelized, God simply 'applies that gospel even if the person never hears the gospel during his lifetime' (1975: 43). Lake's argument is analogous to Rahner's implicit faith argument, without in any way attributing positive import to any elements within other religions.

The third rule simply acknowledges that we cannot and do not know how God will reach the unevangelized who are to be saved, and we cannot exclude such a possibility. God will do so, and it is a legitimate mystery. The evangelical John Stott (Stott and Edwards

1988) occupies this position along with the Calvinist Paul Helm, who speaks of 'opaque exclusivism' (Helm 1991: 274).

The fourth rule is that explicit faith and baptism are the normal means to salvation; there can, however, be other means that act as a preparation (*praeparatio*) to salvation, which will eventuate in final salvation. How this might happen (the means) varies: through natural revelation in nature (natural law – objectively); in following the good through conscience and reason (natural law – subjectively); or through elements within a religion (culture mediating the previous two) though not through that religion *per se*. This would conform to restrictivist inclusivism were it not for the qualification of a *praeparatio* status and the further qualification that salvation entails a specific knowledge and full participation in the life of the triune God. These two qualifiers complement and develop the restrictivist inclusivist position, but make it universal exclusivist as a result. They also grant the possibility of a positive status to elements of non-Christian religions without making them salvific.

This, some argue, is the official Roman Catholic position (see D'Costa 2014) and the position of a wide number of Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, and Protestant theologians. A consideration of one Lutheran and one Catholic theologian will help to flesh out these rules.

5.3 Particularist universal access exclusivism

The American Lutheran George Lindbeck argues that becoming a Christian is a process of being included into cultural–linguistic practices, a kind of language game (Wittgenstein). Thus, it follows that there is no damnation – just as there is no salvation – outside the church. One must, in other words, learn the language of faith before one can know enough about its message to reject it knowingly, and thus be lost, or to accept it and be saved (Lindbeck 1984: 59). It should be noted that this post-liberal or particularist approach can then be used to retain a permanent soteriological agnosticism regarding the 'Other' (see Cornille 2017); or it can be harnessed to more pluralist approaches, emphasizing 'difference' so that negative condemnation is made irrelevant.

This particularist position is deeply dependent on the post-liberal emphasis on the cultural–linguistic construction of social reality, such that people are shaped by the sign-worlds within which they are raised and that they then subsequently shape. The relationship between different cultural–linguistic worlds is ambiguous. Lindbeck initially spoke about the incommensurability of different worlds, which some have taken to imply a deep relativism in his position. Some argue that Lindbeck's position implies that we cannot simply judge one world 'X' from the perspective of another world, 'Y', in terms of that judgement being meaningful to those in X. Hence, what is required is that a Y learns the language of an X, like an Englishwoman might learn German; or better, a Christian learns the language

and practices of a Hindu so that they can understand the inner logic, the practices that are entailed by various beliefs, the way in which beliefs and practices evolve within the rules of the Hindu tradition. In this way, a Christian might be able to make evaluative intra-traditional judgements about Hinduism – and vice versa.

In terms of the metaphor of learning languages, both languages potentially are being enriched through this process. Lindbeck believes that Christianity has an inner drive towards this learning of languages as a pre-condition of mission. If Lindbeck really held religions as cultural–linguistic forms that are incommensurable (as some claim), it would be impossible to understand another religion or thought world (see Davidson 1973 defending this type of position). It would make no sense for him to even suggest learning another language.

With no damnation outside the church in place, Lindbeck suggests a programme of real engagement between Christianity and other religions in the spirit of open learning and mission. John Milbank turns this process of mission into the out-narration of other religions (that is, through aesthetic and other non-rational criteria that provide a compelling story) because reason no longer has a foundational place within post-liberal particularism (see Milbank 1990). Lindbeck also holds out a hope, not a certainty, for the salvation of all and suggests a post-mortem confrontation with Christ (thereby satisfying the *fides ex auditu* principle) to allow all non-Christians who have not heard the gospel in this life to have a chance of salvation. Lindbeck claims the benefit of this position is that it does not entail a negative judgement on non-Christian religions, nor does it imply that ‘below’ or ‘above’ their own self-knowledge (which is thoroughly cultural–linguistic) something else non-cultural–linguistic is going on, such as hidden grace or ‘anonymous Christianity’ (Rahner) or the operation of ‘the Real’ (Hick).

The American Roman Catholic Joseph DiNoia develops Lindbeck’s position in two ways. First, in terms of the doctrine of purgatory (a process of purification after death and prior to the beatific vision): DiNoia holds purgatory as the means whereby the non-Christian who has already responded positively to God in this life will be purified and will hear the gospel, thus satisfying the requirement for *fides ex auditu*. Second, DiNoia leaves it open as to whether other religions play a role in God’s plan of salvation – they may and they may not, but their different aims and means must be examined for what they are. Both Lindbeck and DiNoia emphasize the importance of a proper phenomenological grasp of the ‘Other’.

DiNoia is resolute that Rahner’s way of affirming a non-Christian religion as a possible means of salvation – that is, as a possible anonymous Christianity – is problematic because it neglects the explicitly stated goals of the religion concerned. Likewise, it neglects the means for achieving these goals as taught by that religion. By calling adherents of a non-Christian religion ‘anonymous Christians’, Rahner imposes a goal

upon its adherents that is 'not the aim fostered by their distinctive patterns of life but [the aim] fostered by the Christian pattern of life' (DiNoia 1992: 77). DiNoia develops this point quite differently from Lindbeck due to his knowledge of Buddhism; and also in his careful argument that Buddhism, for example, might be understood to be providential (indirectly contributing to final salvation) though not salvific (directly contributing; DiNoia 1992: 92).

What unites Lindbeck and DiNoia is their concern to facilitate universal accessibility (not universalism) that satisfies the epistemological, ontological, and causal necessity of Christ for salvation; the necessity of baptism into the church (in differing manners); a respectful listening to other religions to see how they envisage reality and the means to attain that reality; and the possibility of affirming elements of both the means and goals of other religions, while always recognizing that this involves Christian interpretation and appropriation.

5.4 Criticisms of universal access exclusivism

Lake's middle-knowledge position can be challenged because it does not clarify itself from restrictivist inclusivism, despite a firmer distinction being possible. More importantly, Lake's view does not actually show why we cannot articulate the way this salvation might occur given a rich biblical and historical set of speculations (which it could). Some have disagreed with Stott and Heim on the same grounds. The resort to 'mystery' regarding how the non-Christian may be saved is perhaps premature. Additionally, it is unclear whether this appeal to 'mystery' has any biblical justification.

There is also an important disputed question. On the one hand, if a person's destiny is fixed at death and they can make no choice after death affecting their destiny (which is the teaching of the Catholic Church), then what of the *fides ex auditu* principle? This is a particular problem for Catholic theologians. On the other hand, if a person's destiny is not fixed at death, allowing for a post-mortem 'conversion' and thus satisfying the *fides ex auditu*, then what of the necessity of mission and the strong Augustinian tradition that a person's destiny is fixed at death? This is a particular problem for Reformed theologians.

6 Non-soteriological responses to religion

This movement began with a concern for the particular – a move away from the universal gaze that dominates doctrinal theology. The following non-soteriological responses to religion have been deeply influenced by postmodern currents such as deconstruction, feminism, postcolonial, and constructivist thinking (Cheetham 2013; Daggers 2013; Hedges 2010), but have often developed theological concerns in a different direction to the earlier paradigms discussed above.

6.1 Comparative theology

Some theologians have felt a concern that traditional theology of religions has been absorbed with a single soteriological question (is the non-Christian saved?), which has led to the neglect of the phenomenological 'Other'. Comparative theology has developed out of this concern. The scholars working in this field constitute a loose and evolving group. Some are tightly clustered around Boston, USA: Francis Clooney, Jim Fredericks – both Catholic priests – and their Protestant colleagues, John Berthrong and Robert Cummings Neville; and others elsewhere. Keith Ward, an Anglican, deserves special mention for developing several systematic comparative studies (1994; 1996; 1998). Also notable are Marianne Moyaert, David Burrell, Leo Lefubre, Pim Valkenberg, Michael Barnes, and John Keenan with Western backgrounds; and Sebastian Painadath, Joseph Pathrapankal, and Francis Veneeth from Asia. The internal diversities between these theologians are significant, but they tend to be united on several points.

First, doctrinally-oriented responses to religions are held to be insufficient. As Fredericks put it, 'all three options [pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism] inoculate Christians against the power and novelty of other religious traditions' (Fredericks 1999: 167). Fredericks argues that theologies of religion have been fixated on the question of the salvation of non-Christians and had very little interest in the religions as such. It is time for this to change. The dialogue between religions must take centre stage. This dialogue is particular and located, and generic theologies do not always give traction. For example, when theologizing with regard to Judaism, there is a gulf of difference than when theologizing about Buddhism. Additionally, the dynamic changes considerably depending on which Jewish sources/persons and Buddhist sources/persons are being discussed. The same must be said about Christian sources/persons. This reflects the real situation of religions in modern society.

Second, dialogue must precede theology of religions, for dialogue is 'a process or practice, not a theory' and thus we 'must first learn *about* non-Christians' 'from' them, before theorizing 'about' them (Fredericks 1999: 9). This point is important, for it resists theologies that seek to explain a religion despite the historical shape and self-presentation of that community as defined from within. Here we find a proper concern for the grounding of theological language in historical realities – that is, in the self-understanding and actual practices and beliefs held by the 'Other'.

Third, in this approach, the specific religion in a particular context becomes the focus, so that comparativists tend to be specialists in a religion: Clooney, Veneeth, and Painadath in Hinduism; Fredericks, Lefubre, and Keenan in Buddhism; Valkenberg and Burrell in * * Islam. Burrell triangulates with Judaism as well. One can already see the importance of Indology and skills associated with 'religious studies' becoming central for theology to operate effectively.

Fourth, and relatedly, the grand theories of theologies of religion generated by the threefold paradigm must now make way for a theology in engagement with religions – thus comparative theology, not theology of religions. Comparativist close readings of specific texts (and more recently, practices, which have injected a new stream within this tradition; see Moyaert 2019 and Kalsky 2017) are grounded on the assumption that one cannot speak in generalized ways about religions ('Hinduism is theistic', 'Buddhism excludes worship as there is no God', and so on), but that religions become known only through close engagements with their texts, practices, and sociological-historical contexts.

This movement was in part generated by a cultural–linguistic sensitivity, that meanings are understood through the practice of texts and cannot be divorced from the cultural–linguistic world within which they are given. For example, saying that Hinduism is theistic immediately assumes that 'theism' in Hinduism is cognate with 'theism' when used in Islam or Christianity. 'Theism' is shaped by texts and practices, as Clooney (1993; also 2010) shows of Hinduism and Christianity. Attention to these texts and practices might cause us to draw back from abstract comparisons and start moving back and forth between them, exploring how our Christian reading and practice of 'theism' might be transformed in the process.

Fifth, this process differs from comparative religion (which is a separate academic field) inasmuch as comparative theology is a theological engagement with the 'Other', as well as a theological self-transformation in light of this engagement. Comparative religion traditionally sought understanding of similarities and differences between religions without assuming involvement and transformation of the comparativist's own religion. In this way, a greater attention to spiritual transformation and developments within each tradition can be attended to. See, for example, the series *Christian Commentaries on Non-Christian Sacred Texts* (the founding editor of which was Catherine Cornille in 2005). Each writer, a Christian, shows how reading another's scriptures transforms both their understanding of the other and the self.

This type of transformation might well lead to 'multiple identities' or 'dual religious belonging' (though comparative theology does not have this as a goal). For example, the Spanish Indian Catholic priest Raimundo Panikkar says he left Europe as a Christian, found himself in India as a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist, while always remaining a Christian. This multiple belonging is not only the preserve of remarkable individuals like Panikkar, but is also found among certain cultures, as in Japan and parts of South East Asia (see Van Bragt 2002; and Harris 2002 respectively). Dual belonging or multiple belonging raises important theological questions for Christianity. For Christians, are there theological criteria that can discern legitimate from illegitimate dual belonging, or are all forms of dual belonging illegitimate? The question is not exclusive to Christians. Answering such questions presupposes some authority, tradition, or texts that are capable of

rendering an answer (D'Costa 2017). Some scholars claim that dual or multiple belonging is an ancient phenomenon and has always been part of the process of inculturation. Others argue it is a transformation born in the modern period (see Cornille 2002; Fridlund and Vähäkangas 2017). See further below under intercultural theology ([section 6.4](#)) for more on dual belonging.

However, dual or multiple belonging is not representative of, or the goal of, comparative theology. Comparative theology involves being transformed by the novelty and power of another tradition while being deeply faithful to one's own religion. This leads to one final point. Fredericks is very critical of pluralists who mythologize Christ as a pre-requisite to dialogue, for it is precisely such differences and loyalty to tradition that make dialogue engaging. All the comparativists want to uphold strong doctrinal claims and represent Christianity in its orthodox form. Comparative theology is a call for multiple theologies in engagement, not a singular theology of religions. See Cornille (2019) for a helpful overview and taking stock of the field.

6.2 Criticisms of comparative theology

Some have asked whether comparativists have perhaps failed to achieve their own goals (D'Costa 2009: 37–45). Have they remained faithful to their own tradition when neglecting the issue of truth and in effect focusing on inculturation (making Christianity anew in critical dialogue with culture) without reference to mission and dogmatics?

Fredericks perhaps overstates the case in arguing that dialogue must precede theology. Practice and theory cannot be rent asunder. For example, if an exclusivist held that other religions are of no interest except in terms of evangelization, one would have to challenge the theological axioms that generate this attitude – not simply rule out this starting point as invalid. On this Clooney and Fredericks differ, as Clooney thinks inclusivism is best worked out in comparative theology: 'Inclusivism's insistence that salvation is in Christ alone and yet universally available is a perplexing double claim which, if merely stated, may suggest incoherence. Yet now, in the context of [comparative theology] this complexity appears as part of its vitality' (Clooney 1990: 73).

Clooney's description of inclusivism conforms to the above descriptions of universal access exclusivism and both forms of inclusivism. This serves to indicate that Clooney's inclusivism and forms of exclusivism would be consonant with comparative theology, contrary to Fredericks' claim. (Clooney has not written enough on this to differentiate his form of inclusivism further.) There may be a conflation of categories in Fredericks' criticism of the threefold model in his argument that dialogue must precede theology, for there are particular dogmatic tasks that must be addressed, as well as further theological questions regarding mission, inculturation, and so on.

Fredericks conflates different questions that require attention independently of dialogue and also in relation to dialogue. Stephen Duffy (1999) has characterized this conflation as one between a *a priori* theologies (theology of religions) and a *a posteriori* theology (comparative theology), which takes the sting out of Fredericks' critique and also illuminates the manner in which Clooney rightly dovetails the two projects.

What of questions of truth in the engagement with another religion's text? Clooney's response is subtle. He does not want to occlude the question of truth but wishes to stress that with his respect for context and the subsequent tension between intra-textuality and intertextuality, one cannot jump out of one context (Christianity) to criticize a textured practice and belief in another context (e.g. Hinduism) by alien criteria (from Christianity). As it stands, this could be simple cultural relativism; but Clooney is not eschewing the question of truth, insisting instead that it requires a long patient engagement with the embodied, textured nature of the claims. However, none of the comparativists (as yet) seem willing to make these types of judgements concerning questions of truth. If there are no challenges and questioning of these other texts, but simply a self-transformation, can this be called 'comparative', 'dialogue', or even Christian?

Mission, intrinsic to Christian witness, seems to have no place in the comparative theological project except a deferred role. Inculturation (which is another term for the transformation that Fredericks and Clooney speak of) is divorced from mission, which may reflect that it is contextually defined by academic practice, not ecclesiological witness and community. None of these questions undermine the importance of this development in theology and religious understanding.

6.3 Scriptural reasoning

Allied to the comparative theology movement, there has been a promising Jewish–Christian–Muslim dialogue through the inspiration of the Virginia-based Peter Ochs' textual reasoning project coming out of Judaism. Ochs began working with David F. Ford and Dan Hardy, and the three developed a scriptural reasoning project (Ford 2009). Methodologically, the process invites religious adherents to read their sacred texts in the company of others, without any presuppositions of commonality. This cuts across a plethora of hermeneutical problems and simply locates people/communities in the places they find themselves drawing on their texts for inspiration to live in the present. For example, a Christian, Muslim, and Jew might meet monthly to look at what their scriptures say about 'law', 'justice', the importance of 'place' with a very specific political question in mind (see the fieldwork carried out in London by Van Esdonk and Wiegers 2019). When they do this, they learn about each other's ways of reading texts and implementing them – and can ask questions of each other's texts.

This process, while starting as academic discourse involving philosophers, theologians, and exegetes, is thus capable of moving out of the academy to be grounded in local faith communities seeking mutual understanding and social cooperation. This has occurred with some success. Scriptural reasoners emphasize the role of wisdom in this process as friendships and trust might grow. As Steven Kepnes defines it:

Participants in SR [scriptural reasoning] practice come to it as both representatives of academic institutions and particular 'houses' (churches, mosques, synagogues) of worship. SR meets, however, outside of these institutions and houses in special times and in separate spaces that are likened to Biblical 'tents of meeting'. Practitioners come together in these tents of meeting to read and reason with scriptures. They then return to their academic and religious institutions and to the world with renewed energy and wisdom for these institutions and the world. (Kepnes 2006)

This process also pays attention to the forms of reasoning generated in the reading of scripture, which develops a dialogue between the traditions that began in medieval Spain and late-medieval France and Italy. This is an open-ended process that promotes building communities of friends through close and cooperative reading together.

Its impact on the three named communities has been significant. For example, the London Central Mosque Trust and Islamic Cultural Centre published a *fatwa* (legal opinion) in 2002 requiring equal leadership and partnership in every practicable way as a condition of engagement in this movement, because of the history of improper power balances in such dialogues and because of the sacred status of the Qur'an. This concern for power within hermeneutics is the type of dynamic that scriptural reasoning welcomes as it has no fixed agenda – which makes for its attraction.

Scriptural reasoning as it exists is dependent on Ochs' indebtedness to Charles Pierce's philosophical pragmatism, which may cause concern for some religious persons because of its dependence on democracy (see Lamberth 2008). However, the way this movement grows and morphs relates to the communities who take part in the process. Interestingly, Ochs contrasts his own reading strategy against the perspectives of pluralist liberalism and Milbank's out-narration. He writes:

Liberal theologians may argue that Christians, Jews, and Muslims must reinterpret their scriptures in the interest of universal principles of human rights, justice, and peace. Radical Orthodox theologians may argue that universal peace can be guaranteed only through the truths disclosed in Christ, who *is* peace. Postliberal theologians [Ochs' own position] may argue that the inter-Abrahamic study of scripture should both strengthen each of the three Abrahamic traditions of faith and disclose scripture's rules for cooperative reasoning among the three traditions. (Ochs 2005: 659)

Others have extended the scriptural reasoning project to Eastern traditions, and evangelicals have harnessed the approach for witness and mission. It is closely related to comparative theology, outlined above (see Moyaert 2011; and Wrogemann 2016; 2018; 2019). Some Christian theologians have criticized the way scriptural reasoning avoids the christological focus of reading biblical texts (which is especially problematic for Jews and Muslims). Thus, rather than subverting modernity's models of reading texts, it allows for a flattening out of the Christian text (Thatcher 2008: 137–138).

6.4 Intercultural theology and dual belonging

This concern with non-theological aspects of interreligious dialogue has also led to the emergence of intercultural theology (see Cartledge and Cheetham 2011; and Hedges 2010). Intercultural theology is a multidisciplinary exercise that explores the many complex social, political, and identity issues arising between and within religions. The approach initially arose out of the attempt to secure a lasting place for the disciplines of missiology, comparative religion, and ecumenics in German and other European universities where these fields were in decline. (This tradition is carried out most successfully in Wrogemann 2016; 2018; 2019.) The multidisciplinary methods involved in the study of religion called into question the 'purity' of the traditional discipline of 'theology'. That is, theology has assumed a view of truth that operated 'as if' these views had universal validity and were held uniformly by a dominant religious perspective (such as Christianity). This is hardly the case within a more historicist and multidisciplinary approach. Hence, practitioners in this field have explored the way in which women's discourse and marginalized ethnic groups have been excluded from forming the field 'theology of religions' (see Daggers 2013; Hedges 2010). Others have explored the way in which cultural complexity means that the very notion of Christian identity, let alone the identity of the 'Other', is always homogeneous rather than monolithic (Cheetham 2013).

This has inevitably led to a re-examination of 'dual belonging': where porous boundaries had been assumed in the study of religion, the study of culture showed otherwise. Hence, not only do previous great figures of a tradition call into question or help elucidate modern conceptions of the self (Braak 2013; 2020), but the very idea of that tradition should also be reviewed in light of historic factors. Manuela Kalsky (2017), for instance, examines how the Netherlands has undergone a radical religious transformation through secularization, individualization, and migration. Expressions of Christian belief are no longer strictly defined by the church, and hybrid forms of religiosity incorporating other religions have emerged. Kalsky argues that hybrid forms of lived religion present a challenge to traditional concepts of religious identity and belonging. This would require a paradigm shift from an 'either/or' to a relational 'as well as' approach within a rhizomatic network of meaning.

Pioneering theologians like Henning Wrogemann (2016; 2018; 2019) have transformed the nature of the theology of mission and interreligious relations using this interdisciplinary model within theology. Wrogemann seeks to show, in three volumes, how a systematic theology of mission and ecumenism is only possible once the complexity of locatedness is addressed and the level of diverse forms of any single religion is acknowledged in an interdisciplinary manner. This approach is sure to grow considerable fruits.

Of the eight types of response employed in the Christian theology of religions, none are static. As the fields develop, the boundaries change. Those oriented by classical theology will often find the hermeneutical priority being given to non-theological disciplines (although not their use) problematic as that tends to change the method, and the primary focus is not God language. Conversely, more interdisciplinary approaches argue that theology, like every other discipline, is historically situated and thus contextual. Some scholars try to bridge both of these ‘camps’. One might say that particular types of response are better at answering particular questions: students need to know what they seek when they venture into this field, while at the same time being open to discoveries they did not anticipate and challenges that make them uncomfortable.

7 Christianity and Judaism – an example of the theology of religions applied to a specific engagement

This entry concludes with a brief examination of some select Christian theological issues in relation to Judaism. This example will illustrate two features that have not been properly addressed above. The first is that engagement with another religion can profoundly call into question many, sometimes hallowed, traditions within Christianity. It can reveal dark and problematic elements as Christians are called to account, with history showing how theology sometimes translates into socio-political action. The second is to show that, far from interreligious relations being some marginal activity of intellectuals with a specific interest, responding to other religions can generate liturgical changes at the heart of a religious community that engages the non-specialist. Obviously, each religion will generate very different internal changes within Christianity.

It is contestable whether Judaism is to be classed as ‘another’ religion or whether it is in some way intrinsic to understanding Christianity, as Christianity arose as a form of realized messianic Judaism that invited the gentiles (non-Jews) to share the covenant made by God with the Jewish people. This view is a post-Second World War view; prior to that time many Christians saw Judaism as the choice of damnation. The example in this section focuses on the changes in Roman Catholicism, as the largest Christian denomination, in its attitude to Judaism to explore the dynamics related to specific theological encounters.

7.1 Anti-Judaism within Christian culture

Historically, the anti-Judaism of Christian culture derives from a reading of scripture that was understood to establish: (a) the Jewish people were guilty of deicide – they killed Christ, the God-Man; (b) the punishment for this crime was a curse upon the Jewish people, derived from Matt 27:24–25: ‘So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”’; (c) this punishment included the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple and the creation of a wandering people, who in Augustine’s view served the purpose of witnessing to the scripture that was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. While the relation of Christianity to the Holocaust is contested and causally complex (non-Christian anti-Semitism, or Christian anti-Semitism, or modernity’s technology, or the fusion of all these), there can be no question that this theological culture fed into the systematic anti-Judaism found in Western history. One of the remarkable features of this engagement is the profound questioning of age-long Christian traditions and some of the greatest Christian theologians for whom anti-Semitism has been so influential.

7.2 Removing anti-Judaism through theological and liturgical renewal in Roman Catholicism

After the Second World War, Christian churches began to inspect their liturgies and theologies. The Catholic Church began a slow process of changing its Good Friday liturgy, showing how liturgy is the chief transmitter of theology for the masses. The consolidated shift came about at the Second Vatican Council, in two documents which drew upon Paul’s letter to the Romans to recover the teaching that the covenant made to the Jewish people cannot be revoked (see D’Costa 2014).

Returning to the liturgy, before 1959 the Good Friday prayer read: ‘Let us also pray for the perfidious Jews [Latin: *perfidis Judaeis*, better translated ‘faithless Jews’]: that our God and Lord will remove the veils from their hearts, so that they too may acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ’. In 1959, Pope John XXIII removed ‘perfidious’ because of its negative image of Jews as wicked or treacherous. In 1970, the entire Roman missal was reformed in the light of Vatican II. This prayer underwent three more changes. The reference to the veil on the hearts of the Jewish people (2 Cor 3:14) was removed. It suggested a negative image to those who were not familiar with the newer re-reading of St Paul, found at Vatican II, which drew from Romans 9–11. The two references that implied conversion were modified. The new missal rendered the prayer:

For the Jewish people: Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant. [...] Almighty and eternal God, long ago you gave your promise to Abraham and his posterity. Listen to your Church as we pray that the people you first made your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Some argued that conversion and mission had entirely disappeared from this text and claimed that, through this prayer, the Catholic Church acknowledged the intrinsic value of the Jewish covenant.

This development was seemingly reversed by Pope Benedict XVI's *Motu proprio* entitled *Summorum Pontificum* (2007; see Henrix 2008). This change caused outrage and criticism in some circles, even by Catholic Bishops Conferences. It caused a temporary breakdown of official Catholic–Jewish dialogue. It permitted the Roman Missal promulgated by St Pius V to be used as an extraordinary expression of the Latin Church's liturgy – i.e. the pre-1959 prayer. Benedict XVI amended the prayer in response to the controversy, but it reintroduced conversion and the christological fulfilment:

For the conversion of the Jewish people: (Priest): Let us pray for the Jewish people.
May the Lord Our God enlighten their hearts
so that they may acknowledge Jesus Christ,
the saviour of all men.
(Let us pray. Let us kneel. Arise.)
Almighty and everlasting God,
you who want all men to be saved
and to reach the awareness of the truth,
graciously grant that,
with the fullness of peoples
entering into your church,
all Israel may be saved.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Currently, both the revised 1970 version and Benedict's revised 2007 version of the liturgical prayers are permissible, though many argue they are incompatible.

Underlying these changes, we find a deeper contestation regarding the meaning of scripture and the retrieval of the Pauline understanding of the Jewish people in Romans 9–11. In Christian and Catholic circles there were three different theological positions on the matter. The first holds that there are dual covenants, one for the Jews and one for the gentiles, and each covenant is from the same God and operates independently from the other (see Ruether 1974). This mirrors the conclusions of the Jewish philosopher, Franz Rosenzweig, in his *The Star of Redemption* (originally published in 1921). There are two

independent ways to the same God, the Father of Jesus Christ: one for Jews, one for gentiles. This is sometimes called the 'dual covenant' view, and is a form of pluralism.

The other way of viewing the relationship is to affirm that while God is salvifically present in Judaism – as was taught by the early church and applied retrospectively to the righteous people of Israel (those Jewish holy men and woman who died before Christ came to teach) – salvation causally comes from Christ, his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Since Jews are saved within Judaism as they know the true God through Judaism, they should not be the focus of mission. Only in the end times, as a people, will they come to see the meaning of Jesus (see Rutishauser in Moyaert and Pollefeyt 2010). This is a form of structural inclusivism, applied uniquely to Judaism. Others, while recognizing the validity of the irrevocable covenant that God has made with the Jewish people, still argue for sensitive non-coercive witness (as Jesus Christ is the anticipated Jewish messiah) without arguing the obverse – that Jews are damned. This is a form of open access exclusivism (D'Costa 2019: 144–188). This view raises the question of dual belonging, touched upon earlier, in a new fashion: could there be a Hebrew Catholic Church in which Jewish rituals and prayers, appropriately modified in so much as the Jewish messiah has come in Jesus, be part of Catholic liturgical tradition (as argued by Bardan 2017)?

One issue acutely raised by Catholicism's new attitude to the Jewish people is the importance or otherwise of Rabbinical Judaism – and the need of a proper phenomenological appreciation of post-biblical Judaism. Many Jews have criticized the Catholic position for failing to recognize the post-biblical phenomenon that constitutes Jews as they understand themselves today, not as a 'museum piece' of what Christians call the 'Old Testament' (Langer 2017).

Attributions

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