

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Theological Students Fellowship (TSF) Bulletin (US)* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_tsfbulletin-us.php

TSE BULLETIN

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1986
VOL. 10, NO. 1
\$4.00

Introducing This Issue 3
Vernon Grounds

On Ecclesiastical Provincialism 4
Carlyle Marney

Karl Barth: 1886-1986 4
T. F. Torrance

How Karl Barth Changed Their Minds 5
Donald K. McKim

**Karl Barth: Socialism and Biblical
Hermeneutics** 8
Steve De Gruchy

**The Evangelical Witness To the Poor
and Oppressed** 11
Thomas Hanks

The Challenge of Religious Pluralism 20
Harold Netland

Book Reviews and Comments 25

Letters To The Editor 43

A Publication of
**THEOLOGICAL
STUDENTS
FELLOWSHIP**

- ¹⁸ None was richer than He; none became poorer than He." Philip E. Hughes, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 299. C. K. Barrett refers to "the absolute naked poverty of the crucifixion" in *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1973), p. 223.
- ¹⁹ Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977), pp. 95-98; Sider, ed., *Living More Simply* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980); *Life Style in the 80's* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982).
- ²⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978); see my critique, Tomás Hanks, *Opresión, Pobreza y Liberación* (Miami: Caribe, 1982), pp. 121-127.
- ²¹ Cited by Harvey Conn, "Sin in the City: the Privatization Myth," *Occasional Essays XII* (June 1984), p. 48.
- ²² Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979). See also the literature cited on the Christian base communities under note 56 below.
- ²³ Hanks, *God So Loved*, pp. 73-96.
- ²⁴ Ibid., also sections of my doctoral thesis on propitiation and wrath, "The Theology of Divine Anger in the Psalms of Lament," Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1972, pp. 1-24, 483-586.
- ²⁵ Hanks, *God So Loved*, p. 16.
- ²⁶ Ibid., pp. 105-108; Pons, op. cit., pp. 27-52; Kim, op. cit., pp. 22-27, 45-46, 178-184; G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament IV*, 478-487.
- ²⁷ José P. Miranda points out the failure of Marx's dialectics in having nothing to offer as counterpoint to our last enemy: "When Marx avoids the problem of death and therefore does not even glimpse the possibility of resurrection, it is not precisely his lack of faith in God but rather insufficient dialectics for which we must approach him." *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974), p. 279; cf. Sobrino, op. cit., pp. 259-272; 374-381.
- ²⁸ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978); cf. Jacques Ellul, *Changer de Revolution* (Paris: Seuil, 1982).
- ²⁹ John H. Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays in Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971); Norman K. Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), p. 593. Also, see note 40 below.
- ³⁰ Pilgrim, op. cit., pp. 129-134; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 694f. (on Zacchaeus, Lk. 19:1-10).
- ³¹ Luke 3:18 (cf. 10-17f.); Rom. 2:16 (cf. 1-15f.); Rev. 14:6 (cf. v. 7f.); First World commentators often have difficulty seeing what is so "good" about the news in such texts; thus Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 272f.; but cf. Marshall, pp. 61, 149 and Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 56-57.
- ³² As G. C. Berkouwer points out, "Calvin aptly compares faith to an empty vessel" [Institutes III:7], *Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954); See Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), I, pp. 223-253; Peter Davids, *Commentary on James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 110-112; James Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 108-110.
- ³³ F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), pp. 470f.
- ³⁴ Thomas Hanks, "The Kingdom and the Poor: Perspectives from Psalm 72," *Occasional Essays X1* (June 1983), esp. pp. 67-83.
- ³⁵ For the linguistic basis of the *relectura* of Rom. 1:18 (violence . . . oppression), which depends on the LXX translation of Hebrew terms for violence and oppression, see my review of Jacques Pons, *L'oppression dans L'Ancien Testament, Occasional Essays X1* (June 1983), esp. pp. 103-105.
- ³⁶ Martin Luther, "Treatise on the Liberty of a Christian Man," [1520] in *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1943). Regarding the structure of Romans, Anders Nygren's commentary is a helpful starting point.
- ³⁷ Käsemann, *Romans*, pp. 56-57.
- ³⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Tyndale, 1963), pp. 39-40.
- ³⁹ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from cultural anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), pp. 1-24. See also the anthropological emphasis in Peter Worsley, *The Three Worlds: Culture and World Development* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), pp. 41-44, 332-344. The significance of Worsley's work is pointed out by Christopher Hill in his review article, "Keeping One Half of the World Poor," *The [Manchester] Guardian* (overseas weekly edition), May 6, 1984, p. 23.
- ⁴⁰ Käsemann, *Romans*, pp. 56-57.
- ⁴¹ Bruce, *Romans*, pp. 58-60; *Paul*, pp. 469-474. Donald Grey Barnhouse made a similar point in his expository sermons on Romans but omitted mention of Barth. How different church history would have been had Phoebe failed to deliver Paul's letter!
- ⁴² Promising earlier developments, such as Hans Küng's work on justification in Barth's theology, Vatican II, and massive increase in Bible distribution and reading in Latin America, augmented both by the base communities and charismatic movement, have yet to bear their full fruit in the development and application of forensic justification. A growing number of Latin American theologians, both Protestant and Catholic, foresee significant theological development in this area.
- ⁴³ Walther Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), I, p. 215. Few terms in the history of philosophy and theology are as widely used in so many senses with so little attention to careful definition.
- ⁴⁴ These points occur repeatedly throughout Ellul's 40 books and more than 600 articles. See, for instance, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1964); pp. 284-291; *The Technological System* (New York: Continuum, 1980), pp. 55-57, pp. 134f.; *Propaganda* (New York: Vintage, 1965), pp. 74-75, 250-270; *The Betrayal of the West* (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. 134, 193-200; for details, Joyce Main Hanks, *Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1984), indexed references to technique (pp. 134f., 275f.), propaganda (pp. 131f., 274); state (p. 277); violence (pp. 136, 251); totalitarianism (pp. 135f., 280); U.S.A. (p. 281); U.S.S.R. (p. 277); war (pp. 136, 281f.).
- ⁴⁵ John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975), pp. 82-105. See also Robert Saucy, "Dispensationalism and the Salvation of the Kingdom," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin*, May-June, 1984, pp. 6-7.
- ⁴⁶ Hanks, *God So Loved*, p. 132, note 9.
- ⁴⁷ *Institutions of the Christian Religion*, Book III:X-XI.
- ⁴⁸ Mortimer Arias, *Salvación es Liberación* (Buenos Aires: Aurora, 1973); Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 190-194.
- ⁴⁹ Hanks, *God So Loved*, p. 73-96.
- ⁵⁰ Elsa Tamez, op. cit., pp. 75-82.
- ⁵¹ Dt. 8; 32:13-18.
- ⁵² Rom. 5:1-11; 2 Cor. 8-9; on Mk. 10:29-31 see William L. Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 370-373; Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981), pp. 173f.; "Vagabond Radicalism in Early Christianity," in Willy Schottruff and Wolfgang Stegemann, eds., *God of the Lowly* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), pp. 157-160.
- ⁵³ Ellul warns against the common notion that the poor must first have their material needs met before the gospel can be proclaimed to them; *Violence* (London: SCM, 1970), pp. 37-40.
- ⁵⁴ Bruce, *Romans*, pp. 266f. Correlation of the vocabulary for work with the women mentioned in this chapter shows that women seem to be doing the great bulk of the work in these house churches, probably because the men had to fulfill secular callings.
- ⁵⁵ *Newsweek*, Oct. 22, 1984, p. 13.
- ⁵⁶ Guillermo Cook, "The Protestant Predicament: From Base Ecclesial Community to Established Church—A Brazilian Case Study," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 8:3 (July 1984), p. 100; John Eagleson and Sergio Torres, eds., *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979); on house churches, aside from traditional Plymouth Brethren literature, see Howard A. Snyder, *The Problem of Wine Skins* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975); *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977); Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); David Prior, *The Church in the Home* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1983).
- ⁵⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, *Teología de Liberación* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1972), pp. 254-265. Gutierrez' interpretation on certain points, of course, may not be correct. If the "last word" on this intriguing but difficult text has been written, I have not seen it. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 319-331d; Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), pp. 127-141.
- ⁵⁸ See literature cited under note 52.
- ⁵⁹ John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), *passim*.
- ⁶⁰ Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), pp. 16-22.
- ⁶¹ "Ponencia de Hugo Assmann," in Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds., *Teología en las Américas* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1980), pp. 339-343, esp. p. 340.
- ⁶² Norman Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 409.
- ⁶³ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 434.
- ⁶⁴ *Propaganda, passim*: Michael R. Real, "Mass Communications and Propaganda in Technological Society" in Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981), pp. 108-127.
- ⁶⁵ See, however, the distinction made in the Westminster Confession, Chapter I, between the perspicuity for the ordinary person regarding the way of salvation, and theological controversies that must be resolved by reference to the Hebrew and Greek.
- ⁶⁶ John R. W. Stott, et al., *Christ the Liberator* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1971), pp. 208-209

The Challenge of Religious Pluralism

by Harold Netland

Even a cursory survey of the theological literature of the past three decades indicates that theologians have discovered what missionaries and nonwestern Christians have known for a long time: we live in a religiously pluralistic world in which the great majority of people hold religious convictions quite different from those of orthodox Christianity.

Today there is unprecedented interaction between various cultures, and western theologians are becoming aware as never before of the great diversity among religious traditions, and also of the implications of this for doing Christian theology. For someone who has done his or her theologizing exclusively

within the western intellectual context, it can be most unsettling to be invited, for example, to give a series of lectures in, say, Kyoto or Bangalore, and there to be exposed firsthand to sophisticated, articulate, and sincere adherents of other faiths.

With increased awareness of religious pluralism has come a host of disconcerting and perplexing questions: If Christianity is the true religion, why is it that so much of today's world rejects it in favor of diametrically opposing religious traditions? Why are there so many diverse religions? Is it theologically and morally acceptable to maintain that one religion is uniquely true, and that others are at best incomplete or even false? Is Jesus Christ really so unique after all? The challenge to Christian theology posed by pluralism should not be minimized. Canon Max Warren seems to have had prophetic insight when he observed—almost thirty years ago—that the impact of agnostic science upon theology will turn out to have been as mere child's play when compared to the challenge to Christian theology of the faith of other men.¹

Harold Netland is a missionary in Japan serving with the Evangelical Free Church of America. Portions of this essay appeared in earlier form in Dr. Netland's "Religious Pluralism and Truth," in Trinity Journal, 6, (1985) pp. 74-87, and are included here with permission of the editor.

The growing awareness of religious pluralism is forcing many theologians today to grapple in a fresh way with the issue of the relation of Christianity to other faiths. And this is as it should be, for as Wilfred Cantwell Smith notes, the fact of pluralism should affect the way in which theology is conducted in the West:

How does one account, theologically, for the fact of man's religious diversity? This is really as big an issue, almost, as the question of how one accounts theologically for evil—but Christian theologians have been much more conscious of the fact of evil than that of religious pluralism. . . . From now on any serious intellectual statement of the Christian faith must include, if it is to serve its purpose among men, some sort of doctrine of other religions. We explain the fact that the Milky Way is there by the doctrine of creation, but how do we explain the fact that the Bhagavad Gita is there?²

Consequently, over the past quarter century, questions regarding the relation of Christianity to other faiths have been addressed in the writings of P. Tillich, K. Barth, H. Kraemer, S.C. Neill, K. Rahner, H. Küng, R. Panikker, W. Pannenberg, J.A.T. Robinson, J.B. Cobb, Jr., J. Macquarrie, J. Moltmann, J. Hick, and W. Cantwell Smith, as well as a host of lesser figures.³

of the "... sheer incredibility to the modern person of an exclusivist approach . . ." to the relation among religions.⁴ The evangelical Christian, who maintains the unique truth of the claims of Scripture and rejects as false any rival claim, is very much on the defensive in contemporary discussions of pluralism.

Why has exclusivism fallen into such disrepute? Several widely accepted, yet dubious, assumptions seem to be responsible. First, much of contemporary theology is inundated with a pervasive epistemological skepticism which regards any claim to religious truth as problematic, and which views with incredulity those who hold that God has definitively revealed himself in one particular tradition. Closely related is the rejection of the universal (viz., transcultural and timeless) and exclusive (viz., a true statement necessarily excludes its contradictory as false) nature of truth as being "Greek" or "Aristotelian," and thus not necessarily valid in today's pluralistic world. Roger Trigg notes that historically, epistemological and moral relativism have always been attractive options when people who had previously led settled and complacent lives are suddenly confronted with new and different ideas and practices.⁵ It is hardly surprising, then, to see that an increasingly influential relativism has accompanied the growing awareness of cultural and religious pluralism.

Second, it is frequently assumed that there is something

We live in a religiously pluralistic world in which the great majority of people hold religious convictions quite different from those of orthodox Christianity.

Undoubtedly most persons—at least until recent times—have concluded that since some conflicting truth-claims are made by the major religions, not all the claims made by the various traditions can be true. At least some must be false. For example, it has traditionally been held that the Muslim and the orthodox Christian cannot both be correct on the question of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. We might, for convenience, refer to this as the exclusivist position. As I use the term, exclusivism maintains that if the central claims of a given religion R are true, then if the claims of another religion S contradict those of R the claims of S are to be rejected as false. We should note that as here defined exclusivism does *not* entail that if the central claims of one religion are true then *all* of the claims of the other religions must be false; nor does it entail that all of the other religions are without inherent value. It simply maintains that if two or more incompatible beliefs are advanced by various religions they cannot all be true.

On this definition, orthodox Christianity has historically been exclusivist. When claims from Buddhism or Islam contradict those of Scripture, the former have been rejected as false. What is often overlooked, however, is that most other traditions (with the possible exception of certain forms of Hinduism) are also exclusivist. For example, Theravada Buddhism rejects as false those claims made by Christians which are incompatible with its central beliefs.

Now the fact that there are a number of exclusivist traditions presents what is often regarded as the scandal of religious pluralism—the problem of conflicting truth-claims, with the apparent implication that millions of devout and sincere people are embracing false beliefs. In part as a result of great personal contact with adherents of other faiths, exclusivism is increasingly being rejected by Christian theologians and even missionaries as naive, arrogant, intolerant, and a vestige of an immoral religious imperialism. Thus, Waldron Scott, former general secretary of the World Evangelical Fellowship, speaks

arrogant and intolerant about holding that one religion is true and that those which are incompatible with it are false. Similarly, it is sometimes claimed that exclusivism must be rejected since it allegedly produces such reprehensible effects upon the interaction between adherents of different faiths. And, since today we are all members of an interdependent global community, it is claimed that we must at all costs strive for peaceful coexistence and harmony, and that accusing adherents of other religions of embracing false beliefs is somehow incompatible with this.

And third, it is increasingly accepted today that if God is indeed a God of love, he is morally obligated to provide all persons with equal opportunity for responding to him; and that maintaining that salvation is necessarily linked to personal response to the person and work of Jesus Christ is incompatible with God's love and goodness, since it allegedly cuts off from the possibility of salvation those who through no fault of their own have never heard of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, christologies which see Jesus Christ as being uniquely and exclusively divine, and thus normative for all persons, are increasingly being criticized for being out of touch with the realities of our pluralistic world. As a result of these and other related assumptions, a strong reaction against the perceived evils of exclusivism has resulted in a preoccupation with dialogue and searching out areas of agreement among religions at the expense of considerations of truth.

Consequently, a growing number of theologians and mission leaders are rejecting exclusivism in favor of a more open posture which sees God at work in all the major religions. Many—such as Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, and John B. Cobb, Jr.—are willing to admit that God has revealed Himself in other traditions besides Christianity and that other faiths offer authentic ways of salvation, while also still maintaining in some sense the superiority, uniqueness, and normativity of Jesus Christ. However, such "mediating" positions are vigorously attacked from both the theological right and the left. Con-

servatives accuse them of failing to take seriously the biblical data on the exclusivity of the person and work of Christ, while radical theologians chide them for still holding on (in some sense) to the uniqueness and normativity of Christ. Thus, the central focus of much of the debate over the proper Christian response to other religions is upon christological issues.⁶

The Theocentric Model

Of particular interest in recent years has been the emergence of a growing number of theologians who accept what Paul Knitter calls the "theocentric model" of the relation among religions.⁷ Although individual thinkers vary in details, all who put forward this model agree that any christology which allows for the absoluteness, exclusivity, or normativity of Jesus Christ must be rejected. In contrast to exclusivism, the theocentric model holds that it is the one God who is ultimately at the center of reflection and devotion in all the various religions, and thus no single religion can claim superiority or definitive truth. While recognizing significant differences among religions, it is maintained that ultimately all the major traditions are authentic historically and are culturally conditioned responses to the same divine reality. Just as there are

the Christian religion was founded by God-on-earth in person, it is then very hard to escape from the traditional view that all mankind must be converted to the Christian faith.¹³

Accordingly, he urges us to reinterpret the doctrine of the Incarnation as a "mythological idea," a "figure of speech, a piece of poetic imagery" which signifies that Jesus is "our sufficient, effective, and saving point of contact with God."¹⁴ By understanding the Incarnation in mythological categories, Hick claims that Christians can maintain God is *truly* to be encountered in Jesus but not that God is uniquely or definitively revealed in Jesus. God can and does reveal Himself in similar ways through other great religious figures.

But if the various religions all reflect the same divine reality, why the bewildering diversity in the respective conceptions of the divine? Why are there conflicting truth-claims about the nature of the divine reality? Hick has a two-fold answer which brings us to the heart of his theory.

First, the various conceptions of the divine found in the major religions represent culturally conditioned human responses to the one divine reality:

The growing awareness of religious pluralism is forcing many theologians today to grapple in a fresh way with the issue of the relation of Christianity to other faiths.

many paths leading to the summit of Mt. Fuji, so there are many authentic paths to salvation mediated through the great religions. This, of course, is a familiar theme in certain traditions in eastern thought, such as Advaita Vedanta. But it is also a view which has considerable appeal today in the west, not only on a popular level among the laity but increasingly among Christian clergy and the theological community as well. As such it demands closer scrutiny.

One of the most articulate and influential spokesmen for the theocentric position is John H. Hick, currently Danforth professor of religion and philosophy at Claremont Graduate School. Professor Hick's 1986 Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, which deal with the problem of religious pluralism, are to be published in book form under the tentative title, *An Interpretation of Religion*. Hick, who at one time accepted a Christianity "of a strongly evangelical and indeed fundamentalist kind,"⁸ began in 1973 to call for a "Copernican revolution" in our thinking about religions.⁹ The revolution he advocated would involve "a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the center to the thought that it is *God* who is at the center and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around Him."¹⁰ God—or, as Professor Hick prefers, the Eternal One—should be recognized as being the center of religious awareness, with the various conceptions of the divine expressed in the many traditions all being reflective of the one divine reality. That is, "the great religions are all, at their experiential roots, in contact with the same ultimate divine reality."¹¹

One of the implications of Hick's proposal is a kind of equality among religions such that no single religion can claim to be exclusively true or correct, or to have a definitive revelation from God.¹² It naturally follows from this that the orthodox understanding of the Incarnation must be abandoned, or at least significantly modified. For Hick correctly points out that if Jesus were literally God incarnate then it is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Christian revelation is definitive:

For if Jesus was literally God incarnate, the second Person of the holy Trinity living a human life, so that

The basic hypothesis which suggests itself is that the different streams of religious experience represent diverse awarenesses of the same transcendent reality, which is perceived in characteristically different ways, by different human mentalities, formed by and forming different cultural histories. . . . One then sees the great world religions as different human responses to the one divine Reality, embodying different perceptions which have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances.

This is partially simply an extension of Hick's religious epistemology, which is based upon what he takes to be the irreducibly interpretative nature of all experience, including religious experience.¹⁶ In the context of pluralism, then, he is building upon this interpretative element in religious experience and crediting various historical and cultural factors with influencing how followers of different traditions conceptualize the divine reality.

The second part of Hick's answer lies in his distinction between the divine reality as it is in itself and the divine reality as it is experienced by historically and culturally conditioned persons. Immanuel Kant's distinction between noumenon and phenomenon is adapted (and used in a most non-Kantian manner!) to illustrate the point:

Summarizing this hypothesis in philosophical terms made possible by the work of Immanuel Kant, we may distinguish between, on the one hand, the single divine noumenon, the Eternal One in itself, transcending the scope of human thought and language, and, on the other hand, the plurality of the divine phenomena, the divine *personae* of the theistic religions and the concretizations of the concept of the Absolute in the nontheistic religions. . . . The Eternal One is thus the divine noumenon which is experienced and thought within different religious traditions as the range of divine phenomena witnessed to by the religious history of mankind.¹⁷

By making this fundamental distinction Hick claims to be able to maintain consistently both that the conceptions of the di-

vine reality in the various religions are actually different, and even conflicting, and that these various images are human responses to and reflective of the same single divine reality. Certainly if both propositions can be maintained consistently, then it would make good sense to reject the position that one religious tradition can be true and other conflicting religions are false, for all religions would be partial reflections of the same divine reality.

But in spite of its considerable intuitive appeal, Hick's thesis is highly vulnerable on several counts.¹⁸ First, scholars have been quick to point out that Hick and his colleagues who call for a mythological reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Incarnation seriously distort the New Testament data on the person and work of Jesus Christ.¹⁹ Their suggestions that the New Testament language of incarnation was originally intended to be simply metaphorical, and not literal, and that Jesus did not conceive of Himself as in any sense uniquely divine, and that similar notions of divine incarnation can be found in other religious traditions are held on extremely tenuous grounds, and have been vigorously challenged in the academic community. Indeed, such mythological reinterpretation of the Incarnation seems to be little more than a dubious and speculative account of the person of Christ read back into the New Testament writings.

Second, it is important to recognize that Hick's thesis is a comprehensive, second-order theory about all religions and religious experiences. That is, he is not proposing an alternative religious perspective but rather a comprehensive theory

rivalled status among religious experiences. Hick recognizes the Zen claims for the exclusivity of *satori*, but he then goes on to suggest that not even *satori* can be granted such exclusivist status, since it too is the product of interpretative activity and the influence of the surrounding culture.²⁰ Now Hick may very well be correct in his analysis of *satori* (it is not at all clear to me that the notion of *satori* is even coherent) but this is beside the point. Zen Buddhists will almost certainly not accept Hick's reinterpretation of *satori* since it eliminates what is central to Zen: the claim to a direct, unmediated apprehension of ultimate reality which transcends all distinctions. Thus, Hick's theory cannot accommodate the basic notion of *satori* as it is understood within the Zen tradition.

In both cases, Hick attempts to deal with troublesome doctrines by reinterpreting them to eliminate problematic elements. But the price of doing so is that the reinterpreted doctrines bear little resemblance to the beliefs originally held in the respective traditions. And this surely counts against his theory as a general theory of the nature of religion.

Nor does Hick's theory fare much better when we inquire into its internal consistency and plausibility. The Eternal One in itself is said to be the divine *noumenon* and the various conceptions of the divine in the many religions are the divine *phenomena*, or manifestations of the Eternal One. Thus, Yahweh, Allah, Krishna, Shiva, Brahman, Amida, Sunyatta, etc., are all divine *phenomena* or *personae* through which the Eternal One is manifested. If the *personae* are indeed accurate reflections of the Eternal One, there must be significant continuity

A growing number of theologians and mission leaders are rejecting exclusivism in favor of a more open posture which sees God at work in all the major religions.

about *all* religious perspectives. As such, the adequacy of his theory will be a function of at least two factors: (a) the accuracy with which the theory reflects the ease with which it accommodates the various religious traditions, and (b) the internal consistency and plausibility of the theory itself. His proposal is problematic in both areas.

To the extent that certain major religious traditions do not find their views adequately accounted for on Hick's analysis, his theory is called into question. If significant elements of a religion clash with his proposal, this *prima facie* counts against his theory. Two examples, one from Christianity and one from Buddhism, will be given to demonstrate that significant aspects of some major religions cannot be accounted for neatly on Hick's theory.

Orthodox Christianity accepts the traditional understanding of the doctrine of the Incarnation, in which it is held that Jesus was both God and man. Hick, as noted above, rejects this view in favor of a mythological reinterpretation of the Incarnation. Now the christological issues involved in the debate need not concern us here; what is crucial to see, however, is that since Hick's theory—by his own admission—cannot accommodate the orthodox understanding of the Incarnation, it cannot be an adequate *general* theory about religious traditions. Certainly the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation is a central element of a major religious tradition, and the fact that Hick's theory cannot accommodate it counts significantly against his thesis.

Similarly, Hick's theory has difficulty accounting for the Zen notion of *satori*. *Satori* is said to be an immediate, direct, unmediated apprehension of ultimate reality which transcends all distinctions and dichotomies. Any kind of apprehension which implies dualism is rejected by Zen as being less than ultimately real. This, of course, gives *satori* an absolutely un-

between images of the divine and the divine reality they reflect. This can be expressed in another way by saying that the set of true propositions about a given image of the divine (e.g., Allah or Amida Buddha) must form a subset of the set of all true propositions about the Eternal One as it is in itself.

Hick correctly notes that images of the divine can be placed into two broad categories: those which conceive of the divine reality as personal (e.g. Yahweh, Allah) and those which conceive of it in nonpersonal categories (e.g. Nirvana, Sunyatta).²¹ It is crucial to Hick's thesis that the Eternal One can accurately be described in both personal and nonpersonal categories, as these categories are understood in the respective traditions. Thus, terms such as "Yahweh," "Allah," "Shiva," "Nirguna Brahman," and "Emptiness" should all ultimately have the same referent. But this hardly seems plausible. Careful consideration of the meanings of the personal and nonpersonal images of the divine in the respective traditions reveals that several of them seem to have clearly incompatible entailments. For example, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the ontological implications of the Judeo-Christian image of the divine as Yahweh, who is ontologically distinct from and independent of the created world, are incompatible with the ontological monism of the notion of the Nirguna Brahman from Advaita Vedanta.²³ Or again, the ontological implications of the Muslim image of the divine as Allah seem clearly incompatible with the monistic idealism of the Yogacara school of Mahayana Buddhism, to say nothing of the ontologically ultimate notion of Emptiness in Zen.

Thus, in spite of its considerable intuitive appeal, John Hick's proposal is plagued by some serious epistemological difficulties. And it would seem that similar difficulties would vitiate any formulation of the theocentric model which holds that all religious traditions are ultimately reflecting the same single

divine reality. If we are to take seriously the beliefs of the various religions and to portray them accurately, and if we are to have a view which is epistemologically sound, I do not see how we can avoid something very much like the traditional exclusivist position.

An Evangelical Response to Religious Pluralism

How should evangelicals respond to the challenges posed by religious pluralism? Simply ignoring the issues will hardly do; nor will mere mechanical repetition of traditional "pat answers" be adequate. If evangelical theology is to be credible in today's pluralistic world—particularly in Asia—what is needed is a comprehensive and sensitive response to the set of perplexing questions which are the focus of the current debate. And integral to such a response will be a carefully formulated apologetic for exclusivism.

An evangelical response must begin by refuting certain widely accepted—yet gratuitous—assumptions. For example, the epistemological skepticism and relativism which are pervasive in much contemporary theology must be shown to be unwarranted. Much of the current literature on religious pluralism is marked by sloppy and indefensible work in epistemology masquerading as profundity. Evangelical philosophers can make a vital contribution by clarifying basic issues and exposing faulty reasoning. Similarly, evangelicals must refocus attention upon the central issue of truth and the problem of conflicting truth-claims.²³ While we can readily admit that religion serves a variety of social and psychological functions, we must recognize that one of the central concerns of religion is to provide truth about God, humanity, and our universe. As such, the truth question must not be glossed over but must be vigorously pursued.

Further, it must be emphasized that the widely accepted equation of exclusivism with intolerance is misleading. To be sure, history provides ample evidence that exclusivists of all faiths have acted in intolerant and barbarous ways to adherents of other faiths. But there is no necessary connection between holding a given group's religious beliefs to be false and the radical mistreatment of members of that group.²⁴ Surely one can consider the beliefs of another to be false and yet treat that individual with dignity and respect. To deny this is to suggest that we can only respect and live harmoniously with those with whom we happen to agree. But this is nonsense. On the contrary, is it not a mark of maturity to be able to live peaceably with those with whom we may profoundly disagree?

It is crucial that an evangelical response to religious pluralism develop a genuinely biblical theology of religions which gives special attention to three areas. First, since much of the current debate is over christology, the biblical understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ must be clarified. This should be done not simply by collating the biblical data, but also by making explicit reference, through comparison and contrast, to other great religious figures.²⁵ In this manner the supremacy and normativity of Christ will be clearly evident. Second, an evangelical theology of religions must take seriously the biblical teaching on general revelation and its implications for non-Christian religions.²⁶ To what extent do religions such as Islam and Buddhism retain truths (however distorted or incomplete) about the nature of God, morality, and the human predicament? What is needed is not simply careful exegesis of all the relevant biblical texts—though that of course is essential—but also a thorough familiarity with other faiths. Third, given that universalism is practically axiomatic in much of the discussion of pluralism, the biblical teaching on the nature of and conditions for salvation must be clarified. Are those who have never heard of the gospel of

Jesus Christ necessarily lost without hope of salvation? Obviously this is a highly sensitive issue, but it must be confronted and settled solely on the basis of careful exegesis of all the relevant biblical texts.²⁷

Finally, I suggest that the following should serve as guidelines for developing an evangelical response to the cluster of issues raised by religious pluralism:

1. The Bible alone—and not religious experience in general or the sacred scriptures of other traditions—is to be the final authority for conclusions about the relation of Christianity to other faiths.

2. An evangelical response must be based upon careful and rigorous exegesis of all the relevant biblical passages. Too often contemporary discussions of pluralism are marred by what seem to be arbitrary and superficial treatment of the biblical text. Scripture must be allowed to speak for itself.

3. An adequate response must also be epistemologically sound. That is, it cannot be based upon notions of truth, faith, knowledge, or the extent of cultural influence upon beliefs, etc., which are epistemologically untenable.

4. The beliefs and practices of other religious traditions must be portrayed accurately. Too often evangelicals have been guilty of distorting other faiths through gross caricature. Every effort must be made to understand adequately other traditions. And yet in so doing, basic differences between religions must not be ignored. We do the other traditions an injustice if we distort or reinterpret beliefs and practices to minimize the differences.

5. Similarly, a genuinely biblical response will be marked by a sensitive awareness of the fact that those who follow other faiths are also created in God's image and are objects of God's limitless love. Our interaction with those of other faiths must be characterized by genuine humility and respect; there is no room here for arrogance or triumphalism.

6. While in no way compromising the claims of Scripture and the absolute uniqueness of Jesus Christ, nor minimizing the significant differences between various religions, an adequate response must actively seek to discern points of agreement between Christianity and other faiths, and to build upon these to establish bridges of communication to those of other faiths.

7. Out of a profound recognition of the love and grace of God, who earnestly desires that all people come to repentance and an experience of salvation (John 3:16, 2 Peter 3:9) to the end that all the peoples of the earth will glorify and praise Him (Psalm 67), a genuinely biblical response to religious pluralism must also include the priority of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people—including devout adherents of other faiths.

The troubling questions prompted by our increasing awareness of religious pluralism cannot be conveniently ignored; they will not quietly go away. The theological agenda for evangelicals in the coming decades must include careful and Spirit directed consideration of these issues, and the formulation of a response which is thoroughly consistent with Scripture and also sensitive to the realities of other religious traditions.

¹ As quoted in W. Cantwell Smith, "The Christian in a Religiously Plural World," in *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, ed. Willard G. Oxtoby (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) p. 7.

² W. Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) pp. 132-133.

³ See, for example, Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); Karl Barth, "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion" in *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I, part 2, section 17 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, Ltd., 1956); Hendrick Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith* (London: Lutterworth, 1956); Stephen C. Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), revised and reprinted as *Crises of Belief* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984); Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* (New York: Seabury, 1974-1978) vol. 5 pp. 115-134, vol. 12 pp. 161-178, vol. 14 pp. 280-294; Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday, 1976) pp. 89-118,

and "The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation" in *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, ed. Joseph Neuner (London: Burns and Oates, 1967) pp. 25-66; Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, rev. ed. (New York: Orbis, 1981); Wolfhart Panenberg, "Towards a Theology of the History of Religions" in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) pp. 65-118; John A.T. Robinson, *Truth is Two-Eyed* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980); John Macquarrie, "Christianity and Other Faiths" in *Union Seminary Quarterly*, 20, (1964) pp. 39-48; John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); Jürgen Moltmann, "Christianity and the World Religions" in *Christianity and Other Religions*, ed. John H. Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) pp. 191-211; John H. Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) and *Toward A World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981).

⁴ Waldron Scott, "'No Other Name'—An Evangelical Conviction" in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Orbis, 1981) p. 69.

⁵ Roger Trigg, "Religion and the Threat of Relativism" in *Religious Studies*, 19, (1983) p. 297.

⁶ For a good introduction to the current debate see the collection of essays in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*. Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (New York: Orbis, 1985) and Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (New York: Orbis, 1983), both recognize the centrality of christological issues and argue that any view which maintains the exclusivity, finality, or normativity of Jesus Christ must be rejected.

⁷ Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?*, chapter 8. Other advocates of the theocentric model include John Hick, Raimundo Panikkar, John A.T. Robinson, Stanley Samartha, Alan Race, Monika Hellwig, Don Cupitt, and Rosemary Reuther.

⁸ John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, p. 14.

⁹ Idem, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973).

¹⁰ Idem, *God Has Many Names*, p. 36.

¹¹ Idem, "The Outcome: Dialogue Into Truth" in *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth-Claims*, ed. John Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) p. 151.

¹² Idem, *God Has Many Names*, p. 48.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75. See also Hick's "Jesus and the World Religions" in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick (London: SCM Press, 1977) pp. 167-185.

¹⁵ Idem, *God Has Many Names*, pp. 83, 18-19.

¹⁶ For more on Hick's epistemology see his *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); "Religious Faith as Experiencing-As" in *Talk of God*, ed. G.N.A. Vesey (New York: Macmillan, 1969); and Michael Goulder and John Hick, *Why Believe in God?* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

¹⁷ John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, pp. 53, 83.

¹⁸ For a more comprehensive critique of Hick's proposal see Harold Netland's "Professor Hick on Religious Pluralism," forthcoming in *Religious Studies*.

¹⁹ See, for example, the collection of essays in *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued*, ed. Michael Goulder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) and *The Truth of God Incarnate*, ed. Michael Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

²⁰ John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, p. 85.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25, 52, 78.

²² For a concise and helpful introduction to the epistemological and ontological views of the major eastern religious traditions see Stuart C. Hackett, *Oriental Philosophy: A Westerner's Guide to Eastern Thought* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

²³ Donald Wiebe, in his important recent work, *Religion and Truth* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981), strongly criticizes the strictly descriptivist approach to the study of religion for evading the question of truth. Genuine understanding of religious pluralism must confront the question of truth.

²⁴ On this see Paul Griffiths and Delmas Lewis, "On Grading Religions, Seeking Truth, and Being Nice to People—A Reply to Professor Hick" in *Religious Studies*, 19, (1983) p. 77. Jay Newman's *Foundations of Religious Tolerance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) is also very helpful.

²⁵ A good first step in this direction is the late Bishop Stephen Neill's *The Supremacy of Jesus* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

²⁶ Bruce Demarest's *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) is helpful in this connection.

²⁷ Although evangelicals clearly reject universalism, not all evangelicals are agreed on how to answer this question. See Malcolm J. McVeigh, "The Fate of Those Who've Never Heard? It Depends" in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 21, (1985) pp. 370-379. A sampling of evangelical responses can be found in Harold Lindsell, "Fundamentals for a Philosophy of the Christian Mission" in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald Anderson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961); J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) p. 160f; Millard Erickson, "Hope for Those Who Haven't Heard? Yes, but . . ." in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 2, (1975) pp. 122-126; Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions* (Downer's Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pp. 145-161.

BOOK REVIEWS

Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament
by Walter Wink (Fortress, 1984, 181 pp., \$14.95). Reviewed by John H. Yoder, Department of Theology, University of Notre Dame.

Since the initial popular synthesis *Christ and the Powers* by Hendrik Berkhof (E.T. 1962) and more occasional uses by Jacques Ellul and Albert van den Heuvel, the Pauline "principalities and power" language has been used increasingly to express the ambivalence of value structures in human experience: structures which both make life possible and make it difficult. Those who do use this language seldom check out whether it has been demonstrated to be an adequate frame for theologically informed social analysis. The critics of this usage do not take the trouble—with the exception of one passage by John Stott—to make their case.

The "principalities, powers, thrones, etc. . . ." are, in the minds of the apostolic writers, either real spiritual beings (in which case we cannot and need not deal with them, since we moderns know there can be no such things), or they are mythical images for real historical entities, and then we can with profit demythologize them and spare ourselves the spooky projections. This either/or is taken for granted as the name of the problem; no one doubts that that is the problem. Even the conservatives who want to affirm that such spiritual entities do exist do not do much theologically or practically about their meaningfulness for faith and life.

The achievement of the Wink survey is to destroy completely the either/or, on the basis of a meticulous reading of all the texts, not only in the New Testament but in the surrounding literatures.

The powers are both human and super-human, both personifiable and structural, both visible and invisible, both in institutions

and in the heart, both good and evil. Sometimes shades of difference of meaning can be discerned, as with *stoicheia* or *exousia* in the singular. More often their meanings overlap or they occur in near-synonymous strings. Sometimes the change is that they be sacralized, sometimes that they be secularized.

The demonstration is abundantly clear that there is in the New Testament—not only in the Pauline texts where Berkhof had found it emerging most clearly—a coherent and usable cosmology to describe the mysteries of creaturely fallenness and the Cross's Victory. The transition from the New Testament data to contemporary relevance is reserved for the other two volumes of Wink's promised trilogy. The hints already generously offered in this volume need therefore not be reviewed here. The value for guiding discernment in social analysis and ethics should be substantial.

The demonstration is least convincing at the point of the assumptions adopted uncritically from realms not under study. One notable weakness is the variety of meanings with which the word *demonic* is used. The other is the discussion of the sense in which the Powers' reality is "inward and outward" and how the "inward" component has no existence of its own. At both of these points Wink seems to slide back from the semantic and philosophical care that had been so productive in reading first century texts, to make a twentieth century "reality statement" which after all boils off some of the dimensions of the material due to the inadequacy of the "inner aspect" notion. The later volumes will have to fill this gap.

For now, the demonstration is convincing on purely scholarly grounds. The New Testament writers did think this way about the cultural/institutional dimension of creation, fall, and redemption. They took for granted (more than they taught it or declared it) that this cosmology, fluid yet clearly patterned, could describe the facts of both history and salvation. They did so with greater refine-

ment (here the reviewer speaks) than the later theologians' systems of nature and grace, law and gospel, or the "orders of creation," to say nothing of post-enlightenment reductions. Whether we have to think that way because the apostles did is a question "evangelicals" will go on debating. Whether post-enlightenment minds *can* think that way, our apologues and culture critics will still debate. Wink has provided them all the material they cannot avoid facing.

The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America, 1870-1915

by Gary Scott Smith (Christian University Press, 1985, 239 pp., \$14.95). Reviewed by David Kling, Assistant Professor of History, Palm Beach Atlantic College.

Ever since Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr.'s groundbreaking article on "The Critical Period in American Religion" (1932-33), historians have recognized that between the Civil War and World War I Americans succumbed to and eventually embraced secularization—the loss of religion as a molding force in society. In this revised dissertation, Gary Scott Smith focuses on the origins and evolution of secular thought in America during this critical period and traces the response of Calvinistic thinkers to this profound change. After mapping out a useful typology of Calvinists ("consistently," "considerably," and "somewhat"), Smith elucidates Reformed answers to such secular "isms" as scientific and social Darwinism, ethical subjectivism, socialism, and a generic secular humanism. Calvinists not only defended their worldview against these competing ideologies, but also developed institutional responses to such threats. For example, they crusaded for Christian government by supporting the National Reform Association; they strongly advocated biblically centered public education; and they established social agencies for dealing with urban poverty and the