

Contemporary Debates in the Theology of Religions



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**SYMPOSIUM ON EVANGELICALS AND
INTERFAITH DIALOGUE**

Overview



- **Typologies in the Theology of Religions**
 - The 3/4fold typology
 - ✦ Its application and possibilities
 - ✦ Exclusivisms
 - ✦ Inclusivisms
 - ✦ Pluralisms
 - ✦ Particularities
- **An Assessment**
 - The contemporary debates
- **Biblical Hospitality and Interfaith Dialogue**
 - Reassessing the Religious Other?

Christian Approaches to Other Religions



- 3-fold typology:
 - ✦ Race, 1983:
 - Reaffirmed: most widely employed
 - 3 Paradigms:
 - ✦ Exclusivisms
 - ✦ Inclusivisms
 - ✦ Pluralisms

Expanding the Typology



- Since Race's typology (1980s) developments:
 - 4-fold typology:
 - ✦ Found in:
 - Hedges, 2002, 2008a, 2010
 - Paul Knitter, 2002
 - Also in Markham, McGrath, introductions to theology
 - ✦ Paradigms:
 - Exclusivisms (Knitter: replacement model)
 - Inclusivisms (Knitter: fulfilment model)
 - Pluralisms (Knitter: mutuality model)
 - Particularities (Knitter: acceptance model)

Justifying the Typology



Can it be used?

- Recent strong defences:
 - Reply to criticisms
 - ✦ Schmidt-Leukel, 2005 & Hedges, 2008a
- Widely deployed:
 - Even by critics (e.g. D'Costa, 2009)
 - Sometimes under different terms
 - ✦ See Hedges, 2008a

What does it do?

- Shapes a debate
 - Provide a logical delimitation of positions:
 - ✦ Schmidt-Leukel, 2005
 - Provide a rough heuristic framework:
 - ✦ Hedges, 2008a
- Outlines positions in ToR and IFD
 - Cannot engage others without theological presuppositions
 - ✦ (Schmidt-Leukel, 2009 vs. Clooney, 2010; see Hedges, 2010)

The 4 Paradigms



EXCLUSIVISMS
INCLUSIVISMS
PLURALISMS
PARTICULARITIES

Exclusivisms 1: Basis



- “The Gospel of Jesus Christ comes to us with a **built-in prejudgement** of all other faiths so that we **know in advance of our study** what we must ultimately conclude about them. They give **meanings** to life **apart from** that which God has given in the biblical story culminating with Jesus **Christ**, and they organize life outside the covenant community of Jesus Christ. Therefore, **devoid of this saving knowledge and power** of God, they actually **lead men away from God** and hold them captive before God. This definitive and blanket judgement... is **not derived from our investigation of the religions but is given in the structure and content of Gospel faith itself.**”

○ Perry, 1956, pp. 18 f.

Exclusivisms 2: Varieties



- Exclusion by belief or belonging:
 - ‘I am the way’
 - ✦ Acts 4.12: “And there is no salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”
 - ✦ John 14:6: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me”
 - 2 claims: Jesus = way; explicit faith needed
 - Strange, 2008, p. 37.
 - Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus
 - ✦ “We are required by faith to believe and hold that there is one holy, catholic and apostolic Church; we firmly believe in it; outside it there is neither salvation nor remission of sins...” (Pope Boniface VIII)
- Universalism
 - Some suggest God may save all through Grace
 - ✦ Questions: boundaries and definitions of exclusivisms

Exclusivisms 3: Problems



- **Saints**
 - How to explain obviously holy people in other religions?
- **Not universally held**
 - It is not the only early Christian/ Biblical paradigm
- **How do you know?**
 - Why say this one rather than that one?
- **Against God's love**
 - Denies the Christian loving God – can S/He want most people to burn in hell?
 - Stanley Samartha: “Can it be that it is the will of God that many religions should continue in the world?” (One Christ – Many Religions, p. 49)

Inclusivisms 1: Basis



- “Inclusivism in the Christian theology of religion is both an acceptance and a rejection of the other faiths, a **dialectical ‘yes’ and ‘no’**. On the one hand it **accepts** the **spiritual power and depth** manifest in them, so that they can properly be called a **locus of divine presence**. On the other hand, it rejects them as **not** being **sufficient for salvation** apart from Christ, for **Christ alone is saviour**.”
 - (Race, 1983, p. 38)

Inclusivisms 2: Biblical and Historical Support



- **Biblical Support**

- “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him” (Peter in Acts 10:35)
- “In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness...” (Paul in Acts 14.16f)
- “... to an unknown God...” (Paul in Acts 17:22-31)
- “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” (John 1:9)

- **Inclusivists:**

- Justin Martyr, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Wesley.
John Stott

Inclusivisms 3: Varieties



- **Fulfilment Theology**

- “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. 3:24)
- “Think not that I have come to destroy the law and the prophets, rather I have come to fulfil them” (Matt.)
 - ✦ Likewise: other faiths lead people/ are preparations for Christianity
- Edinburgh, 1910; JN Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (1913); Monier Monier-Williams
 - ✦ Developed as a missionary theology

- **Anonymous Christians**

- Karl Rahner – Vatican II
 - ✦ Christianity is true, but grace elsewhere
- The Unknown Christ of Hinduism – Pannikar

Inclusivisms 4: Fulfilment Theology



- “When I began the study of Hinduism, I imagined that certain elementary Christian conceptions – such as the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of God, and the Indwelling of God in the human heart – were not to be found there, but a closer examination has enabled me to detect not only these, but almost every other rudimentary idea of our holy religion.”
 - Monier-Williams, 1887, p. 234.

Inclusivisms 4: Problems



- **Again, exclusive:**
 - how do you know one is right?
- **Patronizing:**
 - Your religion is good, as far as it goes...
- **Theological issues:**
 - Logos, Spirit, exclusive tendencies
- **Raises question:**
 - why convert?

Exclusivisms and Inclusivisms



- 1. Does Christianity (the Bible) explicitly, and consistently, say all other religions are false?
 - If so, are exclusivisms the viewpoint which should be stuck to (despite their problems)?
 - If not, do not inclusivisms make the most sense of it (despite their problems)?
- 2. Should a theology of religions derive a priori from the faith tradition, or a postiori from studying other religions?
- 3. Has the debate moved on?
 - Hedges, 2010

Pluralisms 1: Basis



- “Pluralism entails that **at least some religions**, not necessarily all of them, are **equally right or equally valid** as paths of salvation. “
- “In one way or another, each of the **major religious traditions claims to teach a path of ‘salvation’**, that is, beliefs, attitudes and practices which are considered essential in order to reach the highest goal of human existence in relation to an ultimate reality.”
- “A **Christian pluralist** will therefore agree that **Jesus** is a **unique representation**, in his concrete individuality, and a special **mediator of a saving relationship with God**, but also propose that he is **not the only one...**”

○ Schmidt-Leukel, 2008, pp. 86, 85, 95.

Pluralisms 2: Paths to Pluralisms



- Interfaith dialogue
 - Comparative religion
 - Systematic theology/ philosophy of religion
 - Perennial philosophy
 - Ecumenical/ mission studies
 - Interreligious liberation
 - Interreligious feminism
- Schmidt-Leukel, 'Pluralisms', pp. 89-92

Pluralisms 3a: John Hick



- ▣ John Hick (1922-)
 - Evangelical Presbyterian – exclusivist
 - Meets people of other faiths (Birmingham)
 - Similar for some other major pluralists, e.g. Paul Knitter
- ▣ Growing understanding of other faiths:
 - Christian God > God > The Real
- ▣ Main works:
 - *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*
 - suggests incarnation not essential
 - *An Interpretation of Religion*
 - fullest expression of his pluralism
 - *The Rainbow of Faiths*
 - answers his critics

Pluralisms 3b: Hick's Pluralism



- Main streams of thought:
 - Copernican Shift
 - ✦ From mono – multi tradition/cultural perspective
 - Christology
 - ✦ Reject Chalcedon formula, for NT vision
 - Disputed by Schmidt-Leukel and Roger Haight
 - Noumenal & Phenomenal
 - ✦ God/ The Real ein sich
 - ✦ God/ The Real as mediated/ experienced
 - Schmidt-Leukel: via negativa across all traditions
 - Truth claims and doctrine
 - ✦ Some claims: non-essential: cosmogenic myths
 - ✦ Some claims: traditionally essential, only eschatologically verifiable
 - Non-salvifically essential
 - Salvation
 - ✦ All religions from 'self-centredness' to 'reality-centredness'
 - Evidence
 - ✦ All religions produce 'saints', no access to 'reality', so must make sense

Pluralisms 4: Problems



- Not true to the Christian tradition/ scriptural norms
 - Clear indications of ‘sole’ truth
- Presupposes that all religions are wrong – inserts a new religion in their place
 - Actually exclusivist/ inclusivist
- Based in a colonialist, Western, Enlightenment paradigm
 - Reduces religion to ethics, and oppresses/ denies the ‘Other’
- A viewpoint of those who are not ‘religious’
- Ignores the very real differences between faiths – they are not aimed at similar ends, actually incompatible ends
 - Different ‘salvations’
- How do you know all are true?

Particularities 1: Basis

- “...1) each faith is unique; **alterity** is stressed over similarity, therefore **seeming common elements** in religious experience or doctrine are regarded as **superficial**;
- 2) it is only possible to speak from a **specific tradition**; there can be no pluralistic interpretation;
- 3) the **Holy Spirit may be at work** in other faiths, requiring them to be regarded with respect and dignity;
- 4) **no salvific potency** resides in other faiths; they are somehow involved in God’s plans for humanity, but in ways we cannot know;
- 5) particularity is based in a **post-modern and post-liberal** worldview;
- 6) the **Trinity and Christ** are **grounding points** from which to do theology and approach other faiths.”

○ Hedges, 2008b, pp. 112-3 (bullet pointed here)

Particularities 2: who?



- **Who?**
 - Gavin D'Costa
 - Alistair McGrath
 - John Milbank
 - George Lindbeck
 - J. A. DiNoia
 - Kevin Vanhoozer
 - Paul J. Griffiths
 - <Links with>
 - ✦ Rowan Williams
 - ✦ And others

Particularities 3: Different Languages



- ‘It seems reasonable to say that Greek Orthodoxy and Gelug Tibetan Buddhism are different religions just because it is **performatively impossible to belong to both at once** – in much the same way that it is performatively impossible simultaneously to be a sumo wrestler and a balance-beam gymnast, or natively to live in the house of English and the house of Japanese.’
 - Griffiths, 2001, p. 13.

Particularities 4: Vs. Pluralisms



- 1) Religion
- 2) Religious/mystical experiences
- 3) Religious teachings/doctrines
 - ✦ Hedges, 'Particularities', p. 115
 - Also vs. Inclusivisms, exclusivisms

Particularities 5: Problems



- Claim that every cultural system/ religion is a ‘closed book’ = wrong
- Absolute difference just as totalizing as similarity
- Based in a secular agenda
- It violates religious truth claims of similarity
- Language of ‘respect’ hides an agenda of arrogant supremacy
- Postcolonial response to retain supremacy against the ‘other’

Assessing and Extending the Debates



The Paradigms Today: my assessment



- **Exclusivisms (Radical Discontinuity)**
 - Rejected by all mainstream churches (still credible for some)
 - Unbiblical and theologically untenable
 - Untenable in relation to knowing the Religious Other
- **Inclusivisms (Radical Fulfilment)**
 - Recognized as patronizing, therefore unusable by dialogue minded churches/ in multicultural situations
 - Subsumes the other into my system
 - ✦ No authentic dialogue: always impose self on other
- **Pluralisms (Radical Openness):**
 - Many theologians led this way, however, seen to be at odds with church
 - Traditional expositions have problems
 - Capable of being reformed as a truly Christian option
- **Particularities (Radical Difference):**
 - Seen by some as an acceptable alternative to pluralisms/ inclusivisms
 - However: Untenable philosophically/ historically
 - Sees dialogue as impossible – no shared language

Biblical Hospitality and Interfaith Dialogue



- **Bible: hospitality = key virtue**
 - not a cozy concept (entertainment or making contacts)
 - Rather: transformation of the alien, or stranger, into a guest – part of one's own world
 - ✦ Malina, 1996
 - 'The stranger comes from another world and has a message from it'
 - ✦ Westermann, 1986: 277
- **Found radically in Jesus' own teachings**
 - outsiders welcomed and embraced
 - ✦ social outcasts
 - ✦ religious Others

Jesus and Religious Others



- Jesus' encounter with a Gentile woman:
 - ✦ Matt. 15.22-28, Mark 7.24-30
 - Matt. 15.22-28 = 'actual interreligious dialogue' (Foster, 1990: 26)
 - ✦ Canaanite woman
 - 'In Mark's narrative the abolition of the purity laws [Mark 7.1-23] is followed by the story of the Syrophenician woman (7.24-30). The structuring of the narrative is significant: after making a full-scale attack on the purity system Jesus has his theory tested by a Gentile woman. His reaction is shameful. But this woman, the fiercely protective mother, demands the hospitality that he has declared to be possible (albeit implicitly)' (Stuart, 1998).
 - ✦ Jesus engages the religious Other
 - ✦ Allows his own ideas to be challenged
 - True hospitality
 - Standard Christian exegesis erases radical hospitality – foreshadows Gentile mission

Radical Hospitality



- ‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares’ (Hebrews 13.2)
 - Are we called to a radical hospitality to the religious Other?

Conclusions: Further Questions



- What constitutes a Christian/ biblical basis for interreligious engagement?
- What might the radical hospitality of the Bible and Jesus' example suggest?
- What is acceptable within particular religious constituencies?
- What might IFD mean for Christian identity/ belonging/ understanding?

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