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PROLEGOMENA TO A CHRISTIAN

THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of

Dedman College

Southern Methodist University

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

with a

Major in Religious Studies

by

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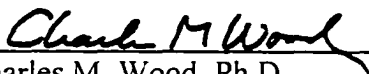
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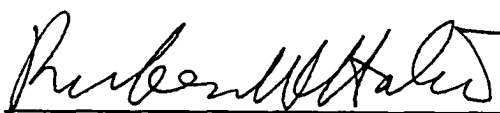
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PROLEGOMENA TO A CHRISTIAN

THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

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Prolegomena to a Christian
Theology of Religions

Advisor: Professor Charles Monroe Wood

Doctor of Philosophy Degree conferred May 16, 1998

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The main aim of this study is to propose prolegomena to a Christian theology of religions. The motivating need for this study is that today's employment of the term "theology of religions" involves systematic ambiguities within itself. Most contemporary theologians of religions are preoccupied with assessing critically one or more of the currently influential models of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, without making any substantial clarification of prolegomena issues to a theology of religions.

This essay has five chapters. Chapter I is devoted to clarifying the nature and task of this essay by setting the scope of prolegomena to a theology of religions. Chapter II critically discusses the three basic issues underlying the formation of a theology of religions: (1) the problem of defining "religion" and "religions" in terms of the common essence and manifestation model, (2) the challenges of religious plurality to Christian faith in general and systematic theology in particular, and (3) the relationship of a theology of religions to systematic theology. Chapter III first identifies the distinctive features of a theology of religions by comparing it to a "theology of the history of

religions" (*eine Theologie der Religionsgeschichte*) and a "world theology." Second, it

argues for envisioning the broadest scope of a theology of religions, criticizing the

inadequacy of the so-far-dominant concern with the christological/soteriological

examination of the salvific value of non-Christian religions and the possibility of

salvation for their adherents. Third, it holds that any adequate theology of religions must

be authentically Christian, meaningful and true, and fitting to a specific context, and that

in correlation with each of these three criteria a theology of religions, as a single

integrative process of critical reflection, must be distinguished, without separating, into

the three phases of historical, philosophical, and practical inquiries. Chapter IV applies

the prolegomena points, as elucidated in the preceding chapters, to a critical assessment

of the contemporary theology of religions which is represented by four theological

positions--Karl Barth's moderate exclusivism, Karl Rahner's inclusivism, John Hick's

pluralism, and Schubert Ogden's pluralistic inclusivism as an alternative proposal to the

existing three paradigms. On the basis of this critical evaluation, Chapter V as a

conclusion of this dissertation offers three theses towards an adequate theology of

religions for today. Such a theology must (1) combine the particularity of Jesus Christ

with the universal validity of God's salvific will, (2) be an integrative project of

systematic theology in collaboration with non-theological disciplines of religious studies

as well as with all the intra-Christian theological disciplines, and (3) be based on a living

and lived dialogue with other concrete religions and socio-political cooperation with their

adherents for increasing human well-being.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, the late Yim Chool Chung (1922-1990),

who sacrificed herself for her six children.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: FORMULATING THE ISSUES

A Christian might ask a number of interrelated questions concerning the plurality of non-Christian religions and their adherents. Can a non-Christian religion be an authentic means of salvation for its adherents? If it can, can Christians still maintain the finality or absoluteness of Christianity in face of such other religions? How should Christians conduct dialogue and practical cooperation with other religious people? The term "theology of religions"[1] has come to be applied to the attempt to answer questions such as these. In other words, the phrase "Christian theology of religions" is often used to designate all sorts of theological enterprises that are concerned with the intellectual and practical problems of the relationship between Christianity (Christians) and other religions (their adherents).

We can identify two central features which the term "theology of religions" conveys in a contemporary setting. First, with the appellation "theology of religions"

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[1] We are using the term "theology of religions" in the specific sense of a "Christian theology of religions." If the term "theology" etymologically conveys the meaning of "thought or speech about God," Christian theology cannot monopolize its title. Thus, we should not preclude the possibility of a Jewish theology of religions or a Muslim theology of religions in an analogous sense to a Christian theology of religions. We will further elaborate this point when we try to clarify the relationship of a theology of religions to systematic theology in Chapter II. Unless otherwise indicated, our use of "theology of religions" will be identical with the specific sense of a "Christian theology of religions."

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most contemporary theologians are concerned with examining the salvific value of non-Christian religions and the possibility of salvation for their adherents. Today, the problem posed for Christian theology by the challenges of religious plurality has been mainly discussed in terms of the three models of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Roughly speaking, the advocates of these options may be identified as follows. An exclusivist argues that full salvation normally requires explicit faith in Jesus Christ and baptism, and that Christianity is the only valid religion established by God. An inclusivist affirms the salvific presence of God in other religions, while still maintaining Jesus Christ as the sole provision for the salvation of their adherents. A pluralist rejects any claim to the uniqueness or finality of Jesus Christ and argues that not only Christianity but also other religions actually offer the same truth and salvation, and the appropriate means of achieving them. Given these basic tenets of the three popular models, for the most part, contemporary Christian theologians are absorbed with defending or challenging one or more of these. They even tend to reduce completely the task of a theology of religions to that of appraising critically one or more of these options.[2]

Second, some liberation theologians of religions are concerned with finding a common ground for interreligious dialogue in the global task of promoting eco-human

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[2]For typical examples, see Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (Oxford: Blackwell Ltd., 1986), and Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 2d ed. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1993). They devote many chapters to evaluating critically the three paradigms of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, and to identifying the most adequate option.

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well-being in today's situation of ecologico-nuclear disasters and socio-political

oppressions.[3] They seek to shift attention from the doctrinal examination of traditional

Christian belief and truth concerning other religions to the practical task of socio-political

cooperation with all other religious people in liberating both suffering humanity and

Earth itself from various disasters and oppressions. In brief, under the rubric "theology of

religions" contemporary scholars are mainly engaged in exploring either the soteriological

efficacy of non-Christian religions as well as the possibility of salvation for their

adherents or the ethico-pragmatic task of cooperation as well as dialogue with other

religious people. In the latter part of this study, we will have a more appropriate occasion

to discuss these central features in greater detail.

The motivating need for this essay is that today's employment of the label

"theology of religions" involves systematic ambiguities within itself. In being

preoccupied with the dominant features we have roughly described above, many

contemporary theologians are employing the nomenclature "theology of religions" loosely

without making any substantial definition or clarification of its prolegomena issues. Alan

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[3]Paul F. Knitter may be one of the most prominent scholars concerned with formulating a liberation theology of religions which seeks to merge religious pluralism with the methods and insights of various sorts of liberation theologies. See Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth and Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1995); *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1996). For other theologians showing a similar concern, see Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1988). Gordon D. Kaufman also emphasizes the necessity to construct or reconstruct various sorts of ethico-pragmatic concepts and symbols (with particular regard to "God") which can promote human fulfillment or liberation on an interreligious level. See Gordon D. Kaufman, *God-Mystery-Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 17-67.

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Race, for example, simply defines it as the "attempt, on the part of Christian theologians, to account theologically for the diversity of the world's religious quest and commitment, a diversity which shows all the signs of continuing to exist, in spite of the Christian mission" or the "endeavor to adumbrate 'some doctrine of other religions', to evaluate the relationship between the Christian faith and the faith of the other religions."[4] John Hick implicitly presumes a theology of religions to be any kind of intellectual attempt to explore the relationship of Christianity to other faiths, without making its definition precise.[5] Joseph A. DiNoia also seems to equate it with any attempt to formulate or reformulate Christian doctrines about other religions, without making any working definition of it.[6] To examine some further problems (especially, regarding its *disciplinary* status) in the use of a theology of religions, at this point, let us elucidate some preliminary issues concerning its nature.

For this task, we first need to clarify the blurred distinction between "religious plurality" and "religious pluralism" because many contemporary scholars tend to be insensitive to this. While "religious plurality" refers to the factual reality that there are many and diverse religions besides Christianity in the world, "religious pluralism" signifies a conviction that the plurality of religious beliefs and practices is a good thing and ought to be encouraged and praised. Religious pluralism may refer to a well-refined

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[4]Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 2; 3.

[5]See John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 1-30.

[6]See Joseph A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 19-25.

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theory of diverse world religions, in which it is typically claimed that all religions ultimately point to the same truth or salvation. While Christian exclusivists claim that Christianity is the only true religion and that Jesus Christ is the only valid path to human salvation, pluralists argue that not only Christianity but also other religions aim at the same truth or salvation and provide effectual means of attaining it. While religious plurality is a fact and has been for as long as recorded history, religious pluralism is a relatively new theory that the presence of a plurality of religions is desirable and commendable. What loads the age-old reality of various religions with new importance and urgency is the increasing belief that the coexistence and cooperation of multiple religions are absolutely necessary for appreciating different religious truth-claims and for promoting human well-being. In fact, more and more Christians, both lay people and professional theologians, are adopting religious pluralism. With this exact distinction between "religious plurality" and "religious pluralism" in mind, let us turn to our preliminary discussions about the nature of a theology of religions.

In the present essay, we regard a "theology of religions" as a theological inquiry which can be construed in two ways. Some sorts of theology may be distinguished from other sorts by their attention to a particular range of phenomena or of issues. Sacramental theology (or a theology of the sacraments) might be understood as a theological examination or re-examination of sacramental doctrine and practice in Christian history.[7] A theology of marriage deals theologically with Christian understanding of marriage and

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[7]Cf. Kevin W. Irwin, *Liturgical Theology: A Primer* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), ch. 1.

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themes related to it. Along these lines, a theology of religions may be defined as a theological reflection on the fact of religious plurality, or as a theological investigation of what Christians think, say, and do (or have thought, have spoken, and have done) about other religions and their adherents. These sorts of theology are identified by their specific subject-matter or object of inquiry, thus in the case of a theology of religions, by the subject-matter of Christian witness about religious plurality. In fact, religious plurality can be investigated in a great number of non-theological ways such as philosophy, sociology, or psychology. What distinguishes a theology of religions from such different approaches is its having Christian witness concerning religious plurality as the constitutive object of its inquiry.

Unlike these inquiries, other sorts of theology are not distinguished by their attention to a particular subject-matter or object, but rather by their taking a particular methodological approach. Feminist theology, for example, does not have a specific subject-matter. It is not simply a theological investigation of women or of the relationship between sexes. Feminist theology starts from raising certain questions concerning the masculine bias of doing theology and of women's status. According to Rosemary Radford Ruether, feminist theology usually takes three moments: The first centers around the radical critique of the androcentric bias of all branches of Christian tradition and of women's experience; the second seeks to find various alternative traditions which extend beyond the orthodox Christian materials to the realms of extra-canonical and even heretical traditions; and on the basis of these critico-analytical stages, the third turns to the main task of constructing or reconstructing adequate theological

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norms and symbols which can affirm and recover the full personhood of women.[8] Its

concerns are not confined to any single issue or subject-matter but extend to the entire

range of Christian beliefs and practices. As evangelical theology is an evangelical

examination or re-examination of the entire range of Christian faith, feminist theology is

a feminist investigation of the scripture and Christian tradition as a whole, taking into

account women's particular experience as afflicted by patriarchal oppression. Along

these lines, a theology of religions may be defined as an examination or re-examination of

the Christian tradition as a whole in the light of "religious pluralism" or the "history of

religions." In my view, some scholars' proposal of a "pluralist or universalist theology of

religions" may be understood in this way. (For example, Wilfred Cantwell Smith

proposes a "world theology of all religions" which is concerned with constructing

theology as a single global discipline based on all faiths in the light of the unitary

religious history of humankind.[9]) With regard to the special case of Christian theology,

this kind of theology can be understood as an attempt to investigate the whole Christian

tradition and witness through the lens of religious pluralism or the history of religions.

(Wolfhart Pannenberg's "theology of the history of religions" may be considered as

another typical example of this sort of theology in that it is concerned with elucidating the

entire history of religions as the history of the appearance and work of God revealed in

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[8]Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology: What It is, and Why It is Necessary," *Unitarian Universalist World* 17, 7 (September, 1986), 1; 8.

[9]See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1989). We will further examine critically the main lines of Smith's argument in Chapter III.

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Jesus.[10]) In analogy with feminist theology, thus, a theology of religions as a religious

pluralist or *religionsgeschichtliche* investigation of Christianity as a whole might be

composed of three distinct stages: The first might focus on the radical critique of

Christianity's exclusivistic claims to truth and salvation; the second might try to identify

various alternative concepts and symbols which are congruent with the conviction of

religious pluralism, seeking them beyond the bounds of Christianity to other religions;

and the third might move to the task of constructing or reconstructing various theological

concepts and symbols which can support religious pluralism, adopting all the world

religions as proper theological sources and data.[11] The more specific term "pluralist

theology of religions" or, more strictly, "theology of religious pluralism" might well be

applicable to this kind of theology.

To sum up, a theology of religions may mean either a theological investigation of

Christians' response to the fact of "religious plurality" or a specific way of doing theology

arising out of and informed by the particular conviction of "religious pluralism" or the

viewpoint of the "history of religions." Thus, it might be understood either as a

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[10]See Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Toward a Theology of the History of Religions," *Basic Questions in Theology* II, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 65-118. In Chapter III, we will also explicate the core features of Pannenberg's proposal of a "theology of the history of religions" so as to clarify the relationship between it and our notion of a theology of religions.

[11]Albeit not explicitly taking this kind of methodology, in my view, John Hick, Gordon Kaufman, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith are three salient theologians concerned with formulating this kind of a pluralist theology of religions, illuminating Christianity as a particular phenomenon in the light of a universal history of religions in the world. Cf. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989); Kaufman, *God-Mystery-Diversity*; Smith, *Towards a World Theology*.

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theological reflection on the Christian witness concerning religious plurality--in an analogous sense to liturgical theology--or as a theological inquiry into the whole range of Christianity as a particular religious phenomenon in the light of religious pluralism or the history of religions--in parallel with feminist theology. In the former case, its nature is identified in terms of its distinctive subject-matter or object of Christian witness about religious plurality, while the latter is constituted not by its specific object (its object may range over the entire Christian tradition and even non-Christian religious beliefs and practices), but by its particular perspective, i.e., religious pluralism or the history of religions. This distinction may be highly important for deliberately prescribing the nature, scope, and main tasks of a theology of religions. In the first part of Chapter III, we will take up this issue again.

Given the fact that a theology of religions as our main concern is a specific theological inquiry identified by the internal subject-matter of Christian witness about religious plurality, we can say that it is not a discipline in its own right. If we call a certain inquiry a "discipline," we usually mean it is a well-organized institutionalized or communal enterprise directed towards a set of collective purposes. According to Stephen E. Toulmin, "The crucial element in a collective discipline . . . is the recognition of a sufficiently agreed goal or ideal, in terms of which common outstanding problems can be identified."[12] A common goal or ideal is one decisive factor for a discipline because it leads a scholarly community to resolve various kinds of common outstanding problems.

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[12]Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 364.

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Toulmin takes a discipline to comprise a "communal tradition of procedures and techniques for dealing with theoretical or practical problems."[13] Here, he emphasizes the communal character of a discipline, distancing it from private knowledge or inquiry. Academic communities seek a consensus which can be accepted as a public knowledge by employing common evidences or ideas. In addition to this, a discipline is also constituted by a "genealogy of problems."[14] A discipline develops research statements to answer a variety of fundamental problems such as the cause of disease, the function of religion in human society, or the importance of written language in communication. As knowledge in a given field grows, a number of new questions proliferate and the nature of fundamental inquiries radically changes. Thus, a discipline is constituted not by a single unchanging problem or question but by a "genealogy of problems." In brief, a discipline may be defined as a well-structured, institutionalized branch of knowledge concerned with elucidating a genealogy of perennial problems by employing a variety of commonly shared methods, technical terms, and theories. Chemistry and physics are disciplines in the field of natural sciences. Sociology and psychology are disciplines in the field of social sciences. Is a theology of religions, then, a discipline? In fact, the question of whether or not it can be called a discipline is fairly complicated and requires deliberate discussion. Some modified and systematized versions of a theology of religions (for example, a "comparative theology of religions") may be disciplinable and we might, at this point, call them *potential* disciplines. Whether or not they can become *actual*

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[13]*Ibid.*, 142.

[14]*Ibid.*, 148.

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disciplines may depend upon many things such as their relationships to existing

disciplines, their internal coherence, and the like. At this point, let us say provisionally

that the theology of religions is not a discipline in its own right, but rather a specific

project incumbent upon systematic theology, which might share some similarities with

either liturgical theology or feminist theology.

Some scholars hold otherwise. The theology of religions is sometimes referred to

as a theological discipline or sub-discipline, or as a discipline in the field of religious

studies. For example, Carl E. Braaten, an evangelical theologian of religions, holds that

"A Christian theology of the religions is the name given to that discipline which aims to

think about the world religions in light of the Christian faith."[15] However subtle or

nuanced his use of the term "discipline" might be, Braaten explicitly classes the theology

of religions as a discipline with other distinct disciplines in religious studies such as

"philosophy of religion," "psychology of religion," or "history of religion."[16] Another

writer on the subject, Joseph DiNoia, likewise refers to a theology of religions as a

discipline.[17] German theologian Max Seckler also argues that

> In the present stage of development in the history of scholarship, there are
> three entirely distinct ways of dealing with religion theoretically or
> scientifically: theology, philosophy of religion, religious studies. Each of
> these disciplines has its specific constitution, in accordance with which it

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[15]Carl E. Braaten, *No Other Gospel!: Christianity among the World Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 93.

[16]*Ibid.*, 92.

[17]Joseph A. DiNoia, *Catholic Theology of Religions and Interreligious Dialogue: A Study in the Logic of Christian Doctrines about Other Religions* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1980), 10.

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differentiates itself from the others and from which it derives its right to life. The theology of religions, accordingly, as its name already indicates, is to be conceived as a *theological* discipline. As such it is fundamentally governed by the conditions and characteristics of theology, whose clarification is here to be presupposed.[18]

Although Seckler does not mention anything about determining criteria for the nature of a "discipline," he clearly identifies a theology of religions as a newly-emerging theological sub-discipline which has its own distinctive aim, task, scope, and method.[19] In my view, this tendency to think of the theology of religions as a discipline may be reinforced by its being confused with a "comparative theology of religions" (or a "theological history of religions") which is aimed at observing, comparing, and evaluating the phenomena of a

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[18]Max Seckler, "Theologie der Religionen mit Fragezeichen," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 166 (1986), 171. "Nach dem gegenwärtigen Stand der wissenschaftsgeschichtlichen Entwicklung gibt es drei ganz unterschiedliche Weisen des theoretischen, wissenschaftlichen Umgangs mit Religion: Theologie, Religionsphilosophie, Religionswissenschaft. Jede dieser Disziplinen hat ihre spezifische Verfassung, gemäß der sie sich von den anderen unterscheidet und aus der sich ihr Lebensrecht ableitet. Die Theologie der Religionen ist demnach, wie auch ihr Name anzeigt, als *theologische* Diszplin zu konzipieren. Sie unterliegt somit grundsätzlich den Bedingungen und Merkmalen der Theologie, deren Klärung hier vorauszusetzen ist."

[19]Max Seckler affirms the possibility of a plurality of theologies of religions insofar as an individual religion is concerned with elucidating its relationship to other religions from its particular perspective: a Christian theology of religions, a Jewish theology of religions, an Islamic theology of religions, etc. In footnote #5 of his essay "Theologie der Religionen mit Fragezeichen," Seckler clarifies the meaning of a theology of religions as a "new theological sub-discipline" with some noteworthy qualifications. Granted that the "department" (Fach) or theological "sub-discipline" (Teildisziplin) concept within theology is not fixed at all, the differentiation of theology into ever new sub-disciplines may tend to establish a theology of religions as *sub-discipline sui generis* despite the dangers and detrimental effects involved in this idea. For Seckler, however, a theology of religions belongs to the treatise "Religion" in fundamental theology (*Traktat Religion der Fundamentaltheologie*) which is partly concerned with *demonstratio religiosa*. By this, he highlights that because of its "orientation towards the history of religions or the religions in their concrete givenness," a theology of religions refers to the "field of empirical research in religions." Despite its "systematic method and function," a theology of religions is not a branch of systematic theology or dogmatics. See *Ibid.*, 171-172.

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plurality of religions from an objectively detached stance. While a theology of religions, our main object here, is concerned with investigating any and every Christian witness concerning the relationship of Christianity to a plurality of other religions from an internal Christian concern, a comparative theology of religions and other disciplines of religious studies (for example, the history of religions) are concerned with describing, comparing, and interpreting the beliefs and practices of all the world religions without prior commitment to any particular religious tradition. Despite its wide popularity, a theology of religions thus definitely suffers from ambiguities as to its status as an inquiry.

The main aim of this study is to set forth the prolegomena to a theology of religions. Etymologically, prolegomena means "to say beforehand" in a treatise or discourse. The basic question of prolegomena is normally related to the debate over where a treatise or discourse should start from. Theological prolegomena usually means some preliminary things that need to be said *before* one begins the theological study itself. Since the age of the Enlightenment, the question of theological prolegomena has become so pressing for theologians because general audiences inside as well as outside Christianity came to have strong suspicion about the validity of Christian faith. In face of such a suspicion, theologians have been required to demonstrate how we can know anything about God or do theology at all before we begin to inquire into the main contents of theology. These prolegomena questions were then usually assigned to some external disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology, or psychology. In the prolegomena to his *Glaubenslehre*, Friedrich Schleiermacher thus holds that before one begins to undertake Christian theology in the proper sense, one needs to get help from the fields of

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ethics, apologetics, and philosophy of religion in order to clarify the nature and right

method of doing dogmatic theology.[20] Against such dependence upon alien fields of

inquiry for clarifying theological prolegomena issues, Karl Barth emphasizes that

theological prolegomena is intended to present an introductory understanding of the way

to knowledge peculiar to dogmatics.[21] He rejects theology's dependence upon other

sciences such as philosophy or anthropology for elucidating its own prolegomena issues,

instead arguing for its autonomous and self-determinative status. For Barth, the most

fundamental questions of theological prolegomena are not merely preliminary ones that

are to be dealt with *before* one starts doing theology, but they themselves are already the

"introductory part of dogmatics" that are to be said *first* when one has already engaged in

the actual course of undertaking theological inquiry. Dogmatic prolegomena must be an

"inner necessity grounded in the [theological] matter itself."[22] Theologians themselves

should embark on the prolegomena task of explicating the nature and right method of

doing theology as their first task and should not allow someone else such as philosopher

or anthropologist to take their place. In a similar sense, we may hold that Christian

theologians of religions themselves should explore a set of prolegomena questions

surrounding their subject-matter with greater clarity and coherence. In brief,

prolegomena means not the preliminary things that are to be said through the aids of some

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[20]Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 1-128.

[21]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, tr. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 25.

[22]*Ibid.*, 31.

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external fields *before* one begins theology, but rather the things that are said *first*, once

one is already doing it.[23]

Since our main concern is with explicating prolegomena issues in a theology of

religions, our study should address at least the following basic questions. How should we

understand our basic concepts "religion" and "religions"? What role does this notion of

"religion" and "religions" play in a Christian theological approach to religious plurality?

What kinds of problems does religious plurality pose to Christian faith in general and

systematic theology in particular? What is the nature and task of a theology of religions?

What are the decisive criteria for judging its adequacy? How is it to be done? Although

the present study aims at dealing with all of these sorts of questions, it will concentrate

upon developing a systematic statement of the nature and method of an adequate theology

of religions.

Including this chapter, this study is divided into five chapters. Chapter II will

clarify the most basic issues underlying the formation of a theology of religions. How do

we approach its subject-matter. "religion" and "religions"? What problems does a

plurality of other religions and their adherents raise for Christian faith? What sort of

theological issues does religious plurality pose to systematic theology in particular?

Since this study cannot expect to deal with the vast array of problems raised by religious

plurality, we will discuss the most fundamental issues from the perspective of systematic

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[23]Schubert M. Ogden makes exactly this same Barthian point, albeit very briefly. See *On Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), ix. In a more recent book, Ogden calls the task of theological prolegomena "theology of theology" which means a theological elucidation of theological prolegomena issues. See *Doing Theology Today* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996), 3-91.

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theology. Chapter II will lay out a proper stage for developing various arguments appropriate to the prolegomena to a theology of religions.

Chapter III, the heart of this study, will then examine the following questions. What are the distinguishing features of a theology of religions? How should we set up its adequate scope and tasks? How ought those tasks to be done? To accomplish its proper tasks, how is a theology of religions to be informed by some theological sub-disciplines and the disciplines of religious studies? This chapter will focus on elucidating the characteristic nature and method of a theology of religions in the context of my own understanding of the overall nature and task of Christian theology today.

On the basis of these prolegomena, we will devote Chapter IV to assessing critically the central features of the contemporary theology of religions by explicating the core points of each of what I think of as the four most important theological positions concerning the challenges of religious plurality--Karl Barth's moderate exclusivism, Karl Rahner's inclusivism, John Hick's pluralism, and Schubert Ogden's pluralistic inclusivism as the most salient alternative to those three existing models. Although at first glance this task seems not to belong directly to the prolegomena issues, it is still related to them in that it will aim at applying the central points of the prolegomena to the critical examination of the contemporary theology of religions.

As a way of concluding this study, in Chapter V, I will propose "three theses" for moving towards a more adequate theology of religions for today. The most crucial thesis of these will be that any adequate theology of religions must hold together christocentric particularism (the normativity of Jesus Christ for salvation and truth) and theocentric

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universalism (the universal scope and effectiveness of God's truth and salvific will

beyond the explicit bounds of Christianity).

CHAPTER II

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THEOLOGY BESET BY
THE CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

This chapter takes up the most basic issues underlying the formation of a

Christian theology of religions. How should we understand our basic concepts "religion"

and "religions"? What problems does religious plurality raise for Christian faith? What

sorts of theological issues does it pose to systematic theology in particular? In answering

these questions, I will first discuss the inadequacy of defining "religion" and "religions"

in terms of the common "essence and manifestation" or "genus and species" model. If

one intends to do a theology of religions, he or she needs to have a certain way of

specifying what counts as a "religion." It is very important for prolegomena to a theology

of religions to elucidate the use of the term "religion" and to arrive at some way of

identifying its subject-matter, i.e., "religion" and "religions." The notion of "religion" as

an indivisible genus and "religions" as diverse species of that genus was originated and

developed by Western scholars since the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries. I will argue that these concepts are no longer adequate to describe the vast

diversity of the world religions (especially, Eastern religions) today. To avoid such an

ethnocentric view of religion and religious plurality, I will argue that we need to turn

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from the attempt to define the common essence of religion to the description of its "family-resemblance" characteristics.

Second, I will identify some central problems the existence of large numbers of adherents of non-Christian religions raises for traditional Christian faith. For this task, I will focus on elucidating the absolutistic salvation-claims of traditional Christian faith as expressed in language about the unique saving event of Jesus Christ and about the normative status of Christianity as the true and only religion (*vera et unica religio*) founded by God. We need to do so because the ideas of the finality or uniqueness of Jesus Christ and its consequence of making Christianity the only divinely sanctioned religion are at the heart of the problematic confrontation of traditional Christian faith with non-Christian religions.

Third, I will discuss the relationship of a theology of religions to systematic theology, identifying some theological issues religious plurality poses to systematic theology. I will first examine the disciplinary nature and task of systematic theology and then identify some central issues religious plurality poses to it. Since religious plurality raises an enormous variety of intellectual and practical issues to Christian theology in general, we need to extract from those some core ones relevant to the inquiry of systematic theology. In doing so, I will place a theology of religions as a special project within the scope of systematic theology.

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The Problem of Defining 'Religion' and 'Religions'

To clarify the subject-matter of a theology of religions, i.e., the state of religious plurality, we need to discuss how we are using the term "religion" and "religious plurality" in this essay. Human beings have always practiced religion everywhere. They are rightly called *homines religiosi*. However, it is notoriously difficult to define the meaning of the term "religion" or at least to delimit the range of phenomena to which it applies. To define, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, is "to state the precise meaning of (a word or sense of a word, for example)" or "to describe the nature or basic qualities of [a thing or a phenomenon]."[1] If defining "something" is equivalent to identifying the meaning of a word, the term "religion" is too multivalent and too elusive to isolate its exact meaning. And, if defining a certain "phenomenon" involves describing its nature or basic qualities, it is extremely difficult to find any common nature or quality of "religion" because the so-called religious phenomena are different from person to person, from time to time, and from place to place. Therefore, scholars generally concede the immense difficulty of offering a totally satisfactory definition of "religion." Sir James Frazer made exactly this fundamental point: "There is probably no subject in the world about which opinions differ so much as the nature of religion, and to frame a definition of it which would satisfy everyone must obviously be impossible."[2] It would be impossible for any scholar to present a wholly acceptable definition of religion,

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[1] *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2d College ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 375.

[2] Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), 57.

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i.e., one which is abstract, transhistorical, and cross-culturally applicable to all religious

beliefs and practices. If the definition is too narrow or too exclusive, it may not include

all the religious phenomena it should as implicitly or explicitly expressed in the variety of

cultures. If it is broad enough to comprise all things, it will be virtually vacuous and

therefore unable to distinguish rightly the religious from the non-religious. Eric Sharpe

likens defining "religion" to the fable of the blind men attempting to describe an elephant.

> One touches its trunk and describes it as a snake; another touches its ear
> and describes it as a winnowing-fan; another touches its leg and describes
> it as a tree; another its tail and describes it as a broom.[3]

This plainly shows the difficulty of avoiding a fragmentary or a vague definition of

religion. In these respects, the following claim of Max Weber is worthy of our attention:

"To define 'religion,' to say what it *is*, is not possible at the start of a presentation such as

this. Definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study."[4] Weber's

assertion implies that insofar as a definition of religion is possible, it can be accomplished

only after thorough empirical investigation and discussion of complex religious

phenomena. It would be unwise for us to focus too heavily on this matter of definition at

the outset. To do a theology of religions, nevertheless, we must clarify what sorts of

phenomena count as "religion"and "religions." For this, let us first discuss how and why

today's notions of "religion" and "religions" invented by the Enlightenment rationalists

are no longer adequate to describe the vast diversity of religious plurality.

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[3]Eric J. Sharpe, *Understanding Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 46.

[4]Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 1.

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The Inadequacy of the Modern Western Notions
'Religion' and 'Religions'

The approach to defining certain phenomena usually reflects the definer's specific

perspective and socio-cultural locatedness. The attempt to define "religion"--i.e., to

identify some fundamental core or unique essence of the "religious" that is

distinguishable from the remainder of all human life--is primarily a modern Western

concern. This trend is closely related to the dominant Western religious mode, i.e.,

supernaturalistic theism as inherited from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In Western

culture, the presupposition of ultimate theistic reality or the transcendental realm at least

has been rendered as a decisive demarcation line between the religious and the secular.

The English word "religion" as etymologically derived from the Latin *religio* signifies a

sacred bond between the human and the divine as its origin and goal.[5] The assumptions

of theism seem to permeate the linguistic concepts of "religion" in the Western tradition

in general. However, this kind of dualistic notion of "religion" as necessarily

presupposing the dichotomy between the divine and the human, the sacred and the

profane, and the transcendent and the immanent, is accompanied by many difficulties,

especially when we try to apply it to the enormous diversity of non-Western religious

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[5]Norbert Schiffers analyzes the etymological meanings of the three Latin verbs *relegere, religari*, and *reeligere*, all of which are related to the Latin *religio*. According to him, all of these verbs indicate one's religious attitudes towards a transcendent theistic reality: *relegere* means "constantly turn to" or "conscientiously observe" certain object of supernatural reality; *religari* may denote "binding oneself (back)" to such a supreme reality as one's origin and goal; and *reeligere* means "to choose again" in order to live religiously by his or her origin and goal. Norbert Schiffers, "Concept of Religion," *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 1359.

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phenomena. If we apply the notion of "religion" as belief in a transcendent reality to the major traditional religions of Asia such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, for instance, we cannot but find that this sort of essentialist definition fails to explain those traditions as inherently religious phenomena because they normally do not presume any sharp distinction between the finite human subject and the infinite divine object. Julia Ching notes that "the dimension of transcendence is itself lacking in the Chinese spiritual universe."[6] She also emphasizes that the word "religion" (Tsung-chiao/Zongjiao) did not exist in the traditional Chinese vocabulary but was introduced into China through the Japanese translation (Shukyo) of the Western term "religion" into the Chinese in the late nineteenth century.[7] (The Korean word "Jonggyo" [the same Chinese character] was also appropriated by the Japanese translation.) Moreover, Eric Sharpe points out that most non-Western languages do not have proper terms which exactly correspond to the Western notion of "religion."[8] The long absence of the term "religion" in traditional non-Western languages denotes that what they normally count as the religious phenomena may not conform to the Western standard of "religion." At this point, let us further examine how the modern notions of "religion" and "religions" that originated from the Enlightenment are no longer adequate to describe the vast diversity of religious phenomena today. By so doing, I want to emphasize the necessity to turn from the

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[6]Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 1-2.

[7]*Ibid.*, 2.

[8]Sharpe, *Understanding Religion*, 39-44.

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essentialist definitions to a description of the family resemblances among the so-called religious phenomena.

It is the modern Western habit to define "religion" and "religions" in terms of the common genus and species model (or, the common essence and manifestation model). This model conveys the idea that the different religions are related to each other as species of a common genus. All religions share some sort of inner core or essence which is manifested in each of their different historical and cultural contexts. In attempting to define "religion" and "religions," most modern Western scholars tried to isolate the so-called religious essence from everything that is peripheral or marginal. Although since the Enlightenment different scholars have defined this common essence in different ways, they always presupposed that there is a common core or genus underlying all the diverse manifestations of religious plurality. For typical examples, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) located this essence in the "feeling of absolute dependence."[9] Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) saw this *sine qua non* of religion in the juncture of the *mysterium tremendum* (the awful mystery) and the human response to that power, the *mysterium fascinans* (the fascination with the mystery).[10] He called this juncture the *numinous*.[11] Anders Nygren

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[9]Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 12.

[10]Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 2d ed., trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 12ff.; 31ff.

[11]According to Walter Capps, the Latin *numen* means the "dynamic, spirit-filled transhuman energy or force." He also points out that the term *numinous* refers to an "intangible, unseen, but compelling reality that inspires both fascination and dread,"

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(1890-1979) centered "religion" in the belief that there is an eternal world,[12] trying to

identify the distinctive place of religion by assigning it to a fourth category: not to the

true, the good, or the beautiful, but to the "eternal" on which all the other categories

depend. It is also well known that Paul Tillich (1886-1965) defined "religion" as the

"state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other

concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the

meaning of our life."[13] Instead of trying to identify any specifically religious human

experience or nature--e.g., immediate awareness or profound experience of mystery--

Tillich envisioned a fairly comprehensive picture of religion (religion as an aspect of

human spirit or culture). As with other Western scholars, however, Tillich believes that

the phenomena of religious diversity can be understood in terms of an essentialist

definition. Despite the subtlety and wide difference as to the constitutive essence of

religion, in short, modern Western scholars generally presumed that religious diversity

can be explained by identifying the unitary essence of religion. Let us now move to

sketch briefly the history of the development of the Enlightenment and post-

Enlightenment notions of "religion" and "religions."

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designating the "irrational, nonrational element most characteristic of vital religion."
Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress
Press, 1995), 21.

[12]Anders Nygren, *Essence of Christianity*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia:
Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 38-48.

[13]Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions* (Minneapolis:
Fortress Press, 1994), 3.

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Peter Harrison shows us how the turn to "natural religion"[14] in the English

Enlightenment marked a radical break with traditional Christian absolutism, having

changed the notion of "religion" itself. Protestant scholastics, Platonists, and those

rationalists generally called "deists" shifted attention from the internal concern of

Christian faith in the Middle Ages to "religion" as an external and impartial object of

inquiry. Although they exhibited a variety of different views on the twin concepts

"religion" and "religions," they tended to agree on a single point: that these had to be

understood in terms of nature and reason. They attempted to locate Christianity within

the reach of naturalistic and rationalistic explanations, identifying a point of contact

between Christianity and other religions in the common innate basis of religion, i.e.,

"natural reason." Reason became the criterion and judge of revelation. John Toland

(1670-1722) sought to prove that Christianity is in all respects in accord with the canons

of reason.[15] Christianity as the true religion must necessarily be reasonable and

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[14]The concept of "natural religion" is a key to understanding the Enlightenment's approach to "religion" and "religions," and to later thinkers' reaction to that approach. Peter Harrison identifies three different notions of "natural religion" in the Enlightenment age: (1) natural religion as the "result of human sin" and as standing "in opposition to 'revealed' or supernaturally based religion"; (2) as the "universal religion of morality" which has no conflict with revealed religion; (3) and as "something that was amenable to rational investigation, or more importantly, to rational justification." Among these, "natural religion" in the sense of (3) is the most important and widespread one concerning the Enlightenment debates on religion. Harrison points out that from these three arose "three different interpretations of religion and the religions." Peter Harrison, 'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 5-7. For a more focused treatment of the history of "natural religion," see Peter Byrne, Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism (London: Routledge, 1989).

[15]See John Toland, Christianity not Mysterious: Or, A Treatise Shewing, That

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intelligible. Toland, as a typical deist in the seventeenth century England, accepted nothing above reason as well as nothing contrary to reason. Toland and his contemporary rationalists generally held the view that the contents of revealed religion had to be subjected to the criterion of natural reason and natural religion. Along with this rationalist trend, they began to compare Christianity with other religious beliefs and practices, thereby rendering "religion" a generic term to designate some common essence or genus as variously manifested but invariably corrupted in diverse forms of human religions possibly except Christianity. Religion, more precisely "natural religion," has thus become a generic entity which can be manifested in a variety of historical ways. A plurality of non-Christian religions were understood as different manifestations of natural religion based on universal human rationality.

In particular, different religions were understood as reflecting the different expressions of the same essential truth as generally related to Christian monotheism. Edward, the first Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), often known as the father of deism, sought to identify the common essence underlying all the different manifestations of religion in the propositional truth of Christian monotheism. Exhibiting theological motives very clearly, Herbert finds the unity of religious diversity as well as the essence of true religion in the "five common notions concerning religion": (1) "That there is a supreme God"; (2) "That God is to be worshiped"; (3) "That virtue and piety are the most important part of religious practice"; (4) "That we must repent our wickedness"; and (5)

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there is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor above it: And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd A Mystery (London: 1696).

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"That there is Reward or Punishment after this life."[16] All the world religions are nothing

but the different manifestations of the universal, underlying fundamentals as expressed in

this set of five catholic articles. Herbert shifted attention from an institutionally based

understanding of religion and salvation to a propositionally based view. Peter Byrne

points out that in Herbert's theological scheme all religions are unified by the common

essence of religion, as typically expressed in his list of common beliefs, "only at the cost

of setting aside many forms of theology and worship as superstitious and idolatrous."[17] In

this regard, Byrne argues that Herbert's main concern is to make a theological judgment

about what is correct in religion, rather than to identify what is essential to all religions.

Following Herbert's theological account of religion, at any rate, many Enlightenment

rationalists came to understand religious plurality as a different manifestation of

Christianity's (una religio) propositional truth, presuming that there is some rationally

accessible, universal essence (e.g., natural religiousness) underlying religious diversity.

In the course of modern Western history, thus, religion was understood predominantly

along Christian rationalist lines.

It was David Hume (1711-1776) who separated the natural history of religion

from the rational justification of theism. His The Natural History of Religion (1757) was

aimed at showing that reason played no role in the origin and development of religion in

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[16]Harrison, 'Religion' and the Religions, 67-69. These five common notions were originally listed in his work The Antient Religion of the Gentiles, tr. from Lat. by William Lewis (London: Pr. for John Nutt, 1705), 3-4.

[17]Peter Byrne, "Religion and the Religions," The World's Religions, ed. Stewart Sutherland, Leslie Houlden, Peter Clarke, and Friedhelm Hardy (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1988), 16.

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human history. Hume rejected any foundation of religion upon "reason," thereby tacitly arguing against certain versions of the "natural religion" position that religion is universally human and basic to human nature. The only actual motive of religion is to be found in human ignorance or passions such as hope, fear, or imagination, not in human reason nor in reflection. The underlying, motivating force for religion is not reason but the "adulation and fears of the most vulgar superstition."[18] Hume also argued that "polytheism or idolatry was, and necessarily must have been, the first and most ancient religion of mankind."[19] In spite of its apparent claim to rational foundation, monotheism is also originated from the same factors of ignorance, passion, and imagination that give rise to polytheism. Hume highlighted human beings' "natural tendency to rise from idolatry to theism, and to sink again from theism into idolatry."[20] The entire history of religion is a "kind of flux and reflux in the human nature," i.e., fluctuation between a propensity to theism and a propensity to polytheism or idolatry.[21] The most remarkable characteristic of Hume's arguments lies in that, unlike his contemporaries, he located human passions (not "rationality") at the center of his explanation of religion in its origin and development, thereby making sacred religion the direct object of psychologico-anthropological observation. With Hume the rational history of religion ended. After

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[18]David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, ed. with an introduction by H. E. Root (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957), 43.

[19]*Ibid.*, 23.

[20]*Ibid.*, 46-47.

[21]*Ibid.*, 46.

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Hume, as is well known, Schleiermacher reacted against rationalists in general and Kant in particular, arguing that religion is neither propositional nor moral but has to do with an inner feeling or piety.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries added the historical dimension to the objective study of religions. Religious plurality now came to mean the results of the long historical development of complex socio-cultural ingredients in humanity. Accompanying this historico-critical survey of religious plurality, modern Western scholars conferred such specific names as Buddhism, Hinduism, or Confucianism, to designate each entire system of their beliefs and practices, in spite of the absence of any such name in each of their long histories. According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, some of today's terms designating particular religions were originally invented in the Western minds as follows: "Boudhism" (1801), "Hindooism" (1829), "Taouism" (1839), "Zoroasterianism" (1854), "Confucianism" (1862), and so on.[22] Along with the singular "religion," the plural "religions" came to refer to various systems of other religious people. Smith observes that the plural arises "when one contemplates from the outside, and abstracts, depersonalizes, and reifies, the various systems of other people of which one does not oneself see the meaning or appreciate the point, let alone accept the validity."[23] The upshot of this conceptual reification is to shift attention "from personal

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[22]Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 61.

[23]*Ibid.*, 43.

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orientation to an ideal, then to an abstraction, finally to an institution."[24] The words "religion" and "religions" became outsider's terms which tended to reduce to a separate and fixed entity, the fluid, personal, dynamic life of engaging participants in a changing religious community.

Peter Byrne points out that the rational deists' notion of "natural religion" was received, modified, or rejected by Hume, Kant (1724-1804), J. G. Herder (1744-1803), Schleiermacher, G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), F. Max Mueller (1823-1900), and E. B. Tylor (1832-1917) in Western intellectual history.[25] Undoubtedly, the notion of a universal religiousness underlying all the diverse histories of religion continuously streams down in their thought and is usually tied to its Western, theistic trends. In short, the Enlightenment rationalists in general exerted a vital influence on the emergence of modern "religious studies" as a field distinct from Christian theology, thereby having left a long-lasting legacy of overconfidence that any religious phenomenon can be explained by means of rational observation as well as of conceptual framework.

With this brief sketch of the conceptual history of "religion" and "religions" in mind, I want to identify three reasons why an essentialist definition of these terms is inadequate to describe the state of religious diversity today. First, it might displace the internal dynamics of living faith with the external factors of religion. Any conceptual framework seeking to approach religious phenomena in terms of the common genus or essence may distort the living dynamics of believers' inner religiousness. Smith makes a

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[24]*Ibid.*, 76.

[25]Cf. Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion*, chaps. 5, 6, 7.

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sharp distinction between "religion" as an externally reified, systematized, and institutionalized entity, and "faith" as an internally-oriented piety. Prior to the Enlightenment age, the proper name "religion" was given not to the external or objective system of religious life but to the internal or subjective quality of piety. Various scriptures of religious communities referred to "religion" not as a total system of objectively observable doctrines or institutions but as a set of internal dispositions such as piety, reverence, obedience, and the like. In this regard, Smith contends that the title of St. Augustine's *De Vera Religione* should be translated as not "On True Religion" but as "On Proper Piety" or "On Genuine Worship."[26] In a similar vein, John Calvin's *Christianae Religionis Institutio* must be translated as something like "Grounding in Christian Piety" rather than as "The Institutes of the Christian Religion."[27] Smith well reminds us that what we have to understand is not one's religion as a static object but his or her subjective religiousness. I fully concur with Smith in rejecting the fixed, definable common essence of religion because such an attempt may reduce the unfathomable depth of inner religiousness to the total sum of objectively accessible beliefs and practices.[28]

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[26]Smith, *The Meaning and the End of Religion*, 29.

[27]*Ibid.*, 36-37.

[28]As alternatives to the misleading concepts "religion" and "religions," Smith proposes to use jointly two interrelated notions "personal faith" and "cumulative tradition." The former means an "inner religious experience or involvement of a particular person; the impingement on him of the transcendent, putative or real," while the latter refers to the "entire mass of overt objective data that constitute the historical deposit, it were, of the past religious life of the community in question: temples, scriptures, theological systems . . . ; anything that can be and is transmitted from one person, one generation, to another, and that an historian can observe" (*Ibid.*, 156-157). While "personal faith" is largely unobservable and yet is underlying all visible religions,

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We will have a more appropriate occasion to focus on Smith's thought when we explicate

his proposal of a "world theology" in the first section of the next chapter.

Second, the essentialist definitions arising from the Enlightenment project

disguise a commitment to the superiority of Christianity over other religions. It is true

that modern Western rationalists in general tried to elucidate the genus and species model

most frequently in Christian terms. This model is always connected with the description

of the nature and knowledge of the supernatural deity. It is not too much to say that the

attempt to define religion in the modern West is nothing other than that of identifying the

essence of Christianity. Irrespective of what this essence really is, a plurality of different

religions are understood as different manifestations of the alleged Christian essence in

different historico-cultural contexts. As with Herbert, religious differences were often

understood as concealing an underlying unity of the Christian truth. If non-Christian

religions do not share any certain aspect of what those rationalists regard as the common

essence of religion (i.e., of Christianity), they are readily considered as deceptive,

insufficient, and corrupted or even as atheistic. In many cases, Christianity was construed

as the highest religion which actualizes the inner essence of religion most fully and most

perfectly. Thus, a theory of religion's unifying essence may serve apologetic aims for

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"cumulative tradition" is directly accessible to historian's empirical observation. I
wonder, however, to what extent we can properly isolate the inner disposition of faith
from the external data of cumulative tradition. Is not faith an indispensable constitutive
element of the objective, observable tradition? If religious tradition shapes and is shaped
by faith, how can we appropriately divide "religion" into two distinctive parts of "faith"
and "cumulative tradition"? All in all, Smith's insistence on replacing the objective term
"religion" by subjective "faith" may evoke a false impression that religious people in
general cling to subjective preferences rather than to objective truth.

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specific religions such as Christianity. Highlighting different religions as radically different social projects, John Milbank criticizes the "usual construals of religion as a genus" for embodying "covert Christianizations."[29] He well reminds us that the modern Western search for the common essence of religion is pursued predominantly in terms of Christian categories. In short, the essentialist definition must be rejected because of its implicit or explicit tendency to insure the superiority of Christianity over other religions.

The third point is directly related to the second. If the covert essence of religion is Christian, this normally entails the false presumption that different religions are simply different ways of worshiping the same Ultimate Reality, i.e., often the Christian deity. The Enlightenment rationalism generated the view that there is a rationally accessible, universal, indivisible common core of religion. Many contemporary Christian theologians are tempted to identify an underlying, definitive unity of religion in terms of common essence, in order to resolve the problems posed by the phenomena of religious diversity. They try to search for a tolerance and harmony among diverse religions at the level of the inner essence of religion. A plurality of different religions can be explained by its manifesting the common core of religion, while its unique features are merely reflections of geographical and socio-cultural factors. Essentialism is not adequate because it renders the real differences between religions trivial in relation to the common essence they share. Against the false assumption of essentialism, Nicholas Lash finds a great mistake of the Enlightenment rationalists in their wrong expectation that "the

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[29]John Milbank, "The End of Dialogue," *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), 176.

human grasp of truth could ever be other than tradition-constituted."[30] Lash flatly agrees

with John Clayton's claims: "Nor are religions just different paths to the same goal; they

are different paths to different goals. The goal aimed at is as tradition-specific as the path

taken. The goal is constituted as goal by the path chosen."[31] There is no single essence of

religion. There is no neutral, common ground or essence, the manifestation of which is

religious diversity. There are only different construals of the aim of life as well as of the

means of reaching it.

Religion as a Family-Resemblance Concept and Its Implications

If the attempt to isolate any single essence of religion is inadequate and

misleading, how can we resolve the problematic of defining "religion" and "religions"?

One cogent answer would be this: "religion" is a family-resemblance notion and

"religions" form a family. A plurality of different religions are different members of the

"religion" family. Their characteristic features may be viewed as reflecting their family

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[30]Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19.

[31]*Ibid.*, 19. See John Clayton, "Thomas Jefferson and the Study of Religion," An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Lancaster, 18 November 1992, 22-23. As with Lash, here, Clayton criticizes the false presumptions of neutrality and universality envisioned by the Enlightenment project for divesting allegiance to any particular religious community. In the wake of the Enlightenment rationalism, it became the *consensus gentium* of the academic study of religion that the "universal, tradition-free discourse" alone had to lay a common foundation for a public debate (14). In face of more radical pluralism today, Clayton seeks to identify an adequate alternative to this emphasis on "tradition-free" and public discourse in the "classical Indian vada-tradition of public debate" which can protect the "otherness of the Other" without giving up "public contestability."

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resemblances. In discussing the terms "language" and "game," Ludwig Wittgenstein

proposes to replace the idea of a common essence of games with the idea of their "family

resemblances":

> Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am
> saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes
> us use the same word for all,--but that they are *related* to one another in
> many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these
> relationships, that we call them all "language".[32]

> Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games". I mean
> board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and do on. What
> is common to them all?--Don't say: "There *must* be something common,
> or they would not be called 'games'"--but *look and see* whether there is
> anything common to all.--For if you look at them you will not see
> something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a
> whole series of them at that . . . we see a complicated network of
> similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities,
> sometimes similarities of detail.[33]

> I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than
> "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of
> a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc.
> overlap and criss-cross in the same way.--And I shall say: 'games' form a
> family.[34]

A variety of games ranging from chess to Olympic games do not have any single essence

but simply exhibit a set of certain resemblances in one family. If we apply this

Wittgensteinian idea to religion, we can say that different religious traditions or

ideologies do not exemplify any common core or essence but form a whole series of

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[32]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3d ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), sec. 65, 31e.

[33]*Ibid.*, sec. 66, 31e-32e.

[34]*Ibid.*, sec. 67, 32e.

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similarities and differences within the same family of religion. Ninian Smart explains the Wittgensteinian notion of the family resemblances of religion as follows:

> To give a crude scheme of family resemblance: suppose A has properties a, b, and c; while B has b, c, and d; and C has c, d and e; while D has d, e and f. Although A has nothing in common with D, it is sufficiently like B for them both to have the same name--and likewise with B and C and with C and D. Of course in actual examples the situation is a much richer one, with subtle and overlapping similarities, as with the word 'game'--though patience and hockey have no common item of content, or at least none which would help to define 'game', they are both called games. To call something a game is to place it in a family rather to ascribe it some complex essence. Similarly, perhaps, with 'religion'--we can place both early Buddhism and early Islam in the same family, even though they have nothing obvious or important in common.[35]

As Smart incisively explains, there is no single essential core or set of features that every member of the religion family must have if it is to be counted as a "religion"; but there is a complex chain of overlapping family-resemblance features which distinguish it from others. Instead of seeking any definition of the single essence of religion which all things called religion must share, therefore, we need to illustrate many examples of religious traditions, examine family resemblances between them, thereby claiming that anything which possesses a large set of resemblance features can be called a religion. Although all the individual examples of religion do not necessarily possess any single set of common features, we can apply the collective term "religion" to these diverse examples because of their sharing a network of family relationships.

Peter B. Clarke and Peter Byrne identify the five distinctive features of the family-resemblance idea of religion:

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[35]Ninian Smart, *Concept and Empathy: Essays in the Study of Religion*, ed. Donald Wiebe (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1986), 46-47.

(a) There will be a characteristic set of features to be seen in the examples of religion (such as those listed by Southwold--see above [i.e., "a central concern with god-like beings, ritual practices, an ethical code, an association with an ethnic group, a mythology, a priesthood or similar elite, and a body of scripture or similarly exalted oral tradition"]). (b) Over and above the fact that they are religions, there will be no single feature or set of features to be found in each and every example of religion. (c) There will be no limits to be set in advance to the kind of combinations of characteristic features newly discovered or developing religions might be found to exemplify, nor will there be absolute limits to the additional features such new examples could add to the set. (d) The various examples of religion will then be related by a network of relationships rather than shared possession of necessary and sufficient conditions for membership of the class. (e) The meaning of the word 'religion' will nonetheless be projectible: that is, having rehearsed the characteristic features of religion in an inclusive family resemblance definition or having become acquainted with some central examples of religion, one will be able to say of newly found examples whether they are religions or not.[36]

The above features well summarize the strengths of the family-resemblance concept of religion over the essentialist approach to religion. In particular, features (c) to (e) incisively explain why we prefer the family-resemblance notion of religion to the essentialist idea of religion. Since religion exhibits a wide array of different forms and is interpreted in vastly different ways, it cannot be adequately defined but only described. Thus, the search for the indivisible essence of religion must give way to the description of the family resemblances of the things called religions. Whenever we examine the complex phenomena of religions, therefore, we must "see how similarities crop up and disappear."[37]

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[36]Peter B. Clarke and Peter Byrne, *Religion Defined and Explained* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 11-12.

[37]Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 66, 32e.

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In my view, the family-resemblance notion of religion enables us to approach religious plurality with less cultural prejudice and with a more detached perspective. Through this concept, we can appreciate differences of each particular religious tradition in virtue of recognizing its idiosyncracy. We can fully recognize the tradition-specific character of diverse religions, without arbitrarily reducing them to any ethnocentric conceptual framework. Smart identifies two merits of this notion: (1) negatively, "it discourages attempts to define 'religion' in an essentialist manner, which leads to misinterpretations accruing upon trying to formulate some common insight in all faiths-- there may be different sorts of spiritual insights"; (2) positively, "it allows for a sort of disjunctive account of religion: thus, for instance (and crudely), the activities and doctrines associated with worship, sacrifice, *bhakti*, etc., on the one hand, and those associated with the yogic endeavours on the other hand, are two centrally important items in a number of major religions; but we need not insist on the central presence of both or of any particular one of these items for something to count as a religion."[38] Without trying to identify any fundamental core of all religions, as Smart rightly points out, we can explain the phenomena of religious plurality by observing a set of overlapping features found in various examples of religious traditions. However, the weakness of this notion is that it can blur the boundaries between the religious and the non-religious. For example, if Marxism as a militant opponent of religion satisfies some (not all) of the family resemblances of religion, it may be called a religion. This might bother those who want to exclude Marxism from the category of religion. At any rate, religion as a family

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[38]Smart, *Concept and Empathy*, 47.

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resemblance will be very helpful for our study seeking a very comprehensive picture of religion with little concern for definite boundaries.

One important question now suddenly emerges: What are the family resemblances of religions? More precisely, what functions, rules, or characteristic features do different religious traditions share so that despite their vast differences each can be called a member of the religion family? As in the case of games we do not call the "act of childbirth" or the "act of murder" an example of a game, "no one would look to a teapot or a post office for an example of religion."[39] To avoid this problem, we need to list the characteristic features of the typical members of the class "religions." (Please note the ten features Southwold lists in Clarke and Byrne's paragraph cited above.) Nicholas Lash calls the great traditions, generally termed "religions" in the modern sense, "schools whose pedagogy has the twofold purpose of weaning us from idolatry and purifying our desire."[40] He attempts to explain the phenomena of religious plurality in terms of these two typical characteristics. Despite the enormous difficulty of determining anything like an exhaustive list of the family resemblances, let us briefly explore some feasible features by referring to Clifford Geertz's functional notion of religion.[41] We choose the case of

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[39]Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 4.

[40]Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 27.

[41]In the field of the social-scientific study of religion, the controversy between substantive and functional definitions of religion is prominent. In a substantive definition, according to Gregory Baum, religion is defined in terms of its "essential characteristic," which can be epitomized in terms of immortal gods, transcendent realms, and their offer of inner meaning for believers, while in a functional definition religion is defined in terms of its various roles and functions in the social matrix. Gregory Baum, "Definitions of Religion in Sociology," *What is Religion?: An Inquiry for Christian*

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Geertz because it offers us a very inclusive and neutral analysis of religion's central

family-resemblance features. Geertz defines religion as follows:

> *(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive,*
> *and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating*
> *conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these*
> *conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and*
> *motivations seem uniquely realistic.*[42]

He unpacks each of these five constitutive elements in turn. The first mark of family

resemblances is that religion consists of a set of interrelated symbols. By "symbol," he

means "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a

conception."[43] In this regard, Christianity can be described as a set of interrelated

symbols such as God, Jesus Christ, and Church. Likewise, Buddhism can be depicted as

a system of symbols such as Buddha, Dharma, and Nirvana.

The second feature is that this system fuses an ethos--i.e., a set of "powerful,

pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations"--with a world-view--i.e., a set of

"conceptions of a general order of existence." With "ethos" Geertz emphasizes the

values or personality traits in terms of which people believe they ought to live in the

world. Religious symbols shape the "world's climate" by "inducing in the worshiper a

certain distinctive set of dispositions (tendencies, capacities, propensities, skills, habits,

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Theology, ed. Mircea Eliade and David Tracy (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 27;
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[42]Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc.,
Publishers, 1973), 90.

[43]*Ibid.*, 91.

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liabilities, pronenesses)" or "moods and motivations."[44] Thus, for example, religious

symbols may form the social world by leading believers to fall into certain religious

moods such as "reverential," "solemn," or "worshipful" by producing in them specific

motivations, i.e., "liabilities to perform particular classes of act or have particular classes

of feeling."[45] While using "moods" to characterize psychological states of religious

response to the symbolic systems, Geertz refers to "motivations" to highlight particular

sorts of action or feeling towards a certain goal fostered by the symbols. The central

symbols of Christ in Christianity and of Nirvana in Buddhism may well cause in each of

their believers particular sorts of pious moods such as "being redeemed" or "becoming

enlightened" and motivations such as "agape" or "detachment."

In explicating the elements of the third part, Geertz stresses that human beings

feel an acute necessity to formulate "concepts of a general order of existence" in face of

intellectual, emotional, and ethical predicaments in the course of life because or insofar as

they always tend to see the world as meaningful and ordered. In particular, three forms of

experience threaten to reduce the whole world to a meaningless jumble of chaotic events

that lack "interpretability": "bafflement," "suffering," and "evil" (i.e., evil as causing a

"sense of intractable ethical paradox").[46]

"Bafflement" occurs when one feels the limits of his or her analytical capacities to

explain various kinds of anomalous events or experiences such as "death, dreams, mental

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[44]*Ibid.*, 95.

[45]*Ibid.*, 97.

[46]*Ibid.*, 100-108.

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fugues, volcanic eruptions, or marital infidelity."[47] Geertz regards religious symbols as attempts to bring these anomalous phenomena "within the circle of the at least potentially explicable." The second experience of "suffering" in general and of "illness and mourning" in particular is the most serious hindrance which threatens our view of the world as a meaningful order. Whereas the religious response to bafflement is primarily intellectual or analytical, the religious response to suffering is largely emotional or affective. In its intellectual dimension, religion affirms the ultimate explicability of perplexing experience, while in its emotional dimension it confirms the ultimate endurability of suffering experience. Finally, the third form of threatening experience is that of "evil." In contrast with both the intellectual and affective aspects of intimidating experiences, an ethical dimension is highlighted by the problem of evil. If and when one is aware of a discrepancy between moral behavior and material reward, he or she cannot but entertain doubts about the justice and morality of the world. In face of the enigmatic unaccountability of evil, religion renders the world morally coherent and orderly by means of sacred symbols. In the cases of Christianity and Buddhism, each of them has formulated different "conceptions of a general order of existence," i.e., each of their own distinctive world-views such as "original sin"/"redemption" or "illusion"/"awakening" in their encounter with all kinds of troubles such as sin, death, ignorance, suffering, greed, and the like. In sum, the third feature of religious family resemblances is that by means of diverse symbolic systems religion attempts to make the problems of ignorance, pain, and inequity explicable and meaningful.

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[47]*Ibid.*, 100.

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Geertz probes the fourth part of his definition by identifying the distinctiveness of the religious perspective from the "common-sensical," the "scientific," and the "aesthetic" perspectives. Whereas the scientific perspective is skeptical and thus puts its ideas to empirical test through detached observation, for instance, the religious perspective establishes its ideas as being true beyond any doubt or evidence through faith-commitment. At this juncture, Geertz attributes the central role to "ritual" in the religious perspective. Rituals have a particular capacity to clothe religious symbols with the "aura of factuality." "In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world."[48] The fourth feature of the religion family is that the religious perspective can be found primarily in the performance of rituals in which a set of symbols serve to fuse a world-view and an ethos in the actual life of observers.

Finally, in the last part of his analysis Geertz refers to the moods and motivations created by religious symbols as uniquely realistic. Here, the operative word is "uniquely." The conceptions of a general order of existence form such an "aura of factuality" in the midst of rituals that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. The fifth feature is that adherents of each different religion regard their own religious perspective as the most sensible or the uniquely realistic one. In short, with the functional notion Geertz can explain the central features of religion very broadly without necessarily referring to its transcendental or theistic aspects.

Geertz well shows us *some* of religion's family resemblances which are distinct

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[48]*Ibid.*, 112.

from various moral systems or aesthetic expressions. These five Geertzian features of religion are what I want to regard here as the typical characteristics or family resemblances of several major religious traditions. In accordance with the Wittgensteinian theory of family resemblances, then, I want to make clear that these characterizations are neither essences nor arbitrary but the sort of descriptions which help us discern the religious phenomena from the non-religious. The list of religion-making characteristics should not be limited to the Geertzian category but be extended open-endedly in distinguishing members of the religion family from the non-religious. Thus, our illustration of the Geertzian analysis of religious features is to show merely that they may serve to characterize some family of religion and some of its members as religions.

What are, then, the main implications of the family-resemblance notion of religion for this study? First, when we refer to the "state of a plurality of religions," we embrace all possible phenomena under the umbrella of the religious, insofar as they exhibit one or more of family resemblances of religion brought out in Geertz's analysis. (It is important to note that for a certain phenomenon to count as a "religion," all the features of the Geertzian list need not be necessarily present in it. In other words, religion A and religion B may not share any significant common feature, even though each will possess certain common elements with other religions.) I want to consider even atheistic secularisms as religions rather than categorize them as religion surrogates, insofar as they share some of the characteristic features of the religion family. When we refer to the "phenomena of religious plurality," thus, we encompass not only the major post-axial religions (i.e., religions of literate humanity) such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, but

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also pre-axial religions (i.e., pre-literate or primitive religions of stone-age humanity) as well as atheistic secularisms like Marxism or Fascist nationalism. Since I will argue that one of the main tasks of a theology of religions is to explore whether or not non-Christian religions have the same salvific value as Christianity and to examine the possibility of salvation for non-Christians, we must hold such a broad and inclusive picture of religion, under the framework of which we can consider all the conceivable religious phenomena and their adherents in the light of Christian faith.

Second, when we talk about "religion" and "religions" in this essay, we refer to both the subjective dimension of religion (in Smith's term, internal faith), i.e., religion as an inner disposition of religiousness and the objective sense of religion, i.e., religion as a system of cumulative traditions insofar as they are discernable as institutionalized forms and cultural movements. Suffice it to say that religion as a subjective faith in ultimate reality should not be identified with any adherence to the objective forms of religion such as Christianity or Judaism. In the case of Christian faith, God saves us through our faith in Him/Her, not through any institutionalized form of religion. In this regard, we must be keenly aware of the possibility that objective religion often functions as a hindrance to genuine faith in God in the personal dimension. In referring to the religion family, for these reasons, we include both the subjective aspect of religion as expressed in a believer's interior life (i.e., "religion" which *is* believed or understood) and the objective form of religion as embodied in institutionalized systems of symbols (i.e., "religion" *through* which our existence is understood). The family-resemblance notion of religion well illuminates this point in its focus on the network of relationships between the various

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examples of religion as well as between individual experiences of religion.

Third, the family-resemblance notion of religion allows us to appreciate the unique claims of other religions, while still affirming our own particular beliefs and practices. The essentialist definition of religion tends to impose an ethnocentric conceptual framework upon other religions, as observed above, while the family-resemblance notion enables us to recognize fully the tradition-specific character of diverse religions. In relating this point to the salvific worth of non-Christian religions from a Christian perspective, by this notion we can dispel the false presumption of the common soteriological structure underlying all different religions. As claimed above, each individual religion tends to claim that it offers the ultimate aim of salvation or liberation as well as the appropriate means of pursuing it. Although there are significant disagreements among religions about the true aim of salvation or liberation, they generally tend to teach their adherents as well as outsiders the unique validity of their salvation-picture and encourage them to cultivate some proper attitudes or dispositions towards attaining that salvation. For instance, Buddhism teaches that all Buddhists must pursue *Nirvana* as the ultimate aim of life and the Eightfold Path as an appropriate means to attain it. In commending this principle to its own members as well as others, Buddhism normally claims that its proposal of *Nirvana* and the Eightfold Path are universally applicable and decisive for leading human beings to the state of salvation or liberation from the destructive forces of everyday life such as chaotic transience and inauthenticity. The *Dharma* of Buddhism, as pointing to the aim of *Nirvana* as well as to the means of the Eightfold Path, may be an effective way of overcoming egoism and

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attaining inner liberation but it does not intend to lead people into a personal relationship with God revealed in Jesus Christ. If there are significant differences between the Buddhist picture of liberation and Christian salvation, how can we properly claim that the Christian salvation is actually occurring in Buddhism? If the Christian notion of salvation is possible only on the account of Jesus Christ, how can we say that the same salvation is really taking place in Buddhism? Although we will take up this issue again when we discuss the scope of a theology of religions in the second section of the succeeding chapter, suffice it to say that our notion of religion as a family resemblance can rectify this problem. What is experienced as "ultimate" with regard to salvation or liberation always remains tradition-specific, depending upon the particular uses or rules of a religion in particular contexts. They do not share any common experiential core or essence but exhibit a set of overlapping similarities widespread among the phenomena of the religion family.

Christian Faith beleaguered by Religious Plurality

What problems does religious plurality pose to Christian faith? Before answering this question, we need to clarify the central claims of the traditional Christian faith and several key concepts. Christian faith can be articulated as faith in God, more precisely, faith in the ultimate reality of God as decisively revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In this regard, the essential ingredient in Christian faith is not merely faith in God but faith in the unique or distinctive event of Jesus Christ whereby such Christian faith in God is rendered possible or available to us. This Christian faith has normally

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affirmed that Jesus Christ is the sole provision for the salvation of the entire human race and that Christianity is the only valid religion established by God.

Let us also define more clearly our notion of "salvation," a key concept germane to Christian faith. In fact, the notion of salvation is as diverse as the different names of all individual religions. Although many diverse religions teach that a certain present condition of human existence must be escaped or transformed, if this usually means "salvation," all of them present substantially different descriptions of the nature of that condition, of the liberated or transformed state, and of the appropriate means of attaining it. While Christians and Jews normally interpret salvation in terms of a "state of being redeemed or forgiven by God," Muslims regard it as a "total submission to Allah." Unlike these Western monotheistic religions, Eastern religions in general and Buddhism in particular tend to approach salvation in terms of "liberation or enlightenment from ignorance or suffering." Therefore, we are not using a single all-encompassing and neutral notion of "salvation" which is equivalent to a common core or essence underlying all particular religions. This is in accordance with our rejection of the essentialist definition of religion, as discussed in the first section of this chapter. Instead, when we refer to the salvific value of non-Christian religions and the salvific possibility for their adherents from a Christian point of view, we are adopting the specifically Christian concept of "salvation" as being forgiven and accepted by God through Jesus' death and resurrection. Since our main concern is with a Christian theological elucidation of non-Christian religions and their adherents, following Joseph DiNoia, more precisely, by "salvation" we mean all of what Christians have traditionally affirmed it to embrace:

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complete well-being in the life to come, in eternal fellowship with the Blessed Trinity and with other human beings, won for us by Jesus Christ through whom grace is given in the present life to nurture the beginnings of this fellowship and to overcome obstacles to its flourishing that arise from creaturely limitations and from sinful actions and dispositions.[49]

Given this Christian notion of "salvation," throughout Christian history Christians have confessed that this kind of salvation is available only through one's explicit communion with Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Son of God as well as the only Savior who is the absolutely normative Mediator through whom we achieve salvation. This has been and is the most important and non-negotiable claim of the traditional Christian faith with regard to the salvation of billions of non-Christian people.

In addition to the ontological necessity of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the entire human race, the majority of Christians have also claimed that Christianity alone is the absolute and final religion that cannot be surpassed or even equaled by any other religions. The simple identification of Christianity with the true and absolute religion has been a typical trait of the traditional Christian faith. At this point, let us clarify our exact meaning of "Christianity." It would be very difficult and even undesirable to identify any continuing essence of Christianity, which embraces all the manifestations of Christian beliefs and practices throughout nearly two thousand years of its history. This is parallel with our previous criticism of isolating any common essence of religion, the manifestation of which is rendered to be religious plurality. According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, the standard medieval term for what Christians today call Christianity was *fides Christiana* (Christian faith) which emphasized the interior life of Christians; it

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[49]DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 37-38.

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was not until the Reformation that the collective term "Christianity" came to emerge and only during the Enlightenment it became standard.[50] Smith well shows us how the internal meaning of Christian piety was gradually displaced by the objective and impersonal concept of "Christianity." Although I am sympathetic with Smith's insistence on reverting to the subjective piety of Christian religion from the objectively reified concept of Christianity, for convenience's sake I want to continue to use the term "Christianity." By this term, however, I want to embrace both the subjective piety of Christian faith and the objective system of cumulative traditions and institutions. In fact, Christianity has shown an enormous diversity and heterogeneity of expressions in its beliefs, rituals, organizations, denominational ramifications, and so forth. In referring to Christianity, therefore, I mean neither the totality of all Christians' experiences nor the entire system of all Christian traditions and institutions in all periods and all places. In this regard, Friedrich Schleiermacher helps us catch the invariable core of what we call "Christianity." According to him,

> *Christianity is a monotheistic faith, belonging to the teleological type of religion, and is essentially distinguished from other such faiths by the fact that in it everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.*[51]

In this definition, Schleiermacher is concerned with the core element which remains the

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[50]Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 74. Smith reports that since the seventeenth century onward the word "Christianity" came to be used in two senses: (1) a "pietistic one, more or less equivalent to 'Christ-like-ness' or 'Christian living'"; (2) a "system of beliefs." As observed in part 1, Smith argues for replacing the latter sense with the former.

[51]Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 52.

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invariable constant throughout Christianity's multifarious aspects and the distinctive from other religious traditions, i.e., its relatedness to the *redemption through Jesus Christ*. Christianity is constituted by the fact that everything in it is referred to God's redeeming act in Jesus Christ. When I talk about Christianity as a religion, therefore, I signify it as any or every institutionalized system of interrelated symbols, beliefs, practices, and values, as well as any or every form of Christian piety, insofar as they appeal to the saving act of God through Jesus Christ as their reference-point. For the convenience of our study, here, I want to put more emphasis on the word "institutionalized" which means that Christianity is a stable property of those who are called Christians from the beginning of the church up to the present regardless of the vicissitudes of the particular experiences of individual members in each generation.

Given this notion of Christianity, throughout most of its history Christianity's claim to be the only true and absolute religion in the world has formed an essential part of its entire beliefs and practices. Although all religions make or imply the claim to be true, Christians typically claim that no other religion can be true in the same sense in which this can be said of Christianity. In the modern Western history of philosophy (especially, in German idealism), this exclusive claim to truth was formulated in terms of the "absoluteness" of Christianity. According to Reinhold Bernhardt, "absoluteness" in this usage is a philosophical term which goes back to Hegel's "absolute religion."[52]

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[52]Reinhold Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums: Von der Aufklärung bis zur pluralistischen Religionstheorie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1990), 15. In his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel referred to Christianity as the "revealed religion" (*offenbarte Religion*) that determines the nature of the absolute religion. In the whole system of Hegel's philosophy of religion, the absoluteness claim is

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The absolute is the non-historical, that which exists entirely for itself, detached from the worldly structure of limitations. It is the utterly free ... conditioned by nothing outside itself. This constitutive negative-relationality means: the absolute is without any necessary reference to another (unrelatedness), perfectly detached from all conditions (unconditionality), purely of itself (aseity), without beginning (causelessness), and end (infinity). The absolute stands over against the relative as the infinite over against the finite, as Being over against the existent, as the essence over against the historical, as the absolute unity over against plurality.[53]

The absolute stands opposed to the relative, often meaning the negation of the relative.

The term conveys the sense of the fixed, the self-independent, and the unqualified. The

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the expression of the experienced superiority of the Western spirit. The absolute spirit (the spirit of God) realizes itself in all spiritual events, especially in art, religion, and philosophy. Religion as the actualization stage of the spirit (*Verwirklichungsstufe des Geistes*) comprises three essential phases: natural religion, the religion of spiritual individuality (*Religion der geistigen Individüalität*), and Christian religion. In the first stage of natural religion, spirit is not distinct from nature, while in the second stage spirit is conceived as a personal deity independent from the natural world. The self-consciousness of the absolute spirit (*Selbstbewußtsein des absoluten Geistes*) becomes obvious at the point where everything is perceived as the work of God's spirit. And this final stage culminates in Christianity in which religion becomes absolute because in the Christian doctrine of the man of God the link between God and humanity reaches the highest possibility and actuality (*zur höchsten Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit*)--i.e., in Christianity the separation or alienation between God (transcendence) and humanity (immanence) is *aufgehoben* or reconciled. For Hegel, Christianity as a revealed religion achieves a higher synthesis between the infinite spirit of God and the finite world, becoming the absolute religion in the evolutionary history of religion. However, the term "the absoluteness of Christianity" appeared explicitly only since the middle of the nineteenth century. See Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums*, 15, 83-87; F. Wolfinger, "Absolutheitsanspruch," *Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe*, ed. Karl Müller and Theo Sundermeier (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1987), 4-5.

[53]*Ibid.*, 17. "Der/das Absolute ist das Nicht-Geschichtliche, das aus dem weltlichen Bedingungsgefüge gelöst, gänzlich für sich Seiende. Er/es ist das schlechthin Freie ... von nichts außer von sich selbst Bestimmte. Diese konstitutive Negativ-Relationalität bedeutet: Der/das Absolute ist ohne notwendigen Bezug auf anderes (Beziehungslosigkeit), schlechthin losgelöst von allen Bedingungen (Unbedingtheit), er/es ist rein an sich (Aseität), ohne Anfang (Unverursachtheit) und Ende (Unendlichkeit). Der/das Absolute steht dem Relativen gegenüber wie das Unendliche dem Endlichen, wie das Sein dem Seienden, wie das Wesen dem Geschichtlichen, wie die schlechthinnige Einheit der Vielhalt."

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absolute itself does not "exist," but is the releasing or loosening power of existing. Nevertheless, the absolute requires an "object" from which it must differentiate itself. The noun and adjective "absolute" derives from the Latin verb "ab-solvere" which means to "loosen" or "detach" (*los-lösen*).[54] Given this etymological origin, the "absolute" always presupposes the object from which it can loosen or detach itself. The characteristics (*Eigenschaften*) of the absolute are determined by the kind and nature of the object from which it differentiates itself. In this regard, Bernhardt points out that the concept of "absolute" is originally a non-relational term but always functions as a "relational notion" (*relationaler Begriff*) and "relational value claim" (*relationalen Geltungsanspruch*) in the actual context of its linguistic usage. If we refer to the "absoluteness claim of Christianity" in particular, thus, it always presupposes various sorts of non-Christian objects from which it can totally differentiate itself, thereby acquiring a special status against such external phenomena. The *Verabsolutierung* (making absolute) of Christianity is always possible in its external relationship (*Außenbeziehung*) with non-Christian objects such as other religions, secular ideologies or philosophies, and world-views. Bernhardt claims that "the absoluteness claim of Christianity determines its relationship to what is outside Christianity in such a way that *the latter undergoes a devaluation*."[55] F. Wolfinger states that "[the adjective] 'absolute'

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[54]*Ibid.*, 16.

[55]*Ibid.*, 18. "Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums bestimmt das Verhältnis zu Außerchristlichem in der Weise, *daß dieses dabei eine Abwertung erfährt*."

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is synonymous with 'only', 'unmistakable', 'underivable', and 'unsurpassable'."[56]

According to Walter Kasper, the absoluteness of Christianity means that it is "not only *de facto* the noblest of all living religions but is God's one ultimate self-disclosure, completely valid for all men in whatever age they may be living, essentially definitive, never to be superseded."[57] In claiming Christianity as the absolute religion in its external relationship with other religions, Christians normally affirm that Christ, the Christian Gospel, or the Church alone are true, unmistakable, underivable from other sources, and unsurpassable by all other saviors, gospels, or other religious institutions.

The absoluteness claim of Christianity was then typically expressed in the Cyprianian formula *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (there is no salvation outside the church). Although the original context of this Latin church father's saying makes it clear that his concern was not with the possibility of salvation for adherents of other religions but with schism, heresy, and apostasy within the Roman Catholic Church, this formula remarkably articulates an absolutist Christian attitude towards other religions, that salvation is possible only through the visible or historical church (whether Catholic or Protestant) and its explicit proclamation.[58] In short, by "Christianity as the absolute religion," I mean the

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[56]Wolfinger, "Absolutheitsanspruch," 4. "'Absolut' steht gleichbedeutend für 'einzig', 'unverwechselbar', 'unableitbar', 'unüberholbar'."

[57]Walter Kasper, "Absoluteness of Christianity," *Encyclopedia of Theology*, 202.

[58]Both Joseph DiNoia and Maurice Wiles contend that this Cyprianian doctrine was not designed to deny the salvific value of non-Christian religious traditions, but to warn against heretical groups with an explicit intention to guard the full authority of the Roman Catholic Church from them. Nevertheless, I want to stress that this Cyprianian slogan has been used as a typical instance of Christian absolutism against heathen outsiders. See DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 36-37; Maurice Wiles, *Christian*

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claim that it is the final, unsurpassable, and unequaled religion as constituted by God through the event of Jesus Christ. According to this claim, Christianity cannot be superseded by another religion in the course of human history because it is sanctioned by God as the only legitimate and definitive means through which all human beings can gain access to salvation. Christianity is destined to spread throughout the world, eventually replacing all other non-Christian religions.

With these preliminary clarifications in mind, let us turn to our main question in this part: What challenges does religious plurality pose to Christian faith? First of all, today's situation of a single global village forces Christianity to reconsider seriously its absolute and exclusive claims because these claims are offensive and incredible to other religious people and even may threaten the survival of their religions. Not long ago in Western society, Christianity itself was regarded as identical with religion. Since Constantine declared Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313 C.E., adhering to religion in the West has been synonymous with conversion from idolatry or unfaith to Christian faith. To say that a certain person was deeply religious was equivalent to saying that he or she was a devout Christian. Although Christianity was intermittently shocked by the sudden expansion and threat of other religions such as Islam in the seventh century in particular, at least until the advent of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the simple identification of Christianity with the only true and absolute religion has been dominant in Western philosophy and theology.

Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 11.

During the Enlightenment era and the ensuing centuries, there has developed a Western realization that Christianity is a part of much broader human civilization and just one way among many others. Since the end of the World War II, in particular, this awareness has become prominent in public discussions. Through the technological revolutions in transportation and communication and the unprecedented influx of knowledge about the world religions (in particular, oriental religions) into Western society, in particular, Christianity has come to recognize itself as one historical religion among many others. Through this enforced proximity of Christianity to a plurality of other religions, Christians can empirically observe that non-Christian believers are as ethical as themselves and that they are fully satisfied with their own religions. In many cases, they do not feel any urgency or necessity to convert to Christianity and are even sure that their own religions are superior over Christianity. Moreover, Christians themselves come to be keenly aware of their own weaknesses in spiritual and moral matters. Therefore, an increasing number of Christians have been affirming that non-Christian believers remain not as objects of conversion or mission but as sincere partners in living together. In encountering these people in everyday life, Christians should deal seriously with the vexing question of the truth of non-Christian religions as well as of the salvation of their adherents, if they want to render the Gospel of Jesus Christ as credible or intelligible to many people who are outside as well as inside Christianity.

Second, religious plurality compels the Christian monopoly of salvation to be re-examined or abandoned. It is a non-negotiable part of the traditional Christian claim that salvation is ordinarily restricted to explicit Christians who have heard or understood the

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Gospel of Jesus Christ within the bounds of Christianity. Orthodox and conservative evangelical Christians have always affirmed the radical necessity of the explicit confession of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation within the institutional affiliation with the Christian community. In other words, explicit membership in the Christian community as well as some regular association with the sacramental dispensation is believed to be necessary for attaining salvation. This exclusive salvation claim demands us to weigh seriously the possibility of the salvation of non-Christian believers and of all the unevangelized. This issue covers not only the adherents of non-Christian religions but also the ultimate destiny of all of the unevangelized who have never heard of Jesus Christ before death. Although we may categorize as many people as possible as religious through a family-resemblance notion of religion, there would still remain some people who would never be called religious. When we refer to the destiny of the unevangelized, therefore, we must include not only non-Christian religious adherents but also all non-Christians who do not belong to any particular religion.

The salvation or damnation of the billions of the unevangelized outside the Christian community raises a serious question about the scope and effectiveness of God's grace and justice. If salvation is restricted to only a small number of explicit Christians, how can we say that God is both omnipotent and omnibeneficient? As Schubert Ogden rightly points out, the exclusive restriction of salvation within the bounds of explicit Christians and Christianity creates a form of the problem of evil that cannot be properly resolved: Either God is not powerful enough to have extended the possibility of the salvation of all humankind, or God is not good enough to have wished to stretch it to all

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human beings regardless of their explicit faith in Christ.[59] How can we believe that God

is both omnipotent and omnibeneficient, if God fails to provide billions of people with

any ultimate opportunity to participate in salvation through Jesus Christ? Why did God

create so many people who will be eventually destined to damnation, if God foreknew

that the vast majority of human race would have no explicit chance of salvation? Because

of this problem, religious plurality is a serious challenge to Christian faith.

The absolute and exclusive claims of Christian faith raise these sorts of

interrelated problems concerning the state of religious plurality. These are all important

issues to be pondered seriously. In the following section, we will further extract and

elaborate some particularly important ones relevant to the inquiry of systematic theology.

Systematic Theology and Religious Plurality

What sorts of issues does religious plurality pose to Christian systematic

theology? What place does a theology of religions have within the discipline of

systematic theology? These are the two main questions with which this part is concerned.

In answering these questions, we will first discuss the disciplinary nature and task of

systematic theology, giving particular attention to the kinds of argument appropriate to it.

Second, we will explore a set of theological issues posed for systematic theology by the

state of religious plurality. Finally, we will examine the specific place of a theology of

religions within systematic theology. In so doing, we will highlight a theology of

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[59]Schubert M. Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* (Dallas, TX: SMU Press, 1992), 31ff.

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religions as an indispensable project incumbent upon systematic theology in today's global context.

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The Disciplinary Nature and
Task of Systematic Theology

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What is our notion of "systematic theology"? In this essay, we understand it as a theological discipline concerned with presenting a coherent and consistent articulation of Christian faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ. Before clarifying this meaning of "systematic theology" in detail, we need to discuss the nature of theology itself as a general form of critical reflection because systematic theology is always practiced as a specific way of doing theology through its particular aim, subject-matter, and method. "Theology" is derived from the two Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (thought or speech), and therefore the compound *theologia* may be crudely translated as "thought or speech about God." This plain etymology specifies both theology's subject "God" and its activity "thinking" or "speaking." In the broadest sense, theology goes back to its pre-Christian usage which refers to any reflective and right discourse about God. If theology in its generic sense means what is thought, said, and done[60] about the ultimate reality that theistic religions normally call "God," Christian theology cannot monopolize the term "theology." From now onward, however, we are using the word "theology" in the specific sense of "Christian theology" except as noted in particular cases.

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[60]"Activity" is added to "thought" and "speech" simply because human beings can "speak" eloquently without saying anything at all, but rather by doing something. Cf. Ogden, *Doing Theology Today*, 5.

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If theology is to be understood as such, can any kind of thinking, saying, and doing about God be called "theology"? To answer this question, I want to explicate a sharp distinction some theologians such as Ogden typically make between "witness" and "theology," thereby defining theology as a *critical reflection on the validity of Christian witness*. Ogden understands "witness" in general as all that humans think, say, and do about God in their life-praxis, distinguishing it from "theology" as the second-order activity of critically reflecting on the validity of witness. If "witness" in its generic sense is everything that humans think, say, and do concerning the ultimate reality of God, "Christian witness" in particular refers to anything and everything that Christians think, say, and act about God through their "particular experience of Jesus as of decisive significance for human existence."[61] Charles M. Wood uses the term "witness" as roughly equivalent to "Christian tradition" in a fairly comprehensive sense.[62] He prescribes his use of "Christian witness" in two more strict ways: (1) it is not normative but includes "anything and everything which represents itself as, or might plausibly be taken as intending to be, Christian witness"; (2) it is "both official and unofficial, formal

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[61]*Ibid.*, 6.

[62]Charles M. Wood, *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), 21. Wood notes that the term "Christian witness" (or "Christian tradition") may involve both the subjective activity of bearing witness (or "handing on the tradition") and the objective "substance of what is borne or handed on." The corresponding Greek noun *Martus* (often translated as "witness") designates "one who bears witness," while *marturia* conveys what Wood himself means by the current use of the term "witness," i.e., either the subjective activity of bearing witness (the *that* of witness) or the objective content of what is being borne (the *what* of witness). See *Ibid.*, 38.

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and informal, explicit and implicit, verbal and nonverbal."[63] For Wood, it embraces

everything which is constitutive of Christian identity and mission as Christians act in

church and society. Following Wood's comprehensive picture of Christian witness, we

understand it to involve any and every possible Christian thought, speech, and activity,

which may range from doctrinal formulation, worship services, revival meetings,

participation in political movements, to various testimonies of personal faith, based on an

experience of God expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In bearing Christian witness, Christians always make or imply a claim about the

validity of that witness. Whenever and wherever Christians bear witness concerning their

particular experience of Jesus as the Christ, according to Wood, they always tend to claim

that their witness is *authentically Christian, meaningful and true*, and *fitting* or

appropriate to a specific context.[64] In engaging in various acts of witness to Jesus Christ,

in Ogdenian terms, Christians implicitly or explicitly claim that these acts are adequate to

the content of Christian witness--i.e., appropriate to Jesus as Christians experience him

and credible to the common experience and reason of today's people--and fitting to its

situation.[65] (In my view, Ogden's criteria of the appropriateness of witness to Jesus

Christ and its credibility to humans are parallel to Wood's criteria of its authentic

Christianness and meaningfulness and truth respectively. The only difference between

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[63]*Ibid.*, 38; 47.

[64]See Charles M. Wood, *An Invitation to Theological Study* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 15; *Vision and Discernment*, 39-40.

[65]Ogden, *Doing Theology Today*, 7.

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them is that Ogden puts these two criteria under the single category of what he calls the "adequacy of witness to its content," while Wood does not do so. This slight difference may illuminate their different understandings of the nature and task of systematic theology that we will examine below shortly.)

To maintain its viability, first of all, Christian witness by nature makes or implies a claim to be genuinely Christian and this claim to the authentic Christianness of certain acts of witness must be measured by their accordance with the normative Christian witness. (There is a wide controversy about what is to count as the normative Christian witness. Protestants generally appeal to "scripture" as normative, while Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox regard both "scripture" and "tradition" as normative. However, what is to be counted as *norma normans non normata* of the authentically Christian witness is notoriously difficult and highly controversial among theologians. We will take up this issue again in greater detail in exploring the first phase [historical phase] of a theology of religions in the next chapter.) Second, Christian witness makes or implies a claim to be worthy of belief by any "contemporary" man or woman. In bearing witness to Jesus Christ, Christians do not simply express their convictions but strongly commend their witness as meaningful and true, and therefore as worthy of acceptance by all contemporary people. Third, to bear Christian witness to Jesus Christ is to make or imply a claim to be apt to its specific context. Since witness is always addressed to a specific situation, it must be appropriate to the context in which it is enacted. In sum, any and every act of Christian witness makes or implies three claims to validity: the claim to be

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authentically Christian, the claim to be meaningful and true, and the claim to be apt to its

circumstances.

With these implicit or explicit validity-claims of all acts of witness in mind,

Ogden distinguishes the "primary form of bearing Christian witness" from theology as the

"secondary form of critically reflecting on the validity of such witness."[66] Following

Ogden, we understand theology as either the process or the product of a certain kind of

critical reflection seeking to validate the various witnesses' claims to validity. Given this

definition of theology, the three dimensions of the "claim to validity" determine the so-

called division of theology into the three main disciplines of historical, philosophical, and

practical theologies. Roughly speaking, historical theology is concerned with

determining the authentic Christianness of Christian witness, i.e., the faithfulness to what

is normatively Christian; philosophical theology seeks to answer the critico-constructive

question about its meaning and truth; and practical theology is concerned with elucidating

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[66]Schubert M. Ogden, "Toward Doing Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 75
(1995), 1. According to Wood, the distinction between "witness" as the first-order
activity and "theology" as the second-order reflection on it involves both strengths and
weaknesses. It rightly enables us to isolate Christian theology as a study of certain
sample witnesses from the crude activity of bearing them, preventing the misuse of the
name "theology" from its rationalization (i.e., its facile confusion with witness).
However, the inseparable interrelatedness between "witness" and "theology" should not
be overlooked because it can distinguish theology as critical reflection on the validity of
Christian witness from all other academic fields or disciplines in the university. Wood
argues that this distinction is not between the "scholarly" and the "popular," but is merely
"functional" because there can be a theological element (i.e., a "process of reflection and
judgment") within the Christian life of bearing witness. As Wood rightly points out, it is
true that a number of statements can serve both functions of witness and theology. Here,
however, we want to highlight the positive implications (i.e., strengths) of this distinction
for our study. Wood, *Vision and Discernment*, 24.

the question of the fitting enactment of Christian witness in a specific context.[67] Since we will have a more appropriate occasion to elaborate each of these theological phases for doing an adequate theology of religions in Chapter III, let us only focus on clarifying the disciplinary nature and task of systematic theology in relation to these phases.

As with theology itself, we understand systematic theology either as any "written product" about it such as Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* or as a "mode of systematic reflection." We need, therefore, to give special attention to the word "system" because it is the constitutive core of either sense of the term "systematic theology." According to Gerhard Ebeling, the use of "systematic theology" can be traced back to the seventeenth century when the concept of "system" became directly accessible to the field of

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[67]This is what Charles Wood proposes as the three basic dimensions of theology that we are adopting here. Unlike him, Schubert Ogden divides theology into the disciplines of historical, systematic, and practical theology respectively: the first being constituted by the question about the "meaning of Christian witness"; the second and third by the question about its validity--i.e., more precisely, the second by asking about its adequacy consisting of its appropriateness to Jesus Christ and credibility to any contemporary people, the third, about its fittingness. In this Ogdenian scheme, historical theology anticipates both systematic and practical theology and they conversely presuppose it. See Ogden, *Doing Theology Today*, 41. As seen in the Ogdenian division of theology, systematic theology is normally mediated between historical and practical theology, receiving and critically reflecting on the results of historical theology, and transmitting its own product to practical theology. Thus, systematic theology is typically understood as the "middle discipline" (present) between historical (past) and practical theology (future). In this regard, Wood criticizes the tendency of such an understanding of systematic theology to "suggest--even if it does not assert outright--that the flow of traffic among these disciplines is one-way." In other words, it may disregard a necessity for the close interdisciplinary illumination among theological disciplines. Despite its considerable overlap with philosophical theology, Wood wants to regard systematic theology as a "complex mode of reflection involving all three dimensions of theology." We are here directly appropriating the Woodian theological schematization. See Wood, *Vision and Discernment*, 50-51.

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theology.[68] Etymologically, a "system" consists of the Greek words *syn* (together) and *histanai* (to cause to stand up or set up), referring to an organic whole or unity which is set up or assembled from various fragmentary parts.[69] In referring to systematic theology as a coherent and consistent organization of the various parts of Christian faith in God in His/Her relationship to humanity as well as to the world, I want to emphasize the systematic method of its inquiry.

According to Wood, systematic theology is systematic in three senses: (1) it integrates the three inquiries of historical, philosophical, and practical theologies, "bringing the resources and insights of each to bear upon each of the others, and coordinating them as aspects of a single inquiry into the validity of Christian witness"; (2) "it is comprehensive in its scope"; and (3) it is both critical and constructive, seeking to "give a positive, coherent answer to the question of what constitutes valid Christian witness."[70] As Wood incisively epitomizes the core nature of systematic theology, it purports to form an integrative organization of Christian faith, as opposed to a partial and one-sided approach. The Christian message, as expressed in scripture and tradition, needs such a systematic organization because its diverse fragments are interrelated enough to disclose a coherent story of God's redemption through Jesus Christ, from the creation of the world to the last things. In order for systematic theology to explore the

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[68]Gerhard Ebeling, *The Study of Theology*, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 125.

[69]*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 1234.

[70]Wood, *Vision and Discernment*, 51.

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unity of Christian witness in its diversity, it must inform and be informed by the historical interpretation of the authentically Christian witness, the philosophical investigation of its meaning and truth, and the practical examination of its relevance to a particular context. Theologians generally concede that systematic theology involves only both the dogmatic and apologetic tasks, i.e., the task of validating the claim of witness to be faithful to the normative Christian witness and that of validating its claim to be intelligible to contemporary people. Although they presume that for this double task systematic theology must be informed by the results of historical theology, as a matter of fact, they do not emphasize that it must be equally informed by practical theology, but only vice versa. For them, thus, systematic theology is to be done simply in anticipation of practical theology. In this regard, Wood powerfully suggests that for the fulfillment of its aim--in Ogdenian terms, for example, critically validating the claim of witness to be adequate to its content--systematic theology must be informed by practical theology as well. It is also important to note that systematic theology, as Wood points out, is both critical and constructive. It asks a critical question, "Is the sample witness in question authentically Christian, meaningful and true, and appropriate to a particular context?", while raising a constructive one, "What witness would be genuinely Christian, intelligible to today's people, and fitting to a specific context?" In the process of explicating these critico-constructive questions, the overriding concern of systematic theology is with seeking the wholeness and unity of Christian witness, that is, seeing how its various parts hang together.

If systematic theology is an attempt to organize the various parts of Christian

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witness into an integrative system in view of critically reflecting on its Christianness, meaning and truth, and aptness, it normally treats such topics as these: the doctrine of God (theology *proper*), the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ (christology), the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), the doctrine of human being (anthropology), the doctrine of salvation (soteriology), the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology), and the doctrine of the last things (eschatology).[71] Given these loci of systematic theology, what about Christian doctrines about other religions? What particular issues does the existence of many religions pose to systematic theology? In what follows, the explication of these issues is in order. (Hereafter, the word "theology" will be used in the specific sense of "Christian systematic theology" unless otherwise qualified.)

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The Challenges of Religious Plurality to
Systematic Theology

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Theology as understood in the present work involves the method of correlation which was first utilized by Paul Tillich. He seeks to correlate the existential questions of human beings, as exposed by an analysis of the human situation through the aids of

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[71]Systematic theology is often understood as an attempt to formulate a set of doctrines about such topics. Jaroslav Pelikan defines Christian doctrine as "What the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches, and confesses on the basis of the word of God." Despite the complicated issues involved in this general definition, following Pelikan, we regard "doctrine" as church's official teaching as normally expressed in the form of statements of Christian witness. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1. For the further clarification of this definition and exploration of the nature of Christian doctrine, see Charles M. Wood, "The Question of the Doctrine of Providence," *Theology Today* 49 (1992), 210-217.

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philosophy, art, literature, and the like, with the proposed answers involved in the Christian message.[72] Tillich's aim in adopting this method is to promote a conversation between theology and other secular disciplines, revelation and human culture, and the Christian witness or tradition and the modern world. Identifying Tillich's weakness in surrendering the question of the human situation to the answer of the Christian message, David Tracy intends to strengthen this method further by emphasizing a mutual correction as well as a mutual enrichment in the process of interacting with the conversation partners.[73] He argues that only a critical correlation of theology with various dialogue partners such as social sciences, natural sciences, other religions, and the like, can render Christian faith intelligible and credible to contemporary people living in a pluralistic situation. One of the tasks of theology is to correlate the Christian witness expressed in scripture and tradition with the modern situation as characterized by radical plurality. If the hermeneutical circle in which theology must operate involves the correlation of the Christian Gospel with the contemporary context, it has mainly adopted as its dialogue partners scientists and secular atheists. Since the Enlightenment, for the most part, Western European theologians have sought to formulate the doctrines of God, creation, sin, Jesus Christ, salvation, and the final things almost entirely in dialogue with science and secularism. The credentials for a capable systematic theologian depend upon how he or she is well informed about contemporary sciences as well as about popular

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[72]Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Three Volumes in One (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 59-66.

[73]David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1988), 45-46.

philosophies such as existentialism, linguistic analysis, or process metaphysics.

According to Wolfhart Pannenberg, the most important challenges to systematic theology

since the beginning of the modern era are from modern science and the consequent

emergence of the secular interpretation of reality, and the critique of ecclesial authority.[74]

He seeks to reformulate the doctrine of God in dialogue with atheism and science. Tillich

also wrote his magnum opus, *Systematic Theology*, almost entirely in response to the

challenges of modern secularism and atheism. It is widely recognized that he felt a strong

necessity to rewrite completely his *Systematic Theology* by taking into account

Christianity's encounter with the world religions only during the last phase of his life,

after having visited Japan in 1960 in particular.[75] However, his main dialogue partners

were modern secularists and atheists. It is no exaggeration to say that modern Western

systematic theology has been shaped in predominant relation to the public audiences of

scientists and secular atheists.[76] In formulating various doctrines, at least until the dawn

of the Second World War, Western theologians thus have not seriously considered other

religious traditions and their adherents as sincere dialogue partners. In what follows, I

want to emphasize that without considering seriously the challenges of religious plurality

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[74]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 13-14.

[75]See Krister Stendahl, "Foreword," *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions* by Paul Tillich, vii-xiv.

[76]This point is exactly what Gavin D'Costa highlights in his short essay "The End of Systematic Theology," *Theology* 95 (1992), 324-334. He emphasizes the importance of "religious plurality" as an unavoidable dialogue partner for systematic theology as a whole.

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theology cannot make itself credible to contemporary people living in a religiously pluralistic situation.

Systematic theology as a whole needs to be correlated with different perspectives of other religions in order to be credible to contemporary people who are surrounded by adherents of those religions, and appropriate to a particular context characterized by the state of religious plurality. It will remain systematic insofar as it can articulate the authenticity, meaningfulness and truth, and fittingness of Christian witness in its relation to today's global situation of religious plurality. It needs to take into account other religions' views of ultimate reality, human beings, savior figures, salvation, the last things, and the like, in order to present a truthful and integrative systematization of Christian faith about today's religious plurality.

Religious plurality raises both a priori and a posteriori issues for theology. By "a priori," I mean issues which start from the mere presupposition of the bare fact that there are actually many diverse religions besides Christianity, while by "a posteriori" I refer to those which serve to form some specific theological judgments about specific features of more than one other religious tradition by the substantial mastery of those actual features. A priori, then, religious plurality challenges theology to struggle with the following question in its task of formulating or reformulating various doctrines: If Christianity is to be considered as one among many world religions, how should we interpret its finality or absoluteness? In other words, if each particular religion equally claims itself to be *the* true religion and to offer the best means of salvation for insiders as well as for outsiders, can Christians still assert the unique superiority of their religion over other religions?

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This central question can be further extended to the following questions in detail. How should Christians evaluate pre-Christian religions in general and the Old Testament religion in particular? Are they genuine means of salvation for certain people before the coming of Jesus Christ? Can each of them be interpreted as a *praeparatio evangelica* or a tutor leading up to Christ (cf. Gal. 3: 24)? Why have they continued to flourish even after the coming of Jesus Christ? And what about post-Christian religions? Does God's light shine in both pre- and post-Christian religions? Or, are they dark, deceptive, and satanic? Do they reflect general revelation and the prevenient grace of God to some degree? Will Christianity finally absorb them? If it will ultimately replace all other non-Christian religions, why does God allow them to exist? What is the providential role of other religions in the universal history of God's salvation? Is every religion a vehicle of salvation for its members in its own terms and rights without presupposing any necessity for explicit membership in the Christian religion? If there is a mixture of positive and negative features in non-Christian religions, how can we properly evaluate them as a totality from a Christian point of view? In a word, can we identify any salvific value and truth in those non-Christian religions *qua* religions in the same way as Christianity, or as independent from the soteriological structure of Christianity? The state of religious plurality raises these sorts of a priori and internally related questions to systematic theology. At this moment, our concern is not to answer these questions but to illustrate simply some prominent issues for formulating an adequate systematic theology in relation to other religions. (In Chapter IV, we will try to examine how each of our four representative theologians seeks to answer some of these questions.)

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Besides these a priori sorts of questions, religious plurality also raises a number of a posteriori significant questions which may require us to reshape completely the substance of systematic theology itself. Religious plurality provides theology with a novel framework for highlighting the particularity and universality of Christianity as situated among many religions which might play mediative roles in God's total plan of salvation. It is very important for modern theologians to know in depth at least one other religion because it may enable them to get illuminating insights and resources for doing an adequate theology. Through a dialogical interaction with other religions, Christians can enlarge or rectify what they have previously held to be true or right. In formulating a Christian doctrine of God, for example, theologians may be profoundly challenged by Theravadin Buddhism or Hinduism with regard to the attributes of the divine reality. (Of course, Theravadin Buddhism or Hinduism can be profoundly challenged by Christian theology as well.) As process philosophy offers some theologians a significant tool to deepen and correct the traditional Western monotheism in more adequate ways, these religions may awaken Christianity's danger of falling into a radical form of idolatry in its speaking of God and provide some significant alternatives to avoid the facile identification of any visible object or concept with the unknown mystery of God. They may help theologians make a sharp distinction between what Gordon D. Kaufman calls the "real referent of the word 'God'" ("God" as the ultimate mystery and unknowability) and the "available referent for 'God'" ("God" as an imaginative or linguistic construct).[77]

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[77]Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 84ff.

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Taking another important example, christology and soteriology can be enriched and radically reconstructed in dialogue with other religions' view of salvation and savior figures. If Jesus is the absolute and unique mediator of God for the salvation of the entire human race, what role do other religious mediators such as Buddha or Muhammad play in the salvation history of God? In articulating this question, other religions may enable theologians to reinterpret the normativity of Jesus as the sole provision of salvation for human beings and help them approach Jesus' human side as one expression or channel of the unknown mystery of ultimate reality. In radical forms, this sort of encounter of Jesus with other saving mediators may confirm that Christians attain a Christian salvation through the mediator Jesus, while Buddhists reach a Buddhist salvation through Buddha, and so on. Depending upon the kind and nature of theology's dialogue with different religious partners (e.g., Christian-Buddhist, Christian-Hindu, Christian-Jewish, or Christian-Marxist), its method and material contents will be quite differently shaped. In the process of theology's dialogue with other religions, undoubtedly, there must be a reciprocal critique as well as a reciprocal transformation. This can help Christian theology go beyond its limited viewpoints and reach more illuminating and creative insights than its past or present forms intact with other religions. In short, I want to emphasize that all other religions can be useful resources for formulating an adequate systematic theology today and thereby may lead us to understand differently but more illuminatingly the whole range of our views of God, Jesus Christ, salvation, the nature and destiny of humanity, eschatology, and the like. I have not been able to clarify the material contents of this sort of newly shaped theology but am content with delineating its

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general direction in face of the fundamental challenges of religious plurality. A theology of religions is a collective term for designating the whole project dealing with the issues we have so far analyzed within the general scope of systematic theology. Let us now turn to examine briefly the relationship of a theology of religions to systematic theology as a whole.

A Christian Theology of Religions as a Special Project of Systematic Theology

We noted above that systematic theology involves a set of more specialized inquiries such as theology *proper* (i.e., the doctrine of God), christology, pneumatology, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology, etc. This sort of inquiry is often pursued in terms of doctrines about those particular themes: theology *proper* is a set of doctrines about the attributes of God, christology and pneumatology about the person and work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit respectively, soteriology about salvation, ecclesiology about the nature and mission of the church, and eschatology about the final judgment of God at the end of the world. Each of these individual inquiries is constituted as such by its particular topical or thematic questions, while systematic theology as a whole has the task of integrating them all. Each of the individual loci or projects is to be interrelated with all the others as well as with the system as a whole so as to form an integrative and coherent articulation of Christian faith.

In parallel with the other specialized inquiries of systematic theology, a theology of religions is constituted as such by the theological question of the relationship of

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Christianity to other religions. We understand a theology of religions to be an important and indispensable constitutive part or locus of systematic theology today. As a part of systematic theology as a whole, it must examine the validity of any given witness concerning the relationship of Christianity to other religions in terms of the criteria of adequacy: its faithfulness to what is normatively Christian, its meaningfulness and truth, and its aptness to a particular situation. If we locate a theology of religions within the general spectrum of systematic theology, it must operate in dynamic interrelation with the whole range of other parts or loci within systematic theology as a whole. Thus, a theology of religions both has its own special locus and (like all other loci in systematic theology) also affects and is affected by every other locus. In formulating Christian doctrines about the person and work of Jesus Christ, for example, we may not properly speak of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus without relating him to God the Creator, the Holy Spirit, human beings, the world, the church, the last judgment of God in him, etc. The task of christology necessarily involves discussing the whole range of Christian doctrines, albeit centering around the redeeming activity of God made known in Jesus as its focal subject. Likewise, the task of ecclesiology may not be appropriately pursued without referring to the unbounded love and grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as well as to sinful humanity and corrupted world. Thus, all the individual projects of systematic theology must be pursued in their interconnectedness with one another so as to form systematic theology as a single coherent inquiry. This is especially true in the case of a theology of religions. In articulating the meaning and truth of Christian faith in face of other religions and their adherents, it must touch on all the major

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theological topics such as God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, and the last judgment. What is demanded in the formation of a theology of religions is not simply changing the traditional orthodox doctrine of God or Jesus Christ but constructing or reconstructing radically the entire range of topics in ways that are appropriate to Jesus Christ, credible to human existence, and fitting to a specific situation. Of course, the question of the uniqueness or finality of Jesus Christ is at the heart of any Christian theology of religions. Any form of a theology of religions will remain Christian only insofar as it seriously deals with Jesus and the salvation or truth he brings to the world. Thus, the main burden of a theology of religions is to examine how Christians should relate to Jesus as the Savior in the context of other religions.

Despite its inseparable unity with other constitutive parts of systematic theology, a theology of religions is to be distinguished from those parts by adopting the thematic question of the relationship of Christianity to other religions as its overriding and constitutive concern. The proper pursuit of a theology of religions requires us to deal with all the key themes of systematic theology, always making the topic of religious plurality its particular focal point. In fact, other projects such as christology or ecclesiology may implicitly or explicitly speak of the subject-matter of religious plurality in the course of pursuing each of its central tasks. However, they must be distinguished from the theology of religions in not adopting the topical question of religious plurality as their constitutive object but only as a secondary or indirect concern. A theology of religions is constituted as such by having the theological question of the relationship of Christianity to other religions as its focal object of critical reflection. (Analogous to

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various names having the Greek suffix "-logy" (*logos*) [e.g., christology, ecclesiology, or soteriology], a theology of religions may be interchangeably used with the term "religiology" if it well serves to emphasize a theological elucidation of "religion" and "religions" from a Christian perspective. Please note that the following individual projects, rarely involved in the scope of today's systematic theology, have their particular names structured around the Greek suffix "logy": "cosmology" as an inquiry into the nature of the world, "angeology" and "demonology" as into the nature and work of angels and demons respectively, or "hamartiology" as into the origin and nature of the human sinfulness and corruption. As with these terms, "religiology" may be used as an alternative to designate the special project of a theology of religions in a more brief form insofar as we qualify it as a well-developed theological inquiry into the relationship of Christianity to religious plurality within the realm of systematic theology. In the present essay, however, we prefer to use a "theology of religions" to "religiology" simply because it well conveys a theologically comprehensive nature of what this project intends to accomplish. Moreover, "religiology" is aesthetically objectionable.)

Having clarified the relationship between systematic theology and a theology of religions, I want to turn to the issues of what is and how to form an adequate theology of religions within the general framework of systematic theology. Our next chapter will turn to the heart of this study: to elucidate the questions of "what the distinctive nature of a theology of religions is" and of "how it ought to be done."

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CHAPTER III

THE FORMATION OF A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

In Chapter II, I sought to clarify the most basic issues for the formation of a theology of religions. Regarding the notions of "religion" and "religions," we rejected the essentialist definition because it can dilute or distort the real differences among those phenomena conventionally called "religions." To understand other religions truly and rightly, it would be necessary to approach "religion" and "religions" through their own eyes in the light of their answers to the existential questions they raise in their particular contexts. We adopted the concept of religion as a "family resemblance" in order to envision the broadest picture of religion and to allow for genuine differences between religions. In the last chapter, we also examined the reasons why the traditional absoluteness claim is a serious stumbling block to the reality of religious plurality. We tried to show that the absoluteness claim brings out a number of perplexing issues with which Christians must theoretically and practically struggle in order to make the Christian Gospel acceptable to contemporary people. In Chapter II, finally, we located a theology of religions within the discipline of systematic theology, having illuminated the latter's inseparable connection with other intra-Christian disciplines such as historical, philosophical, and practical theologies. We also stressed that a theology of religions has

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its own independent locus or subject-matter, while affecting and being affected by every other locus of systematic theology.

On the basis of these fundamental postulates clarified in Chapter II, the burden of this chapter is to explore two questions. What is a Christian theology of religions? How ought it to be done? In answering these questions, first, I will identify the distinctive nature of a theology of religions in far greater clarity by comparing it to a "theology of the history of religions" (*eine Theologie der Religionsgeschichte*) and a "world theology." In addition to this, I will elucidate various forms of a theology of religions and the possibility of its specialization according to denominational background, historical period, geographical location, etc. Second, I will argue for envisioning the broadest scope of a theology of religions, highlighting the inadequacy of the salvation-centered theology of religions. Third, I will discuss the proper method of doing an adequate theology of religions. Any and every adequate theology of religions must satisfy the three criteria of "authenticity," "truth," and "fittingness," as introduced in the third section of the previous chapter. Meeting each of these three criteria generates the three distinctive phases of a theology of religions as a single process of critical inquiry: historical, philosophical, and practical phases.

The Distinguishing Features of
a Christian Theology of Religions

At the outset of this chapter, we need to clarify further what we mean by the term a "Christian theology of religions" in comparison to a "theology of the history of religion"

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and a "world theology"[1] which Wilfred Cantwell Smith proposes, so as to illuminate the

distinctive nature of our notion of a theology of religions. In fact, there seems to be a

lingering confusion about the exact relationship between a "theology of religions" and a

"theology of the history of religions" and a "world theology," and many readers tend to

identify readily the first one with either the second or the third.

A Theology of the History of Religions

Since the Enlightenment, theologians have been asked to reexamine critically

Christianity's claim of absoluteness in the light of the ever increasing knowledge of the

history of other religions. The emergence of historical consciousness and the historico-

critical method led to a keen awareness of the historically-conditioned character of

Christianity itself, eventually having evoked a radical reassessment of its absolute

superiority over other religions. It was Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) who was the most

notable theologian of the newly emerging "history-of-religions school,"[2] having tried to

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[1] Wilfred Cantwell Smith interchangeably uses the term a "world theology" with a "global theology," a "theology of comparative religion," a "theology of the religious history of mankind," a "theology of the religious history of us human beings on earth," a "theology of the faith history of us human beings," or a "theology of comparative religion for those amongst us who are Christians." See Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 124-129. As our examination of Smith's central ideas will show, a "theology of the religious history of mankind" seems to be the most appropriate term for designating the point of Smith's argument since he holds that "the data for [his world] theology must be the data of the history of religions." *Ibid.*, 126. To avoid a possible confusion between a "theology of the history of religion" and a "world theology," however, we will primarily use a "world theology" to specify Smith's distinctive proposal.

[2] The so-called "history-of-religions school" (the German term *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) was founded in 1890, centered at the University of Göttingen. It designates a group of scholars who sought to explore the historical origins

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reconcile historico-cultural relativism with the normativity or superiority of Christianity over other religions. The entire theological scheme of Troeltsch may be characterized by the German term *eine religionsgeschichtliche Theologie*[3] which is different from a theology of the history of religions in many respects. This term denotes a whole theological program informed by the entire history of religions as well as by the consciousness of historical relativism and is not simply taken to refer to one locus of systematic theology. Historical relativism eventually leads Troeltsch to the conclusion that Christianity is the best religion for Christians, Hinduism is the best religion for Hindus, and so on. Troeltsch's *religionsgeschichtliche Theologie* no longer ascribes any absoluteness or finality to Christianity, interpreting it as one (culminating) point in the evolutionary history of religions.[4]

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and developments of the Old Testament (OT), the New Testament (NT), and the early church in relation to the evolutionary context of other religious movements, especially of late Judaism. They utilized the comparative method of religions in order to explain the origin and development of the biblical religion. The OT scholar Herman Gunkel (1862-1932), NT scholars such as Wilhelm Heitmüller (1869-1926), Wilhelm Bousset (1865-1920), Richard Reitzenstein (1861-1931), William Wrede (1859-1906), Johannes Weiss (1863-1914), and systematic theologian Ernst Troeltsch were major representatives of this "little Göttingen faculty." See *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1993), 266-267.

[3]Wolfhart Pannenberg labels Troeltsch's theological enterprise as the "program of a theology oriented around the history of religions" (Das Programm einer religionsgeschichtliche orientierten Theologie). Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* II, 65. I have checked Pannenberg's original text entitled "Erwägungen zu einer Theologie der Religionsgeschichte," in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 252-295.

[4]For Troeltsch's detailed treatment of the relationship between Christianity and other religions from a historico-relativist perspective, see his works, *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions*, trans. David Reid (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1971); "The Place of Christianity among the World Religions," *Christianity*

As a reaction against this Troeltschian type of *religionsgeschichtliche Theologie*,

Paul Althaus (1888-1966) first used the term *eine Theologie der Religionsgeschichte*, i.e.,

our exact notion of a "theology of the history of religions"[5] here, which is intended to

specify a Christian-kerygmatic investigation of the history of religions, allying with the

neo-orthodox theology in the 1920's. Althaus sought a middle path between the extreme

positions of Troeltsch (Christianity as one among many) and Karl Barth (revelation as

sublation of religions).[6] Roughly speaking, Althaus aligned himself with Troeltsch in

exploring the positive implications of non-Christian religions in the economy of

salvation, while, as with Barth, still trying to endorse the unique validity of Jesus Christ

and of Christianity among the world religions. Althaus defined his notion of a theology

of the history of religions as follows:

> Theology of the history of religion is an exercise of faith and of the
> judgment contained within it upon the ways of human beings concretely
> actualized in the world. Faith does not ground itself upon the history of
> religion, but is exercised in the history of religion. The theology of the
> history of religion does not justify faith empirically, but makes faith
> conscious of itself and proves faith in the critique of all human religion.
> For its own sake, theology also must be 'religious-comparative,' in this
> sense religions-historical. It must attempt 'a Christian theological

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and Other Religions: Selected Readings, ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 11-31. For illuminating studies of Troeltsch's
thought, see Sarah Coakley, *Christ without Absolutes: A Study of the Christology of Ernst
Troeltsch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), especially ch. 1; *Ernst Troeltsch and the
Future of Theology*, ed. John P. Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[5]This information is according to Carl Heinz Ratschow: "Der Begriff einer 'Theologie
der Religionsgeschichte' stammt von Paul Althaus." Carl Heinz Ratschow, *Die Religionen*
(Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1979), 102.

[6]See Paul F. Knitter, *Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions: A Case Study
of Paul Althaus and Contemporary Attitudes* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1974), 4-55.

construal' of the history of religion, of its movement and of its possibilities, i.e., attempt a critique of all religions from the Gospel. The 'theology of the history of religion' is the self-consciousness of missionary Christianity. It accompanies the struggle of mission and, like mission itself, is an ever new, inexhaustible task because it is supremely concrete.[7]

In this definition, Althaus made it very clear that his notion of a theology of the history of religions starts from a missionary approach to the history of religions. It aims at vindicating Christianity's missionary claim of unconditional validity for the entire human race by examining its unique place within the history of religions. Althaus was not willing to subordinate certain pre-established theological norms (*Vorurteile*) to the methods of the science of comparative religions. Although these pre-given theological *Vorurteile* need to be verified through their concrete confrontation with the history of religions, they must not be reduced to the standards of the scientists of religion (*Religionswissenschaftler*). In a controversial response to Althaus' proposal of a theology of the history of religions,[8] Joachim Wach (1898-1955) charged it with a lack of scientific objectivity or neutrality. Ratschow summarizes Wach's critique of Althaus' position as follows: "his [Althaus'] proposal, a 'theology of the history of religion,' would be an

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[7]Paul Althaus, "Mission und Religionsgeschichte," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 5 (1928), 586. "Theologie der Religionsgeschichte heißt Vollzug des Glaubens und des in ihm liegenden Urteils über die Menschenwege in konkretem Durchdringen der Religionswelt. Nicht auf die Religionsgeschichte gründet sich der Glaube, aber in ihr wird er vollzogen. Die Theologie der Religionsgeschichte begründet den Glauben nicht empirisch, aber sie macht ihn seiner selbst bewußt und bewährt in der Kritik aller menschlichen Religion. Die Theologie muß also um ihrer selbst willen 'religionsvergleichend', religionsgeschichtlich in diesem Sinne werden. Sie muß den Versuch 'einer christlich theologischen Deutung' der Religionsgeschichte, ihrer Bewegung und ihrer Möglichkeiten machen, den Versuch einer Kritik aller Religion vom Evangelium her. Die 'Theologie der Religionsgeschichte' ist das Selbstbewußtsein der missionierenden Christenheit. Sie begleitet den Kampf der Mission, sie ist, wie dieser selber, eine immer neue, unerschöpfliche, weil höchst konkrete Aufgabe."

[8]Joachim Wach, "Und die Religionsgeschichte? Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Paul Althaus," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 6 (1929). 484-497.

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'inner-theological matter' which inclines to apply its own theological concept of understanding to the religions. And this understanding has nothing at all to do with the understanding which concerns the science of religion. Wach said that Althaus wanted to 'judge' and evaluate religions from the standpoint of the theology of missions, but not to understand them."[9] As Wach rightly points out, Althaus' theology of the history of religions is a subjective attempt which refuses to reduce the finality of Christianity to the objective facts of the history of religions. In a similar vein, Reinhard Leuze holds that for Althaus a theology of the history of religions is an attempt to construe the history of religions from the particular presuppositions (*Voraussetzungen*) of Christian faith.[10] Leuze makes a sharp distinction between a theology of the history of religions in terms of *genitivus objectivus* and that in terms of *genitivus subjectivus*. The former form seeks to interpret the history of religions as its object from a particular perspective of Christian faith or *Heilsgeschichte*. Althaus' proposal exactly belongs to this category in that it derives from the "fundamental conviction of the Christian about the claim of the Gospel upon humanity" and can be determined by the "self-consciousness of missionary Christianity."[11] The objective knowledge of the science of religion may not play an

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[9]Ratschow, *Die Religionen*, 118. "sein Vorschlag einer 'Theologie der Religionsgeschichte' eine 'innertheologische Angelegenheit' (491) sei, die einen eigenen theologischen Verstehens-Begriff auf die Religionen anwenden wolle, der mit dem Verstehen, auf das es der Religionswissenschaft ankomme, gar nichts zu tun habe. Althaus wolle missionstheologisch die Religionen 'beurteilen' und werten, aber nicht verstehen (492), sagt Wach."

[10]Reinhard Leuze, "Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Theologie der Religionsgeschichte," *Kerygma und Dogma* 24 (1978), 231.

[11]Althaus, "Mission und Religionsgeschichte," 586. "... der grundlegenden Gewißheit des Christen um den Menschheitsanspruch des Evangeliums"; "... das Selbstbewußtsein der missionierenden Christenheit."

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essential role in this sort of theological program. In contrast, a theology of the history of

religions in the form of genitivus subjectivus means theology for which the history of

religions is the subject, not the object. This sort of theology seeks to examine the validity

of Christianity from the viewpoint of *Religionsgeschichte*. Leuze locates Althaus and

Ernst Benz[12] within the camp of a theology of the history of religions as genitivus

objectivus and Pannenberg within that of genitivus subjectivus. In short, Leuze holds that

> The phrase "theology of the history of religion" served the theology of
> 1920's as motto for the effort to overcome the impasses of the nineteenth
> century theology in general and the theology of the history-of-religions
> school in particular. One was determined to set out explicitly from the
> presuppositions of Christian faith and to seek a theological ordering of
> religions from those presuppositions. If we compare this with the
> employment of the phrase in the theological literature after 1945, we
> detect a remarkable difference: here the expression acquires the function
> of arousing the interest in other religions, which the effects of the
> dialectical theology just let wane. . . . Pannenberg's essay, "Considerations
> of a Theology of the History of Religions" [translated in English as
> "Toward a Theology of the History of Religions"] as well as the
> investigations produced under the name of 'theology of religions' pursue
> the goal to activate or force anew the theological engagement with other
> religions.[13]

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[12]Although there is considerable difference between Althaus and Benz concerning
the place of Christianity within the history of religions, according to Leuze, they might be
regarded as the typical proponents of a theology of the history of religions as genitivus
objectivus in their commonly adopting theological world-views as the self-evident
starting-point of argumentation. See Leuze, "Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Theologie
der Religionsgeschichte," 234. This observation of Leuze can be confirmed by our
thorough reading of Benz's essay, "Ideas for a Theology of the History of Religions," *The
Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: McGraw-Hill
Book Company, Inc., 1961), 135-147.

[13]Leuze, "Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Theologie der Religionsgeschichte,"
233. "Das Stichwort, 'Theologie der Religionsgeschichte' diente der Theologie der Zwanzigerjahre als
Motto für das Bemühen, die Aporien der Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts im allgemeinen und der Theologie
der Religionsgeschichtlichen Schule im besonderen zu überwinden. Man war entschlossen, ausdrücklich
von den Voraussetzungen des christlichen Glaubens auszugehen und von ihnen aus eine theologische
Einordnung der Religionen zu versuchen. Wenn wir damit die Verwendung dieser Formel in der

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Leuze's observation that since 1945 a theology of the history of religions as genitivus objectivus has shifted to a theology of the history of religions as genitivus subjectivus seems to be sound. For the most part, the latter seeks to consult seriously the results of empirico-historical study of religions. Let us turn to examine the core of Pannenberg's theology of the history of religions which deserves the genuine name of *Theologie der Religionsgeschichte* since it is firmly grounded in his theology of history (*Geschichtstheologie*).

Pannenberg tries to overcome the impasses (*Aporien*) posed by both Troeltsch's *religionsgeschichtlich*-oriented theology and Althaus' "kerygmatically grounded way of laying claim to the history of religions" (*kerygmatisch begründeten Inanspruchnahme der Religionsgeschichte*). In other words, Pannenberg is concerned with going beyond both the purely objective view of Christianity gained by the discipline of *Religionswissenschaft* and the subjectively-accepted supernaturalistic standpoint of Christianity, thereby exploring the positive relationship between Christian theology and the scholarly or scientific study of religions.

In proposing his theology of the history of religions, Pannenberg is concerned with explicating two fundamental issues: the unity or unification of the history of religions and the experiences of the divine in the history of religions. In explicating these issues, Pannenberg's view of "history" plays an essential role. He argues that "History is

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theologischen Literatur nach 1945 vergleichen, so stellen wir einen bemerkenswerten Unterschied fest: Hier kommt diesem Ausdruck die Funktion zu, das Interrese an den anderen Religionen zu wecken, das gerade die Auswirkungen der dialektischen Theologie erlahmen ließen. . . . Ebenso verfolgen der Aufsatz W. Pannenberg's: "Erwägungen zu einer Theologie der Religionsgeschichte" sowie die unter dem Stichwort, "Theologie der Religionen" vorgelegten Untersuchungen den Zweck, die theologische Beschäftigung mit den anderen Religionen neu in Gang zu setzen oder zu forcieren."

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the most comprehensive horizon of Christian theology."[14] In particular, the history of

religions provides the decisive framework within which the uniqueness, truth, and

particular mission of Christianity can be asserted and verified. Concerning the first issue,

Pannenberg finds the unity or ultimate integration of the history of religions in the mutual

interaction of various religious traditions in general and in the history of Christian

mission in particular. Through the aids of the phenomenology and history of religions,

we can confirm that any and every individual religion has undergone a series of

syncretistic interactions with other religions.[15] Christianity offers the "greatest example

of the syncretistic assimilative power."[16] History clearly shows that Christianity

incorporated almost all the ingredients of the Mediterranean religious world into its own

tradition. At first, Pannenberg identifies the possibility for the integration of the history

of religions in this syncretistic interaction and competition between different religions

concerning the nature of reality. The unifying process of the history of religions is "still

in progress today as a competion between the religions concerning the nature of reality, a

competition grounded in the fact that the religions have to do with total views of

reality."[17] The total views of reality or universal claims to validity appear in any

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[14]Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* I, trans. Geroge H. Kehm (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1970), 15.

[15]Pannenberg takes examples of this syncretistic process between religions in Hellenism, the OT religions, the Egyptian gods, Marduk of Babylon, and Greek gods such as Apollo or Zeus. See *Basic Questions in Theology* II, 86-87.

[16]*Ibid.*, 87.

[17]*Ibid.*, 88.

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historical contact between religions through the intensive process of competition and mutual influence. (Acccording to Pannenberg, the upper Egyptian deity Amon, Marduk, and Mithras may be regarded as typical "gods" who succeeded in achieving the victory for the *Wettstreit der Götter um die Wirklichkeit*.) Through its universal mission, then, Christianity has become the "ferment for the rise of a common religious situation of the whole of the mankind."[18]

> One can begin to speak of a global process of integration for the first time in relation to the history of Christian missions and the Islamic conquests. Christian missionary activity especially, which proceeded apace with the expansion of Western civilization and technology in the last century, drew together the different, more or less isolated religious traditions into a world history of religion. The unification of the religious traditions of mankind taking place in this process does not appear for the first time with the displacement of other religions by Christianity. Rather, the simple fact of the different religions moving into relationship with each other mainly through the impact of the Christian missions brought to the fore a unity in the religious world situation, albeit one filled with tension.[19]

Christianity has made a decisive contribution to the emergence of a common unity of the history of religions in that all religions came to be confronted with the Christian mission as well as with the modern secularized culture as a by-product of Christianity.

Concerning the second issue of the experiences of the divine in the history of religions, Pannenberg seeks to demonstrate the monotheistic God revealed in Jesus Christ as the unifying source and ground behind all religions and their gods. He approaches the reality of the monotheistic deity not from a philosophical principle such as the "religious a priori" nor from social-scientific theories but from the analysis of the fundamental

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[18]*Ibid.*, 94.

[19]*Ibid.*, 93.

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structure of humanity. Anthropology shows us that "it belongs to the structure of human existence to presuppose a mystery of reality transcending its finitude and to relate oneself to this as the fulfillment of one's own being."[20] The reality of this divine mystery (*göttliche Geheimnis*) can be verified only by its "happening" (*Widerfahrnis*) of powers in the open field of history: "the question about the *existence* [*Dasein*] of a god is inseparable from that of his powerful *appearance* [*Erscheinung*] and of his *revelation* [*Offenbarung*]--in the sense of his definitive appearance."[21] Granted that the history of religions is the proper context in which various gods compete to prove their "powers," there is a decisive difference between Christianity and other religions. While other religions, as related to the past-centered myth of primordial time, tend to finitize (*verendlichen*) the infinite divine mystery by "fixation onto a finite medium" and by "splitting into a multiplicity of divine powers," the God revealed in Jesus Christ discloses the "openness of the future" and the "noncloseability of the history of mankind."[22] Although Christianity itself is also charged with a great number of "dogmatic finitizations" which result from forgetting its "provisionality" and "mutability," its peculiarity lies in its consistent emphasis upon the future of God revealed in Jesus as the eschatological power of salvation. The eschatological Kingdom of God proleptically present in Jesus can be considered retrospectively to be active in all epochs and religions before Christ as the power of their goal. In short,

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[20]*Ibid.*, 103.

[21]*Ibid.*, 105.

[22]*Ibid.*, 108-110.

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As the power of the future, the God of the coming reign of God proclaimed by Jesus already anticipates all later epochs of the history of the church and of the non-Christian religions. From this standpoint, the history of religions even beyond the time of the public ministry of Jesus presents itself as a history of the appearance of the God who revealed himself through Jesus.[23]

Leuze holds that Pannenberg's *Geschichtstheologie* may well be applicable to Western monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam but cannot properly explicate the agnosticism of Buddhism as a "living universal religion" which does not assume any theistic principles.[24] More precisely, according to Leuze, there are two major difficulties in applying Pannenberg's monotheistic picture of the history of religions to Eastern religions such as Buddhism: first, "a religion [such as Buddhism] is subordinated to an orientation [such as the Western view of *Geschichtsphilosophie* or *Geschichtstheologie*] which does not possess any significance for its own self-understanding"; second, "obviously God cannot be regarded as the self-evident theme of all religions."[25] In face of these problems, if we postulate the divine reality [*göttliche Wirklichkeit*] as the "universal and unconditional mystery" [*allgemeine und unbestimmte Geheimnis*] or the "infinite and nameless horizon" [*unendliche und namenlose Horizont*], we may still approach Buddhism from the monotheistic perspective of the history of religions. Nevertheless, we still need to determine whether this "divine mystery" is

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[23]*Ibid.*, 115.

[24]See Leuze, "Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Theologie der Religionsgeschichte," 234-243.

[25]*Ibid.*, 237. "eine Religion einer Orientierung unterworfen wird, die für ihr eigenes Selbstverständnis keine Bedeutung besitzt"; "Offensichtlich kann Gott nicht als selbstveständliches Thema aller Religionen gelten."

personal or impersonal. Unless it is impersonal, it cannot adequately deal with Buddhism. Leuze seeks to find a common basis for a dialogue between two opposing religions such as Christianity and Buddhism in the common postulate of the divine as "mystery," eventually urging a comparative analysis of the different doctrines of those religions in order not to fall into the purely abstract universality of the nameless mystery. Our main concern is not with critically assessing Pannenberg's position but with illuminating his concept of a theology of the history of religions. Pannenberg's theology of the history of religions is an ambitious attempt to reconcile the uniqueness or finality of Christ and Christianity with the objectively given facts of the history of religions. He makes it very clear that his theology of the history of religions starts "*from the standpoint of the examination of Christianity as a phenomenon in the history of religions*, without any additional supernaturalistic principles."[26] Its primary goal is to demonstrate that the history of religions is the history of the appearance of the divine mystery. This demonstration is not produced by the actual phenomena of the history of religions. Rather, it is this perspective (i.e., the radically monotheistic view of history) that first allows those phenomena to be construed as the history of the divine reality. Pannenberg argues that

> the characteristic contribution of Christian theology to the history of religions should consist not in some sort of construction developed from the standpoint of Christian dogmatics, but rather in working with an unprejudiced openness to create space in the history of religions for the appearing of the divine mystery *and* for its debatability [Strittigkeit].[27]

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[26]Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* II, 116.

[27]*Ibid.*, 117.

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John B. Cobb, Jr. identifies Pannenberg's most distinctive contribution to the theology of religions in his "unqualifiedly historical approach."[28] One probable difference of a theology of the history of religions from our notion of a theology of religions may be found in its emphasis upon the historical approach to religious phenomena and the activity of God in them. For Pannenberg, the history of religions is the subject from which he tries to explore the uniqueness of God revealed in the eschatological vision of Christ. His theology of the history of religions is aimed at demonstrating the appearance and power of the monotheistic God revealed in Jesus in the whole history of religions. He notes that a "theology of the history of religions" is an appropriate expression for designating this task because "the reality of God (or of the gods) is precisely the object of its occupation with the history of religions."[29]

A theology of the history of religions remained up to the 1970's fragmentary and was eventually replaced by the new term "theology of religions." Thus, it is short-lived and absorbed into the broader horizon of the theology of religions. (Please note that since the early 1970's Pannenberg himself displaces the term *Theologie der Religionsgeschichte* with *Theologie der Religionen*.[30]) A theology of the history of religions is one way of exploring the task of a theology of religions. Our conclusion is that it is a particular

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[28]John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 34.

[29]*Ibid.*, 112.

[30]See Pannenberg, *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973), 361-374.

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variety of a theology of religions which pursues the saving activity of the monotheistic God incarnated in Jesus Christ via a theological history of religions.

A World Theology

Wilfred Cantwell Smith is a widely-known proponent of a world theology based on all religious traditions in the world. He is a rare scholar who is well equipped with both the comparative history of religion (especially with Islamic studies) and the theological acumen to elucidate the phenomena of religious diversity. I intend to explicate the central features of a world theology Smith boldly advances in *Towards a World Theology* (1981, 1989) in which he thinks a Christian theology of religions is not applicable to his undertaking, thereby leading us to some interesting issues concerning the nature and task of a theology of religions.

In proposing a world theology, i.e., a single, unitary theology of all faiths, which includes a vast plurality of Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, secular atheist, and any other particular theologies, Smith criticizes the term and practice of a "Christian theology of other religions" which is concerned with examining other religions and their adherents from outside, i.e., from the particular perspective of Christian tradition. For Smith, a Christian theology of religions is problematic on two grounds. First, the subject of this inquiry, Christian theology, inevitably subordinates the particularity of other religions to its own conceptual categories, misconceiving them in their own right. Any theology of religions that is Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and so on, is inherently flawed because it intends to look out from within one tradition upon others. For Smith, theology

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retains its primary meaning in its "talk about God" that is equivalent to something like "'transcendent reality,' or everything that one recognizes as valuable, plus the transcendence and coherence of their value, or ultimate truth and beauty and goodness and various other such things."[31] It is crucial to note that Smith's main concern is not with Christian theology *per se* but with theology in general which is akin to the field of religious studies. If theology is merely Christian (or Jewish or Buddhist), it is inadequate simply because it limits itself to such a narrow framework of its own concepts and data on God or transcendence. A world theology as an adequate alternative must involve a vast plurality of particular theologies such as Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, and the like. Each of these particular theologies is merely a sub-species of one single global discipline of a world theology. Its task is then to search for a set of universal vocabularies and concepts that are common to all the religious traditions of the world. To this grand scheme of a world theology Smith attempts to apply a set of tradition-neutral categories such as "faith," "cumulative tradition," "participation," and "corporate critical self-consciousness," some of which we will examine later.

Second, the objective genitive of a theology of religions, "of religions," entails problems in its external or objective reification. As briefly observed in Chapter II, Smith poignantly criticizes the modern Western notions of "religion" and "religions" because they tend to reduce a dynamic continuity of personal piety or religiousness to a static system of objectively observable data. Although there can be a Christian theology of

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[31]Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Theology and the World's Religious History," *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, ed. Leonard Swidler (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 53.

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marriage, of liturgy, of political liberation, of almost anything else, "there cannot be a Christian theology of the other religions, because religion embraces more than an outsider perceives."[32] In place of "religion" and "religions," Smith proposes two categories which enable us to deal with the historical and transcendent aspects of the religious more adequately: the cumulative historical tradition and personal faith. While the former is historical, mundane, changing, and fully open to historical study, the latter is a personal, inward relation to the transcendent and is the link between God (or transcendence) and humanity. For Smith, faith as a universal human quality always precedes the community and its changing traditions because they are nothing more than the expressions of such a basic human faith. Without faith, the elements of a religious tradition would not be "religious" and so would not be there.[33] Faith does not vary in its nature because it is a universal quality of human life. In this regard, Smith claims that "faith differs in form, but not in kind."[34] Any study of religion must be *humane*, focusing on the inner quality of religious people, i.e., of universal faith. A world theology is not a theology about the world religions as objective data but a theology of all living faiths as expressed in diverse religious forms. In short, the theology Smith proposes is neither a theology of religions, in the sense of an objective genitive--a theology about religions--, nor a theology of one religion, in the sense of a subjective genitive, one's own religious tradition.

To sum up, on the basis of the double-edged critique of a Christian theology of

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[32]Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 110.

[33]Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 169.

[34]Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 168.

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religions, Smith seeks to propose a world theology which is a theology of universal faith in its diverse forms, adopting the entire history of religion as its relevant data. A world theology or a theology of comparative religion (Smith replaces the unacceptable phrase "of religions" with the different objective genitive "of comparative religion") must be Christian but must not be confined to a Christian theology. Similarly, it must be Jewish or Buddhist or Islamic but it must not be a Jewish or a Buddhist or a Islamic theology. A Christian theology of comparative religion is descriptively candid because it well denotes the unavoidable particularity of its Christian situation as one among many. However, this sort of particular theology alone is inadequate. A world theology should be Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Islamic, etc., but must be more than a Christian theology--or more than a Jewish or a Buddhist or a Islamic theology. It is Christian plus Jewish plus Buddhist plus, and so on.[35] A truly ecumenical Christian theology is neither a Presbyterian theology of ecumenism, nor a Catholic theology of ecumenism.[36] Unless it is in some sense Presbyterian or Catholic, however, it cannot be called a genuinely ecumenical theology. Likewise, a world theology may well be based on Christian or Buddhist tradition but always must transcend that particular tradition. How can, then, we participate in more than one faith, going beyond our own limited tradition so as to participate in a single, unitary project of a world theology? Smith answers this question in terms of "corporate critical self-consciousness." Let us clarify this notion in detail because it is pivotal in illuminating the collaborative nature of a world theology.

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[35]*Ibid.*, 125.

[36]*Ibid.*, 125.

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In approaching the phenomena of religion, Smith suggests to move beyond the alternatives of "objective impersonalism" and "subjective personalism" to another ideal of "corporate critical self-consciousness." By this notion, Smith means

> critical, rational, inductive self-consciousness by which a community of
> persons--constituted at a minimum by two persons, the one being studied
> and the one studying, but ideally by the whole human race--is aware of any
> given particular human condition or action as a condition or action of itself
> as a community, yet of one part but not of the whole of itself; and is aware
> of it as it is experienced and understood simultaneously both subjectively
> (personally, existentially) and objectively (externally, critically,
> analytically; as one used to say, scientifically).[37]

As the above passage clearly indicates, by this notion Smith means a collectively-attainable knowledge which is apt for both external observers and internal participants. A true grasp of anything humane must involve both the critical understanding of its conditions and the existential participation in its self-consciousness. In studying a Hindu temple, most scholars in West sought only an objective investigation of the external facts--its arts, rituals, priests, myths, etc.--without giving sufficient attention to the internal significance of the temple which rests in the self-consciousness of those adherents who frequent it. Humane knowledge, i.e., knowledge of other humans, must be always self-conscious. To understand persons in other communities, we need a "corporate self-consciousness," i.e., a consciousness of them not as "others" but as "us."[38] The corporate

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[37]*Ibid.*, 60.

[38]See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither-and Why?," *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, ed. Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 34. "The traditional form of Western scholarship in the study of other men's religion was that of an impersonal presentation of 'it.' The first great innovation in recent times has been the personalization of the faiths observed, so that one finds a discussion of a 'they.' Presently the observer becomes personally involved, so that the situation is one of a

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self-consciousness must be critical, thereby enabling it to include both the observer

(critically-minded) and the observed (self-consciously engaging), our own faith and

others'. "No statement involving persons is valid . . . unless theoretically its validity can

be verified both by the persons involved and by critical observers not involved."[39]

According to Smith, we are reaching in the history of religion a "stage where

consciousness must be a universal self-consciousness: corporate; critical; both analytic

and synthesising."[40] We are all participants in the single religious history of humankind.

Only in global self-consciousness can we know any particular religious tradition as a part

of the whole or as one of diverse ways of being religious. We all must see ourselves as

primary participants in one universal community, the "human."[41] The core of Smith's

argument is that our theology should not be a parochial view from within one tradition

out upon the others but should look from the corporate human perspective of "us" upon

all particular faiths as constitutive parts of our collective self-knowledge. "Our solidarity

precedes our particularity."[42]

In forming the single system of a world theology, the primary datum is the single

historical phenomenon of faith as expressed in diverse forms of religions. The starting

point for a world theology is that there is a certain unity of the world religions. Every

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'we' talking about a 'they.' The next step is a dialogue, where 'we' talk *with* 'you.' The culmination of this progress is when 'we all' are talking with each other about 'us'."

[39]Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 60.

[40]*Ibid.*, 97.

[41]*Ibid.*, 103.

[42]*Ibid.*, 103.

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religious tradition has developed in interaction with others and therefore it is impossible to give a full account of any one particular tradition without referring to others. In this sense, every particular tradition can be called one participant in the unitary history of religion. The notion of Islamic religious history must give way to the broader concept of an *"Islamic strand in the religious history of the world."*[43] All religious traditions are fairly different from one another and Smith is keenly aware of this undeniable fact. Nevertheless, Smith argues that it is only the "historian who can hold all the evolving diversities of any one religious community's developments in interrelated intelligibility; and *a fortiori*, all the evolving diversities of all religious communities."[44] It is important to note that Smith envisions a world theology first as a historian and then as a theologian. For him, theological formulations ought not to be divorced from the empirical awareness of such a historical interconnectedness of the world religions.

With the notion of a world theology, Smith does not intend a "formal systematic theology in the sense of an established discipline."[45] His aim is not to develop fully this kind of universal theology but to delineate various conditions for its possibility. Smith makes it very clear that his attempt is only one contribution to a world theology from a Christian perspective. He intends to participate Christianly in the formation of a world theology with Christian terms and concerns, ultimately inviting all the adherents of other traditions to participate in and contribute to this global project with their unique

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[43]*Ibid.*, 44.

[44]*Ibid.*, 4.

[45]*Ibid.*, 151.

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backgrounds. As already observed above, a Christian contribution to a world theology must be based on a Christian view from *within all* religious traditions, rather than on a Christian view *of* other religions. Smith does not urge that Christians should cease to remain Christians (or Muslims as Muslims). Rather, Christians as Christians (Muslims as Muslims, Jews as Jews, and so on) will participate in the collaborative work of a world theology, thereby without losing any particularity of their religious tradition. For Smith, a world theology is a ultimate point of convergence in which what is distinctively Christian or Buddhist can be acceptable to all human beings in the world.

Smith rightly emphasizes that the dynamic faith of religious persons cannot be adequately seen by others. Smith's insistence that our approach to other religions must be an engagement from "within" in terms of personal participation is stimulating. At first glance, Smith's vision of a world theology as a collective and cooperative enterprise among all religious traditions seems to be fascinating. The enforced ecumenism of today's global age may well demand the Smithian world theology which incorporates all particular theologies into a single, unitary whole. Despite the visionary quality of Smith's proposal as a whole, however, I am fairly skeptical about the actual shape and content of a world theology for the following reasons. I want to identify briefly some inherent problems of a world theology in relation to our concept of a theology of religions.

First of all, I wonder how we can actualize a world theology which arises from the particularity of all the faiths, simultaneously acceptable to all the faiths. As far as I understand Smith correctly, he does not intend to relativize the particularity of any

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religious tradition, nor does he propose any sort of syncretism.[46] Nevertheless, Smith's

dual emphasis on the global nature of theology and the necessity to retain the particularity

of one's own religious tradition seems to be ambivalent. In other words, why should a

Christian theology (or any particular theology) be incorporated into the single scheme of a

world theology? Would it not be better to keep allowing for a Christian theology as

based on Christian tradition, a Muslim theology as based on Muslim tradition, and the

like, without merging these particular theologies into a world theology as a whole?

Although there is a logical possibility of a world theology as such, the actual content of

that sort of theology would be virtually vacuous and bizarre or even monstrous. It would

definitely not be Christian, nor Buddhist, nor Islamic, nor Hindu, but syncretic despite his

disclaimers. In my view, a world theology is to be distinguished from "universal

theology" which starts from the premises of one particular tradition and attempts to

universalize those premises to include all the others. Why is not this sort of universal

theology sufficient? Although a Christian theology of religions is a Christian theological

inquiry into Christian witnesses concerning religious plurality, it may be universal and

therefore credible to all contemporary human beings. Its primary aim is not to examine

other religions and their adherents from outside, nor to intend to reduce arbitrarily those

alien phenomena to its own conceptual framework. Rather, it starts from a sort of

metanoia, i.e., from the internal criticism of exclusive Christian faith and tradition in

relation to the challenges of other religions. It seeks to render the Christian Gospel and

tradition credible and acceptable to all human beings living with the unprecedented

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[46]See *Ibid.*, 125-129.

consciousness of religious plurality. Is it not more suitable to our contemporary situation to allow for a vast diversity of incompatible doctrines in different theologies, rather than to press towards a single goal of common synthesis among different religions? Each particular theology seeks to present a variety of different theological inquiries about the ultimate aim of human life and appropriate means to pursue it. That is enough! Let each theology remain different! Theology is not singular but plural.

Second, a world theology seems to belong to the broader field of religious studies and therefore is not congruent with our notion of Christian theology. It is designed to approach a plurality of religions not from the internal concern of Christian faith but from the tradition-free perspective of religious history. In Chapter II, we defined theology in the most generic sense as what is thought, said, and done about the ultimate reality that theistic religions normally call "God." In this regard, Smith's world theology is an attempt to go back to the comprehensive sense of "theology" as "God-talk" in pre-Christian ages. If "theology" can retain its name only insofar as it thinks, says, and acts about *God*, however, a world theology seems not to be theological but anthropological. I wonder to what extent a world theology is concerned with the subject of theology, "God." In fact, Smith says very little about God, reducing God to the abstract realm of transcendence. Moreover, Smith's universal theological categories such as "faith," "cumulative tradition," "participation," or "corporate self-consciousness" seem to be related to humanity, not to God. They are anthropological categories, rather than theological. Is it not more appropriate to call his enterprise a "world history of religions" rather than a world theology?

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Third, there seems to be no space for "special revelation" or normative criteria for approaching God or transcendence in the scheme of a world theology. Smith rejects the idea that "God was fully revealed in Christ" or "God was revealed in Christ."[47] In this regard, he argues that theology should be theocentric rather than christocentric. For him, a "more than Christian theology" or a total sum theology of Christianity plus Judaism plus Buddhism, etc., is possible only by ignoring the special norm of Jesus Christ. In critically reviewing a batch of Smith's works, Langdon Gilkey argues that

> Without that defining and definitive center ["special revelation"], or its equivalent, the Christian, Judaic, Islamic or Buddhist component vanishes, and only "more's" and "plus's" are left, that is to say, a theology based on an empathetic assessment of the general history of religions but with no central point of interpretation lodged in any one of them, or even in the ultimate viewpoint of any particular culture.[48]

As Gilkey rightly points out, any theology without a normative center might well become vacuous. The affirmation of a definitive norm for the knowledge of God may not exclude the possibility of salvation for other religious people or of other sources of knowledge of God.

A Christian Theology of Religions

So far we have observed that a theology of the history of religions is a particular variety of a theology of religions, while a world theology is clearly different from it. Let us now turn to clarify further the nature of a theology of religions. As Smith's world

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[47]*Ibid.*, 175.

[48]Langdon Gilkey, "A Theological Voyage with Wilfred Cantwell Smith," *Religious Studies Review* 7 (1981), 304.

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theology suggests, there can be a plurality of different theologies of religions such as Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and so forth, insofar as each of these particular traditions is concerned with investigating the relationship between its own tradition and others. We need to make it clear again that our major concern is not to inquire about doing a "theology in general of religions," but about doing a "Christian theology in particular of religions."[49] A Christian theology of religions[50] is to be distinguished from other theologies of religions in its firm grounding in the confession of Jesus as the Christ in the Christian religion.

In Chapter I, we noted that a theology of religions may be construed in two ways: either as a theological investigation of Christians' response to the fact of "religious plurality" or as a specific way of doing theology arising out of and informed by the particular conviction of "religious pluralism" or the "history of religions." For the sake of convenience, the former might be identified with what Leuze calls a "theology of religions as genitivus objectivus" (our use of this term may be significantly different from his) in that the given fact of religious plurality is the object of Christian theological reflection. More precisely, this sort of a theology of religions attempts to offer a critical self-reflection on what Christians think, say, and do (or have thought, have spoken, and

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[49]I want to make a precise distinction between a "theology in general of religions" and a "theology of religions in general." The former is a "global, interreligious, ecumenical theology of religions" which is not based on any one particular tradition, while the latter means Christian theology (or any theology) which deals with all religions, not with one or two particular religions only.

[50]Please note that we are using a "theology of religions" as the same meaning of a "Christian theology of religions."

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have done, throughout the whole history of Christianity) concerning other religions and their adherents. It seeks to investigate critically the validity of the whole Christian witness concerning religious plurality from the standpoint of Christian theological presuppositions. A theology of religions as genitivus objectivus can be called a subjective-insider approach to religious plurality because it starts from the self-understanding or self-interpretation of Christian faith in the context of other religions. As with Karl Rahner, it approaches religious plurality dogmatically, not "in the light of the history or phenomenology of religion."[51] (This dogmatic approach is not necessarily indifferent to other empirical religions but may be sometimes seriously attentive to them.) In pursuing the Christian dogmatic elucidation of religious plurality, it always adopts a set of internal Christian concepts and theological presuppositions. This sort of a theology of religions may well be done without any direct contact with the concrete individual religions. Therefore, it may not refer to the results of the empirico-historical study of other religions because its main concern is not with making a comparative judgment between Christianity and other religions but with validating the claims to validity that Christians either make or imply in bearing their witnesses about other religions. As a consequence, the main audience of a theology of religions as genitivus objectivus is not outsiders such as other religious people or atheists but Christian insiders who confront the fact of religious plurality.

In contrast, our second construal of a theology of religions may be equivalent to a

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[51]See Karl Rahner, "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations* XVII, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 39.

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theology of religions as genitivus subjectivus which is concerned with the religionsgeschichtliche or religious-pluralistic investigation of the relationship of Christianity to the history of religions or other religions. In this case, the subject for a theology of religions is not the Christian witness concerning other religions but the specific perspective of religious pluralism or the history of religions (as with Pannenberg's case). This form of a theology of religions can be labeled as a pluralist theology of religions or a theology of the history of religions. (It will remain a Christian theology of religions insofar as it seeks to interpret the central symbol of Christ and other theological principles related to that from the particular perspective of religious pluralism or the history of religions.) A theology of religions as what we understand here as genitivus subjectivus may be much more influenced by an objective-outsider approach to religious plurality than by a subjective-insider stance in that it seeks to construe Christianity as one phenomenon of the history of religions, positively accepting the evidences of *Religionswissenschaft*. (It may not be always governed by this objective-neutral perspective and can also adopt various inner-Christian concepts and theological premises in order to demonstrate the compatibility of Christian truth with the results of the historico-empirical investigation.) The audience of this sort of a theology of religions may be either Christian insiders or extra-Christian outsiders or both who demand to know the grounds for the intelligibility and acceptability of the decisiveness or uniqueness of Christianity.

At this point, we need to make another important distinction between a priori and a posteriori theologies of religions. According to Paul J. Griffiths, the former is

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concerned with "what can be said theologically about the facts of religious pluralism without appealing to anything other than theological axioms," while the latter with "specific empirically available knowledge about actual religious communities."[52] A priori theology of religions simply presupposes that there are other religions besides Christianity. Our first definition of a theology of religions (i.e., a theology of religions as genitivus objectivus) may share many overlapping features with this a priori theology. Its primary concern is not to evaluate the truth or salvific efficacy of some specific individual religions such as Buddhism or Hinduism through the empirical knowledge of their actual beliefs and practices, but to examine or reexamine critically the validity of Christian witness concerning religion and religions in general from a particular viewpoint of Christian faith. (Please note that a theology of religions as genitivus objectivus seeks to answer a set of interrelated a priori questions assigned to systematic theology as we analyzed in the third part of Chapter II. Of course, this should not exclude the possibility that a theology of religions as genitivus objectivus may also consult with the empirico-historically available information about other religions' actual doctrines. Nevertheless, it need not necessarily involve actual judgments about other religions on the basis of the research of *Religionswissenschaft* because its main concern is to present a dogmatic elucidation of intra-Christian issues in face of other religions.)

On the contrary, a posteriori theology of religions intends to make particular theological judgments about specific beliefs and practices of other religions and therefore

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[52]Paul J. Griffiths, "Modalizing the Theology of Religions," *The Journal of Religion* 73 (1993), 382.

need to be well-informed about those actual features. Our second notion of a theology of religions as genitivus subjectivus may share some analogous features with this a posteriori theology because in order to argue for religious pluralism or relativism it must be firmly based on objective knowledge about other religions. In my view, then, there can be only a posteriori specific theology of one or two religions (not a posteriori theology of religions in general) because one person cannot achieve adequate knowledge of all religions in the world. In view of a posteriori theology of religions, therefore, there can be only, for example, a Christian theology of Buddhism or of Islam, which seeks to make comparative judgements about specific issues between Christianity and these one or two different religions. Depending upon its theological dialogue partners, a posteriori theology of religions must be fully informed of the doctrinal beliefs and rituals of those religious communities concerned, in order to make appropriate theological judgments about them. Ranging over far different areas of interreligious dialogue (e.g., Christian-Buddhist, Christian-Islam, Christian-Marxist, etc.), a plurality of different systematic theologies may well emerge: systematic theology written out of dialogue with Buddhism, systematic theology in dialogue with Islam, etc. Today, religious pluralists in general tend to draw a too hasty conclusion concerning the actuality of many true and salvific religions when they should affirm only the possibility of many true and salvific religions. In other words, they should make not actual judgments about the equality or rough parity of all religions unless there are sufficient empirical evidences for that but only some qualified and provisional opinions concerning the different doctrines between Christianity and a limited number of other religions.

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I need to mention the possibility of integration of or reconciliation between a

priori and a posteriori parts in a given theology of religions through modal terms. In the

philosophy of logic, modality classifies propositions in terms of possibility, impossibility,

contingency, necessity, or other related concepts. A. N. Prior summarizes the

fundamental features of modal logic as follows:

> The basic concepts of modal logic are primarily expressed by certain
> adverbs and auxiliary verbs and verb phrases--possibility by forms like
> "Possibly p," "It is possible that p," "It could be that p"; necessity by
> "Necessarily p," "It is necessary (necessarily true) that p," "It is bound to
> be the case that p," "It must be that p." These words and phrases may be
> combined in various ways with others of the same type--for example, with
> those expressing negation--and the equivalences and implications that hold
> between these complexes were among the first laws of the subject to be
> recognized.[53]

In spite of his primary concerns with a priori theology of religions, for example, Joseph

DiNoia seeks to combine a priori theological claims with a posteriori implications by

modalizing some essential claims of Christianity and other religions (Theravada

Buddhism in particular).[54] I simply want to emphasize that a priori and a posteriori

dimensions are not necessarily in conflict or mutually exclusive but can be integrated or

reconciled through modal logic.

To summarize our clarification above, let us refer to Ulrich Schoen's insightful

distinction between a theology of religions arising out of "intra-religious existence" and a

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[53]A. N. Prior, "Modal Logic," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1972), Vol. 5, p. 5.

[54]See DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 11-19; 68-72.

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theology of religions resulting from "inter-religious existence." The central features of

the former are as follows:

> a) the interreligious lies on the margin, reflection thereon is only a sort of
> by-product which arises from an interest whose center of gravity is
> elsewhere; b) the target-group addressed by this theology are Christians
> who also live in intra-religious existence and for whom the reference to
> non-Christians is considered as salutary for various reasons; c) the export
> of this thinking into the interreligious world is only a side-effect--an often
> and unfortunately very far-reaching side-effect--because this thought,
> while not meant for export, if it is shifted into a different environment, can
> lead to surprising effects not intended by the theologians concerned.
> These effects, then, hinder rather than promote the open, honest, and
> uncontroversial dialogue between the religions as well as their common
> pursuit of truth.[55]

In contrast, a theology of religions grown out of the inter-religious existence has the

following characteristics:

> a) the interreligious is a problem filling the whole life; b) the target-group
> addressed by this theology are above all the persons whose life is filled
> with the same problem as that of the theologians concerned; c) the
> importing of what is thus thought and said in the interreligious border
> region into intra-religious lands occurs only haltingly, and requires caring
> importers and interpreters who know how to clear away misunderstanding
> and prejudices which such imported goods evoke in the inner-Christian
> environment which is not accustomed to them.[56]

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[55]Ulrich Schoen, *Das Ereignis und die Antworten: Auf der Suche nach einer Theologie der Religionen heute* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1984), 80. "a) das Interreligiöse liegt am Rande, das Nachdenken darüber ist nur eine Art von Nebenprodukt, das aus einem Interesse erwächst, dessen Schwerpunkt sich woanders befindet; b) die angesprochene Zielgruppe sind Christen, die ebenfalls in intrareligiöser Existenz leben und für die der Hinweis auf die Nicht-Christen aus verschiedenen Gründen als heilsam betrachtet wird; c) der Export dieses Denkens in die interreligiöse Welt ist nur eine Nebenwirkung--eine oft und leider sehr weitreichend Nebenwirkung--denn dieses Denken, weil es nicht für den Export bestimmt war, kann, wenn es in eine andere Umwelt versetzt wird, zu überraschend und vom betreffenden Theologen nicht beabsichtigten Wirkungen führen, die den offenen, ehrlichen und unverkrampften Dialog zwischen den Religionen und ihre gemeinsame Suche nach der Wahrheit mehr hindern als fördern."

[56]*Ibid.*, 80. "a) das Interreligiöse ist ein das ganze Leben erfüllendes Problem; b) die angesprochene Zielgruppe sind vor allem die Menschen, deren Leben von demselben Problem erfüllt ist wie das des betreffenden Theologen; c) der Import dieses im interreligiösen Grenzbereich Gedachten und

As the above passages show, a theology of religions arising out of intra-religious existence is often done a priori at the theological ivory towers without any serious contact with other positive religions, while a theology of religions resulting from inter-religious existence can be established only through the life-long involvement in the actual dialogue between Christianity and one or two living and lived non-Christian religions. Identifying the inadequacy of the former theology of religions, Schoen devotes most of his chapters to arguing for the necessity of the latter, which can be formulated only through one Christian's actual inter-religious life and sincere dialogical praxis with other religious people such as Buddhists or Muslims. In this regard, Schoen emphasizes the "liberation of the theology of religions from the ivory tower of the Christian theologians."[57] For him, a theology of religions as genitivus objectivus or a priori theology of religions is meaningless insofar as it is not based on any significant experiential contact with other living religions. Only a theology of religions which is fully informed by and arisen out of the direct praxis of inter-religious interaction is adequate and acceptable. (As the typical representatives of the intra-religiously-oriented theology, he takes Rahner, Barth, Pannenberg, and Tillich, while as the representatives of the theology of religions in inter-religious existence he considers Kenneth Cragg who worked in an Islamic world, Jean Faure in African tribal religions, and Katsumi Takizawa in Japanese Buddhism.)

Given the possibility of these different forms of a theology of religions, there must

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Gesagten in die intra-religiösen Länder hinein geschieht nur stockend und bedarf liebevoller Importeure und Interpreten, die es verstehen, Unverstand und Schäden zu beseitigen, die eine solche Importware in der an sie nicht gewöhnten binnenchristlichen Umwelt hervorruft."

[57]*Ibid.*, 57. "die Befreiung der Theologie der Religionen aus dem Elfenbeinturm der christlichen Theologen."

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be an integrative approach to the highly complicated issues of the relationship between Christianity and other religions. In order for a theology of religions to be adequate, either the a priori (intra-Christian) or the a posteriori (inter-religious) approach alone is defective and it must be conjoined by the other approach. No one-sided theology of religions (whether intra-Christian or inter-religious) is adequate to elucidate both the intra-Christian theological issues related to religious plurality and the inter-religious problems involved in the actual encounter of Christianity with other individual religions. An adequate theology of religions must not be reduced to inner-theological matters but must be informed by the historico-empirical study of non-Christian religions. A solely intra-Christian theology of religions may face some difficulties when its main line of proposals is not applicable to the distinctive beliefs and practices of any one particular other religion. Therefore, a theologian's lack of knowledge about any one particular religion may well diminish the plausibility and effectiveness of his or her proposal. In short, all the parts of a theology of religions must be so integrated that the relationship of Christianity to other religions may be fully and appropriately explored. We will further take up this issue when we examine criteria for the adequacy of a theology of religions in the latter part of this chapter.

Let us now finish this part by noting the possibility of the specification of a theology of religions. A theology of religions as a whole can be ramified into various sorts according to its confessional settings, chronological orders, and contextual milieu. Depending upon denominational confessions, it may be specified as follows: a Roman Catholic theology of religions, an Anglican-Episcopal theology of religions, a Lutheran

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theology of religions, a Baptist theology of religions, a Methodist theology of religions, etc. These sorts of confessional theologies of religions may be typically formulated in terms of official doctrines in order to present a set of authoritative actual guidelines to their own members concerning the relationship of their church to other surrounding religions. There also can be a chronological specification of a theology of religions: a patristic theology of religions, a Reformation theology of religions, an Enlightenment theology of religions, and so forth. Although each period shows an enormous diversity of intermingled strands of different responses to other religions, the dominant mood has been exclusivist at least until the dawn of the Enlightenment age. This period-centered theology of religions may be very helpful for overviewing the characteristic features of Christian positions about other religions in each specific time in Christian history. We can also consider a geographical specification of a theology of religions: a Korean Christian theology of religions, a Japanese Christian theology of religions, or more broadly, an European Christian theology of religions, a Latin American Christian theology of religions, and so on. Although both European and Asian Christians equally confess Jesus as the Christ, their witnesses about non-Christian religions may be significantly different in their living relationship with other religious people. Asian Christians may feel a more acute necessity for interreligious dialogue or a pluralist option than Europeans simply because they are living in a more dramatic situation of religious plurality. This geographical ramification of a theology of religions is suggestive for illuminating the concrete situation of local churches beset by other traditional indigenous religions. In short, the actual shape and material content of a theology of religions may be

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greatly influenced by the confessional background, specific time, and contextual milieu of authors who are engaged in it. Despite the possibility of the wide array of specified theologies of religions, however, we can talk about a theology of religions as a whole single project *ecumenically* because the Christian Gospel is universal and Christians all can communicate with each other in the global village regardless of specific time, place, and confessional commitment.

The Scope of a Christian Theology of Religions

What is the scope or extent of a theology of religions as a whole? In answering this question, I first need to examine critically the contemporary salvation-oriented theology of religions which is concerned only with the christological or soteriological elucidation of the salvific role and value of non-Christian religions and of the salvific possibility for their adherents.[58] In spite of the centrality of soteriological implications in a theology of religions, I will argue for broadening its scope such that internally all the loci of systematic theology inform and are informed by the subject-matter of a theology of religions, and externally an infinite range of other religions' literatures are potentially considered. This argument is in accordance with our claim made in the third part of

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[58]The classic works of Christian theology tend to demarcate sharply christology as doctrine about the "person of Jesus" from soteriology as doctrine about the "work of Jesus." Despite some usefulness of this exact distinction, we will consider both christology and soteriology as two sides of the same coin in that the ontological identity of Jesus is inseparably related to his functional work. In particular, we do so because in the area of a theology of religions the christological view of non-Christian religions is always constructed out of soteriological considerations.

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Chapter II that a theology of religions is a special project of systematic theology and, therefore, must affect and be affected by every other locus of systematic theology.

The Inadequacy of the Salvation-centered
Theology of Religions

As has been repeatedly pointed out, for the most part, contemporary theologians of religions tend to limit the vast range of a theology of religions merely to the christological or soteriological explication of both the intra-Christian and the inter-religious issues. More precisely, they are mainly concerned with examining critically the validity of the traditional Christian claim that Jesus Christ is the normative, unique, and final path to salvation for the entire human race. As Karl Rahner incisively puts it, many theologians simply concentrate on answering the intra-Christian question, "What do we mean precisely and specifically when we say that Jesus Christ is to be found in non-Christian religions as well?"[59] The central focus on the critical examination of the salvific efficacy of non-Christian religions in the light of christological or soteriological matters is understandable if we take into account the characteristics of religion in general and the decisive difference of Christianity's self-understanding from others. First, religions are rightly considered as vehicles by which their adherents can achieve salvation, liberation, or fulfillment. Mariasusai Dhavamony holds that

> Any scientific study of religions should treat of the subject of salvation because this theme in a particular way defines the purpose of religion itself. . . . The so-called higher religions are structured on salvational models, for they teach explicitly a soteriology which envisages man as

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[59]Rahner, "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions," 39.

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being in some spiritually perilous or doomed situation from which he needs to be saved. These religions propose salvation both in the sense of liberation from evil and its consequences, and in the positive sense of reaching a perfect state of happiness and of eternal union with the divine.[60]

Dhavamony well points out that the characteristic concern of any and every religion lies in its proposing salvation, liberation, fulfillment, or whatever term is used to indicate the final state of being transformed from various sorts of human predicaments. In fact, each individual religion describes differently the final state of being saved, liberated, or fulfilled, while prescribing a variety of different means for arriving at this ultimate goal of life. Despite this difference in defining the ultimate condition of transformation and the appropriate means to reach it, all the higher religions converge in the one point that they claim to offer salvation to their adherents. This fact of salvific assertion within the embrace of all the major world religions challenges the Christian monopoly of salvation as well as any other religions' exclusivistic salvation-claims.

Second, what defines the Christian's relation to Jesus as well as the identity of Christianity is the belief that Jesus Christ is the normative salvation-bringer for all human beings. Christian exclusivists in general tend to impose their specific commitment to Jesus on the rest of humanity as well. Due to the enormous importance of this *solus Christus* assumption, theologians may well be preoccupied with exploring how we Christians should understand Jesus Christ in the light of other religions and their adherents. Although some theologians suggest a shift from a christocentric approach to a

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[60]Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism* (Rome: The Gregorian University Press, 1982), 411.

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theocentric or a soteria/liberation-centered approach to religious plurality,[61] they could not

do so without considering seriously christological or soteriological issues related to the

salvific value of other religions. Moreover, even if they move towards theocentrism or

soteriocentrism beyond christocentrism, there can be no guarantee that a plurality of non-

Christian religions will be taken seriously. In short, Jesus Christ is at the heart of

Christianity's confrontation with religious plurality; the primary intra-Christian issue in a

theology of religions is how to formulate or reformulate adequate christology or

soteriology so as to be faithful to the Christian commitment to Jesus, while still

respecting the distinctiveness of other religions.

Given the two facts stated above, Christian theologians may have good reasons to

put the highest emphasis on salvation issues in the context of religious plurality. In this

regard, the most influential typology of the contemporary theology of religions revolves

around the christological or soteriological axis: for exclusivists, only those who have a

conscious faith in Jesus Christ can be saved; inclusivists hold that salvation may be

derivatively available through non-Christian religions, but is always grounded in Jesus

Christ who is the constitutive event of human salvation; and pluralists affirm the rough

parity and multiplicity of salvation mediated through diverse non-Christian religions

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[61]In his book *No Other Name?* (1985), Knitter proposes to move towards an
evolutionary trajectory from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism and then finally to
theocentrism. See *No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the
World Religions* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 166. In the more recent phase of
his theological career, Knitter urges us to move further from theocentrism to
soteriocentrism or liberation-centrism. See "Dialogue and Liberation: Foundations for a
Pluralist Theology of Religions," *The Drew Gateway* 58 (1988), 1-53; *One Earth and
Many Religions.*

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independently from Jesus Christ. Since we will have a more appropriate occasion to explore the validity of these positions in the next chapter, let us confine our main concern to examining critically whether or not the delimiting of the territory of a theology of religions to the salvation-oriented issues is adequate.

There is a serious problem inherent in restricting the compass of a theology of religions to soteriological issues. Since salvation claims are tradition-specific, one cannot properly apply any one religion's distinctive assumptions to other religions without reducing some of those other religions' essential salvation claims to its own soteriological scheme. Despite considerable family resemblances among religions, there is no one way of salvation, liberation, or fulfillment. As noted, each individual religion describes differently the nature of the human predicament from which human beings must be saved or liberated, the ultimate state of being saved or liberated, and the means to reach that state. It is precisely about salvation issues that most religions do not agree. Joseph DiNoia incisively shows that each religion specifies a highly different pattern of life-aims, sets of virtues or dispositions, etc.[62] For example, Catholic Christianity identifies the ultimate aim of life as the "beatific vision of God" and asks Christians to cultivate various virtues and dispositions (e.g., faith, hope, and love) appropriate to reach that aim. Thus, Christian salvation means forming a specific person who pursues a Christian aim of life, cultivates Christian virtues or character, follows the Christian course of actions, etc. To

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[62]DiNoia, "Varieties of Religious Aims: Beyond Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism," *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce D. Marshall (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 249-274; *The Diversity of Religions*, 34-64.

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examine whether or not other religions seek the same or at least a similar life-aim and means to approach it requires a long investigation of a posteriori differences as well as similarities between Christianity and those other religions. If and when other religions have some significant affinities with Christianity in their salvation pictures, they might be understood as being superseded or fulfilled by Christianity. If one cannot find any significant common denominator between Christian aim of life and other religions' aim, however, he or she would do better to explore what specific and independent roles those religions may play in the universal plan of God's salvation, thereby allowing for their unique particularity. Without venturing into this extensive comparative analysis, at any rate, one cannot a priori say that other religions actually achieve the same Christian salvation or something similar. In their mutual rejection of exclusivism, as DiNoia rightly points out, generally speaking, inclusivists tend to subsume the distinctive soteriological doctrines of other religions into the Christian scheme of salvation, while pluralists tend to "homogenize cross-religious variations in concepts of salvation in the direction of an indeterminate common goal, nonspecific conditions of insufficiency and limitation, and an undefined program for transcending them."[63] In short, one's obsession with the salvific efficacy of other religions might distort the "intractable otherness of other religions"[64] by equalizing or assimilating the particular soteriological programs of

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[63]"Varieties of Religious Aims: Beyond Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism," 252.

[64]See Kenneth Surin, "Towards a 'Materialist' Critique of 'Religious Pluralism': A Polemical Examination of the Discourse of John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith," *The Thomist* 53 (1989), 673.

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other religions to those of Christianity. We need to allow for the diverse religions' own accounts of themselves in presenting their unique aims of life and the specific means to reach them. For this reason, it is surely unadvisable for us to concentrate too much on salvation issues in the context of religious plurality. A plurality of non-Christian religions may be theologically significant regardless of whatever salvific role they might play in history. This fact leads us to envision the comprehensive scope of a theology of religions which internally ranges from the doctrine of creation to that of the last things, externally covering (of course, potentially) the unlimited breadth of different beliefs and practices of other religions.

Envisioning the Comprehensive Scope of a Christian Theology of Religions

If the salvation-centered theology of religions is not adequate and even misleading, how far should we extend the scope of a theology of religions? Put more bluntly, if our exploration of the salvific efficacy of other religions is not fruitful by itself, which areas or issues must it turn to? According to Max Seckler, a theology of religions may be formally subdivided into three subjects: 1) *"religions-related theory of Christianity"*; 2) *"theological theory of religious pluralism* in connection with a *soteriological theory of the history of religion"*; and 3) *"theological criteriology of religions* and 'interreligious' *critical hermeneutics."*[65] The first subject is the

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[65]Seckler, "Theologie der Religionen mit Fragezeichen," 169-170. "1. *Religionenbezogene Theorie des Christentum*"; "2. *Theologische Theorie des Religionenpluralismus* in Verbindung mit einer *soteriologischen Theorie der Religionsgeschichte*"; "3. *Theologische Kriteriologie der Religionen* und '*interreligionische*' *kritische Hermeneutik.*"

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"*foundation* of all continuing works in a theology of religions" in that it pursues a critical

examination of Christianity itself, its self-understanding, and its self-assessment

(especially, regarding the "character of its truth-claims and the form and range of its

universal mission") in the context of religious pluralism.[66] The second area is concerned

with the "theological assessment of the meaning, function, and possible intrinsic value of

non-Christian religions in general and in connection with this the question of their

salvation-historical role and their soteriological importance."[67] The third area finds its

own theme in the "theological examination of the individual religions and of individual

givennesses and elements of these religions." Concerning the third subject, more

precisely, Seckler holds that

> This concerns the encounter with concrete religions and with precise facts
> and data from these religions. These are to be properly put forward and
> brought into mutually critical relationship with the corresponding data of
> the Christian faith, for which first an appropriate hermeneutics and
> criteriology is still to be developed. Here, the place and the task of
> interreligious dialogue also lies in this field of the encounter and grappling
> with the concrete religions or with findings of facts and facts from them.[68]

The first and second areas are far more strongly governed by dogmatic perspectives and

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[66]*Ibid.*, 169. "Die religionenbezogene *Theorie des Christentums* ist deshalb die *Grundlage* aller weitergehenden Arbeit in der neuen Disziplin. Das Thema ist hier das Christentum selbst, sein Selbstverständnis und seine Selbsteinschätzung angesichts des Religionenpluralismus, vor allem, was den Charakter seines Wahrheitsanspruchs und die Art und Reichweite seiner universallen Sendung angeht."

[67]*Ibid.*, 170. "Es geht um die theologische Einschätzung von Sinn, Funktion und möglichem Eigenwert der nichtchristlichen Religionen überhaupt und im Zusammenhang damit auch um die Frage ihrer heilsgeschichtlichen Rolle und ihrer soteriologischen Bedeutung."

[68]*Ibid.*, 170. "Hier geht es um die Begegnung mit konkreten Religionen und mit präzisen Sachverhalten und Gegebenheiten aus diesen Religionen. Diese sind sachgerecht zu erheben und in wechselseitige kritische Beziehung zu den entsprechenden Daten des christlichen Glaubens zu bringen, wofür erst noch eine angemessene Hermeneutik und Kriteriologie zu entwickeln ist. Hier, auf diesem Feld der Begegnung und Auseinadersetzung mit den konkreten Religionen oder mit Tatbeständen und Sachverhalten aus ihnen, liegt auch der Ort und die Aufgabe der interreligioschen Dialogs."

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methods than is the third which deals with "empirical findings of the history of religions."
In those first two areas the superiority of Christianity over other religions is often asserted
in terms of "dogmatism" or "positionalism," while the third is concerned with
considering "*religionsgeschichtliche* findings of facts or concrete data from the life-world
of religions," i.e., with the interpretation, the comparison, and the assessment of religions.
In my understanding, Seckler seems to have in mind intra-Christian issues in the first and
second areas, and inter-religious problems in the third. At any rate, Seckler points us to a
far broader scope for a theology of religions than we have normally conceived. He
reminds us that the range of a theology of religions should not be limited to the
exclusively dogmatic or intra-Christian theological matters. In order for a theology of
religions as a whole to be adequate, it must involve both intra-Christian aspects and extra-
Christian or inter-religious dimensions. Although the former is necessary for reaffirming
or relocating the identity of Christian faith in the context of religious plurality, its
distinctiveness may not be truly defined without referring to actual components of other
faiths. As Seckler's third area implies, a theology of religions must explore mutually
acceptable criteria which can take into account both intra-Christian concerns and extra-
Christian or inter-religious experiences. Only then can it genuinely contribute to
enhancing mutual criticism as well as mutual enrichment between Christianity and other
religions.

It has now become more or less evident that theologians' preoccupation with
questions about the salvific value of non-Christian religions and salvific possibility for
their adherents may be primarily for an intra-Christian use. As DiNoia points out, the

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central burden of a theology of religions is then to preserve the unique valuation of

Christian faith without downplaying the distinctiveness and integrity of other religions.

> Do other religious communities, while pursuing their distinctive aims,
> foster rather than obstruct the development in their members of the
> dispositions to attain and enjoy the true end of life, fellowship with the
> Blessed Trinity?[69]

> The unique valuation of the Christian community and of its particular role
> in divine providence does not preclude the attribution to other
> communities of some role in God's plan for the salvation of the world.[70]

If Christians confess that Jesus Christ is the universal Savior and therefore God's salvific

activity through him is confined neither to any particular place nor to any specific period

of time in history, we can positively explore what distinctive roles each other religion

may play in God's universal salvific plan. To clarify this issue, DiNoia himself presents

the notion of the "providential diversity of religions," by which he seeks to ascribe an

"indirect or providential value" to those non-Christian religions without diluting their

distinctive aim of life and specific means to reach it. He explores the possibility that non-

Christian religious people may be saved not *through* but *in spite of* the distinctive life-

aims and specific means of attaining them recommended by their own religions, in terms

of an eschatological or prospective rather than a present salvific value.[71] In ascribing a

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[69]DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 67.

[70]*Ibid.*, 89-90.

[71]DiNoia identifies a decisive key to the solution of a universal salvific possibility for the adherents of non-Christian religions in the Catholic doctrine of "purgatory." The core point of this doctrine is that "it allows for an interval (which may be thought of as instantaneous and coterminous with death) the essential feature of which is the experience of a necessary purification or transformation in view of the assured prospect of eternal bliss." (*The Diversity of Religions*, 105.) Through the doctrine of purgatory, DiNoia

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broadly providential role rather than a specifically salvific value to non-Christian religions, DiNoia urges us to move towards a highly comprehensive understanding of the scope of a theology of religions in which the historical, cultural, dispositional, and even cosmological roles of all the other religions are to be seriously considered. For example, if a Buddhist community pronounces a certain person to be enlightened, it normally signifies that his or her total life has been shaped according to the distinctive aim and means of Buddhist teachings. Not only does Buddhism form people differently by recommending to outsiders as well as to its insiders the true aim of life (i.e., the realization of the state of *Nirvana* beyond all transient things) and the patterns of life fit to their pursuit of it (i.e., the practice of the Eightfold Path), it has also had vastly different consequences for human history, culture, and for what Geertz calls ethos and world-view. The task of a theology of religions (of course, as in its a posteriori part) is then to explicate theologically the impact of the Buddhist tradition on human history and lives of specific persons. Assessing that impact theologically--in effect, asking how the God known in Jesus Christ is related to or involved in these phenomena--goes considerably beyond inquiring into the salvific efficacy of that tradition in terms of only christological or soteriological implications. Are not Islam, Confucianism, or African tribal religions similar to Buddhism in this regard? Of course, the answer will be different in each case.

In conclusion, a theology of religions as a whole involves both an internal and an

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emphasizes that if other religions do not share any present material affinities with Christianity in their particular presentation of life-aims and means to attain them, Christians should not ascribe a direct or contributory salvific value to them, but explore what providential role ("a real but as yet perhaps not fully specifiable role") they may play in God's universal salvific design.

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external task. Internally or intra-Christianly, a theology of religions must touch every locus of systematic theology: from the doctrine of creation to that of the last things. All the topics of systematic theology must affect and be affected by the subject-matter of religious plurality. Thus, how should we assess other religions' view of the origin and course of the universe (or more specifically, the Buddhist doctrine of *Sunyata*) in view of the Christian doctrine of creation and providence? Likewise, how should we assess other religions' view of ultimate reality (or more specifically, the Buddhist doctrine of *Buddhas*) in view of the Christian doctrine of God or revelation; other religions' view of the authority of scriptures (or the Buddhist doctrine of *dharma*) from the Christian view of the Bible; other religions' view of the nature and destiny of human beings (or the Buddhist doctrine of *samsara* or *duhkah*) from the perspective of Christian anthropology; other religions' view of the last things (or the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation or the pure land) in the light of Christian eschatology, etc.? In short, a theology of religions has the task of formulating a set of adequate doctrines about other religions in general (or adequate doctrines about specific religions such as Buddhism) in affecting and being affected by every other locus of systematic theology so as to articulate a responsible account of Christian faith which is credible to other religious people in general (or to the specific audience of Buddhists). In this regard, a theology of religions inevitably involves both dogmatic and apologetic aspects. It must pursue an appropriate or authentic expression of Christian faith in the context of religious plurality, simultaneously rendering the Christian Gospel to be credible or intelligible not only to non-believers (atheists) or non-persons (the oppressed) but also to non-Christians (other religious

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people). Because of the double relatedness of a theology of religions (i.e., the elucidation of the intra-Christian issues in relation to the extra-Christian religions), it also needs to turn to the unique specificity of other individual religions. Thus, externally or inter-religiously, if any and every other non-Christian religion can be a theological dialogue partner for a theology of religions, the potential for its scope in encounter with particular religions is virtually unlimited. We may illustrate a vast array of different systematic theologies (not just one systematic theology) depending upon different areas of dialogue (e.g., Christian-Buddhist, Christian-Jewish, etc.).

The Three Phases of a Christian Theology of Religions

If we now have some clear idea of what a theology of religions is, our next question is how to construct an adequate theology of religions. To answer this question, I want to begin with the elucidation of criteria for its adequacy. In the third section of Chapter II, we observed that any theological statement's claim to validity must be determined by three criteria: its authentic Christianness, its meaningfulness and truth in terms of universal human experience and reason, and its fittingness or appropriateness to its specific context. These three general criteria can be applied directly to the regional case of a theology of religions as well. Any theology of religions, then, involves both critico-analytical and constructive aspects as its complementary moments in the course of meeting each of these three criteria: Critically questioning, "Is a given proposal for a theology of religions truly Christian?" and pursuing the constructive question, "What is a truly Christian theological proposal about religious plurality?"; "Is a given body of

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doctrines about other religions and their adherents meaningful and true?" and "What are meaningful and true doctrines about religious plurality?"; and "Is a given testimony about religious plurality fittingly enacted?" and "How can Christian testimony concerning religious plurality be fittingly enacted?"[72] In parallel with each of these three criteria, a theology of religions as a single integrative process of critical reflection must be distinguished, without separating, into the three phases of historical, philosophical, and practical inquiries. Thus, the *how* of doing an adequate theology of religions must involve first the historical phase of both critically judging the appropriate Christianness of the witness in question and constructing an authentically Christian theological proposal about religious plurality. The historical phase is called such simply because by necessity this first phase adopts the historico-critical method to accomplish the double task of testing and constructing a theological proposal's authenticity. Second, an adequate theology of religions must move to the philosophical phase in order to analyze critically a given proposal's intellectual credibility and to construct a true theological proposal about religious plurality. Since the method relevant to this second phase is a philosophical method, it is simply termed the philosophical phase. The third and last phase is the practical phase which is supposed to answer the question of what and how of enacting witness fittingly. Despite the lack of any distinctive method specific to this third phase, as compared to the first two phases, I want to emphasize that critical reflection on the Christian practice of religious plurality is necessary to investigate any proposal's aptness to its context. Unlike the other two phases, the practical phase is termed such not because

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[72]Cf. Wood, *Vision and Discernment*, 39-40.

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of its distinctive method but its involvement of ethico-pragmatic implications. A Christian theology of religions, as an integrative approach involving the three distinctive but inseparably-related phases, is analogous to the claim made in Chapter II that systematic theology must be an integrative approach which both informs and is informed by the three moments of historical, philosophical, and practical theologies. In the remainder of this chapter, the clarification of these three phases in greater detail is in order.

Criteria for the Adequacy of
a Christian Theology of Religions

In this section, I want to discuss three criteria, giving particular attention to the specific nature of a theology of religions which is concerned with both the internal Christian witness and the external subject-matter of religious plurality. Of course, it is not the only inquiry which has a double object of reflection. In a sense, any and every Christian theological reflection revolves around the double axis of the internal Christian tradition in the comprehensive sense of the totality of the Christian past and present, and the whole external experience of human beings, as related to Christian faith. As its sources, Christian theology draws upon the total data of Christianity such as scripture and tradition and all of the resources of extra-Christian realities (e.g., religious plurality). What distinguishes a theology of religions from other sorts of theology is its dealing with the highly complicated and elusive phenomena of religious plurality as its constitutive and overriding concern. Its concern with the objectively-given existence of other

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religions as its dominant subject-matter may well determine the peculiar nature of criteria for its adequacy, which fluctuates between intra-Christian elements and extra-Christian or inter-religious matters.

First, any adequate theology of religions must be genuinely Christian. It must deserve the adjective "Christian." Any and every theology of religions must answer the question of what constitutes Christian witness about religious plurality as exactly Christian. In its critico-analytical dimension, for example, it must answer the following questions. If an exclusivist claims that salvation or truth is restricted to explicit Christians only, is that assertion truly Christian? Does an inclusivist's claim of the implicit occurrence of christological salvation within the sphere of non-Christian religions accord with what is normatively Christian? When a pluralist argues that in addition to Christianity there can be and actually are many independent salvific accesses to the divine truth, does he or she really express Christian ideas? In its constructive dimension, then, a theology of religions also needs to ask the question of what is truly Christian witness about other religions. The extent of Christian authenticity, involved in each of the above three typical positions stated above, cannot be measured only by its wide popularity among contemporary theologians or lay people, nor by its credibility to contemporary human existence, nor by its fittingness to the particular context. In fact, there can be many credible and attractive and therefore popular theological proposals about religious plurality that are not precisely Christian. I am not arguing that every legitimate theology of religions is Christian. There can be other legitimate theologies of religions that are Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, etc. I just want to emphasize that any

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adequate Christian theology of religions must be faithful to its adjective in order to be truly called a Christian theology of religions.

How can, then, we determine whether a given witness's or proposal's claim is to be appropriately called Christian? It must be appropriate to Jesus Christ who is the core and constitutive symbol of Christianity. More precisely, it must be in accordance with Jesus Christ whom Christians in the past and present have experienced and experience. However, there have been and are a vast plurality of different and even mutually-conflicting witnesses or experiences about Jesus Christ and his relation to other religions and their adherents. To be sure, one cannot appeal to the whole Christian tradition (including scripture) because it is filled with a diversity of contradictory witnesses about Jesus and his possible relation to religious plurality. Therefore, one must first determine what is to count as the normative or representative witness by which one can critically test the authenticity of some or all witnesses' claim to be faithful to Jesus Christ and move to construct a truly Christian theological proposal about religious plurality. Generally speaking, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox regard both scripture and tradition to be normative, while Protestants appeal to "sola scriptura" as the normative witness. In determining the authentic Christianness of any witness, however, we face an enormous task of deciding what within scripture and tradition is normative or more precisely *norma normans sed non normata*, i.e., the "norm which norms but is not normed." Since the advent of the historico-critical investigation of scripture and tradition, the question of what is the *norma normans non normata* of appropriateness of theological assertions has become highly complicated and more controversial than ever. I

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want to assume the apostolic witness contained in the Synoptic Gospels (Jesus who is available to contemporary human existence through the apostolic witnesses) to be normative (the canon *before* the canon) and will further clarify the significance of this point for testing and constructing the appropriateness of witness about religious plurality when I turn to deal with the historical phase below. Suffice it to say that a theology of religions cannot be called Christian without satisfying the first condition of the appropriateness of its proposal to the normative Christian witness.

Second, any adequate theology of religions must be meaningful and true to contemporary human existence. A given proposal is meaningful when it discloses the vital and authentic self-understanding of contemporary human existence concerning the problem of religious plurality. It is also true if it is properly formulated without internal or external inconsistency and incoherence.[73] By "internal coherence," I mean inner-

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[73]There are at least four theories of truth: "coherence theory of truth," "correspondence theory of truth," "performative theory of truth," and "pragmatic theory of truth." The "coherence theory of truth" and the "correspondence theory of truth" are well known as the two classical theories of truth. According to Richard L. Kirkham, a general definition of coherence theory is as follows: "a set of two or more beliefs are said to cohere if and only if (1) each member of the set is consistent with any subset of the others and (2) each is implied (inductively if not deductively) by all of the others taken as premises or, according to some coherence theories, each is implied by *each* of the others individually." Richard L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992), 104. The "correspondence theory of truth" as the "most venerable of all kinds of theories of truth" can be categorized into two types: "correspondence as *correlation*" and "correspondence as *congruence*" between belief and fact. In the former case, simply put, "If the state of affairs to which a given truth bearer is correlated actually obtains, then the truth bearer is true; otherwise it is false." While the "correspondence-as-correlation theory" does not claim that "the truth bearer . . . is in any sense structurally isomorphic with the state of affairs to which is correlated," the congruence theory does claim that "there is a structural isomorphism between truth bearers and the facts to which they correspond when the truth bearer is

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Christian doctrines' self-consistency with each other. In its critico-analytical dimension, for example, a theology of religions needs to assess whether the exclusivist witness possesses any internal coherence. If an exclusivist asserts that only those who explicitly accept Jesus as his or her Savior can be saved, salvation is inevitably confined by this assertion to a small minority of human beings. The question of the unevangelized raises such fundamental issues as the attributes of God (especially God's love and power), the problem of evil, and the predestination of the elected and the damned. The eternal loss of the majority of humanity (including all the adherents of other religions) is incompatible with the Christian view of God's goodness and dominion because there were many generations prior to the coming of Jesus (beyond the salvific will and power of God) and there are still millions of people who have no chance of hearing the Gospel of Jesus. How can we believe that God is just, good, and omnipotent if God fails to provide billions of people with any kind of salvific opportunity? Such an exclusivist claim appears to be untrue because its logical structure is self-inconsistent with the traditional Christian understanding of God.

By "external coherence," I mean specifically the logical compatibility or incompatibility of Christian doctrines with the truth claims of other religious communities. In its generic form, by external coherence it is implied that the particular Christian doctrine about religious plurality under examination is consistent with the knowledge produced by a variety of non-theological disciplines of religious studies.

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true." See *Ibid.*, 119. When we are talking about the criterion of truth, we consider all the implications of these sorts of theories of truth.

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For example, theologians of religions may ask the question, "Is the Christian doctrine of creation coherent with the evolutionary view of the origin and development of the universe, as espoused by natural scientists?" In its specific form, however, by external coherence I highlight various logical connections between Christian truth-claims and other religions' truth-claims.[74] As a matter of fact, each higher religion makes a vast array of different claims about the divine, humanity, life after death, and so on. In its a posteriori dimension, therefore, a theology of religions must assess the external coherence or compatibility of its doctrines with those alien conflicting claims. For example, how is the Christian affirmation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah logically related to the Judaic expectation of a Messiah who will be sent by God? The logical relationship between these two claims is that of dependence--i.e., the truth of the Christian belief in Jesus depends on the Jewish hope that God promised to send a Messiah. The latter does not depend on the former. However, the Christian claim is not acceptable unless the Judaic statement is acceptable. In pursuing the criterion of truth in any given theological proposal about religious plurality, theologians thus need to examine critically diverse logical connections--not simply a similarity or contrast--between some Christian doctrines and doctrines of some other religious community. We will take up this sort of logical issue related to the second criterion again when we examine the philosophical phase below. Suffice it to say that one way of assessing any proposal's meaning and truth

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[74]William A. Christian, Sr., illustrates the external coherence of the doctrines of one religious community with those of other religions in terms of four logical connections: "identities," "consequences," "dependencies," and "oppositions." See *Doctrines of Religious Communities: A Philosophical Study* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 115-144.

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is by the internal and external consistency and the coherence of its doctrines.

The adequacy of any witness about other religions depends not only upon its authentic Christianness but also upon its meaningfulness and truth. Although a certain proposal about religious plurality contains authentically Christian ideas and fittingness to a specific context, it may yet be false. Thus, there can be many appropriately Christian and practically fitting testimonies that are not true. Any theological proposal about religious plurality that claims to be Christian but is neither meaningful nor true is not viable. It should not pursue authenticity at the expense of truth or vice versa. It must claim to be true not just for the internal audience of Christians but also for any extra-Christian people living in the same world of religious plurality. In this regard, it must be catholically valid, i.e., be intellectually credible to everybody, everywhere, always.

Third, any adequate theology of religions must be fitting to the specific context in and for which Christian witness about religious plurality is borne. If the second criterion is concerned with intellectual or theoretical credibility, this criterion is connected with practical credibility. Theoretical validation alone is not enough but must be combined with practical application. Theological content cannot be separated from its context and each must presuppose the other. Judging the adequacy of a theology of religions only in terms of its authenticity and truth may sanction the status quo of Christian exclusivism without furthering any interreligious dialogue or practical cooperation between Christianity and other religions. Christopher Morse emphasizes the importance of a context for formulating faithful doctrines in terms of two Cs: "Consequence" and "Cruciality." By the criterion of "consequence," Morse means the "effect of what the

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church is saying and doing for harm or benefit upon all."[75] With regard to this criterion,

any theological proposal must present positive answers to the following questions. Does

it increase love and shalom, while diminishing conflict and suffering? Does it really

elevate God's righteous justice and human well-being? Is it helpful for liberating the

oppressed as well as for making peace among different religions? By the norm of

"cruciality," Morse has in mind the following question: "Is the doctrine in question, what

the community is saying and doing, pertinent to, or an evasion of, what is crucial, what

matters most in the present situation?"[76] This question indicates that theological

doctrines must be formulated according to the priority of urgent matters. If the weightiest

matter in a given setting is poverty or political oppression, theology must explore a

certain way (whether theoretical or practical) of liberating people from such a devastating

situation of poverty and oppression. If we apply Morse's criteria to the specific case of a

theology of religions, any witness which does not bear fruitful effects and is not

structured around the weightiest matter about religious plurality may not be adequate. In

its critico-analytical dimension, for example, if a certain version of a theology of religions

such as exclusivism tends to aggravate the mutual hostility between Christians and other

religious people, it is not adequate. More specifically, if an exclusivist in the Korean

context asserts that all the statues of the Buddhist temples must be destroyed because they

are idols, it will surely be repugnant to all Korean people regardless of their religious

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[75]Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International Press, 1994), 64.

[76]*Ibid.*, 65.

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profession. Aloysius Pieris, S. J., holds that Asian theology must struggle with the two most notable facts of the Asian continent: the many poor and the many religions.[77] His argument indicates that any proposal for the Asian theology of religions may not be adequate unless it addresses the problem of Asian poverty and liberation, especially within the context of Asian religious plurality. A theology of religions has the task of critically assessing a given witness's appropriateness to its context and of pursuing the constructive question of "what a fitting witness in a particular situation is." The third criterion of fittingness is directly related to the many versions of contextualized or genitive theology. What is practically credible to white, male, First World, middle class people may be incredible to non-white, female, Second and Third World, low-and-upper class people and vice versa. Any testimony that justifies Christian imperialism or Western/male domination over the non-Christian or non-Western/female world is practically incredible and vice versa. The criterion of fittingness bears the most important implications for the geographically-specialized theology of religions as analyzed in the first section of this chapter. We will further examine various issues related to this third criterion when we discuss the third phase below. Suffice it to say that any theological proposal about religious plurality which is not fitting to its particular context is not adequate.

All proposals for a theology of religions that are authentically Christian, meaningful and true are not always fittingly enacted. A proposal which is both authentically Christian and true may be inappropriate to its specific situation. One also

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[77]Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*.

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should not collapse the criterion of authenticity into the criterion of either truth or fittingness. All that is true and fitting is not thereby *de facto* Christian. Any authentically Christian proposal for a theology of religions must be both true and appropriate to its situation. The three criteria of authenticity, truth, fittingness must be combined with each other so as to determine fully the adequacy of a theology of religions. They are not competitors but are interdependent. With these three criteria in mind, let us turn to the three phases of a theology of religions which are correlative with each of these criteria.

Historical Phase

In what follows, we are concerned with providing a method for constructing an adequate theology of religions. To accomplish this task, one must pursue three sequentially distinctive but closely interrelated phases: the historical phase of critically interpreting what is truly Christian about Christians' response to religious plurality throughout the whole of Christian history, the philosophical phase of critically determining what is meaningful and true in its logical structure, and the practical phase of critically reflecting on witness's claim to be fitting to its concrete context. Let us then start with the elucidation of the historical phase.

The first test of appropriateness calls for the use of various historical data such as scriptural texts, traditions, and other cultural resources related to them as well as the use of historico-critical methods pertinent to investigating those data. To illuminate the distinctive nature of the historical phase, let us clarify the concept "history" itself underlying any and every historical investigation and method. According to Robert Eric

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Frykenberg, the English noun "history" is etymologically derived from the Greek root and

its branches (whether noun or verb): "*istor* (ιστορ), *istorie* or *istoria* (ιστορια), and

such."[78] Despite the open debate about its original meanings, Homer was known to use

the Greek word as a verb signifying "to witness" ("know" or "learn"), while Herodotus

used it as a noun meaning "inquiries," "investigations," or "researches." Identifying these

etymological meanings, Frykenberg holds that the word was originally used to "designate

anything in the world that was 'witnessed'" and "any more systematic (or scientific)

account of things that actually existed in the 'natural,' 'real,' or 'seen' world."[79] With

these meanings in mind, he makes a distinction between the objective or more

comprehensive sense of history (history as "all that has happened") and the subjective or

narrower sense of history (history as "all that is *known* about the *part* of what has existed"

or "all that is *understood* about *some* of what has happened").[80] History in the former

sense refers to anything and everything that has happened and does happen, while the

latter indicates "history" as a specific sort of human inquiry, which aims at explaining or

interpreting the past or present events. Our concern is more focused on the latter, i.e.,

history as an explanation or interpretation of some perceived happenings or events in the

world. Let us then clarify some central features of the historical phase.

In the historical phase, the most important aim of theological reflection is to

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[78]Robert Eric Frykenberg, *History and Belief: The Foundations of Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 22.

[79]*Ibid.*, 23.

[80]*Ibid.*, 33.

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determine what is to count as normative witness by which one can test some or all of

Christian witness's (about religious plurality) claim to be authentically Christian. This

task can be done only through historical inquiry and historical method relevant to that

inquiry. In the first phase of critically searching for the normative witness, theologians of

religions must rely on historical theologians (including biblical theologians)[81] and even

secular historians who are equipped with highly advanced linguistic skills and interpretive

techniques. In dealing with a posteriori doctrines of other religious communities,

theologians of religions also must rely on historians of religions[82] who are concerned with

the objective and descriptive investigation of all the histories of religions. Although the

division of labor in today's theological arena is not always clear, interdisciplinary

cooperation is absolutely necessary because one theologian is not fully competent to deal

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[81]We have good reasons to include "biblical" or "exegetical" theology within the discipline of historical theology. One of the primary reasons for this is that historical theology as a whole necessarily involves the critical interpretation of the Bible which is regarded as a part of Christian tradition. See Ogden, *On Theology*, 8ff.; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, Translation of the 1811 and 1830 editions, with Essays and Notes, by Terrence N. Tice (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 58-77; Wood, *Vision and Discernment*, 43-44. We understand here "historical theology" as a theological sub-discipline which involves all the historical studies of the Bible, Christian dogma, doctrine, church, theology, etc.

[82]I understand here the "history of religions" as a sub-discipline of religious studies, which is concerned with the objective-empirical investigation of all the histories of religions. I want to highlight its integrative approach which involves the historico-comparative study of religious traditions in their relation to particular cultures and the phenomenologico-descriptive examination of the structures of religious life as expressed in symbols, rituals, doctrines, etc. In this regard, Joachim Wach argues that the history of religions comprises the task of both "diachronic studies" (the development of religions) and "synchronic studies" (the structure of religions). See Joachim Wach, *Introduction to the History of Religions*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Gregory D. Alles with the collaboration of Karl W. Luckert (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), 19.

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with all theological matters. This fact is particularly true in the case of a theology of religions.

As noted above, then, we cannot appeal to the whole Christian tradition (including the Bible) to identify normative elements because it conveys the vast diversity of different witnesses about Jesus and his possible relationship with religious plurality. If we appeal to the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, the Synoptic Gospels as well as the New Testament as a whole involve a number of different and mutually conflicting witnesses about Jesus and pagans. The writer of the Gospel of John says that Jesus is "the way, and the truth, and the life" and therefore no one can gain access to the Father except through him (14: 6). In the Book of Acts, St. Peter also proclaims that "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (4: 12). To be sure, we can easily find a number of similar verses in the New Testament which advocate or warrant the absoluteness of salvation or truth in Jesus alone.

In contrast to these exclusive christological claims, many of the New Testament passages also affirm that God works outside the realm of explicit Christianity and desires to save all people (including pagans) through God's limitless grace. In the parable of the great dinner, the writer of the Gospel of Luke makes it very clear that God does not want his house half empty but wants it to be filled (14: 23). The writer of 1 Timothy claims that God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2: 4); that "we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people" (4: 10). The writer of the Second Letter of Peter also boldly declares that God is patient, "not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (3: 9). A number of scriptural

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verses explicitly or implicitly indicate the universal possibility of salvation beyond the confines of visible Christianity because God never leaves Godself without a witness (Acts 14: 16-17). Given these mutually exclusive witnesses about Jesus and his relation to pagans, we need to sort out the *norma normans non normata* of appropriateness of Christian witness or tradition by which we can judge the authenticity of some or all of Christian witnesses about religious plurality.

In discussing the criterion of authenticity above, we argued that any Christian witness must be appropriate to Jesus who is the constitutive figure of Christianity. Any and every norm for judging whether or not something is Christian must be derived from Jesus. Which Jesus, then, should we turn to? The historical Jesus? The biggest problem of this appeal to the actual Jesus of history is that he is not directly accessible to us. The Synoptic Gospels as the most reliable source for the knowledge of Jesus were not historico-empirical reports on his actual life and death but the later results of compiled witnesses about him. Although there might be some degree of continuity between what Jesus actually said and did and his followers' reactions to him, the search for the "historical Jesus" is not promising at all because "we know Jesus only through the testimonies of his followers as those testimonies were incorporated into the documents of a later period."[83] If the actual Jesus himself cannot be the norm of appropriateness (in Ogden's words, Jesus is instead the "primary authorizing source"), our next best option would be to identify the earliest or at least an earlier witness about Jesus than others.

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[83]Marinus de Jonge, *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 20.

Following Ogden, I want to regard the apostolic witness to be normatively Christian because the apostles were putatively the earliest or at least earlier followers of Jesus than others. Jesus is accessible to contemporary human beings only through the apostolic witness about him. We come to faith in Jesus only through the apostolic faith in him. Where should, then, we locate the apostolic witness? Ogden seeks to locate it within the "earliest layer of witness" in the Synoptic Gospels, which is discernable through the historical criticisms such as text criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, etc. Thanks to the study of Willi Marxsen, we can identify the "Jesus-kerygma" (going beyond the "historical Jesus," the "Christ-kerygma," and the "Jesus-Christ-kerygma") as the earliest stratum of the apostolic witness (as the "canon *before* the canon") by which the authenticity of the Synoptic Gospels as well as of the New Testament may be tested.[84] I also want to consider the Jesus-kerygma as the *norma normans non normata* for determining the authenticity of any Christian witness about religious plurality. What are, then, the implications of this point for judging the authenticity of some or all of Christian

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[84]Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), 51-55. In his review of Ogden's book *On Theology* (1986), Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. charges Ogden's use of the "Jesus-kerygma" as normative with being problematic: (1) It is problematic whether or not the Jesus-kerygma can be specified with the "clarity and reliability which can make something useful as a norm"; (2) "an even more crippling difficulty" is that the earliest New Testament documents not only do not appeal to the Jesus-kerygma to justify their assertions but also the key New Testament documents simply reject the "norm of apostolicity." (Concerning the second critical point, in particular, Jennings argues that the category of apostolicity itself is an "invention of the later church" and therefore a "product of ideological bad faith.") Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., Review of *On Theology*, by Schubert M. Ogden, *Perkins Journal* 40 (1987), 39-40. For Ogden's critical and persuasive response to Jennings, see "The Problem of Normative Witness: A Response," *Perkins Journal* 41 (1988), 22-26.

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witnesses about religious plurality? In my judgment, Pamela Dickey Young provides us with some crucial clues for answering this question.

In exploring an adequate Christian feminist theology, Young seeks to locate the norm of appropriateness in the Christian tradition, more precisely, in the earliest layer of biblical traditions. She charges some prominent feminist theologians with using only "women's experience" as a source and a norm, while with not considering the Christian tradition (including the Bible) as a proper norm for formulating an adequate feminist theology.[85] Placing a more normative emphasis on Christian tradition, Young argues that the criteria of appropriateness and credibility must go together in any feminist theological formulation. Although women's experience, oppressed by androcentrism, must be used as a norm for determining the credibility of feminist theology, it cannot be the sole criterion for theological adequacy. Feminist theology also must search for a norm of appropriateness which can judge whether or not any given theological proposal is truly Christian. Following Marxsen and Ogden, Young identifies the locus of this appropriateness in the earliest stratum of the apostolic witness, i.e., the Jesus-kerygma which is retrievable through historical criticism. This earliest apostolic witness then depicts the kingdom or reign of God as central to Jesus' message. To summon one to

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[85]In particular, Young focuses on criticizing three feminist theologians' positions: Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's women-church as a "new magisterium" that determines what aspects of tradition are liberative for women; Rosemary Radford Ruether's "feminist eclecticism" that draws on a variety of sources and norms; and Letty Russell who draws on norms from both women's experience and Christian tradition (only "usable" tradition for feminist liberation.) See Pamela Dickey Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology: In Search of Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 23-48.

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love God and his or her neighbor is essential in God's kingdom or reign inaugurated by Jesus. "The normative character of this earliest witness lies not in specifics (What exact words did he say? What precisely did he do?) but in the experience of God's love and the call to love both God and neighbor in response that he represents."[86] Thus, Young argues that the earliest followers of Jesus conveyed no patriarchal bias against women.

> In the earliest layer of tradition no mention is made of male or female. No distinction is made between men and women. All are offered God's salvation and called to decision about God's love. What this means, then, is that when one raises the question of credibility to women in the context of the norm of appropriateness, one discovers that what is normative from Christian tradition is not practically incredible to women. But patriarchal notions have certainly encroached on this earliest layer of tradition.[87]

In her more recent work dealing with feminist christology in the light of religious pluralism,[88] Young argues that the earliest layer of Christian witness did not convey any exclusive or imperialistic attitude towards other religions and their adherents. The earliest strands of biblical texts and earliest christologies implied by them approached Jesus not in terms of abstract concepts such as the highest christological titles but in terms of his *effects* on his followers. In this regard, "Jesus was not experienced by those [the earliest followers] who encountered him as the restriction of God's love but as its fullness."[89] The earliest witness was neither directly concerned with Jesus' maleness or

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[86]*Ibid.*, 87.

[87]*Ibid.*, 90.

[88]Young, *Christ in a Post-Christian World: How can we believe in Jesus Christ when those around us believe differently--or not at all?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

[89]*Ibid.*, 48.

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femaleness as normative for humanity nor with exclusive restriction of God's grace and love to a small group of chosen Christians. The divine grace which the earliest followers experienced need not be restricted to "Jesus as its only source or conduit"; "An all-loving or all-gracious God [revealed in Jesus] can hardly reveal Godself as only partially loving."[90] Many of the exclusive passages about Jesus' finality or uniqueness in the New Testament do not represent the earliest apostles' authentic response to Jesus but are later reflections on those responses. I fully agree with Young's argument concerning the decisiveness of the earliest witness as the norm of norms for determining the authenticity of any theological proposal. In sum, I want to regard the earliest stratum of the apostolic witness contained in the Synoptic Gospels as the norm for judging the authenticity of some or all theological proposals about religious plurality for the following two reasons: First, because they are foundational or constitutive for all later christologies and Christian doctrines; second, because they can show us that exclusion of non-Christians from the sphere of God's unbounded grace and love is the product of later reflections on the earliest followers' experience of Jesus. I want to stop short at presuming simply this point, more importantly emphasizing the necessity of historical inquiry for explicating the issues as to what and how of searching for the normative witness.

Another important objective of the historical phase is to interpret critically some or all of the traditional Christian doctrines which implicitly or explicitly deal with the relationship of Christianity to other religions throughout the whole Christian history: chronologically ranging from patristic, medieval, Reformation, post-Reformation, to

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[90]*Ibid.*, 53.

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modern times, and confessionally varying from patristic, Eastern Orthodox, Roman

Catholic, to diverse Protestant denominations. Systematic theologians of religions should

learn as much as possible from historical theologians who are fully competent to interpret

various classical doctrines about other religions. They can inform theologians of

religions how church councils have made a variety of theological decisions about other

religions (or, about the salvation of the unevangelized) through creeds, confessions of

faith, and the writings of the individual theologians. Jaroslav Pelikan defines historical

theology as the "genetic study of Christian faith and doctrine."[91] Although Pelikan

affirms its possible use as an umbrella term involving "history of dogma," "history of

theology," "history of Christian thought," "history of doctrine," "history of Christianity,"

and the like, he identifies its closest affinity in the "history of Christian doctrine." He

does so because among the multifarious objects of historico-critical interpretation

historical theology often focuses on the issue of the continuity and change of Christian

doctrine. If orthodox dogma is normally considered as unchanging, continuous with the

earliest and thus the purest apostolic witness, the later innovation, change, or accretion

may well be rendered as inauthentic and heretical. In this regard, Pelikan finds the central

task of historical theology in its asking *where* and *how* to locate the continuity and change

or growth of the pure and unchanging doctrine.[92] In its historical phase, then, a theology

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[91]Jaroslav Pelikan, *Historical Theology: Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), xiii.

[92]See *Ibid.*, 1-32. See also Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine: Some Historical Prolegomena* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 9-69. It is noteworthy for our concern here that in the first part of this book, Pelikan critically

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of religions needs to discern what Charles Wood calls the "orthodoxy of the radically

heterodox" or the "faithlessness of apparent orthodoxy"[93] with regard to Christianity's

response to religious plurality. Given the complicated and subtle history of Christianity,

it is extremely hard to sift rightly orthodoxy from heterodoxy because this task was

frequently determined not by truth but by majority or authority. For this very reason,

Schleiermacher argues that both orthodox and heterodox elements are equally necessary

for formulating adequate dogmatics in its unity and flexibility.[94] He defines orthodoxy as

"every element of doctrine that is construed in the intention of holding fast to what is

already generally acknowledged, along with any inferences which may naturally follow,"

while regarding heterodoxy as "every element construed in the inclination to keep the

conception of doctrine mobile and to make room for still other modes of apprehension."[95]

With this distinction in mind, Schleiermacher warns us against both "false orthodoxy"

and "false heterodoxy." The former seeks to "retain in dogmatic treatment what is

already entirely antiquated in the public announcements of the Church and does not

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analyzes John Henry Newman's seven criteria for distinguishing authentic development
in Christian doctrine from doctrinal distortion.

[93]Wood, *Vision and Discernment*, 73.

[94]Schleiermacher divides "historical theology" into three main branches in
accordance with three specific divisions of Christian time: exegetical theology as the
"historical knowledge of primitive Christianity," church history as the "knowledge of the
total career of Christianity," and dogmatics and church statistics as the "knowledge of the
state of Christianity at the present time." He is referring to the relationship between
orthodoxy and heterodoxy under the heading of "dogmatics" as the present self-
understanding of the Christian community. Cf. *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of
Study*, 41-130.

[95]*Ibid.*, 103.

exercise in its scientific expression any definite influence upon other points of doctrine," while the latter tries to "inveigh against formulations which have well grounded support in pronouncements of the Church and the scientific expression of which does not create confusion regarding their relation to other points of Christian doctrine."[96] Schleiermacher's admonition offers some significant implications for illuminating the importance of the historical phase of a theology of religions because a pluralistic or even an inclusivistic tolerant approach to other religions was often condemned as heterodox in Christian history. The historical investigation of the traditional Christian doctrines can distinguish what Schleiermacher calls "false orthodoxy" (or "false heterodoxy") from "right orthodoxy" (or "right heterodoxy") with particular regard to the problem of religious plurality.

In my view, the first phase of the historical inquiry is significant especially for a pluralist theology of religions. It may start from the radical critique of the exclusivist Christian tradition itself from a perspective of religious pluralism. On the basis of the radical critique of the imperialistic aspects of the Christian past, pluralist theologians of religions may try to retrieve various alternative concepts and symbols in the Christian tradition which can support religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. In their critique of the exclusivistic strands of Christian tradition and the historical retrieval of various alternatives to promote religious pluralism, the historical phase may play a pivotal role for proposing a pluralist theology in its historico-critical analysis of and search for various historical materials.

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[96]*Ibid.*, 104.

In short, a theology of religions may not be properly done without first passing through the historical phase because it must deal with historical data such as scriptures and traditional Christian doctrines which can be rightly interpreted only by historical method. The historical investigation of some data appropriate to the formulation of a theology of religions can help theologians of religions distinguish authentic materials from distortions or accretions. Determining the validity of any witness's claim to be worthy of acceptance, then, requires critically validating its meaningfulness and truth, which is to be pursued in the philosophical phase. The historical phase now anticipates the philosophical phase and the latter presupposes the former.

Philosophical Phase

The second criterion of the meaning and truth of Christian witness about religious plurality is to be pursued in the philosophical phase of a theology of religions. As in the case of the historical phase, the philosophical phase is also termed such solely because of its methodological orientation. To begin with the distinctive features of this phase, let us clarify the meaning of the term "philosophy." Can we identify any single-encompassing notion of "philosophy" underlying all particular philosophies or diverse ways of philosophizing? During the latter part of the nineteenth century and throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, the question "What is philosophy?" was highly controversial and problematic among a number of Western philosophers. Despite this wide-ranging controversy, however, there seems to be some generally agreed consensus about the nature of philosophy. One effective way to identify this consensus would be to

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explore the etymological meaning of "philosophy." Philosophy is derived from the Greek

words "philos" (φιλος, loving) and "sophia" (σοφια, wisdom) and therefore the

compound "philosophia" may be directly translated as the "love of wisdom." Philosophy

is an intellectual inquiry which pursues the love of wisdom in the broadest possible realm

of human life. In its non-technical sense, everybody can be a philosopher insofar as he or

she explores the love of wisdom in his or her everyday life. In a less general and more

technical sense, however, philosophy means the reasoned and methodical way of

intellectually loving wisdom. Although the popular usage of the term "philosophy" has

never entirely lost its original breadth of etymological meaning, professional philosophers

have tended to restrict its exact meaning and scope to a well-ordered and disciplined

rational inquiry about the whole things in the world. In the course of human history, so-

called technical philosophers have applied the term "philosophy" to a variety of

intellectual enterprises and to a number of complicated themes or problems within its

scope. What are, then, the essentially constitutive elements of philosophy as critical

inquiry?

Frederick Ferré identifies at least two minimal traits of "philosophical

reflection."[97] First, any philosophy must be comprehensive in its scope. Philosophy must

explore "omnirelevant" questions which are not confined to any specialized or

compartmentalized department of human inquiry. What properly distinguishes

philosophy from all sorts of specialized disciplines is its unlimited scope of inquiry.

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[97]Frederick Ferré, *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons, 1967), 11-21.

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Second, philosophy must be critically pursued. Simply being comprehensive in its way of

dealing with all things is not enough but must be complemented by thinking and

reasoning critically. Ferré holds, then, that this critico-rational method involves at least

three essential ingredients: (1) the "rule of consistency"; (2) the "rule of evidence"; and

(3) the "ideal of coherence." Without logical consistency, no question can be

meaningfully raised in its conceptual sense. Although logical consistency is an

indispensable prerequisite for thinking and reasoning philosophically, it must be

supplemented by the "rule of evidence." Any philosophical inquiry must appeal to

evidences which can offer sufficient grounds for rational belief. And "our beliefs must

not only *coexist* with one another without contradiction but also be *connected* (to some

degree) with one another."[98] In order for something to be philosophical in its most

technical sense, in short, it must be free from logical contradiction, evidential deficiency,

and incoherence. With these basic conditions of philosophical reflection in mind, let us

explicate the central features of the philosophical phase in a theology of religions.

A theology of religions may be differently shaped in proportion to each

theologian's particular philosophical interest, e.g., notion of religion, or preference of

some distinctive philosophical modes such as metaphysical, existential, analytico-

linguistic, phenomenological, deconstructive, etc. If and when we refer to the

philosophical phase, therefore, we do not refer to all of the diverse philosophical concerns

or trends, but to the basic features of the philosophical method underlying any

philosophical inquiry as so far examined above. Among a variety of constitutive

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[98]*Ibid.*, 20.

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elements in a given theological proposal about religious plurality, then, a theology of

religions in its philosophical phase focuses on its doctrinal statements. Although there is

no unified conclusive definition of philosophy, I agree with the general assumption of

analytical philosophers that the central task of philosophy is to clarify the logic of a given

discourse in conceptually precise ways. The main objective of the philosophical phase in

a theology of religions is then to elucidate the meaning and truth of a given body of

Christian doctrines about religious plurality. In proceeding to the philosophical phase,

theologians must rely on philosophical theologians and philosophers of religion who are

technically versed in various philosophical issues.[99] The philosophical phase may consist

of the two interrelated dimensions of critically analyzing a given proposal's meaning and

truth and of creatively constructing a body of meaningful and true statements about

Christianity's response to religious plurality.

In its critico-analytical dimension, theologians of religions need to clarify the

logical meaning and truth of a given body of doctrines about religious plurality. By so

doing, they can make actual judgments about the truth or falsity of those doctrines in

terms of their consistency, evidential ground, and internal coherence with other Christian

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[99]I regard here "philosophical theology" as a theological sub-discipline which is concerned with the philosophical elucidation of and the actual judgement about the meaning and truth of Christian witness in its wider relationship to universal human existence. Unlike our notion here, some theologians such as Schubert Ogden uses "philosophical theology" to designate an independent philosophical (especially, metaphysical) inquiry related to Christianity as well as to every other religious tradition. I understand here "philosophy of religion" to be a discipline in the distinctive field of philosophy, which is aimed at making a critico-analytical investigation of the meaning and truth of the whole of possible religious discourses independent from any particular religious tradition. In my view, Ogden's notion of philosophical theology seems to be very similar to our concept of "philosophy of religion." See On Theology, 69-93.

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doctrines. For example, is an exclusivist claim about the finality or absoluteness of Jesus for the salvation of the entire human race compatible with other Christian teachings which affirm the universal validity of God's grace and love? How can we make actual judgments about the truth or falsity of the pluralistic assumption of the relativity of all religions from the standpoint of unique Christian faith? In critically pursuing these sorts of question, theologians of religions can borrow a variety of useful concepts and criteria from philosophers to disclose the internal compatibility or incompatibility of given doctrinal proposals with other Christian doctrines.

In the philosophical phase, another important task is to examine critically the logical possibility of compatibilities or incompatibilities between *authentic* and *justified* Christian truth-claims and other religions' *authentic* and *justified* truth-claims.[100] This is related to the external coherence of Christian doctrines with other alien truth-claims. A plurality of the great world religions have developed very different belief-systems throughout their long histories. They make truth-claims about the nature of reality as well as about ultimate reality, which are assumed to be necessary for the attainment of salvation or liberation. According to some, ultimate reality is personal, according to others, non-personal. For example, the Catholic Church teaches that the beatific union with the triune God in heaven is the supreme goal of life, while Buddhism normally

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[100]If and when I talk about the notion of compatibility or coherence among the truth-claims made by different religions, I always assume that there ought to be compatibility or incompatibility only between the *authentic* and *justified* truth-claims of different religions. I do so because it is hard to imagine why there ought to be compatibility or incompatibility between false truth-claims made by different religions or between inauthentic truth-claims--even if true--advanced by different religions.

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teaches that the attainment of *Nirvana* here and now is the ultimate aim of life. As this

bare comparison shows, there could be a number of different conceptions of ultimate

reality, related to correspondingly different proposals of reaching it as well as to different

patterns of life proportionate to pursuing each of these ultimate aims. If any one of these

belief-systems is true, must not all the others be false? Because of this *prima facie*

incompatibility between different religious truth-claims, a believer of any one particular

religious community may well regard the truth-claims of other religious communities as

false and therefore as not leading to salvation or liberation. Facing this difficulty,

Rahnerian inclusivists might assume that there could be no genuine (though apparent)

oppositions between Christian truth-claims and other religions' simply because they are

ultimately destined to attain the Christian scheme of truth or salvation achieved in Jesus

Christ. The major difficulty with this kind of inclusivist proposal is that using the

categories of one's own tradition to assess other religions' truth-claims might be very

offensive to them. In critically testing the external coherence of Christian doctrines with

the truth-claims of other religions, one must adopt not any exclusively privileged truth-

criteria but cross-culturally applicable truth-criteria. Then, how about the pluralist

response to the possibility of conflicting truth-claims between different religious

doctrines? As will be seen in the next chapter, a Hickian pluralist might assume that all

the competing truth-claims among different religions are merely phenomenal or apparent

because all religions are ultimately aimed at the same soteriological path. Insofar as a

plurality of different religions provide their adherents with the effective soteriological

path, there are not any genuine oppositions between their different truth-claims.

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Concerning the validity of this hypothetical claim of a pluralist, we need to note William A. Christian, Sr.'s claim that incompatibilities or oppositions between different religious doctrines are possible if they cannot be accepted jointly without absurdity.[101] For example, if what is proposed for Buddhist belief and what is proposed for Christian belief cannot both be true, they are in direct opposition. To believe a certain proposition is to assert that it is true. It is *prima facie* evident that two religions cannot assert the same truth, if they believe different propositions. The Buddhist assertion that there is no Creator diametrically opposes the Christian belief that there is one perfect Creator. The Muslim assertion that Allah has no son excludes the Christian belief that Jesus Christ is God's only begotten Son. Our direct concern is not to argue for the actual incompatibilities or oppositions between different religious doctrines but to emphasize the importance of the philosophical phase in critically elucidating this sort of logical issues.

In its constructive dimension, a theology of religions also must formulate a body of meaningful and true Christian doctrines about religious plurality. In so doing, it may utilize various secular philosophies and their entailing concepts and truth-criteria which are cross-culturally applicable. On whatever distinctive philosophies it may rely, its methodological focus is always on logical consistency, evidential warrant, and coherence. Despite the enormous complexity and diversity of the so-called philosophical strategy, thus, one indispensable reminder concerning the philosophical phase is its careful and

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[101]William A. Christian, Sr., *Oppositions of Religious Doctrines: A Study in the Logic of Dialogue among Religions* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 2.

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invariable attention to the truth of Christian witness about religious plurality. Critically validating any witness's claim to be intellectually credible now anticipates critically validating its practical credibility, i.e., its aptness to a specific context, which is to be pursued in the practical phase. A theology of religions as a whole receives the results of historical investigation through the historical phase, reflects upon their meaning and truth through the philosophical phase, finally turning to the critical reflection on the Christian life-praxis of religious plurality, which is to be pursued in the practical phase. (However, the order of priority among these three phases should not be understood as an "one-way stream of traffic" because they are inseparably interpenetrated.)

Practical Phase

The practical phase in a theology of religions is concerned with critically validating Christian witness's (about religious plurality) claim to be fitting to its context. The great difficulty in clarifying the practical phase is that it neither indicates any distinctive method nor any association with other cognate non-theological disciplines, while the previous two phases clearly exhibit distinctive methods (historical and philosophical) and corresponding non-theological disciplines (history and philosophy). Moreover, one may wonder whether there is any solely practical method in sharp contrast to theoretical method and whether the practical phase is exclusively concerned with "practice," while the other two phases must be devoted to "theory" only. With regard to this false wondering, we need to emphasize that like the two phases the practical phase is also to be pursued as a mode of critical reflection on the praxis (πρᾶξις) of Christian

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witness related to interreligious situation. The practical phase is to be sought as the secondary activity of critical reflection on the first-order practice of the actual living of Christians in the world. This phase centers around "φρόνησις," i.e., "practical wisdom or reason" with regard to the practical relationship of Christianity to other religions. The most remarkable feature of the practical phase, as compared to the other two phases, is its holding together theoretical reflection and practical application to a specific context. Thus, I want to emphasize the practical phase as a mediating moment of interplay between critical reflection on the practice of Christian witness and practical prescription for the betterment of Christian praxis in the context of religious plurality. Before examining the central features of the practical phase, then, let us elucidate its necessary involvement of ethical implications.

As noted above, the overriding concern of the practical phase is with the fittingness of any witness about religious plurality to its context. Like the other two phases, it also involves both the critico-analytical question of "whether this witness about religious plurality is fittingly enacted" and the constructive question of "How this witness about other religions is to be fittingly practiced." In exploring this twofold question, then, the practical phase inevitably involves ethical dimensions. In this sense, the third phase can be rightly called "ethico-pragmatic." H. Richard Niebuhr shows us the importance of "responsibility" in our moral relation to others and God. He develops the idea of the "responsible self" through a series of sharp contrast with the "teleological" and "deontological" theories of human existence. The teleological theory views man or woman as the "maker" or "fashioner" who acts towards fulfilling some end or goal. His

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or her main objective is to achieve the "good" through various utilitarian ways, raising the following questions: "What is my goal, ideal, or telos?"; "What shall I do?"[102] The great difficulty inherent in the model of "man-the-maker" is that "he cannot speak of accountability for success or failure" in achieving his goals.[103] The deontological theory sees man or woman as the "citizen" who is living under law, interpreting self-existence in the midst of mores, laws, and commandments. His or her main goal is to realize the "right," trying to answer the question: "What is the law and what is the first law of my life?"[104] In the moral category of "man-the-citizen," the Christian Gospel becomes paradoxical with the law in that "To love in obedience to requirement is not to love at all; yet it is required that one love unrequiredly."[105]

As an "alternative" (more precisely, "supplementary") symbol to the above two metaphors, Niebuhr presents the notion of "man-the-answerer." This symbol enables us to see man or woman as a moral agent who acts in response to all actions upon him or her. "Responsibility" answers the moral query in the light of the prior question, "What is going on?"[106] The primary concern of the responsible man or woman is then with the *"fitting* action, the one that fits into a total interaction as response and as anticipation of

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[102]H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 60.

[103]*Ibid.*, 70.

[104]*Ibid.*, 60.

[105]*Ibid.*, 131.

[106]*Ibid.*, 60.

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further response."[107] Niebuhr defines his concept of "responsibility" as the "idea of an agent's action as response to an action upon him in accordance with his interpretation of the latter action and with his expectation of response to his response [i.e., 'accountability']; and all of this is in a continuing community of agents [i.e., 'social solidarity']."[108] Whereas teleology is concerned with the "good" to be realized" and deontology is concerned with the "right" to be obeyed, responsibility is concerned with the "fitting action" in relation to whomever or whatever one is responsible. In its radically-monotheistic form, responsibility affirms that "God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to his action."[109] Our central concern is not with critically judging the validity of Niebuhr's argument but with illuminating the ethical aspect inherent in the fitting enactment of witness in a specific context. Although the immediate context of Niebuhr's discussion is for Christian moral philosophy, his analysis of "responsibility" has a far broader range of applicability. If we apply his metaphors to the specific case of a theology of religions, roughly speaking, exclusivists (or some inclusivists as well) seem to be deontological in that they emphasize obedience to the great commission of Jesus to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28: 19), while pluralists are teleological in that they are ready to do whatever to achieve the good of interreligious cooperation and dialogue, minimizing the necessity for Christian mission

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[107]*Ibid.*, 61.

[108]*Ibid.*, 65.

[109]*Ibid.*, 126.

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or evangelization. Although this general assumption must be carefully tested in the light of specific cases, Niebuhr's analysis of responsibility helps us escape from both the teleological or utilitarian contextualization of the Christian Gospel and the deontological fixation to the rigid and unchanging commands of God. Responsibility requires us to pay serious attention to the demands of our neighbors and the context in and for which our witness is enacted. In short, Niebuhr implicitly informs us of the significance of the moral dimensions for responsibly and fittingly practicing Christian witness in the context of religious plurality. Let us now turn to explicate the distinctive features of the practical phase.

In engaging in the practical phase, theologians of religions must rely on practical theologians[110] and social-scientists of religion[111] who are fully competent to deal with various practical issues. How can, then, they help theologians of religions proceed to the practical phase? Gijsbert D. J. Dingemans informs us of the updated discussion about the academic status and methodology of practical theology. If practical theology is a

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[110]I regard here "practical theology" as a theological sub-discipline which is concerned with critically examining the appropriation, enactment, and practice of Christian witness within the universal context of human existence. I want to avoid its narrow application to the official functions of the ordained church leadership. I do so in order to escape from what Charles Wood calls "clericalism" ("the identification of Christian witness with clerical activities") and "institutionalism" ("the identification of Christian witness with the maintenance of the religious institution known as the church"). The term "pastoral theology" may be used to designate the narrower limitation of practical theology to the pastoral functions. See Wood, *Vision and Discernment*, 48-49.

[111]By "social-sciences," I mean a group of homogeneous disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc., which adopt the social-scientific methods germane to each of their inquiry. In using the collective term "social-sciences of religion," I want to highlight their putative interdisciplinary convergences or methodological resemblances in approaching religious plurality.

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theological approach to practice, according to Dingemans, it refers to four paradigmatic

practices: the "practice of ordained ministers and church leaders," the "practice of the

church as a whole," the "practice of the liberation of the oppressed," and the "practice of

individuals."[112] In recent decades, practical theology is also understood as an integrative

discipline which involves "empirical-analytical," "hermeneutical," and "critical-political

approaches."[113] Practical theology itself has undergone a radical shift from the notion of

"clerical techniques" to the "science of action" (*Handlungswissenschaft*) or the "socio-

political theory of praxis." In discussing the methodology of practical theology,

Dingemans emphasizes practical theology's interdisciplinary cooperation with social-

sciences. Practical theologians then must employ the following four methodologies: (1)

The research of practical theology must begin with an "interdisciplinary *description* of the

practice or *analysis* of the situation"; (2) It needs to provide an "*explanation* of the

situation by drafting a hypothesis that can be verified (or falsified) afterwards and that

will probably lead to new theories or new options"; (3) "After the analysis of the

situation, practical theologians pass into the *normative* phase of their research"; and (4)

"all practical theological work aims towards making suggestions and recommendations in

order to *improve* and *transform* the existing practice."[114]

In my view, Dingemans' proposal of the four methods is very helpful for

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[112]Gijsbert D. J. Dingemans, "Practical Theology in the Academy: A
Contemporary Overview," *The Journal of Religion* 76 (1996), 84-87.

[113]*Ibid.*, 87-91.

[114]*Ibid.*, 92.

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illuminating the pertinent procedures of the practical phase in a theology of religions. In

critically appropriating his methodology, I want to lump together the first and second

methods as the first stage of the "critico-analytical explanation of the situation of

religious plurality" and the third and fourth methods as the second stage of "theological

reflection on the Christian practice of interreligious dialogue." With the help of various

social-sciences of religion, the first task of the practical phase is to be informed of the

nature of a given context in and for which Christian witness about religious plurality is to

be borne. In so doing, theologians of religions may need to be attentive to the warning of

Peter L. Berger that "every inquiry into religious matters that limits itself to the

empirically available must necessarily be based on a '*methodological*' atheism."[115] In

critically relying on social-scientists, theologians should note that social-scientists

normally bracket theological questions and transcendental elements in order to pursue the

objective and impartial study. A social-scientific analysis of the given context may

disclose that a particular social system influences the shaping of a particular religious

tradition and conversely that a specific religion plays an instrumental role in the particular

identity formation, the social cohesion or conflict, and the shaping of a particular culture.

The praxis of interreligious existence can hardly be explained without taking into account

the social interaction among individual believers, society, and culture. If Christian

witness is borne in the Korean context of religious plurality, for example, the social-

scientific investigation may offer very useful answers about the following sorts of

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[115]Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 100.

question. Does the situation of religious diversity integrate or disintegrate the Korean society? What roles did it play in the process of modernization or westernization in recent Korean history? Between Confucianism and Christianity, which religion does promote more democratic values? If Korean Christians are proved to be more active in participating in various socio-political matters than other religious people, are there any socio-psychological reasons for explaining that fact? What kinds of socio-political effects cause the acute confrontation or competition between Buddhism and Christianity within the current structure and ethos of Korean society? For answering these and other related questions, there must be a multi-disciplinary approach of social-sciences which seek an impartial description and the explanation of the complicated socio-dynamic interaction between different religions as empirically or experimentally verifiable data. In pursuing the first task of the practical phase, in short, theologians of religions need to be fully informed of the results of the social-scientific analysis and of the explanation of a specific situation in and for which Christian witness about religious plurality is borne.

The second task of the practical phase is to explore various theological theories which can give an impetus to effective strategic practices for the apt enactment of Christian witness in a given context. On the basis of the results of the social-scientific investigation of the context, theologians should turn to their own enterprises such as pastoral care, preaching, liturgy, counseling, church administration, Christian education, etc., all of which are directed towards the Christian practice of interreligious dialogue. This stage is what Don S. Browning calls "strategic practical theology" or "fully practical theology" by which he means "what is commonly understood as the church disciplines of

religious education, pastoral care, preaching, liturgy, social ministries, and so forth."[116]

The goal of the second moment in the practical phase is to reflect critically on the praxis of interreligious dialogue, giving special attention to the promotion of socio-political cooperation between Christianity and other religions in face of various human sufferings and oppressions based on class/race/sex, ecological devastation, and the possibility of nuclear holocaust. Its concern is how to formulate an adequate practical theological proposal which can promote human well-being, justice, environmental preservation, interreligious peace and reconciliation, and so on. As liberation theologians typically assert, theologians of religions need to note that liberative orthopraxis may take a precedence over orthodoxy. In searching for various practical theological strategies, theologians need to reflect critically on the question of how being faithful to Jesus Christ requires the radical transformation and betterment of human existence as well as peace or reconciliation among different religions.

In conclusion, a theology of religions as a single integrative inquiry necessarily involves three distinctive but inseparably interrelated phases. As a constitutive part, each of these three phases forms a theology of religions as a whole. Each must depend upon the others and the results of the cognate non-theological disciplines in pursuing its own

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[116]Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 8. In this book, Browning divides what he calls a "fundamental practical theology" into the four specialized moments of "descriptive theology," "historical theology," "systematic theology," and "strategic practical theology." This specification is based on his conviction that theology as a whole must be understood as fundamentally practical. He seeks to reverse the classical model of the "theory-to-practice" theology to the "practice-theory-practice" model.

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distinctive objective. A theology of religions comprises what Ogden calls a "method-encompassing method."[117] As so far argued above, the historical phase is concerned with the dogmatic task of critically reflecting on witness's claim to be appropriate to the apostolic witness of faith; the philosophical phase with the apologetical task of critically validating witness's claim to be meaningful and true; and the practical phase with the ethico-pragmatic task of critically inquiring about witness's claim to be fitting to its situation. Each phase can be distinguished from the others through its distinctive method as well as its distinctive contribution towards critically reflecting on the general validity of Christian witness about religious plurality. If the historical phase composes the root, the philosophical phase constitutes trunk, and the practical phase the branches, leaves, and fruits.[118] I want to argue for the combination of all these three phases in framing any adequate theology of religions in order to avoid what Wood calls a "risk of one-dimensionality": Pursuing only the question of authenticity by ignoring the questions of truth and aptness, being preoccupied with the issue of truth at the expense of the issues of authenticity and aptness, or being exclusively concerned with the fitting response to situation without giving serious attention to Christian authenticity and intellectual credibility.[119] The three phases must be incorporated in any theology of religions so as to

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[117]Ogden, *Doing Theology Today*, 11.

[118]I have borrowed a hint for this analogy from Schleiermacher who likens philosophical theology as the "root" of the theological tree, historical theology as the "actual corpus" of the tree, and practical theology as the "crown of theological study." This metaphor originally appears in the first edition of *Kurze Darstellung* (1811), "Introduction" §26, §31, §36. Cf. *Brief Outline of Theology*, 14-17.

[119]See Wood, *Vision and Discernment*, 52-53.

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evade any one of those pitfalls. This argument is parallel with our claim, as made in the third section of Chapter II, that a theology of religions is an inquiry incumbent upon systematic theology which must inform and be informed by the other intra-Christian disciplines such as historical, philosophical, and practical theologies.

CHAPTER IV

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

In the preceding two chapters, I clarified the most fundamental questions of prolegomena to a Christian theology of religions. These questions involve our notion of "religion" and "religions," theological issues which religious plurality poses to Christian faith and theology (systematic theology in particular), the relationship between a theology of religions and systematic theology, the distinctive features of a theology of religions, the scope of a theology of religions, and the proper method of formulating an adequate theology of religions.

In this chapter, I will apply these prolegomena points to the critical evaluation of the contemporary theology of religions. I want to do so by elucidating the central features of what I consider as the most salient four theological positions concerning religious plurality--Karl Barth's moderate exclusivism, Karl Rahner's inclusivism, John Hick's pluralism, and Schubert Ogden's pluralistic inclusivism as an alternative proposal to the existing three paradigms. I have chosen these four theologians because they all are prominent theologians who have made a remarkable contribution (in Barth's case, only an implicit contribution) to the contemporary discussion of a theology of religions, representing four distinctive cases about religious plurality. The critical

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examination of each of them may indicate where and how we should move in order to do a more adequate theology of religions in our time.

In this chapter, I will first discuss whether or not the currently influential typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism is an appropriate and useful scheme for approaching Christianity's theological response to religious plurality. Second, I will critically probe four theologians' positions as the paradigm cases of the contemporary theology of religions. Third, I will make a brief summary evaluation about the central marks of the contemporary theology of religions, as expressed in each of the four theologians' positions, and identify some of their implications for moving towards a more adequate theology of religions. I will here apply some of important prolegomena points, made in chapters II and III, to assessing critically the four theologians' thoughts about religious plurality.

The Typological Usefulness of
Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism

The threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism was first classified by Alan Race.[1] Gavin D'Costa further strengthened and elaborated this typology as the most workable framework for illuminating various approaches to the relationship of Christianity to other religions.[2] Since the path-breaking works of these

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[1]Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism.*

[2]D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*; "Theology of Religions," *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century,* ed. David F. Ford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989), 274-290; "Christian Theology

two scholars in the 1980s, a majority of theologians have adopted this typology as the most useful and appropriate scheme by which they can explore a number of important theological issues in religious plurality. A German religious pluralist Perry Schmidt-Leukel extols this typology as follows:

> In the international discussion, a certain typology has been widely used in the last ten years. It distinguishes the three basic models of the theology of religions: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism . . . these three schemes for the first time offer a systematic classification which is in logical respect *comprehensive* and *inevitable* and is in theological regard *adequate*. The comprehensiveness and inevitability of this typology compellingly prove themselves through a plain set-theoretical representation! This has considerable consequences for the further discussion of a theology of religions: The search for alternative typologies is of no use and the commitment to one of the three possibilities is unavoidable. However, the explanation of the adequacy of these schemes will show that there can be sufficient room to play for differentiated commitment and for a pertinent criteriological consideration of the offered alternatives.[3]

Our main concern here is not to examine critically whether or not Schmidt-Leukel succeeds in demonstrating the "comprehensiveness" (*Umfassendheit*) and "inevitability" (*Unausweichlichkeit*) of this typology in its logical aspect, and its theological adequacy as

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and Other Faiths," *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, eds. Peter Byrne and Leslie Houlden (London: Routledge, 1995), 291-313.

[3]Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Zur Klassifikation Religionstheologischer Modelle," *Catholica* 47 (1993), 163. "In der internationalen Diskussion hat sich in den letzten zehn Jahren eine bestimmte Typologie weit verbreitet, die drei religionstheologische Grundmodelle unterscheidet: Exklusivismus, Inklusivismus und Pluralismus . . . dieses Dreierschemata erstmals eine systematische Klassifikation bietet, die in logischer Hinsicht *umfassend* und *unausweichlich* und in theologischer Hinsicht *adäquat* ist. Umfassendheit und Unausweichlichkeit dieser Typologie lassen sich durch eine einfach mengentheoretische Darstellung zwingend beweisen! Das hat erhebliche Konsequenzen für die weitere religionstheologische Diskussion: Die Suche nach alternativen Typologien ist nutzlos und die Festlegung auf eine der drei Möglichkeiten unvermeidlich. Die Darlegung der Adäquatheit dieses Schemas wird jedoch zeigen, daß es hinreichend Spielraum läßt für eine sachbezogene kriteriologische Abwägung der angebotenen Alternativen."

well. Rather, our focus is to highlight his claim that previous classifications, such as

what he calls Owen C. Thomas' *Telling-Names-Classification*,[4] had neither "systematic-

unified character" nor "logical completeness." According to Schmidt-Leukel, this sort of

old model involves "two serious disadvantages" for directing theological discussion about

religious plurality: "(1) One is not forced to be committed to one of the various

typologies, and therefore the question about the *logical inevitability* of the typology is not

clarified. (2) One can make up one's mind within a typology not definitely for the

proposed alternatives, and therefore the question of the *logical comprehensiveness* is

open."[5] Schmidt-Leukel emphasizes that with the help of the typology of exclusivism,

inclusivism, and pluralism we can overcome these two defects. As with him, I believe it

can help us understand a vast array of different approaches to religious plurality in

systematic and comprehensive ways. Our main concern is then not with critically

validating the material contents of each of the three models but with examining the

conceptual utility or categorial fittingness of the typology as a whole. In this regard, our

aim is different from that of such theologians as Joseph DiNoia and Schubert Ogden who

intend to identify some material defects of each of the three usual options and then to

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[4]Schmidt-Leukel informs us of Owen C. Thomas' classification of models which are named on the basis of the "common characteristics" among Christian responses to religious plurality: "rationalism," "romanticism," relativism," "exclusivism," "dialectic," "reconception," "tolerance," "dialogue," "catholicism." and "presence." Cf. Owen C. Thomas (ed.), *Attitudes Toward Other Religions: Some Christian Interpretations* (London: SCM Press, 1969).

[5]Schmidt-Leukel, "Zur Klassifikation Religionstheologischer Modelle," 164. "(1) Man ist nicht genötigt, sich auf eine der verschiedenen Typologien festzulegen, da die Frage der *logischen Unausweichlichkeit* der Typologie nicht geklärt ist. (2) Man kann sich innerhalb einer Typologie nicht definitiv für eine der vorgeschlagenen Alternativen entscheiden, da die Frage der *logischen Umfassendheit* offen ist."

present a sound alternative to them.[6] (I regard DiNoia's proposal of "particularistic

universalism" as a modified version of exclusivism or as what Schmidt-Leukel calls

"indeterminate exclusivism" [*unentschiedener Exklusivismus*] in distinction from "radical

exclusivism" [*radikalen Exklusivismus*],[7] while considering Ogden's "pluralistic

inclusivism" as a variety of "theocentric inclusivism." Despite their common endeavors

to surmount the impasses of the current three models, their alternative proposals still can

be properly explicated only within the matrix of such a comprehensive and systematic

typology. Thus, their alternative proposals do not seriously affect the threefold typology

itself.)

At first glance, the simple classification of the three models may appear to

obscure many of the subtle variations within each of them. It might be hard to locate

exactly a given theological position concerning religious plurality within any one of these

models without any qualification. There may well be considerable differences even

between those theologians who belong to the same camp. Therefore, facilely lumping all

theologians' positions together within these three categories must be avoided. We can

also identify some dangers latent in the typology itself. For instance, the model of

exclusivism is easily associated with arrogance, antagonism, intolerance, obstinacy,

militant spirit, and the like. Against this typical presumption about the very term

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[6]Cf. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*; Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*

[7]Schmidt-Leukel, "Zur Klassifikation Religionstheologischer Modelle," 167. I will further clarify Schmidt-Leukel's notions of "radical exclusivism" and "moderate exclusivism" when I explicate Barth's thought below.

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"exclusivism," we need to distinguish "theological exclusivism" from "socio-political

exclusivism" which evokes self-righteousness and blind enmity against those who are

different. In approaching other religions and their adherents, it is logically possible for a

Christian to respect them, while still confessing his or her exclusive or particular

Christian faith. In reviewing a batch of books written by pluralists and inclusivists,

Francis X. Clooney makes a similar point:

> And then, what about exclusivists? None of our authors admits to being
> an exclusivist, probably because the current discussion of religions has
> arisen in search of an alternative to exclusivism--and because exclusivists
> are generally presented unsympathetically, as fiercely ruling out the truth
> of other religions, proclaiming (sometimes arrogantly) Christian
> superiority, having naive views on world history, etc. But this is of course
> a caricature, not quite fair; it is unfortunate that the exclusivist position is
> not presented in the best possible light, as more complex than a mere
> rejection of religions (non-Christian, perhaps Christian too).[8]

The term "exclusivism" itself carries negative connotations. To avoid this kind of

prejudice, some evangelicals have adopted the terms "restrictivism"[9] and

"particularism"[10] which are nonetheless synonymous with "exclusivism" in their view of

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[8]Francis X. Clooney, "Christianity and World Religions: Religion, Reason, and Pluralism," *Religious Studies Review* 15 (1989), 200.

[9]Both Clark H. Pinnock and John Sanders use the word "restrictivism" in the sense that the access to salvation is restricted to a limited number of explicit Christians who confess Jesus as the Christ. See Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 14-15; John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 37-79.

[10]Some other evangelicals such as Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips propose to use "particularism" which emphasizes the particularity or indispensability of the salvific atonement of Jesus Christ. See Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (eds.), *More Than One Way: Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralist World* (Grand

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Jesus Christ as the sole norm for salvation and truth. All of those newly employed terms more or less coincide in stressing that only those who hear the Gospel proclaimed and confess Jesus Christ (whether in the present life or in the post-mortem state) are saved. With regard to both inclusivism and pluralism, then, the case is also the same in that whatever names are adopted to displace them, there are no significant differences in holding the basic tenets of these two models. Given the distinctiveness of salvation-issues in a theology of religions, depending upon the extent of the prospect and scope of salvation, we might adopt the terms such as "pessimism," "agnosticism" ("pessimistic agnosticism" vs. "optimistic agnosticism" in particular), and "optimism," each of which may correspond to "exclusivism," "inclusivism" (optimistic agnosticism in particular), and "pluralism" respectively. Over a decade ago, Paul Knitter also proposed to use confessional labels for analyzing Christian responses to other religions: the "conservative evangelical model" (one true religion), the "mainline Protestant model" (salvation only in Christ), the "Roman Catholic model" (many ways, one norm), and the "theocentric model" (many ways to the center).[11] The first two models correspond to "exclusivism," while the Roman Catholic model is identical with "inclusivism," and the theocentric

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Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995). In my view, however, this evangelical notion of "particularism" must be distinguished from the "post-liberal particularism" (as proposed by George Lindbeck and Joseph DiNoia) which affirms the unique claims of other religious traditions, while still asserting the particularistic Christian claims to truth and salvation.

[11]Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 73-167.

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model with "pluralism."[12] In the same work, Knitter rephrased each of these models in terms of "ecclesiocentric," "christocentric," and "theocentric" approaches.[13] If we extend these paradigms in detail, the following models can be generated according to each of their emphases on the nature and scope of the possibility of salvation for non-Christians: ecclesiocentric exclusivism, christocentric exclusivism/christocentric inclusivism, and theocentric inclusivism/theocentric pluralism. All of these classifications do not make any genuine difference but revolve around the same points of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism respectively.

To emphasize the utility of the current typology, let me take one more example of the classification made by Reinhold Bernhardt. He proposes three models in terms of the "absoluteness claim of Christianity" (*Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums*): "the model of dualistic-exclusive sole validity" (*das Modell dualistisch-exklusiver Alleingeltung*), "the model of hierarchical superiority" (*das Modell hierarchischer Superiorität*), and "the model of inclusive duality" (*das Modell inklusiver Dualität*). The two distinctive features of the first model are as follows:

- the qualitative distinction of Christianity (x) from all other religions and philosophical or ideological truths (y) in the sense of a dualistic opposition (true-untrue, right-wrong, life-death, light-darkness, salvation-damnation).

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[12]Please note that in his more recent theological phase Knitter himself also adopts the typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism as the most effective conceptual device for analyzing Christians' attitudes towards other religious people. See *One Earth and Many Religions*, 23-37. In this book, Knitter newly calls "pluralist model" a "correlational, globally responsible model."

[13]Knitter, *No Other* Name?, 166-167.

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- the exclusive claim to the sole validity of Christianity with simultaneous condemnation of what is outside Christianity.[14]

Bernhardt specifies this model into the "ecclesiocentric" and "christocentric" versions, locating Martin Luther, Karl Barth, Hendrick Kraemer, and others within it. The model of hierarchical superiority has then the following two characteristics:

> - the ultimate continuity, guaranteed through a general concept, between Christianity (x) and all other religions and philosophical or ideological truths (y) in the sense of similarity in principle.
> - the guarantee of the priority of x (without depriving y of validity) through the idea of quantative or qualitative superiority.[15]

Bernhardt includes Schleiermacher, Hegel, Troeltsch, Rudolf Otto, Gustav Mensching, Pannenberg, and others within the category of this model. Finally, the two central marks of the model of inclusive duality are as follows:

> - duality: Christianity or the Gospel and religions stand over against each other in fundamental distinction; there is no unbroken route, whether linear or ascending by steps, between them. The transition cannot occur through extension, further development, or supplementation, but only through an overpowering sublation, conversion, and purgation (against the model of hierarchical superiority).
> - inclusivity: The distinction in principle is not bound up with exclusivity (against the model of dualistic-exclusive sole sovereignty). Rather, Christianity or the Christian message and religions are ordered in a positive, inclusive relationship to one another in the sense of two overlapping levels, a »lower«, elementary and universal level and a higher,

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[14]Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums*, 58. "- die qualitative Unterscheidung des Christentums (x) von allen anderen Religionen und philosophischen bzw. weltanschaulichen Wahrheiten (y) im Sinne einer dualistischen Entgegensetzung (wahr-unwhar, richitig-falsch, Leben-Tod, Licht-Dunkel, Rettung-Verwerfung). - der exklusive Alleingeltungsanspruch des Christentums bei gleichzeitiger Verwerfung des Außerchristlichen."

[15]*Ibid.*, 71. "- die letztliche, durch einen Allgemeinbegriff garantierte Kontinuität zwischen Christentum (x) und allen anderen Religionen und philosophischen bzw. weltanschaulichen Wahrheiten (y) im Sinne prinzipieller Gleichartigkeit. - die Sicherstellung des Vorranges von x (ohne y die Geltung abzusprechen) durch den Gedanken quantitativer oder qualitativer Superiorität."

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specific one; the one »below« stands in need of elevation into the one »above« and is oriented towards that.[16]

As representative advocates of this model, Bernhardt lists Nicholas of Cusa, Raimundo Pannikkar, Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, and other theologians. In addition to these three models, he mentions John Hick's pluralist theology of religions with some reluctance to call it a distinctive model because of its novelty. If we list "religious pluralism" as his fourth model (albeit potential), Bernhardt's four models can be best summarized in terms of three validity-relational claims. The first model corresponds to what he calls the validity-relation of "exclusivity" which is stated in the following formula: "absolutistic order: »x is valid, y not«."[17] The models (2) and (3) are equal to what Bernhardt calls the validity-relation of "superiority" which is based on the formula of "super-ordination, which can be expressed comparatively (»x is more valid than y«) or superlatively (»x is valid the most against y«)."[18] The model of religious pluralism is then parallel with what Bernhardt calls the validity-relation of "equivalence" or "parity" which is expressed in the following form: "equal order: »x is as valid as y«."[19] In comparing our typology with

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[16]*Ibid.*, 94. "- Dualität: Christentum bzw. Christusbotschaft und Religionen stehen sich in grundlegender Unterschiedenheit gegenüber; zwischen ihnen besteht keine ungebrochene, linear oder stufenförmig aufsteigende Linie. Der Übergang kann nicht durch Verlängerung, Weiterentwicklung und Ergänzung, sondern nur durch überwindende Aufhebung, Umkehr und Läuterung erfolgen (gegen das Modell der hierachischen Superiorität). - Inklusivität: Die prinzipielle Unterschiedenheit verbindet sich jedoch nicht mit Ausschließlichkeit (gegen das Modell dualistisch-exklusiver Alleinherrschaft). Christentum bzw. Christusbotschaft und Religionen sind vielmehr positiv-inklusiv aufeinander hingeordnet im Sinne zweier übereinanderliegender Ebenen, einer »unteren«, elementar-universalen und einer höheren-spezifischen; die »untere« bedarf der Erhebung in die »obere« und ist daraufhin angelegt."

[17]*Ibid.*, 35. "Alleinsetzung: »x gilt, y nicht«."

[18]*Ibid.*, 35. "Überordnung, die sich komparativisch (»x gilt mehr als y«) oder superlativisch (»x gilt am meisten gegenüber y«) ausdrücken kann."

[19]*Ibid.*, 35. "Gleichordnung: »x gilt ebenso wie y«."

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Bernhardt' four models, model (1) matches with exclusivism, models (2) and (3) with inclusivism, and model (4) with pluralism. Except for the difference of verbal expressions, in short, one cannot identify any decisive difference between other sorts of classification and the typology with which we are concerned here. It can cover all the possible theological positions concerning the complicated issues of religious plurality. I believe any theological response to religious plurality can be explained either as exactly belonging to any one option of the three or as a variation on one or another of the three. Although the typology was initially developed to analyze Christian attitudes towards other religions and their adherents, it might be equally applicable to other religions' response to religious plurality, say, a Buddhist view of religious plurality, and the like. In conclusion, the threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism can be used as the most workable scheme to explicate the central features of the contemporary Christian theology of religions.

An Examination of Four Paradigm Cases in the Contemporary Christian Theology of Religions

If the existing typology of three models can provide us with an appropriate conceptual tool for illuminating various approaches to religious plurality, we can classify some renowned theologians' positions in terms of these models. Although there are a number of self-avowed inclusivists and pluralists (maybe some exclusivists as well), the neat classification of some theologians' positions in these terms is not always obvious. In this regard, one may try to identify each of the three popular models as a certain ideal or

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formal type of generic theological position. However, I want to avoid this sort of

generalization simply because there are actually too many variations and subtleties within

any one of these models. Instead, therefore, I want to discuss the material views of four

different individual theologians, each of whom is regarded or regards himself either as an

advocate of one of the three options or as a proposer of an alternative. Thus, I am going

to explicate the core arguments of what I have chosen as the typical representatives of

each of the three models and of one prominent alternative to them respectively.

Karl Barth's Moderate Exclusivism

Rather than deal with a traditional exclusivist whose position might be readily

dismissed, let us examine Karl Barth's (1886-1968) christocentric theology of *religion*

(not religions) as a test case for exploring a highly nuanced and qualified sense of

exclusivism which is open to a diversity of interpretations. Borrowing Schmidt-Leukel's

conceptions, I want to identify the traditional exclusivism with "radical exclusivism," and

the latter case of Barth's position with "moderate exclusivism." If we define exclusivism

in terms of the salvific possibility for individuals and of the salvation-mediating roles of

religions, the two versions of exclusivism may be specified as follows: "Radical

exclusivism" excludes any possibility of salvation for all individuals outside one's own

religious tradition, whereas "moderate exclusivism" does not inevitably deny the

possibility of salvation for those individuals, though denouncing the salvation-mediating

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roles of other religions.[20] (In the latter case of what I call "soft exclusivism" in contrast

with the former "hard exclusivism," more precisely, Schmidt-Leukel distinguishes

"moderate exclusivism" from "indeterminate exclusivism" which leaves the possibility of

salvation for individual non-members open. We here seek to identify Barth's position in

terms of "moderate exclusivism.") All of these versions of exclusivism, however,

converge in limiting the existence of the salvation-mediating instances within the sphere

of one's own religion. Our notion of "moderate exclusivism" needs to be distinguished

from "inclusivism" which Schmidt-Leukel defines as the position affirming that "there is

a possibility of salvation for individuals as well as salvation-mediating instances outside

one's own religion."[21] (We will employ this definition of "inclusivism" directly to the

case of Rahner's position in the following section.) The burden of the remainder of this

section is then to demonstrate that Barth's thought about religion and religions can be

best explained in terms not of "radical or hard exclusivism" but of "moderate or soft

exclusivism."

It is generally thought that Barth's thesis of the "revelation of God as the sublation

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[20]Cf. Schmidt-Leukel, "Zur Klassifikation Religionstheologischer Modelle," 166-167. "Demnach werden dem religionstheologischen *Exklusivismus* zum einen solche Positionen zugeordnet, die eine Heilsmöglichkeit für die Nicht-Mitglieder der eigenen Religion definitiv ausschließen. Ich schlage vor, diese Form als 'radikalen Exklusivismus' zu bezeichnen. Zum anderen werden aber auch solche Positionen als exclusivistisch betrachtet, die die heilsmittelnden Instanzen ausschließlich mit der eigenen Religion verknüpfen. Sie schließen heilsvermittelnde Funktionen bei anderen Religionen aus, nicht jedoch zwangsläufig auch eine individuelle Heilsmöglichkeit all jener, die nicht Mitglied der eigenen Religion sind. Entweder wird die Frage nach ihrer Heilsmöglichkeit offen gelassen ('unentschiedener Exklusivismus!') oder in einer Weise bejaht, bei der die anderen Religionen keine heilsvermittelnde Rolle spielen ('gemäßigter Exklusivismus')."

[21]*Ibid.*, 167. "Der Inklusivismus wird dann definiert durch die Position, daß es sowohl eine individuelle Heilsmöglchkeit als auch heilsvermittelnde Instanzen außerhalb der eigenen Religion gibt."

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of religion" (*Gottesoffenbarung als Aufhebung der Religion*)[22] can be extended to a

plurality of a posteriori religions. As a result of this facile presumption, many scholars

have depicted Barth as a typical advocate of what we call here radical exclusivism which

repudiates any possibility of salvation outside the Christian faith and strongly condemns

all other extra-Christian religions as false. Alan Race holds that Barth has presented the

"most extreme form of the exclusivist theory."[23] Hans Küng talks about the *"arrogant*

domination of a religion *claiming an exclusive mission and despising freedom*," which

has resulted, albeit unintended, from the *"dogmatic repression of the problem of religion*

by Karl Barth and 'dialectical theology.'"[24] Paul Knitter also identifies Barth as a typical

advocate of the "conservative evangelical model (one true religion)."[25] Despite some

positive implications of Barth's dialectical examination of Christianity's relationship to

other religions, according to Knitter, his radical christocentrism as well as his emphasis

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[22]The English version translated the German word *aufhebung* as "abolition." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), 280. Given the fact that Barth borrowed it from Hegel's dialectical philosophy, we could better translate it as "sublation" which is etymologically equivalent to that technical German word. Garrett Green holds that "revelation as the sublation of religion" means two points: "(1) that Christians, on the basis of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, must say a resounding no to human religion; and (2) that on the same basis they may also say a qualified yes to religion." In the first point, sublation is the same sense of "abolition," while the second point means that religion is to be sublated into the higher unity which is based on the "christological concentration." Garrett Green, "Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theory of Religion," *The Journal of Religion* 75 (1995), 477.

[23]Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 11.

[24]Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), 111.

[25]Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 80-87.

on "only by faith" does not allow for any truly positive approach to other religions. It is commonly assumed that Barth's "crisis theology" has played an instrumental role in evoking Hendrik Kraemer's exclusivist stance towards the mission of non-Christian religions and their adherents.[26] Generally speaking, most of Barth's critics seem to concur with one another in charging Barth's christocentric theology with obstructing a genuine appreciation of human religiosity and of a plurality of positive religions as well as of a necessity of interreligious dialogue. However, this kind of sweeping accusation of Barth's position as exclusivistic involves both truth and falsity. Barth can be rightly called an exclusivist in his uncompromisingly *christomonistic* approach to religion and religions and in his emphasis on the radical discontinuity between "revelation" as God's movement towards us and "religion" as our effort to reach God. Thus, his theology has a sufficient room to be called exclusivistic in his inflexible grounding of the true religion in the name of Jesus Christ who is the only election and reconciliation of God. However, he is not a radical or extreme exclusivist in his allowing for the possibility of universal salvation as well as for *"Die Wahren Worte extra muros ecclesiae."* Because of this double aspect of his theology of religion, I want to call him a moderate exclusivist who is to be distinguished from a radical exclusivist.

In explicating Barth's central argument about religion and religions, then, let us delimit our main concern to the following three questions. How does Barth criticize the concept of "religion" as a product of the liberal humanism of the nineteenth century?

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[26]For Hendrik Kraemer's exclusive missiology, see *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938); *Religion and Christian Faith* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956).

How does he illuminate the relationship of Christianity to other religions? How does he

respond to the question of the possibility of universal salvation? Both the first and

second issues are mainly expressed in Barth's earlier thought, while the third is primarily

considered in his later thought, especially in his doctrines of universal election and

reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

As noted above, Barth is concerned not with a "theology of religions" but with a

"theology of religion" which is aimed at theologically criticizing "religion" as interpreted

in terms of an indivisible core of human experience in the Protestant liberalism of the

nineteenth century. In this regard, David Lochhead holds that Barth's primary concern is

not with any comparative examination of Christianity with other empirical religions but

with the "theological significance of religion" or the "central question of the nature of

truth in theology."[27] Barth's theology of religion is aimed at attacking the so-called

Kulturprotestantismus whose representatives such as Schleiermacher and Troeltsch

interpreted Christianity as one empirical or historical phenomenon alongside others.

Michael von Brück poignantly epitomizes the central features of the theology of "cultural

Protestantism": "It blows the horn of the universal human-faith and dresses up the self-

exaltation of the human beings religiously. Not the will of God is proclaimed through it,

but the will of human beings is pretended to be good and godly."[28] Schleiermacher as a

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[27]David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 31.

[28]Michael von Brück, *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Theologie der Religionen* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1979), 19. "Sie [die Kulturprotestantische Theologie] stößt mit in das Horn des allgemeinen Menschheitsglaubens und verbrämt die Selbsterhebung des Menschen

father of liberal Protestant theology held the view that religion is primarily a matter of "intuition" (*Anschauung*) or "feeling" (*Gefühl*). Deeming the "true religion" as the "sensibility and taste for the infinite,"[29] he equated religion with the "feeling of absolute dependence" in his *Glaubesnlehre*. Although Schleiermacher's explicit aim was to demonstrate that such a religious a priori reached its purest and culminating expression in Christianity, he tended to reduce the essence of Christian faith to the level of human experience or cultural phenomenon. Barth makes a sharp confrontation of the "man-seeking-God" against such a "God-seeking-man" as expressed in the liberal Protestantism. He inverts the liberal and humanistic approach to religion to the divine judgment on religion given the revelation of Jesus Christ. He seeks a radical reversal of the "revelation of religion" to the "religion of revelation," harshly charging the liberals of *Neuprotestantismus* with placing religion on a par with revelation. For Barth, religion is "unbelief," "self-righteousness," and "idolatry."[30] Religion is a purely anthropological, immanent, secular phenomenon which completely belongs to the human side. God's revelation in Jesus Christ is the only adequate locus for approaching human religion.[31] A priori religion itself and all the phenomena of a posteriori religions must be viewed in terms of revelation in Jesus Christ who is God's judgment upon all religions, including

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religös. Nicht der Wille Gottes wird durch sie verkündigt, sondern der Wille des Menschen wird als gut und göttlich ausgegeben."

[29]Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 102.

[30]Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, 303-307.

[31]*Ibid.*, 280.

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even Christianity. How does, then, Barth think about the place of Christianity in relation to other religions? For him, is Christianity the only true or absolute religion?

When Barth refers to "religion" and "religions," he definitely includes the beliefs and practices of Christianity as well as of other religions insofar as they constitute a false relationship with God from a human side. How does Barth, then, identify a true religion? No religion can be true, if it is to be understood as a human effort to justify itself before God. A true religion is any and every religion which "through grace lives by grace." He identifies an exact parallel between a "justified sinner" and a "true religion."

> Like justified man, religion is a creature of grace. But grace is the revelation of God. No religion can stand before it as true religion. ... And similarly in the wider sphere where it shows all religion to be false it can also create true religion. The abolishing of religion by revelation need not mean only its negation: the judgment that religion is unbelief. ... Revelation can adopt religion and mark it off as true religion. ... There is a true religion: just as there are justified sinners.[32]

In order for any religion to be true and have genuine salvific force, it must be justified by God's redeeming grace and love in Jesus Christ. "No religion *is* true. ... It can only *become* true"[33] [emphasis is mine]. Any religion, including Christianity as the religion of revelation, cannot be true by itself. Christianity can become true only insofar as it is associated with the name of Jesus Christ. "Only one thing is really decisive for the distinction of truth and error. ... That one thing is the name of Jesus Christ."[34] Christianity is true not because it is a religion of grace but because it has the name of

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[32]*Ibid.*, 326.

[33]*Ibid.*, 325.

[34]*Ibid.*, 343.

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Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ, Christianity of itself is equally as impotent as all

other religions in bringing about salvation to human beings. In this regard, Bernhardt

rightly observes that "The revelation-theological inspection of Christianity as such, as

human religion, thus, can in no way allow for the establishment of an absoluteness claim

for this religion."[35] Does Barth, then, make or imply no absoluteness claim of

Christianity over against other religions?

For Barth, the absoluteness of Christianity derives neither from its superiority over

other religions nor from its internal quality, but from God who alone can sanction it as the

true religion. Christianity has been elected as the true (or absolute) religion only because

"it listens to Jesus Christ and no one else as grace and truth."[36] As a brief survey of both

Eastern and Western Christianity readily shows, Christianity as a human construct is

frequently indistinguishable from and is as riddled with idolatry and self-righteousness as

any other religion. In this regard, Barth holds that

> On the contrary, it is our business as Christians to apply this judgment
> [i.e., the divine judgment of revelation as sublation of religion] first and
> most acutely to ourselves: and to others, the non-Christians, only in so far
> as we recognize ourselves in them, i.e., only as we see in them the truth of
> this judgment of revelation which concerns us, in the solidarity, therefore,
> in which, anticipating them in both repentance and hope, we accept this
> judgment to participate in the promise of revelation.[37]

Thus, Barth does not seek any "polemic against non-Christian religions" but gives the

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[35]Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums*, 159. "Die
offenbarungstheologische Betrachtung des Christentums als solchem, als menschlicher Religion, kann somit
in keiner Weise die Begründung eines Absolutheitsanspruches für diese Religion erlauben."

[36]Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, 344.

[37]*Ibid.*, 327.

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foremost warning against Christianity's possibility of falling into unbelief or idolatry.

> The statement that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God has really nothing whatever to do with the arbitrary exaltation and self-glorification of the Christian in relation to other men, of the Church in relation to other institutions, or of Christianity in relation to other conceptions.[38]

The christological claim does not justify Christianity (and its adherents) in boasting of its supremacy over other religions (and their adherents) but requires its "submission" and "humility" before the one sovereign God. In these respects, Lochhead may be justified in his arguing that "Barth is not attempting to assert triumphalistically the superiority of Christianity over other religions. He is attempting to maintain that there is genuine response to God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ within the religious tradition we know as Christianity."[39] In the light of the absoluteness claim, Bernhardt also argues that

> For Barth, the absoluteness of Christianity is a merely derived one, a participation in the absoluteness, the autonomy, the unrestrictivity of God; it is a communication which is willed and worked by God Godself, a self-communication: Absoluteness as God's gift of election and justification, which comes true sanctifyingly, as gift, through whose human denial nothing can be taken away from it and through whose assertion and argument nothing can be added to it--on the contrary: precisely through them the gift is covered up. Christianity is the religion absolutized by God Godself.[40]

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[38]Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), 91.

[39]Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative*, 35.

[40]Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheistanspruch des Christentums*, 163. "Die Absolutheit des Christentums ist bei Barth eine bloß abgeleitete, eine Partizipation an der Absolutheit, der Autonomie, der Uneingeschränktheit Gottes; sie ist eine von ihm selbst gewollte und gewirkte Mit-teilung, eine Selbstmitteilung: Absolutheit als Gottesgeschenk der Erwählung und Rechfertigung, die sich heiligend verwirklicht, als Gabe, durch deren menschliche Bestreitung ihr nichts genommen und durch deren Behauptung und Begründung ihr nichts hinzugefügt werden kann--im Gegenteil:gerade dadurch wird sie verdeckt. Das Christentum ist die von Gott selbst verabsolutierte Religion."

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The vertical, christocentric orientation in Barth's theology of religion leads us to conclude that Christianity by itself cannot make any "unconditional absoluteness claim." Bernhardt finds the "decisive characteristic of the Barthian absoluteness theory" in Barth's abandonment of the "unconditional absoluteness claim for Christianity."[41] Christianity's absoluteness can be claimed only conditionally, i.e., by its inseparable relation to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. For Barth, thus, "the exclusivity of God's revelation solus Christus and the exclusivity of the binding of the Holy Spirit with Christ justifies the sole-validity claim of this religion [Christianity] sanctified by God."[42] Let us now turn to explicate Barth's theological thought about the possibility of universal salvation.

As has been so far observed, in the light of Christ (*sub specie Christi*) religions do not produce any salvific capacity in their own terms. Access to salvation is possible only through God's reconciling grace in Christ, not by any human efforts, including human religions. Human beings can be saved neither by Christian religion nor by any other great world religions simply because they do not carry any real capacity to reach revelation from below. Both Christians and all other religious believers are in dire need of God's salvific offer in Christ. With this basic principle in mind, Barth implicitly indicates the possibility of universal salvation and of the true Word of God outside Christianity. He does so by emphasizing the objective work done by God in Jesus Christ. Because of the

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[41]*Ibid.*, 164.

[42]*Ibid.*, 165. "Die Exklusivität der Gottesoffenbarung solus Christus und die Exklusivität der Bindung des Hl. Geistes an Christus begründen den Alleingeltungsanspruch dieser von Gott geheiligten Religion."

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universal and objective work of Christ's redemption, "Godlessness is not, therefore, a

possibility, but an ontological impossibility for man," while "sin itself is not a possibility

but an ontological impossibility for man."[43] "In fellowship with Jesus, therefore, to be a

man is to be with his correspondence, reflection and representation of the uniqueness and

transcendence of God, to be with the One who is unlike us."[44] By thus firmly grounding

anthropology in christocentrism, Barth affirms the possibility of salvation for non-

Christians.

> [I]n the truth of this reality there might be contained the super-abundant
> promise of the final deliverance of all men. To be more explicit, there is
> no good reason why we should not be open to this possibility. If for a
> moment we accept the unfalsified truth of the reality which even now so
> forcefully limits the perverted human situation, does it not point plainly in
> the direction of the work of a truly eternal divine patience and deliverance
> and therefore of an *apokatastasis* or universal reconciliation?[45]

> Hence no aversion, revolt, resistance, or outrage on the part of the non-
> Christian can alter the fact that he, too, exists in the world which God
> created good as the external basis of the covenant and therefore for this
> salvation, and which He has reconciled in Jesus Christ in fulfillment of
> this covenant and in realisation of the election in which he, too, is elect.
> He, too, is reconciled to God. Jesus Christ died for him. . . . And when
> there comes the hour of the God who acts in Jesus Christ by the Holy
> Ghost, no aversion, rebellion or resistance on the part of non-Christians
> will be strong enough to resist the fulfillment of the promise of the Spirit
> which is pronounced over them too, which applies to them, which

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[43]Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance
(Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 136. In *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, Barth expresses this
point as follows: "[after the coming of Jesus Christ] unbelief has become an objective,
real and ontological impossibility and faith an objective, real and ontological necessity for
all men and for every man." *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F.
Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 747.

[44]Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, 135.

[45]Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3/1, 478.

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envisages and comes to them, or to hinder the overthrow of their ignorance in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and therefore of themselves as creatures reconciled in Him, or to prevent the discovery of their freedom as such, and therefore the beginning of its exercise, and therefore the Christian alteration and renewal of their existence. Their blindness and deafness still stand like a dam against the surging and mounting stream. But the stream is too strong and the dam too weak for us to be able reasonably to expect anything but the collapse of the dam and the onrush of the waters. In this sense Jesus Christ is the hope even of these non-Christians.[46]

As the above passages indicate, Barth does not reject the possibility that within the sovereignty of God's freedom and universal reconciliation in Jesus Christ all people (including even the adherents of non-Christian religions) may be redeemed in the end. He also affirms the possibility of the true Word outside the sphere of Christianity. Christianity by itself is never allowed to claim its own authority but points in the direction of the scriptural witness concerning the unique authority of Jesus Christ.[47] This fact implies that other words also can point to Jesus Christ as the only true Word of God and that such words are not restricted to scriptures and church. In service of the one true Word of God, apart from the Bible and church, there can be other words, signs, and lights even within the world of non-Christian religions. However, they cannot completely supplant the Word of God in Christ but merely supplement it. All other words and witnesses outside scriptures and church must be measured and assessed by the christocentric principle. If there is anything in which non-Christian religious people can be saved, it is not through their religious doctrines or rituals but through the irresistible grace of God in Christ.

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[46]*Ibid.*, 355-356.

[47]*Ibid.*, 92.

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Barth surely does not close the possibility of salvation for the entire human race, but that universal salvation is always possible only through God's particularistic redemption in Jesus Christ. In this regard, Donald G. Bloesch argues that

> It can perhaps be argued that Barth transcends the polarity between universalism and particularism in that he denies both of these as rational principles or even as necessary conclusions of faith. He sees the truth in universalism in that Christ's victory over the chaos is all-encompassing and his love goes out to all. But he also recognizes an element of truth in particularism in that not all open their hearts to God's love revealed in Jesus Christ, not all receive the message of salvation through the sacrificial death of Christ. . . . One thing is certain: we must regard even the non-Christian with a certain degree of optimism, since we know that he too is in the hands of the living God, whose essence is love.[48]

As Bloesch points out, Barth's theology involves both particularistic and universal aspects with regard to the destiny of non-Christians. The so-called liberals may illuminate the universal aspect of his theology and guard him from being called an exclusivist. The conservative evangelicals may highlight the particularistic dimension of his theology and protect him from a too excessive liberal interpretation of it. Our main concern is to salvage Barth from being called a "radical exclusivist" who does not allow for any possibility for the salvation of non-Christian individuals. I want to identify him as a moderate exclusivist, according to Schmidt-Leukel's definition, who affirms the salvific possibility for non-Christian individuals but is not willing to admit any positive functions of human religions, restricting the salvation-mediating instances to the *solus Christus*. (I have slightly modified the latter part of Schmidt-Leukel's definition, i.e., the "restriction of the salvation-mediating instances to one's own religion alone," because Barth does not

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[48]Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus is Victor: Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 70-71.

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exclusively argue for the superiority of Christianity over other religions but rather urges

the self-critique and self-humility of Christianity itself.) The overriding tone or mood of

the Barthian voice seems to be still exclusivistic in non-negotiably identifying the true

religion with the name of Jesus Christ. In comparing Amida Buddhism in Japan with

Christianity, thus, Barth reaches the conclusion that it is still unmistakably erroneous and

is a religion of unbelief because it lacks the one essential norm, the name of Jesus

Christ.[49] *Extra Christum nulla salus.* Individual members of other religions can be saved

despite their religions rather than because of those salvation-mediating religions. I still

want to locate Barth within the camp of exclusivism (albeit moderate) because of his

negative view of the salvation-mediating roles of positive religions and his sole emphasis

on the christocentric nature of salvation and its implications for extra-Christian religions

(especially, in his earlier thought). Let us now move to explore how Barth's theology of

religion is to be distinguished from Karl Rahner's inclusivist theology of religions.

Karl Rahner's Inclusivism

It is well known that since Vatican II (1962-1965) Karl Rahner (1904-1984) has

played a pivotal role in articulating a Roman Catholic theological response to the

relationship of Christianity to other religions. He represents a major voice of Catholic

inclusivism which affirms the possibility of salvation for non-Christian individuals

regardless of their membership in the visible Church and the positive functions of non-

Christian religions as salvation-mediating channels. Rahner's inclusivism is to be

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[49]Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, 340-344.

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distinguished from Barth's moderate exclusivism which denies any salvation-mediating instances (especially, religions) outside the *solus Christus*. Unlike Barth, Rahner explores the possibility of salvation for the adherents of other religions in the light of their specific affiliation with their religions. In what follows, I focus on explicating Rahner's proposal of two inseparably interrelated concepts: *die anonymen Christen* who participate in Christ's salvation implicitly or unknowingly and *das anonyme Christentum* which is judged to be a lawful religion insofar as it properly mediates Christ's salvation through its own beliefs and practices.

Rahner's inclusivism is grounded in the basic tenet of the Catholic theology that "grace perfects nature without destroying it." *Mutatis mutandis*, we can epitomize the core of Rahner's inclusivism as follows: "Christianity perfects other religions without destroying them." Rahner's concepts of "anonymous Christians" and "anonymous Christianity" are not systematically treated but dispersed over several articles.[50] They are also developed within the wider context of his understandings of revelation, grace, anthropology, christology, ecclesiology, and so on. According to Reinhold Bernhardt,

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[50]Rahner's major article dealing with his inclusivism is "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations (TI)* V (Later Writings), trans. Karl-H. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 118-133. For other noteworthy articles which further elaborate his key concepts of "anonymous Christians" and "anonymous Christianity," see "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions," *TI* XVII, 39-50; "Anonymous Christians," *TI* VI, trans. Karl-H. And Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 390-398; "Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church," *TI* XII, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 161-178; "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'," *TI* XIV, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 280-294; "Anonymous and Explicit Faith," *TI* XVI, trans. David Morland O.S.B. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979), 52-59; and "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," *TI* XVI, 199-224.

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Rahner's theology of religions as a whole is an attempt "to harmonize *theological*

fundamentals in soteriological perspective with *anthropological* axioms and features of

present *world-interpretation*."[51] More precisely, Bernhardt holds that these three

components are intertwined in Rahner's inclusivism as follows:

> (1) Theologically-christologically Rahner's theology of religions is held in tension between the propositions of the universality of the divine salvific will on the one hand, and of the exclusivity of salvation in Christ and his Church on the other. (2) Anthropologically-soteriologically it [Rahner's theology of religions] wants to do justice to the insight that *faith* should be necessary for salvation (sine fide nulla salus) as well as to the fact that faith is so far not yet mediated to most human beings in the world. (3) The empirical perception of history and the present, moreover, shows a tension between the absoluteness claim of Christianity and the vitality of alien religions, which is in no way resolved in the two-thousand-year history of Christianity but on the contrary is still aggravated.[52]

With this basic structure of Rahner's inclusivist theology of religions in mind, let us

explicate first the central implications of "anonymous Christians" and then of

"anonymous Christianity."

The theory of "anonymous Christians" is based on Rahner's view of human

existence as "supernatural" or "grace-filled." In the earlier phase of his theological

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[51]Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums*, 176. "Rahners religionstheologische Entwurf im ganzen läßt sich als Versuch verstehen, in soteriologischer Blickrichtung *theologische* Grundanliegen mit *anthropologischen* Axiomen und Zügen gegenwärtiger *Weltdeutung* in Einklang zu bringen."

[52]*Ibid.*, 176. "(1) Theologische-christologisch ist Rahners Religionstheologie eingespannt zwischen die Sätze von der Universalität des göttlichen Heilswillens auf der einen, der Exklusivität des Heils in Christus und seiner Kirche auf der anderen Seite. (2) Anthropologisch-soteriologisch will sie der Einsicht, daß der *Glaube* zum Heil notwendig sei (sine fide nulla salus) ebenso gerecht werden wie der Tatsache, daß den meisten Menschen auf der Welt dieser Glaube bisher noch nicht vermittelt worden ist. (3) Die empirische Wahrnehmung von Geschichte und Gegenwart zeigt zudem eine in zweitausendjähriger Christentumsgeschichte keineswegs aufgelöste, sondern sich im Gegenteil eher noch verschärfende Spannung zwischen dem Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums und der Lebendigkeit fremder Religionen."

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career, Rahner explored the possibility of a post-Kantian metaphysics that seeks to illuminate an unconditional openness to the Infinite as an a priori precondition of finite (categorial) knowledge. From a Christian viewpoint, this a priori precondition can be expressed in terms of "transcendental revelation" or "supernatural grace." Because of the permanent feature of the supernatural structure of human existence, humans can experience the divine self-communication and respond to it appropriately. This universally given condition of "supernatural" or "grace-filled" human existence can be applied to extra-Christian individuals as well simply because God as the Absolute Mystery intends to communicate Godself to all human beings always and everywhere (*immer und überall*). The universal salvific will of God and the supernatural element of human existence are the two inseparable preconditions of the possibility of anonymous Christians. It is important to note that Rahner calls such persons not simply "anonymous theists" but "anonymous Christians." This is because God's universal salvific will is specified and manifested through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. For Rahner, Jesus Christ is not the "efficient cause" but the "final cause" (*Finalursache*) of God's universal salvific will.[53] God's salvific will and love are not caused by Jesus' death and resurrection but result in them in ways that are final and irreversible. Jesus Christ as the "historical bringer of salvation" is the final cause of God's universal self-communication to the world.[54] Jesus Christ himself, not God's love, is constitutive of salvation.

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[53]For Rahner's discussion of the "efficient cause" and "final cause" in christology, see "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," 199-224.

[54]Rahner, "Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions," 47.

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Therefore, all humanity is saved consciously or unconsciously through Jesus Christ. In short, since the original human condition features a "supernatural existential," non-Christians can be called "anonymous Christians" who have already been affected by Christ' redeeming grace and love.

While the theory of anonymous Christians refers to the recipients of saving grace in Jesus Christ, that of anonymous Christianity refers to its concrete historico-social expression through the institution of religions. There is an exact parallel between anonymous Christians and anonymous Christianity: The former is an a priori, non-historical, individual, anthropological principle, while the latter is nothing other than the application of the former principle to the a posteriori, historical, collective, ecclesiological existence of concrete religions. In proposing the notion of "anonymous Christianity," Rahner extends the doctrine of God and christology to ecclesiology which indicates both the visible and invisible churches. Through this notion, he highlights the socio-historical nature of human beings and the salvation-mediating roles of non-Christian religions. In particular, Rahner develops his ideas of "anonymous Christians" and "anonymous Christianity" in terms of four theses. The first thesis is that "Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right."[55] In this first thesis, Rahner affirms Christianity's absoluteness with the sensitivity that there are two categories of people who did not and do not reach the Christian Gospel: those who lived before the coming of Jesus and those who lived and live after Jesus but do not have any

[55]Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," 118.

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opportunity to hear the Gospel. One crucial problem for attributing an absolute status to

Christianity is that like all the other human religions it has its determinate historical

origins. Since Christianity appeared as a "historical tangible form" in specific time and

place, it has not stretched over all people. These people did not and do not have any

explicit occasion to hear the Gospel through no fault of their own. With this socio-

historical condition of Christianity in mind, Rahner moves to the second thesis which

affirms the same christological salvific value of pre- and post-non-Christian religions as

with Christianity.

> The second thesis illuminates the universal salvific will of God.

> Until the moment when the Gospel really enters into the historical
> situation of an individual, a non-Christian religion (even outside the
> Mosaic religion) does not merely contain elements of a natural knowledge
> of God, elements, moreover, mixed up with human depravity which is the
> result of original sin and later aberrations. It contains also supernatural
> elements arising out of the grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gift
> on account of Christ. For this reason, a non-Christian religion can be
> recognized as a *lawful* religion (although only in different degrees) without
> thereby denying the error and depravity contained in it.[56]

The core of the second thesis is that extra-Christian religions can be "lawful" insofar as

they possess some elements which are supernatural and grace-filled, though ambiguously.

By a "lawful" religion, more precisely, Rahner means an "institutional religion whose

'use' by man at a certain period can be regarded on the whole as a positive means of

gaining the right relationship to God and thus for the attaining of salvation, a means

which is therefore positively included in God's plan of salvation."[57] For example, the

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[56]*Ibid.*, 121.

[57]*Ibid.*, 125.

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historical community of the Old Testament, despite its depravity and sin, is lawful because it has played a positive role as a *praeparatio evangelica* until the advent of Christianity. Likewise, other pre- and post-Christian religions might possess some positive elements which mediate God's grace. Until Christianity replaces non-Christian religions in due time, God's grace and love must be made available through their religious institutions. Thus, Rahner emphasizes that God's grace must be mediated socio-historically: "in practice man as he really is can live his proffered relationship to God only in society, man must have had the right and indeed the duty to live this his relationship to God within the religious and social realities offered to him in his particular historical situation."[58] The right locus of God's saving grace is not in the individual lives of religious people but in each of the concrete religions as mediating vehicles of God's grace to their members. If a conscientious Buddhist is saved, he or she is saved through the beliefs and practices of his or her Buddhist religion insofar as it implicitly mediates God's grace. Christianity confronts such a Buddhist not just as an individual human being who is independent from his or her religious tradition but as an affiliated member of that tradition.

The third thesis presents the concept of "anonymous Christian": "Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an anonymous Christian."[59] Without any prior implicit presence of God's salvific grace

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[58]*Ibid.*, 131.

[59]*Ibid.*, 131.

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in non-Christian religions, their adherents could not accept the explicit offer of the Christian Gospel. If a certain Buddhist lives according to the precepts of self-awakening and compassion, for example, even though the fact is not known explicitly and objectively, he or she can be called an "anonymous Christian" who has been already touched by God's grace and love. In a similar vein, Buddhism can be called an "anonymous Christianity" insofar as it can express the acceptance of God's offer of grace socio-historically. Despite the possibility of anonymous Christianity, however, mission is absolutely necessary because Christianity must eventually supersede all the other religions. Thus, explicit Christians must continue their missionary activity with the conviction that the non-Christian world is indwelt by an anonymous Christianity and its unknown members. Through the mediating activity of a plurality of non-Christian religions, their adherents can become anonymous Christians from the status of non-Christians. Through the proclamation of the Gospel, however, those anonymous Christians are to be further transformed into explicit Christians who can maintain a right and full fellowship with God in the Church. The replacement of other religions by Christianity is not superfluous but required because the latter alone can offer a clearer grasp of the nature of true religion and a "still greater chance of salvation" than other religions. In short, the absoluteness of Christianity pertains to the destination of human history in the final course of which it will supersede all other pre- and post-Christian religions.

The last thesis stresses the humility of the Christian Church. If there is always a possibility of "anonymous Christianity," the actual Christian community should not boast

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of itself as the elite group which is superior over other religions. Instead, Christianity must regard itself as the "historically tangible vanguard and the historically and socially constituted explicit expression of what the Christian hopes is present as a hidden reality even outside the visible Church."[60] Although it might be "presumptuous" for Christians to call non-Christians "anonymous Christians," nevertheless, they would not need to renounce their presumption because in Paul's words they proclaim what men or women do not know and yet worship (Acts 17: 23).[61] In sum, through these four essential theses Rahner wishes to combine both the unique or absolute status of Christ and Christianity and the universal presence of God's saving grace beyond the explicit realm of Christianity.

While Barth's main concern was initiated from a problem about human religiosity in the abstract (or a priori religion), Rahner seeks to account for the urgent challenges of a plurality of empirico-concrete religions to Christianity from a Catholic dogmatic standpoint. However, they converge in the christocentric emphasis on the salvation of human beings through Christ alone. Whenever and wherever salvation occurs, it is exclusively christological salvation. In this sense, I regard both Barth's moderate exclusivism and Rahner's inclusivism as two different expressions of a common christocentrism (the *solus Christus* theology). In very different ways and for different reasons, both try to be faithful to the normative value of Christ for approaching religion and religions. Despite this commonality, as observed above, Rahner avoids the a priori

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[60]*Ibid.*, 133.

[61]*Ibid.*, 134.

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Barthian condemnation of human religions. I will further compare these two theologians when I critically summarize the four representative theologians in the light of our points with regard to the prolegomena in the last section of this chapter.

In Rahner's inclusivism, there seems to be no difference between God's way of saving Christians and His/Her way of saving non-Christians. God saves non-Christian religious people as members of their own particular religions as legitimate social institutions. Non-Christians can reach the Christian scheme of salvation anonymously or unknowingly not in spite of their religions but through them. This is because the universal possibility of salvation through Christ is ontologically rooted in human beings' supernatural orientation towards God's irresistible grace and God's proffer of salvation can be properly mediated only through the socio-historical institution of religions. All institutional religions are embraced within the one and same mystery "Jesus Christ" in either open or hidden ways. Non-Christian religions can provide ordinary or latent ways of salvation, while the extraordinary or manifest way of salvation is possible only through Christianity in Jesus Christ.

Although there are many crucial issues in the controversy between Rahner (or Rahnerian inclusivists) and his critics, our main concern here is not to deal with those complex debates in detail. I simply want to introduce some noteworthy criticisms regarding Rahner's concepts of "anonymous Christians" and "anonymous Christianity." Rahner's inclusivism involves a tension between universalism (the universal salvific will of God) and particularism (salvation and truth only through Jesus Christ). Ulrich Schoen points out that this conflict in Rahner's thought is clearly expressed through his own

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words: "in solidarity with all, and yet [remembering] the claim of Christianity to absoluteness" (*mit allen solidarisch und doch Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums*); "humble and yet inexorable in the face of all non-Christian religions" (*bescheiden und doch unerbittlich gegenüber allen nicht-christlichen Religionen*).[62] Because of this dual aspect, Rahner's inclusivism has received much criticism from both exclusivist and pluralist camps. Exclusivists often charge Rahner with taking the plurality of religions too positively, roughly speaking, while pluralists accuse him of not taking it seriously enough.[63] Exclusivists typically complain that Rahner tends to reduce the particularity or uniqueness of Christianity to a common anthropological essence shared with all other religions, while pluralists say that Rahner should go even further and abandon the Christian imperialistic claim embedded in the notion of "anonymous Christians." In particular, pluralists criticize Rahner's "anonymous Christians and Christianity" for being offensive to non-Christian religions as well as to their adherents. John Hick thus argues that the term anonymous Christian (or Christianity) is "an honorary status granted unilaterally to people who have not expressed any desire for it."[64] He claims that other non-Christians equally should be able to call devout Christians "anonymous Buddhists," "anonymous Hindus," "anonymous atheists," and the like. Since the idea of anonymous

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[62]Schoen, *Das Ereignis und die Antworten*, 83.

[63]See *Ibid.*, 89-112; Gavin D'Costa, "Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian—A Reappraisal," *Modern Theology* 1 (1985), 89-112. In my view, D'Costa presents one of the best analyses of a critical dialogue between Rahner and his critics. For another noteworthy critical exposition of Rahner's inclusivism, see Maurice Wiles, *Christian Theology and Inter-religious Dialogue*, 45-63.

[64]Hick, *God has Many Names* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 68.

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Christians cannot guarantee any equal footing of other religions with Christianity, it hinders open and genuine interreligious dialogue.

Concerning this pluralist criticism, we need to give special attention to the context and audience of Rahner's inclusivism. Rahner addresses his theology of religions not to the audience of non-Christians such as Buddhists or Hindus but to Christians whose internal self-identity is seriously challenged by them. His main task is not that of a historian of religions who attempts to evaluate objectively all religions, but that of a Catholic dogmatic theologian who approaches religious plurality from a particular perspective of Christian faith. In this regard, Reinhold Bernhardt argues that Rahner fails to formulate an "independent theology of religions" (*einer eigenständiger Theologie der Religionen*) by subordinating the "legitimacy of empirical religions" to the a priori anthropological principle of "anonymous Christians."[65] Nevertheless, Rahner does not exclude the possibility that other religious people can equally respond to Christianity from their specific standpoints and internal concerns. This fact is well expressed in his positive response to Nishitani Keiji that Nishitani can equally call Rahner an "anonymous Zen Buddhist" from his point of view.[66] In this regard, I agree with Gavin D'Costa who argues that "the notion of an anonymous Christian actually facilitates rather than obstructs dialogue for it designates the possibility of grace in the dialogue partner's life and religion."[67] Although Rahner's inclusivism has triggered a number of other interesting

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[65]Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums*, 192.

[66]Cf. Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," 219.

[67]D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, 90.

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debates, I want to stop here by emphasizing that it points us in a very important direction for formulating an adequate Christian theology of religions which must struggle with how to maintain the normative criterion of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the entire human race without eliminating the possibility of the salvific efficacy of non-Christian religions for their adherents.

John Hick's Pluralism

Although there are a number of self-avowed pluralists in our time, I came to choose John Hick as a representative of pluralism simply because I believe he has made the most systematic and coherent case for pluralistic accounts of religions. He is primarily a philosopher of religion, whose pluralism is tied up with a variety of sophisticated philosophical, theological, and phenomenological arguments. According to Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "the theology of religious *pluralism* shares with inclusivism the assumption that there are given both a possibility of individual salvation and salvation-mediating instances outside one's own religion but rejects its view that these are realized or realizable to the highest degree only in one single religion."[68] As in the case of exclusivism, he also divides pluralism into "radical pluralism" and "moderate pluralism." The former holds that "*in all* religions one equal realization, in principle, of salvific elements is given," while the latter affirms that "this realization allows for *more than only*

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[68]Schmidt-Leukel, "Zur Klassifikation Religionstheologischer Modelle," 168. "Der religionstheologische *Pluralismus* teilt mit dem Inklusivismus die Annahme, daß sowohl eine individuelle Heilsmöglichkeit als auch heilsvermittelnde Instanzen außerhalb der eigenen Religion gegeben sind, lehnt jedoch dessen Auffassung ab, daß diese nur in einer einzigen Religion im Höchstmaß realisiert oder realisierbar sind."

one single highest form and is achieved more than once, though not in all religions whatsoever, but only, it may be, in a certain group of religions (e.g., the great and old world religions)."[69] Despite this narrow specification, according to Schmidt-Leukel, the presupposition of moderate pluralism ("more than one highest form possible and available") is sufficient for the definition of pluralism because it embraces the basic principles of radical pluralism as well. Given Schmid-Leukel's definitions, Hick's pluralism involves the aspects of both radical pluralism and moderate pluralism in that he argues for a single common soteriological structure in all the major post-axial world-religions. Thus, Hick's position includes, on the one hand, the element of radical pluralism in his argument for the occurrence of the "one in principle equal realization of salvific elements" (i.e., the radical transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness) and, on the other, the element of moderate pluralism in his argument that this salvific occurrence happens more than once and not in all religions (such as pre-axial religions) but only in the great post-axial religions. In this regard, unlike the previous two cases of Barth and Rahner, Schmidt-Leukel's definition is not very helpful for illuminating Hick's pluralism. I consider Hick's position "pluralism" because he adheres to the general assumptions of pluralism that all religions are independently valid paths to salvation and that Christianity is only one among many valid ways to the Divine Eternity. The remainder of this section is to prove this fact, giving

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[69]*Ibid.*, 168. "*In allen* Religionen eine prinzipiell gleichrangige Realisation heilshafter Elemente gegeben ist"; "diese Realisation *mehr als nur eine einzige* Höchstform erlaubt und mehr als einmal realisiert ist, aber nicht unbedingt in allen Religionen, sondern eventuell nur in einer bestimmten Gruppe von Religionen (z. B. den großen und alten Weltreligionen)."

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special attention to his proposed solution to the problems of conflicting salvation- and truth-claims between religions.

Hick argues that a plurality of non-Christian religions presents equally valid paths to salvation and that their adherents are actually saved through their own religions regardless of Christianity. In referring to religious plurality, he basically has in mind the major post-axial religions of literate humanity such as Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. because what distinguishes them from pre-axial religions (i.e., pre-literate or primitive religions of stone-age humanity) is that they have been concerned with "salvation/liberation as the realisation of a limitlessly better possibility."[70] All the great post-axial religions point their adherents towards a transformation from the unsatisfactory nature of ordinary human existence to the state of ultimate happiness grounded in fellowship with the transcendent reality.[71] In the earlier phase of his theological career, Hick developed his pluralist explanation of those post-axial religions by using an analogy of Ptolemaic and Copernican astronomy. As Ptolemaic theorists considered the earthly as the center of the solar system and other planets as "epicycles" revolving around it,[72] Ptolemaic theologians have seen Christ (and Christianity also) as the center of the

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[70]Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 12.

[71]*Ibid.*, 32-33.

[72]It should be made clear that for Hick "Ptolemaic theologians" are both exclusivists and inclusivists (both Catholic and Protestant) who regard Christ (or Christianity) as the center of the universe of the world faiths. When Hick refers to "Ptolemaic epicycles," in particular, he means the Roman Catholic inclusivism which still revolves around the center of exclusivism. Unlike his original use of "epicycles," I here intend to designate it as non-Christian religions which rotate around the center of Christianity.

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universe of faiths and other faiths as circumferential. In this Christ- and Christianity-centered theology, other religions are to be graded in value according to the extent of their distance from the center. Just as Copernican theorists repelled the old Ptolemaic view by arguing that the sun, not the earth, is at the center of the universe, religious pluralists also argue for the radical shift from the ecclesiocentric or christocentric picture of the world religions to the "realisation that it is *God* who is at the center, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him."[73] In face of a barrage of criticisms upon the theistic traces of his Copernican theory, however, Hick has later replaced the theistic term "God" with a much more inclusive term the "Real" which embraces both the personal and non-personal aspects. In other words, he has relativized "God" as one aspect of the "Real" or the "Eternal One" who is at the center of all the religions, thereby making a further evolutionary shift from the theocentric theology of religions to a theism-free neutral "Reality-centered" pluralism.

In his Copernican theocentrism or Reality-centrism, Hick rejects the christocentric principle that salvation is possible only through Christ and Christianity. In refusing the traditional exclusive christology, Hick argues that the incarnation of Jesus Christ should be understood not literally but mythologically.

> A true myth, on the other hand, is a story which is not literally true but that nevertheless tends to evoke in the hearer an appropriate dispositional attitude to the story's referent, which in the case of myth always transcends the story itself. So the story that God (i.e. God the Son) came down from heaven to earth to be born as a human baby and to die on the cross to atone for the sins of the world is not literally true, because it cannot be given an

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[73]Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1988), 131.

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acceptable literal meaning, but is on the other hand mythologically true in that it tends to evoke in us an appropriate attitude to the Divine, the Real, as the ultimate source of all salvific transformation, and thus as benign from our human point of view.[74]

A number of titles and images given to Jesus were nothing but poetic-symbolic "love languages" rather than historical truth-claims. The traditional Christian claim that Jesus is God incarnate is not a literal-propositional truth but a mythic-metaphorical truth. The upshot of such a mythic-confessional language of christology is that Jesus Christ is merely one mediator among many who point to the divine Ultimate. Just as a certain husband confesses that his wife is the most beautiful in the world, a Christian might assert that Christianity is the only true and absolute religion. Although Jesus Christ may be an absolute and normative way for those who are confessionally committed to Christianity, he is neither absolute nor normative for other religious people who have their own independent ways of approaching that ultimate Reality. For Hick, the *solus Christus* principle is not compatible with the Christian view of God who desires to save all people. In particular, he further extends the mythological view of the traditional christology to a neo-Kantian type interpretation of all religious languages, making a sharp distinction between the noumenal Real that exists independently from human beings' perception of it and the phenomenal expression of it.[75] All the symbols of the great world religions--God, Brahman, Sunyata, Tao, and the like--are the phenomenal expressions of the Real. They are nothing but the personal and impersonal phenomena of the single

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[74]Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 101-102.

[75]Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 240-251.

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noumenal ultimate and should not be identified as the noumenal *an sich.* Hick thus seeks to go beyond the historico-mythological figure of Jesus to the universal source of all the phenomena of religious plurality, which is what he calls the "ultimate ineffable Reality." The traditional christological claim must be seen as one of a plurality of phenomenal ways to manifest the noumenal Reality.

On the basis of this neo-Kantian epistemology, Hick identifies the rough parity between all the major religions in the common soteriological pattern: "Without going further, it is I think clear that the great post-axial traditions, including Christianity, are directed towards a transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to a recentering in what in our inadequate human terms we speak of as God, or as Ultimate Reality, or the Transcendent, or the Real."[76] Although all religions have different phenomenal conceptions of the noumenal Real and different means of approaching that ultimate end, the one and same salvation process is taking place in all the great religions. Like Christianity, other religions are actually providing their adherents with equally effective and equally salvific paths, i.e., the radical transition from ego-centeredness to Reality-centeredness. By referring to this generic concept of salvific occurrence, Hick thus argues that all the different religions are variations within different phenomenal schemes on a single noumenon. For him, there can be no genuine oppositions or incompatibilities between different religious salvation-claims because all the world religions exhibit the single, common soteriological pattern.

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[76]Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 18.

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Having postulated this generic soteriological structure, Hick backs up his argument by identifying common moral fruits between religions. The common soteriological transformation in different religions is most readily observed by their practical moral effects, i.e., saintly and selfless lives of their adherents. In order for Christians to assert that they have a more direct and closer relationship with God, they must prove their moral or spiritual superiority over other religious believers. How can we, then, compare the moral fruits of Christianity with those of other religions? For Hick, all religious traditions are culturally specific totalities which cannot be properly judged by the criterion of any particular religion. Moreover, we cannot realistically grade the world religions as "totalities" from a particular religious perspective simply because they are mixtures of good and evil which have been produced throughout their long histories.[77] Any randomly chosen individual or small group of Christians may be morally or spiritually superior over any randomly selected members of non-Christian religions. Since Christianity as a complex religio-cultural totality contains a "bewildering mixture of varied goods and evils" throughout its entire history, however, it is impossible to argue for its moral or spiritual preeminence over other religions. Therefore, Hick argues that

> If our traditional Christian theology is true, surely we should expect these fruits [the fruits of the Holy Spirit as appeared in Gal. 5: 22-23] to be present more fully in Christians generally than in non-Christians generally. . . . But I have been suggesting that, so far as we can tell, these visible fruits do *not* occur more abundantly among Christians than among Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Taoists, Baha'is, and so on.[78]

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[77]Hick particularly develops this theme in "On Grading Religions," *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1985), 67-87.

[78]Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 16.

As so far has been shown, Hick extends the soteriological parity between Christianity and other religions to the moral parity between them. Given the actual occurrence of salvific transformation and ethico-practical fruits in various non-Christian religions, their adherents may well be saved by their own religions without any need of explicit membership in Christianity. This salvation has nothing to do with the Christian salvation scheme which is nothing but one provincial expression of the common soteriological transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness. Thus, their salvation is to be understood not in terms of the Christian way but of the universal phenomena of a common salvific process. Hick also does not allow for any exclusive identity of Jesus with God but argues that Jesus is just one phenomenal manifestation of the single, noumenal Reality among many possible ones. Christians cannot and should not claim any longer that Christ or Christianity is the sole mediator of salvation for the entire human race because other religious people are actually being saved through their own religions.

Concerning conflicting truth-claims between religions, Hick directs our attention away from particular truth-claims--which he regards as insoluble and moreover not necessary for salvation or liberation--to an understanding of religious traditions as totalities which mediate the Real and generate the actual process of salvation or liberation. There are no genuine conflicts or oppositions between religious truth-claims because they are nothing other than the partially or finitely conceptualized manifestations of the full or infinite Real *an sich*. Therefore, religious phenomena can be assessed not by their cognitive truth-claims but only by the extent to which they promote or hinder the

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ultimate aims of salvation or liberation for their adherents. The truth or falsity of different manifestations of the one ineffable Reality lies not in their particular cognitive truth-claims but in their practical soteriological effectiveness.

As with the analysis of other paradigm cases, our main concern is not to engage in a critical discussion regarding Hick's case for religious pluralism as a whole but to identify the central core of his arguments. Although Hick's pluralism leans heavily on philosophical issues, he identifies very well a number of important theological issues. Hick's pluralism also supports and enhances an open and sincere dialogue among the world religions, even though I do not believe it is possible only on the basis of his pluralist hypothesis. Hick's pluralism has received a number of criticisms from philosophers of religion and theologians and Hick himself has offered a critical response to them in the form of a hypothetical dialogue with those critics, nicely clarifying the core issues and their implications between his position and others' criticisms.[79] On the one hand, generally speaking, philosophers charge Hick's pluralism with being a Western, liberal form of cultural imperialism which tends to dissolve the unique and contradictory claims of individual religions into the common soteriologico-ethical cores.[80] Thus, they

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[79]In the first chapter of his most recent book *A Christian Theology of Religions* (1995), John Hick sets forth basic rules for pursuing theological discussion and his pluralist hypothesis. In the following four chapters, he then seeks to respond to almost all the important criticisms laid upon his pluralism in the form of a hypothetical dialogue between "John" (himself) and "Phil" (philosophers) and "Grace" (theologians). For a critical dialogue between Hick and his critics, see *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 31-124.

[80]For one noteworthy philosophical criticism of Hick's pluralism which Hick does not mention in *A Christian Theology of Religions*, see Peter Byrne, *Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press,

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accuse Hick of ignoring or dismissing the genuine differences between religions by falsely postulating the common aim of the Noumenon or the transcendent "Reality" underlying all the concrete individual religions. On the other, theologians criticize Hick for minimizing the significance of the incarnation, uniqueness, and normativity of Jesus Christ and of the evangelization mission of Christianity in a non-Christian world.[81] Hick presents appropriate and credible responses to these criticisms but we cannot follow up all those issues. Despite all of his strengths, however, I wonder how far Hick and other pluralists can properly separate the "universal" or "common" from the "particular" or "special." Can Christianity without the christocentric norm still remain Christianity? Likewise, is Buddhism without *Nirvana* or *Sunyata* still Buddhism?

Inc., 1995), 77-78; 91-94; 154-155; 16-163. One of Byrne's main criticisms of Hick is that Hick downgrades the truth claims behind the conceptions of salvation in religions, emphasizing that false claims can generate fruitful moral effects and illusory ideas may have good results.

[81]For one of the best theological criticisms of Hick's pluralism, see Gavin D'Costa, *John Hick's Theology of Religions: A Critical Evaluation* (New York: University Press of America, 1987). His central criticism is that Hick severs the basis for the universal salvific will of God from the normative revelation of Christ. D'Costa's conviction is that theocentrism or Reality-centrism must rely on normative christocentrism and ecclesiocentrism. With particular regard to criticisms focusing on Hick's view of salvation, see S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 13-43. Heim's main criticism is that Hick does not fully account for the actual plurality of the salvation process and of ultimate aims as well as of proper means to attain them in each of the great world religions. For a well-argued German treatment of Hick's pluralism, see also Reinhold Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums*, 199-225; "Deabsolutierung der Christologie?," *Der einzige Weg zum Heil?: Die Herausforderung des christlichen Absolutheitsanspruch durch pluralistiche Religionstheologien*, ed. Michael von Brück and Jürgen Werbick (Freiburg; Basel; Wien: Herder, 1993), 151-156.

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Schubert Ogden's Pluralistic Inclusivism

In a recent phase of his theological career, Ogden has been deeply engaged in a dialogue between Christianity and other religions, especially Japanese Zen Buddhism. Through this substantial engagement in an interreligious dialogue for the last decade, he has produced a very important book, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* (1992) which is nothing other than an incisive application of his entire theological scheme to the issues of religious plurality. Ogden's main aim in this book is to explore a fourth option which is a neglected possibility beyond the three usual options. He himself calls this option "pluralistic inclusivism" which is aimed at overcoming both Christian monism in its two forms of exclusivism and inclusivism and pluralism.

Ogden begins his argument by identifying religion as the "primary form of culture," which is concerned with explicitly answering the existential question of authentic self-understanding in terms of concepts and symbols. There are two senses of truth in religion: (1) A religion may be said to be *formally* or a priori true if its representation of the meaning and truth of human existence is that with which any other religions must agree in substance in order for themselves to be true; (2) A religion may be said to be *substantially* or a posteriori true if it agrees with all other religions that are formally true.[82] It belongs to the inherent nature of a religion, then, to claim itself to be formally true religion by which all other religions must be determined. Each of the world religions presents its own formal norm or canon for determining whether or not some or all other religions are substantially in accordance with itself.

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[82]Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*, 12-13.

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On the basis of the clarification of these basic concepts, Ogden seeks to defeat the two extreme forms of Christian monism and pluralism and then to present his own alternative proposal to them. He does not devote much space to identifying the defects of exclusivism because for him it is neither appropriate to the apostolic witness of faith nor credible to common human experience and reason. Therefore, he directly gets into the critique of pluralism. While his attack on Christian monism is dominated by theological concerns, Ogden's critique of pluralism is primarily logical. Pluralists typically argue for an evolutionary trajectory from exclusivism to inclusivism and then finally to pluralism as a logical conclusion of a theology of religions. Moreover, they assert that a genuine interreligious dialogue is possible only on the basis of a pluralist view of religious plurality. Ogden seeks to overthrow the assumption that pluralism is the only adequate alternative to Christian monism. Pluralists argue that there *are* actually diverse ways of salvation of which Christianity is merely one. Thus, "the possibility they hold is not only that there *can be* many true religions, but that there actually *are*."[83] To argue for the actuality (not merely the possibility or probability) of many true religions, however, pluralists should exhaust the empirico-historical study of religions by which they can properly identify the formal as well as the material similarities between different religions. The problem inherent in pluralism is that it cannot go beyond the "purely formal statement" that there *are* actually many true religions. This is so because "it is likely to remain exceedingly difficult, even after the most extensive study and first-hand experience of another person's religious claims, to know just where, or even whether,

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[83] *Ibid.*, 54.

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one's own religion expresses the same religious truth."[84] Without passing through any sufficient empirical examination of a plurality of religions, pluralists tend to draw too quick a judgment about the actuality of many true religions when they should affirm only the possibility of it. Moreover, pluralists risk plunging into a mere "religious relativism" when they argue for the equality or rough parity of all the post-axial religions. To avoid this sort of relativism, pluralists must adopt some norms or criteria of religious truth for determining the truth or falsity of religions. However, the problem is that they cannot but appeal to a norm derived from some particular philosophical reflection or the formal norm of some specific religion or theology. Despite their self-avowed disclaimers, for example, theocentric pluralists render some principles of one religion or philosophy normative for determining the truth or falsity of religions in arguing that any religions are true insofar as they revolve around "God" or "Reality." In consequence, they inevitably face an insoluble dilemma that

> either to avoid employing a norm of judgment, and thus never to get beyond the purely formal statement that all religions claim to be true; or else to make a reasoned judgment about their truth, but only by employing, openly or tacitly, some one of them, or some philosophy, as the norm required to make it.[85]

On the basis of the criticisms of the two extreme poles of Christian monism and pluralism, Ogden seeks to present his fourth option of "pluralistic inclusivism" which can be construed as a middle path between those extreme contraries. On the one hand Ogden distances himself from monists (especially, exclusivists) by affirming that there *can* be

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[84]*Ibid.*, 60.

[85]*Ibid.*, 73.

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other formally true religions besides Christianity, and on the other from pluralists by arguing for not the actuality of many true religions, but the possibility of at least one more true religion besides Christianity.

In critically breaking with both Christian monism and pluralism, Ogden's adoption of "representative christology" in sharp contrast with "constitutive christology" is at the heart of his own alternative proposal to the three popular options. In constitutive christology, Jesus Christ is constitutive of salvation and therefore the possibility of salvation is nothing until the saving event of Jesus actually occurs. All salvation is done through the agency of Jesus Christ. As shown in the case of Rahner's inclusivism above, constitutive christology affirms that Jesus Christ is the final cause of God's grace and salvation. In representative christology, in contrast, the possibility of salvation is constituted not by Jesus Christ but by God's limitless love, which is universally available to all human beings. Ogden argues that

> the conditions of asserting a christological predicate [i.e., "Christ"] in no way require that Jesus must have perfectly actualized the possibility of authentic self-understanding. On the contrary, because the function of any christological predicate is to assert somehow that Jesus is the decisive re-presentation of the meaning of God for us, and hence of the meaning of ultimate reality for us, the only condition of truthfully asserting it is satisfied if the God whose gift and demand are made fully explicit through Jesus is indeed what is ultimately real and if the possibility of faith in this God that Jesus explicitly authorizes is indeed our authentic possibility as human beings.[86]

For Ogden, Jesus Christ is a decisive representation of the universally given possibility of salvation and the only cause of salvation is the "primordial and everlasting love of God,

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[86]Ogden, *The Point of Christology*, 87-88.

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which is the sole primal source and the sole final end of anything that is so much as

possible."[87] The saving event of Jesus Christ constitutes all the specifically Christian

things such as sacraments, words, and the like. Jesus Christ is the "primal authorizing

source" by which all Christian authorities are explicitly authorized as such.[88] In this

regard, Jesus Christ as a Savior must be distinguished from a mere prophet, sage, or saint.

Just as words and sacraments (as "ordinary means of salvation") do not constitute the

saving event of Jesus but represent it, Jesus does not constitute God's love but represents

it. While all Christian things represent God's love by also representing Jesus Christ, he

represents God's love by also constituting them. Despite Jesus' distinctive role as

constituting any and every Christian fact, the possibility of salvation itself, as distinct

from the specifically Christian representation of it, is always constituted by God's

universal love. Whereas constitutive christology grants a certain priority to Christianity

over other religions by taking the grace of Jesus as constitutive of salvation,

representative christology allows for the possibility of other religions' representations of

God's love in their own categorical terms. Although Ogden does not identify any detailed

criteria for determining true religions, his entire argument generates the following

conclusion: A religion can be formally as well as substantially true insofar as it properly

represents God's unbounded love which alone is constitutive of salvation. Although

Ogden fully recognizes that other religious people can make an Ogdenian case for the

possibility of other true religions by employing their own specific concepts and symbols,

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[87]Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*, 92.

[88]*Ibid.*, 98.

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he makes it very clear that he cannot but speak in specifically Christian terms and ideas because "to be a Christian and to take Christianity to be the formally true religion are one and the same thing."[89] Of course, whether or not other religions properly represent God's love must be judged by complex procedures of historico-empirical investigation. Nevertheless, it is true that if one's own religion is formally true because it decisively represents God's love, then there can be many true religions. One true representation of God's love does not preclude others. As a conclusion, Ogden argues that

> because of the utterly universal and all-embracing love of God decisively re-presented through Jesus Christ, there is a universal possibility of salvation for each and every human being and that, for the same reason, there is a corresponding possibility of as many true religions as there are religions so transformed by God's love as to be constituted by it and representative of it.[90]

Ogden's position may be described as "theocentric inclusivism" because it does not allow for any privileged access to salvation only through Jesus but strongly affirms the universal availability of salvation through God's unlimited love and grace. Each religious tradition, including Christianity, can uniquely represent the salvific possibility as constituted solely by God's love. While Buddha or Christ can decisively represent God's redeeming love for Buddhists or Christians respectively, neither Buddha nor Christ but God alone constitutes salvation. In this regard, Ogden seems not to demand the radical necessity of Jesus Christ for the salvation of non-Christian religious people. The particularity of Jesus is valid only for Christians, while each of the other religions' savior

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[89]*Ibid.*, 100.

[90]*Ibid.*, 104.

figures as unique representatives of God's love is necessary for its adherents only. According to Reinhold Bernhardt, Ogden's proposal involves two interests: On the one hand, siding with Rudolf Bultmann and process theologians, he wants to stick to the "uniqueness of Christ" (*der Einzigartigkeit Christi*); on the other, with pluralist theologians of religions he tries to avoid christological exclusivism.[91] Against pluralist theologians, Ogden emphasizes that the Christ-event is not simply one among many but the *decisive* representation of God's love; against exclusivist theologians, he also highlights the universality of God's love which works in the sphere of non-Christian religious traditions. The Christ revelation is nothing more than the *universal* representation of God's love, but is always *decisive* for Christians. For Ogden, in short, God's love constitutes salvation which is universally available and Jesus Christ decisively represents that love as an originally given possibility of humanity. Let me now conclude this section by briefly introducing two noteworthy criticisms of Ogden's position.

Bernhardt finds the advantage of Ogden's representative christology in its avoiding the fundamental problem of all soteriology: "the universalization of the historically-particular salvation-occurrence" (*Die Universalisierung des geschichtlich-partikularen Heilsgeschehens*).[92] The universal picture of the Christ-event, as typically expressed in the Rahnerian inclusivism, affirms the possibility of universal salvation for all human beings. By trying to reconcile the tension between the universality of God's salvific will and the particularity of the salvation-reality in Jesus, inclusivists typically

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[91]Bernhardt, "Deabsolutierung der Christologie?," 180.

[92]*Ibid.*, 181.

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argue for the christologically defined possibility of salvation for non-Christians.

According to Bernhardt, Ogden dispels such an inclusivist approach.

> The *reality* of salvation is fundamentally as universal as the *will* of God. It needs no constant expansion of its range, but only the disclosure of its characteristic universality to which in the Christ-occurrence nothing needs to be added. That in Christ this realization has taken place in a *decisive* way is of merely existential-ontological and not salvation-historical import.[93]

Because of his separation of the "original occurrence of the salvation-constitution from Christ," however, Ogden risks losing the importance of the concrete history of the salvation-occurrence which is grounded in the life and death of Jesus. For Ogden, Jesus' significance lies not in his God-human essence or being in itself but in his revealing work for us. (Please note that Ogden's theological reflection on Jesus as the Christ is concerned not with the "empirical-historical" question about his being in itself in the past but with the "existential-historical" question about his meaning for here and now in the present.) Regardless of Jesus' death and resurrection, the original possibility of salvation is always and everywhere given to all human beings. Jesus merely represents that human possibility decisively. No particular historical event (including even the Christ-occurrence) can affect or alter God's universal salvific will and God's grace need not be restricted to Jesus as its only conduit. God's salvation, however, occurs not in a vacuum but in a definite time and particular place of history. God's salvific will and love as

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[93]*Ibid.*, 182. "Die Heils*wirklichkeit* ist grundsätzlich ebenso universal wie Gottes*wille*. Sie bedarf keiner ständigen Ausdehnung ihrer Reichweite, sondern nur der Offenlegung ihrer wesensmäßigen Universalität, der im Christusgeschehen nichts hinzugefügt zu werden brauchte. Daß in Christus diese Vergegenwärtigung in *entscheidender* Weise stattgefunden hat, ist lediglich existential-ontologisch, nicht aber heilsgeschichtlich von Belang."

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decisively represented in Jesus Christ exhibit not only the "cosmic universality" but also the "historical condescension of God" (*die geschichtliche Kondeszendenz Gottes*). "Jesus *brings* it [salvation] *about*, i.e., he realizes God's will in a concrete historical situation, as a result of which salvation first becomes reality."[94] Salvation is nothing other than God's occurrence (*Gottesereignung*) in the concrete history of Jesus. In short, Bernhardt charges Ogden with divorcing God's salvific will and love from His/Her historical activity in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

In a similar vein, S. Mark Heim also criticizes Ogden for separating each religion's true representation of God's salvific love from the salvation itself that is represented. He argues: "The Christian affirmations about incarnation and Trinity mean that while salvation as a possibility cannot be attributed solely to 'the Christ event,' apart from God's other creative and sustaining actions, neither can Christ as the Word-in-humanity be excluded from the constitution of our salvation."[95] Despite these critical disputations with Ogden's position, his contribution to a theology of religions lies in his exploring a fourth option which can overcome the defects (both theological and logical) of Christian monism and pluralism.

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[94]*Ibid.*, 183. "er *ereignet* es [das Heil], d.h. er verwirklicht den Willen Gottes in einer konkreten historischen Situation, wodurch Heil erst Wirklichkeit wird."

[95]Heim, *Salvations*, 226.

A Summary Evaluation

As a conclusion of this chapter, I want to make a summary assessment of the four theologians' positions as a whole in the light of our prolegomena points presented in Chapters II and III, focusing on the following four questions. How do they view "religion" and "religions"? What forms of the theology of religions do they represent? How comprehensive is the scope of each of their respective theologies of religions? To what degree are they faithful to our criteria for an adequate theology of religions? Although our four representative theologians have not always explicitly written about each other, this summary evaluation may produce a quaternary dialogue between them, whereby we can compare and contrast, albeit roughly, each of their distinctive positions. The critical assessment of their theological positions in this section is implicitly aimed at searching for a right direction for doing a more adequate theology of religions for today, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Let us begin by assessing Barth's notion of "religion" and the form of his theology of religion. Since Barth did not have any profound firsthand knowledge or experience of the world religions, he was not explicitly concerned with the plurality of empirical non-Christian religions but with the a priori theological critique of the liberal Protestant use of "religion" as the *sine qua non* of human religiosity. Therefore, it is understandable that critics typically accuse Barth's theology of being stuck with "platonic inhistoricity" (*platonischer Ungeschichtlichkeit*) and a "docetic idea of incarnation" (*doketischen Inkarnationsvorstellung*).[96] At first glance, what John Cobb, Jr. calls the "Barthian taboo

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[96]Bernhardt, *Der Absoluheitsanspruch des Christentums*, 165.

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against taking religions seriously"[97] thus appears to hinder any positive evaluation of concrete individual religions. As shown above, however, Barth (especially in his later thought) allows for the universal possibility of salvation as well as for the implicit knowledge of God beyond the wall of Christianity. Moreover, his attack on religion is not directed against the positive individual religions such as Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, etc. Instead, his main concern is with articulating the authentic Christian faith itself against any and every idolatrous human attempt to reach God from below. Since Barth's theological theory of religion clearly exhibits the inevitability of the particular standpoint in approaching cultural phenomena such as religion, according to Garrett Green, his theory of religion can be established as an indispensable subject in the university curriculum on a par with other objective or descriptive disciplines of "religious studies."[98] Given our analysis of the various forms of a theology of religions presented in the preceding chapter, Barth espouses a "Christian theology of religion as genitivus objectivus" which starts from the subjective dogmatic concern of Christian faith. His theology of religion is an a priori confessional theology which shows no serious interest in the posteriori doctrines and practices of non-Christian religions.

Unlike Barth, Rahner is keenly aware of the importance of the given reality of empirical religions for Christian self-understanding and self-interpretation. However, Rahner's theology is still similar to Barth's in his proposing a dogmatico-confessional Christian theology of religions which seeks to apply a set of internal Christian concepts

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[97]Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 35.

[98]Green, "Challenging the Religious Studies Canon," 483-486.

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and presuppositions to the object of religious plurality. (Please note that because of his internal dogmatic concern, as observed above, Rahner's proposal of "anonymous Christians" has been criticized as still involving Christian imperialism in disguise.) Their theses are formulated a priori, i.e., without any direct knowledge of actual non-Christian religions but upon the sole basis of the knowledge of the Christian Gospel. The main audiences of both theologians are not other religious people such as Buddhists or Hindus but Christians whose self-identity is seriously challenged by secular humanism and other religions. Despite their common starting points within internal dogmatic (Protestant and Catholic respectively) concerns, Rahner is to be distinguished from Barth in his positive evaluation of the socio-historical functions of concrete religions as salvation-mediating vehicles. Whereas Barth is exclusively concerned with a theological assessment of religion by focusing on the Christian trinitarian premises, Rahner combines Catholic theological principles with anthropological presuppositions by giving positive value to human religious efforts. However, Rahner has not gone far enough to appreciate genuinely a plurality of non-Christian religions but remains a subjective Catholic dogmatician by dissolving the concreteness of those religions into the a priori *Vorgriff* of the supernatural human existential.

While the two theologians whom we have just considered derive their solution to the problem of "religion" and "religions" from their internal Christian beliefs, Hick's pluralist theology of religions is based on a radical reinterpretation of the Christian tradition on philosophical (especially, the Neo-Kantian) grounds. With this different starting point of Hick's pluralism in mind, let us first explicate his view of "religion" and

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"religions." He explicitly affirms the family-resemblance notion of religion which we adopted in Chapter II.

> [I]t is, I think, illuminating to see the different traditions, movements and ideologies whose religious character is either generally agreed or responsibly debated, not as exemplifying a common essence, but as forming a complex continuum of resemblances and differences analogous to those found within a family.[99]

Hick apparently seeks to avoid the common essentialism in defining the religious phenomena. However, his self-avowed rejection of essentialism becomes contradictory with his postulate of a common soteriological structure as apparent in the great post-axial religions. As means to attain salvation or liberation, they all exhibit the transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness, which is typically expressed in various ethical fruits or dispositional attitudes. For Hick, the basic common soteriological occurrence as morality is nothing but an invariant essential core for explaining the diversity of religious phenomena. In this regard, I concur with Peter Byrne in his arguing that

> The outward family resemblance structure of religion arises in Hick's theory according to a common pattern found in other essentialist accounts of religion. Religion is in essence one, but in manifestation various, as its common essence reacts with the different historical and cultural circumstances in which mankind is placed. The family resemblance character of religion appears to be true only of its surface characteristics. And this must be so for Hick.[100]

In particular, Hick utilizes the principle of the common soteriological core for sifting true

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[99]Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 4.

[100]Peter Byrne, "A Religious Theory of Religion," *Religious Studies* 27 (1991), 127.

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or right religions from false or wrong ones. The major post-axial religions are true or right in that they are different historical and cultural manifestations of the common soteriological essence, i.e., the transformation from ego-centeredness to Reality-centeredness, and in that they are partially and contextually variant manifestations of the same one Real *an sich*. Although Hick makes it clear that he relies on Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblances to describe the phenomena of religion as broadly as possible, he again falls into the pitfall of the essentialism which he wants to avoid. As the essentialist explanation of religion does so, in short, Hick's assumption of the common soteriological core undercuts an appreciation of the genuine difference or distinctiveness among religions.

Concerning the form of Hick's pluralist theology, it belongs to a "theology of religions genitivus subjectivus" which seeks to illuminate Christianity as one phenomenon among many from the perspective of religious pluralism. Neither Christian faith nor theological premises but religious pluralism based on the Neo-Kantian philosophy is the subject for his pluralism. He seeks to evade the dilemma between an external illusionary view of religion ("all religious beliefs are ultimately irrational and false") and an internal confessional position ("we are right, you are wrong") by postulating the non-theological concept of the noumenal Real behind all religions.[101] For

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[101]Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 249. On the one hand, Hick argues for a cognitively realist interpretation of religion against those who present the delusionary view of religion (Hick defends the cognitive status of religious claims by means of eschatological verification.); by postulating the pluralist hypothesis, on the other, he tries to escape confessional exclusivism which approaches the object of religious plurality from the single perspective of one religious tradition.

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Hick, a theological interpretation of "religion" and "religions" is not compatible with a "genuinely pluralistic hypothesis" and "cannot be sustained on impartial grounds."[102] Moreover, a confessionally-oriented theology of religions is not compatible with the historico-scientifically accumulated data of religious studies. In this regard, the presupposition of the Real-in-itself helps confessional theologians recognize that their theological businesses are always contextual and partial contributions to that ultimate reality. If particular individual religions are humanly conditioned reactions to the transcendent Real, the theologies they entail cannot claim any exclusive validity over others. In this regard, Hick's philosophical theory of religion may rule out the Barthian or Rahnerian interpretation of human religiosity and religions. His audiences are both Christians and non-Christians who worship the same unknowable Real with their own different but limited human concepts and symbols. In short, Hick's pluralist theology of religions is an objective-outsider approach to the diversity of empirical religions, which is based on the philosophical hypothesis of religious pluralism.[103]

Ogden presents a functional definition of religion, which is much broader and more inclusive than a substantive definition of religion: Religion is the "primary form of culture in terms of which we human beings explicitly ask and answer the existential

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[102]*Ibid.*, 2.

[103]Hick himself expresses this fact in terms of the interplay between two jobs. As a philosopher of religion, he proposes the pluralist hypothesis on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, while as a theologian who accepted such a pluralist hypothesis he also seeks to make a contribution to the development of Christian thought on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and particularly Sundays. See Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 43.

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question of the meaning of ultimate reality for us."[104] By this definition, he intends to include both Marxism and the evolutionary humanism of Western liberalism as religion insofar as they function as the "primary form of culture" through which the existential question is asked and answered explicitly. Ogden notes that the term "religion" involves an objective as well as a subjective reference: religion as the "explicit understanding through which our existence is understood"; religion as the "explicit understanding which *is* understood as and when we so understand ourselves."[105] He also fully considers the *a posteriori* concreteness of particular religions in holding that religion never exists in general but only as some "specific religion or religions." However, Ogden argues that interreligious dialogue can take place fruitfully only through a necessary moment of formal abstraction, i.e., through abstracting from the concrete form of specific religious traditions to the neutral, formal concepts and symbols of ultimate reality.[106] For him, the real questions in an intellectual dialogue between religions thus can be properly clarified only at the formal level.

Ogden's theology of religions is a sort of "a priori theology of religions" which is at the same time keenly attentive to a posteriori implications. However, his is still a "Christian theology of religions genitivus objectivus" which does not exclude the possibility of other theologies of religions genitivus objectivus. It is a mutually

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[104]Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*, 5.

[105]*Ibid.*, 10.

[106]See Ogden, "Response to Gishin Tokiwa," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* V (Honolulu, Hawaii: East-West Religions Project, University of Hawaii, 1985), 131-141.

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correlative theology of religions which is both subjective and objective, both insider and outsider, both dogmatic and apologetic, both particularistic and universalistic. Unlike Barth and Rahner, on the one hand, Ogden rejects a subjective-particularist-one-sided approach; unlike Hick, on the other, he does not pursue an exclusively objective-universalist-slanted approach. Thus, Ogden searches for a particularist/universalist theology of religions which is grounded in "christocentrism as radical monotheism,"[107] i.e., in the objective reality of God as decisively represented in Jesus as the Christ. Ogden is closer to Hick rather than to Barth or Rahner in that he argues for universally applicable truth-criteria for theological adequacy and in that the audiences of his theology are both Christians and non-Christians who are living in the same contemporary context of religious plurality.

Let us now explicate briefly the scopes of the four theologies of religions. In the second section of Chapter III, we argued that an adequate theology of religions internally must go beyond the so-far-dominant focus on christology or soteriology to embrace every other locus of systematic theology, and that externally the potential for its range in dialogue with other particular religions is virtually unlimited. Since we will talk about the implications of the external scope in the last part of this chapter, let us focus on the internal scope. Given the envisioning of the broadest scope of the theology of religions, the three theologians, except for Rahner, are concerned with relating the problem of

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[107]Cf. Philip E. Devenish and George L. Goodwin, "Christian Faith and the First Commandment: The Theology of Schubert Ogden," *Witness and Existence: Essays in Honor of Schubert M. Ogden*, ed. Philip E. Devenish and George L. Goodwin (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 2-12.

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religious plurality to only one favorite locus or two or three specific loci of Christian systematic theology.

Barth approaches the problem of religion as a priori religiosity exclusively from the perspective of christology/soteriology or trinitarian premises. Although Barth touches the several loci of dogmatic theology--e.g., anthropology or eschatology--in exploring the possibility of universal salvation in his later thought, it would be safe to say that the entire compass of Barth's theology of religion is controlled and delimited by his uncompromising emphasis on the locus of Jesus Christ.

As compared to the other three theologians, Rahner presents the most comprehensive scope of a theology of religions, in which anthropology, christology/soteriology, ecclesiology, theology *proper*, etc., are inseparably intertwined-- albeit the weightiest emphasis is always on the locus of christology as "self-transcending anthropology" (or anthropology as "deficient christology").[108] As he applies the anthropological concept of transcendentality to all the areas of dogmatic theology, his exploration of an anonymous Christian and anonymous Christianity affects and is affected by such a transcendentality anthropology as well as by many other loci. Probably, Rahner is the first modern theologian who seriously struggled with elucidating the impact of non-Christian religions and their adherents on almost all the loci of Christian theology.

Hick's theology of religions uneasily oscillates between philosophy of religion

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[108]See Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology," *TI* I, trans. Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 164, n.1.

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and theology. It is a project incumbent upon philosophical theology in which the two fields are indistinguishably interlocked. As observed above, Hick rejects a Christian dogmatic approach to religious plurality, thereby seeking the radical critique of traditional christology on the basis of his theories of soteria, religion, ultimate reality, etc., all of which are philosophically formulated and tradition-free. Theologically speaking, his theology of religions centers around the locus of christology/soteriology which ought to be formulated or reformulated through the lens of phenomenologico-philosophical theories of religion.

The scope of Ogden's theology of religions, at least as appeared in *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?*, is affected only in relation to the loci of theology *proper* and christology. In other words, he is mainly concerned with answering the question, "How can Jesus Christ as the historical particularity be coherently thought with salvation as constituted by God's primordial love in face of non-Christian religions and their savior-figures?" As already fully examined above, Ogden's representative christology plays an essential role in his exploring the possibility of more than one true religion in the world. My observation is that Ogden does not substantially deal with other loci of systematic theology--e.g., ecclesiology or eschatology--in the light of religious plurality.

To what extent does, then, each of the four theologians meet our criteria for the adequacy of a theology of religions? Answering this question requires a highly complicated discussion and a detailed analysis of their respective arguments in the light of those three criteria. Moreover, it would be difficult to apply equally those criteria to all

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of their cases because except for Ogden the theologians are not explicitly conscious of them. Therefore, I am merely content with generalizing their possibly meeting those three criteria. We can approximately say that Barth tends to de-emphasize the criteria of truth and fittingness with his excessive concern with Christian orthodoxy; Rahner tries to be faithful to both authenticity and truth, giving lesser attention to the criterion of fittingness to a specific context in and for which his theological task is performed; Hick tends to regard anything that promotes "religious pluralism" and interreligious tolerance and dialogue as both Christian and true, without being insensitive to the context; and Ogden, as compared to the other three theologians, is fairly sensitive to trying to meet all three criteria.

The question of the authenticity of Christian witness in the face of secular atheism and heresy was Barth's overriding and distinctive preoccupation. For Barth, the primary task of Christian theology is to interpret the Christian tradition authentically in accordance with scriptural testimony to Jesus Christ. Therefore, he is relatively less concerned with the question of truth or credibility in the sense that Christian claims to validity should be congruent with general truth-criteria. In approaching religion and religions, Barthian theology thus does not seriously consider historical or philosophical arguments based on empirical encounters with other religious traditions. Although Rahner is similar to Barth in his dogmatic concern with appropriateness to the normative witness to Jesus Christ, he differently interprets the human possibility as well as the Christian tradition (including the Bible) in ways that are understandable or credible to contemporary people living in an unprecedented age of religious plurality. In my view,

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Barthian or Rahnerian a priori theology of religions is not sufficient to tackle responsibly the problem of religious plurality because a thorough comparative understanding of the vast differences between religions must be prerequisite for making any actual Christian judgment upon other religions and their adherents. The conclusion of our explication of Barth and Rahner is that a purely intra-Christian or a priori theology of religions is not sufficient and that a Christian theology of religions must give full attention to the results of objective-comparative study of religions.

Hick seems to think that the only question theology must ask is the question of the credibility of Christian witness about religious plurality at the expense of its authenticity. Facing the difficulty in solving the problem of conflicting truth-claims between religions, Hick also tends to reduce the question of truth to the question of ethical effectiveness. As Ogden points out, Hick does not rightly distinguish between the validity of particular individual religions and their practico-ethical effectiveness.[109] Hick's theocentrism (or Reality-centrism) without the normativity of Christ may lead to what D'Costa calls a "transcendental agnosticism," i.e., affirming an abstract transcendence without any concrete qualities.[110] Thus, Hick's pluralist theology is primarily governed by philosophical arguments rather than by theological ones. I think the Hickian reinterpretation of the Christian tradition on purely philosophical grounds is not

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[109]Ogden, *Doing Theology Today*, 166.

[110]See Gavin D'Costa, "John Hick and Religious Pluralism: Yet Another Revolution," *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick*, ed. Harold Hewitt, Jr. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 3-18.

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conclusive in itself because there still can be other theological accounts of religious plurality, which are acceptable to contemporary human beings.

Since Ogden himself has proposed the three criteria for theological adequacy, it is very natural that he seeks to be faithful to satisfying each of them. However, I wonder how far we can fittingly apply his theology of religions to non-Western, non-white, Third World situation in which the issue of religious plurality is seriously intertwined with various socio-political oppressions, poverty, and a unique cultural background and ethos. Especially, Ogden's criterion of "credibility" in terms of "common human experience and reason" may be criticized as disclosing a post-Enlightenment Western liberal perspective. If any critical reflection is conditioned socially and culturally, I wonder whether Ogden can any longer argue for the universal criteria of truth, which are applicable to every context without exception. In this regard, I want to refer to Ronald F. Thiemann's criticism of Ogden:

> The logical structure of the ostensibly common human experience is nothing other than the structure of a local, historically conditioned, and temporally specific experience for which universal status is inappropriately claimed. The diverse richness of human experience, and particularly the experience of those who have been marginalized and excluded, is thereby forced to conform to the exalted single paradigm.[111]

As with Thiemann, I wonder how far Ogden's general truth-criteria can be applicable to the vast diversity of the world religions in our time. As fully observed above, Ogden makes a sharp distinction between "witness" and "theology," thereby rendering the latter to be the *indirect* service of critically reflecting on the validity of the former in order to

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[111]Ronald F. Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 146.

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avoid the mere rationalization or justification of any given position. Although Ogden himself claims that he is doubly concerned with the theoretical credibility of Christian faith (belief and truth) and its practical credibility (action and justice), his uncompromising emphasis on such an indirect service of theology may entail a danger of leading his theology to the extremely theoretical abstractionism or intellectual individualism.

Finally, all of our four representative theologians are concerned with a "general theology of religions" which seeks to elucidate the relationship between Christianity and the world religions in general. Such a general theology of religions needs to be further amplified into various specific theologies of religions such as "Christian-Buddhist," "Christian-Jewish," "Christian-Muslim," etc., which are based on living and lived encounters with a concrete individual religion. Through a sincere dialogue and self-involving experience with the members of the other religions concerned, such a "Christian theology of religion in particular" can make a more remarkable contribution to the cross-fertilization or mutual cooperation between Christianity and other individual religions. Although a plurality of specific a posteriori theologies of religions are already becoming a reality[112] and even indispensable for the mutual enrichment and mutual transformation between Christianity and one or two non-Christian religions, I believe a generalized theology of religions must take precedence over those specific theologies because it can and must serve as a general introduction to them. A general theology of

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[112]For typical two examples, see Reinhard Leuze, *Christentum und Islam* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994); Clemens Thoma, *A Christian Theology of Judaism*, trans. and ed. Helga Croner (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).

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religions can function as a Christian theological "bird's-eye view" of the fundamental religiosity of humanity and of all the world religions as a whole. I can now predict that various systematic theologies of religions—such as systematic theology of the encounter between Christianity and Buddhism, systematic theology in dialogue with Hinduism, and the like—will be in full flourish in the near future. Even in this kind of specific theologies of religions, one essential task must be how to retain the Christian identity and Christian convictions, while respecting the material differences of other religions through a dialogical openness and ethico-pragmatic cooperation with their adherents. What is called for is not a common assimilation or a mutually acceptable "middle way" in which differences are ignored, but a mutual search for truth even with running the risk of a total conversion away from Christianity to a different religion, and vice versa. With these points in mind, let us turn to the final conclusion of our study.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: THREE THESES FOR MOVING TOWARDS
AN ADEQUATE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS FOR TODAY

On the basis of the critical analysis of the contemporary theology of religions in

the preceding chapter, the aim of this concluding chapter is to present three basic theses

for moving towards an adequate Christian theology of religions for today. I want to

highlight here two terms "towards" and "for today." First, I intend to propose not an

"adequate Christian theology of religions" but three general theses for moving towards it

because a full articulation of such a theology may well require a process of highly

complex arguments, which is beyond the scope of this final chapter. Second, by "for

today" I want to emphasize that the concept of an adequate theology is not fixed but time-

variant. A theology of religions which was considered to be fully adequate by the

Reformers in the sixteenth century may not be equally appropriate for contemporary

people who are living with a far more acute consciousness of religious diversity than

those in the past. In suggesting the three fundamental theses, I will draw together,

implicitly or explicitly, some important themes I discussed in the preceding chapters.

Thesis 1: An adequate theology of religions for today must incorporate both particularism (the uniqueness, definitiveness, normativity of Jesus Christ for human salvation and truth) and universalism (the universal scope and efficacy of God's salvation and truth through Jesus Christ).

The adjective "Christian" in a Christian theology of religions inevitably indicates

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a distinctive perspective for approaching its subject-matter "religions." Such a

distinctiveness of Christian perspective is grounded in the particularity of Jesus Christ in

and through whom God as the ground of all being, meaning, truth, and salvation is

uniquely, definitely, and normatively revealed. Christianity is a religion rooted in the life,

death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What distinguishes Christianity from all other

world religions is its christological claim that Jesus is the Christ for the entire human

race. Christianity without Jesus Christ may not remain Christianity. Although this

christological claim can be reinterpreted in diverse ways,[1] the specificity or particularity

of Jesus Christ is essential for retaining the adjective "Christian." H. Richard Niebuhr

defines a Christian as

> one who counts himself as belonging to that community of men for whom
> Jesus Christ--his life, words, deeds, and destiny--is of supreme importance
> as the key to the understanding of themselves and their world, the main
> source of the knowledge of God and man, good and evil, the constant
> companion of the conscience, and the expected deliverer from evil.[2]

However variant Christians' interpretation of Jesus Christ might be, it ought always to be

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[1]Paul Knitter reinterprets the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in terms of "universal," "decisive," and "indispensable," rejecting the notion of the revelation of Jesus as "full," "definitive," and "unsurpassable." See "Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ," *The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, ed. Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 3-16. I do not agree with his non-normative christology because it lacks truth-criteria for interreligious dialogue and socio-political cooperation in promoting human well-being. His placing of "soteria" or "liberating praxis" at the center of interreligious dialogue can result in indeterminate or unspecified common ethico-practical collaboration, eventually obscuring the particularity of each different religion. Christians can participate in various kinds of liberative cooperation with other religious people, without necessarily abandoning their distinctive norm of Jesus Christ for salvation and truth.

[2]H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1951), 11.

obvious that he remains the authorizing source and norm for Christian existence and Christian identity.[3]

Taking into account the particularity of one's own religious tradition ought to be a prerequisite for appreciating the specificity of others. An adequate theology of religions must begin with the particular of one's own religious tradition, e.g., "christological particularism" in terms of the Christian tradition. In critically assessing Wilfred Cantwell Smith's "world theology" in Chapter III, we emphasized that a theology of religions cannot be at once Christian plus Muslim plus Buddhism or whatever religion. This sort of global theology is a utopia or an impossible possibility. Many pluralists propose such a universalist theology of religions because of their strong suspicion that the christological particularism is inherently absolutivistic or imperialistic. However, christological particularism does not necessarily mean that Christ or Christianity is the only and unsurpassable path to human salvation and truth. As shown in the cases of Rahner and other theologians, our adherence to the normativity of Jesus Christ does not necessarily nullify all other salvation-mediating instances outside the confines of Christianity. The concreteness or particularity of Jesus Christ can and must be universalized or globalized.

Jesus Chris was incarnated, died on the cross, and rose from the dead not for a small minority of chosen Christians but for all humanity everywhere. Through Jesus Christ God wishes to save all human beings regardless of their specific religion and condition in the world. The early Church Fathers often had a universalistic outlook

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[3]*Ibid.*, 12-15.

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towards non-Christian religions and their members. In the second century, the Greek

apologist Justin Martyr (*c.* 100 - *c.* 165) claimed that

> We have been taught that Christ is the First-begotten of God, and have
> previously testified that he is the Reason of which every race of man
> partakes. Those who lived in accordance with Reason [*hoi meta logou
> biosantes*] are Christians, even though they were called godless, such as,
> among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and others like them; among
> the barbarians, Abraham, Ananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, and Elijah, and
> many others [Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 46].[4]

For Justin, the seed (*sperma*) of the universal reason (*logos*) is present in all races; anyone

who lived according to that reason can be called Christians and have some degree of

divine revelation. While under the preeminent direction of St. Augustine (354-430) the

orthodox church of the Latin West stressed the particularity of Jesus Christ, prior to that

age the Alexandrian church under the guidance of Clement (*c.* 150 - *c.* 215) and Origen

(*c.* 185 - *c.* 254)[5] tended to emphasize the universal scope and efficacy of God's love and

grace. Although Origenian universalism did not attract much attention from the

mainstream of the Christian church, it began to revive occasionally after the Protestant

Reformation and the Enlightenment era in the eighteenth century in particular. A

considerable number of Christian universalists have sporadically affirmed or reaffirmed

the possibility of salvation for the entire human race and the salvific value of non-

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[4]"The First Apology of Justin, the Martyr," *The Library of Christian Classics,
Vol. I: Early Christian Fathers*, newly trans. and ed. Cyril Richardson (Philadelphia: The
Westminster Press, 1953), 272.

[5]See *Origen: On First Principles*, Being Koetschau's Text of the *De Principiis*
Translated into English, Together with an Introduction and Notes by G. W. Butterworth
(New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), Books I. VI. 2-3; II. X. 6; III. V. 7; III. VI.
5.

Christian religions. For them, the basic theological principle is that through various socio-historical events and communities, God wishes to reach out to the widest range of human beings. In a sense, universal redemption or salvation is a natural result of God's desire for unqualified reconciliation with all human beings as well as of God's unlimited atonement through the blood of Jesus Christ. God's justice or righteousness must be understood as an expression of God's unlimited love and grace which should not be confined to any specific realm of religious community. In addition to the irreplaceable conviction about the normativity of Jesus Christ for knowing God, some Christians have thus affirmed that because of God's cosmic will of salvation the atonement of Jesus Christ is infinitely effective and operative.

One's affirmation of the particular does not necessarily lead to a denial of the universal. On the contrary, because of the particular we can envision and embody the universal. We must avoid subsuming the particularism under the false universalism that all religions are ultimately one or equal. An adequate Christian theology of religions must do full justice to the double axiom of the christocentric particularity and the theocentric universality based on the redemption of Jesus Christ. We should not abandon Christianity's particularistic claim to universality, while respecting the particularistic claims to universality advanced by other religions. Through this first thesis, in short, I emphasize that the particular without the universal is blind, while the universal without the particular is empty. We must hold together the following two maxims in the study of religions: "Those who know only their own religion, know none"; "Those who are not

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decisively committed to one faith, know no others."[6] The primary task of any adequate

Christian theology of religions is then to involve the elucidation of the problem of how

God can genuinely desire all human beings to take part in salvation and yet that salvation

is available through the norm of Jesus Christ.

Thesis 2: An adequate theology of religions for today must be formulated as an integrative project of systematic theology in collaboration with non-theological disciplines of religious studies as well as with all the Christian theological disciplines.

Since we already explicated the theologically interdisciplinary nature of a

theology of religions in the preceding chapters, I want to focus on the relationship

between "religious studies" and a "theology of religions." The elusive and complicated

problem of religious plurality can be fully clarified neither from a purely neutral

perspective of religious studies nor from an internal theological perspective. A theology

of religions cannot be properly formulated only on the basis of our knowledge of

Christianity but also needs to be informed by the comparative knowledge of other

religions. In this regard, the disciplines of religious studies may well provide a theologian

of religions with a number of invaluable data about other religions, without which his or

her theology may remain an a priori and abstract confession.

The subject-matter of "religious plurality" can be investigated by either religious

studies or theological studies. If Christian witness belongs to the larger category of

religion in general, religious studies may be concerned with investigating the validity of

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[6]These two maxims are cited from Heim's *Salvations*, 1. Heim does not mention the origin of these two maxims and I discovered that the dictum "Those who know only their own religion, know none" was originally from F. Max Müller's *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873), 16. Müller modifies Goethe's famous dictum "He who knows one language, knows none."

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Christian witness about religious plurality as its partial or contingent project. Therefore, there may be good reasons to consider a theology of religions as a particular instance of religious studies' generic inquiry about religious plurality. However, a theology of religions as a form of theological reflection on religious plurality is to be distinguished from other forms of critical reflection on religious plurality, such as conducted by religious studies, in its adopting Christian witness about religious plurality as its constitutive and overriding object. Although a constitutive question of a theology of religions may also be asked by religious studies, they can never ask it as their constitutive question. Thus, religious studies may have as one of its subsidiary and contingent aims to reflect critically Christian witness about religious plurality, while a theology of religions adopts it as its overarching and necessary aim.[7] Although a theology of religions is sharply distinguished from religious studies' concern with the object of religious plurality, their proximate aims may overlap considerably. Thus, both inquiries may raise a number of the same questions about the object of religious plurality and use many of the same methods to answer those questions. In approaching religious plurality, as argued in Chapter III, various inquiries or methods such as historical, philosophical, and social-scientific, may be employed. Despite this commonality, however, religious studies is concerned with the general or universal question about the meaning and truth of any and all particular religions, whereas a Christian theology of religions is concerned with critically reflecting on the object of religious plurality in the light of the particular religion

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[7]For this clarification, I am indebted to Charles M. Wood's "Christian Theology and Religious Studies: Some Notes for Discussion" (unpublished manuscript).

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of Christianity. Although religious studies may adopt a theology of religions as one part of its specialized inquiries, a Christian theology of religions does not belong to religious studies. As argued in the preceding chapters, a Christian theology of religions is a special project of systematic theology which is concerned with critically reflecting on the validity of the claims made or implied by Christian witness about religious plurality.

Given the similarities and differences between religious studies' approach to religious plurality and a theology of religions, I emphasize their common concern with "religion" and "religions." These common subject-matters cannot be fully elucidated by only a single discipline such as systematic theology. Moreover, they cannot be adequately explicated by employing the privileged truth-criteria which are acceptable to only internal members of a specific religious community. If a theology of religions begins with the fundamental assumption that Christianity is a religion along with other religions, it must be governed by the general criteria of truth which are available to outsiders as well as to insiders. Although a theology of religions must take into account the specific commitment to Jesus Christ and Christianity, it needs not to be governed by the internal Christian criteria of meaning and truth. Put differently, one can pursue an adequate Christian theology of the world religions without necessarily being a committed participant in the community of Christianity.

An adequate Christian theology of religions for today must be pursued in a multidisciplinary environment in the university where diverse methods of inquiry--such as historical, philosophical, social-scientific, and the like--are fully employed. A theology of religions needs to be an inquiry-encompassing inquiry within which a variety of intra-

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and extra-Christian inquiries and their specific methods are critically incorporated to clarify the complicated relationship between Christianity and other religions. If religions are not static but are dynamic and changing complexes, Christian theology alone cannot fully elucidate those elusive phenomena but must be informed of the disinterested and detached observation of religious studies. As mentioned already, we can now anticipate the emergence of the various sorts of a posteriori theologies of specific religions--such as a theology of Chinese Taoism, a theology of Japanese Buddhism, a theology of Korean Confucianism, etc.--in which various insights inherent in those specific religions can modify or transform Christian faith in illuminating and enriching ways. Especially, such a particular theology of religions must be informed of the results of the comparative investigation of the disciplines of religious studies. To formulate an adequate theology of religions for today, the major burden laid upon a theologian of religions is to appropriate critically various sorts of data produced by the scholars of religious studies.

Thesis 3: An adequate theology of religions for today must be based on an interreligious dialogue which seeks mutual understanding and mutual transformation and increases socio-political justice and ecologico-human well-being.

A theology of religions, as a critical reflection on the validity of Christian witness about religious plurality, is inseparably based on the concrete praxis of Christians who are surrounded by a number of non-Christians in their daily life. Without the primary practice of bearing Christian witness about religion and religions, there can be no secondary reflection on the validity of such witness, i.e., a theology of religions. To do an adequate theology of religions today, therefore, we need to give serious attention to the daily life of interreligious existence.

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Religious plurality is an inevitable part of the everyday life of contemporary

Christians. We can readily see many good Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, etc., as our next-

door neighbors. Since the foundation of Korea, for example, people of different faiths

have long been accustomed to living together in a family or in a workshop as co-workers.

When I was an elementary school student, I became the only Christian among my large

family. My father was a Confucian, my mother a Buddhist who regularly attended a

Buddhist temple near our house, while my brother and four sisters did not adhere to any

specific religion. When I became the first converted Christian in our family, my parents

for a considerable time objected to my attending the Sunday school of the small

Methodist church in our village because they naively thought that my conversion to

Christianity might cause a calamity upon me and my family. (Korean people often

believe the change of religion may bring a scourge upon the whole family as well as upon

the person concerned.) Since a sort of implicit religious pluralism was prevalent in my

family, however, I was able to continue to attend the church without any compulsory

restraint and to convert finally my parents and three siblings to Christianity. By my

theological retrospection, however, I can now say that even though they became

Christians, they still remained multi-religious persons: my father was a Christian who was

also partly a Confucian and a Buddhist; my mother was a Christian whose consciousness

was dominated by Buddhist precepts even after her conversion to Christianity; and my

brother and sisters were explicit Christians whose life-style was nevertheless

Confucianistic.

Let me take one more example about the vivid reality of religious plurality in

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Korea. If and when a Korean president passes away, the public funeral service for him or her must be performed by multi-religious rituals. Regardless of the late president's specific religion, the leaders of three representative religions in current Korean society--a Protestant minister, a Roman Catholic archbishop, and a Buddhist monk--commonly preside over each of their own specific funeral services. Even though the deceased president was a devout Methodist or Catholic, since the consciousness of religious pluralism is embedded in the minds of most Korean people as an unwritten rule, the government cannot allow for any unilateral funeral service for such a public and national figure. On the national funeral day, Christians sing hymns with prayers, Buddhists chant *sutras* with burning incense, while Confucians bow down before the body or portrait of the deceased president. The altar and offerings are often set up according to Shamanistic and Confucian traditions. As this typical fact shows, religious plurality is a natural way of life and of human relationships for all Korean people. Korean society can maintain public order and harmony because throughout its long history a sort of religious pluralism has prevailed implicitly or explicitly, thereby respecting the difference and integrity of other religious people.

A theology of religions does not arise out of a theological ivory tower, but from the concrete experience of interreligious encounters. Today, we hear about various situations in which the co-existence of many religions trigger political conflicts, segregation, hatred, war, and the like. We know that the reality of religious plurality can be the greatest and the most adamant obstacle to the peace and well-being of the world. This is why interreligious dialogue and socio-political cooperation are important sources

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and means for doing an adequate theology of religions for today. The shape and content of a theology of religions may well be determined according to the specific areas and natures of dialogue with other religions.

In the preceding chapters, we have emphasized again and again that a priori monologico-confessional theology of religions is not sufficient but must be supplemented by a posteriori dialogical encounters with other individual religions. Especially, a theology of particular religions must be based on the truth-seeking dialogue with the members of other individual religions concerned. I personally believe amicable interreligious dialogue is the best means for mutual understanding and mutual enrichment between religions. Only sincere interreligious dialogue can wipe out any a priori Christian consciousness of imperialism or superiority over other religions. In the spirit of mutual trust and respect, we can learn many valuable insights from others and purify or modify our own traditional belief and practice, and vice versa. Ethico-pragmatically, we can go hand in hand with other religious people for decreasing human and ecological sufferings based on gender, race, class, etc. Given the unprecedented amount of human and ecological suffering and injustice today, we can affirm the primacy of orthopraxis over orthodoxy through socio-political engagement in realizing justice and peace. In our common efforts to increase human and ecological well-being, we can retain our unique identity, while respecting the difference of other religions. In this practical cooperation, ordinary people's personal-existential dialogue in everyday life is more important than academic dialogue conducted by representative intellectuals of different religions because those lay people are at the front of resolving religious conflict. However, our common

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concern with ethico-pragmatic issues must be eventually extended to our scholarly conversation about doctrinal belief and truth. Interreligious dialogue should not be reduced to the level of socio-political collaboration among religions, which can overlook the importance of truth-claims as the heart of religions. Interreligious dialogue of our everyday life, of action for justice and peace, of intellectual exchange, and of spiritual experience must go together. Dialogue should be not only interreligious but also intrareligious. Through dialogical encounters with other religions, thus, Christianity must experience what H. Richard Niebuhr calls the "permanent revolution of *metanoia*"[8] concerning its imperialistic and self-boasting attitude towards other religions. Through reciprocal questioning and answering, we can see ourselves as others see us, thereby we can repent and correct our falsity, evil, and idolatry. Christianity cannot know itself truly until it critically sees itself through the eyes of other religions.

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[8]Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Theology, History, and Culture: Major Unpublished Writings*, ed. William Stacy Johnson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 30; 63.

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IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

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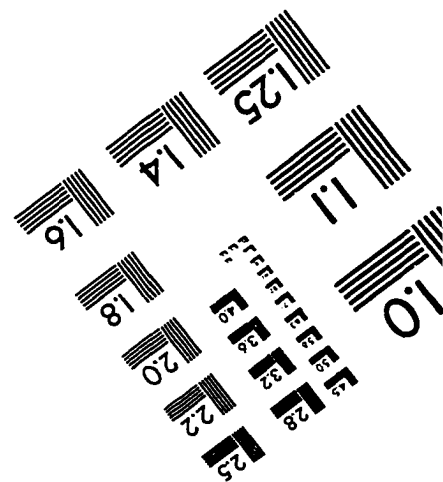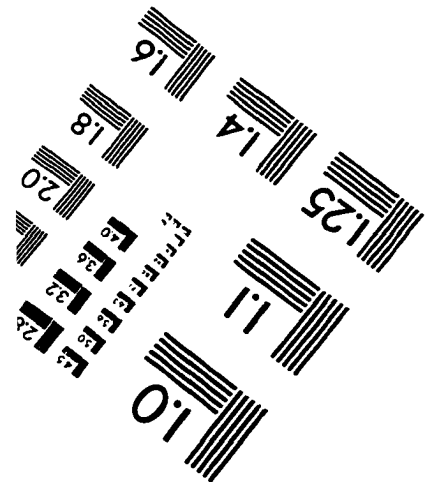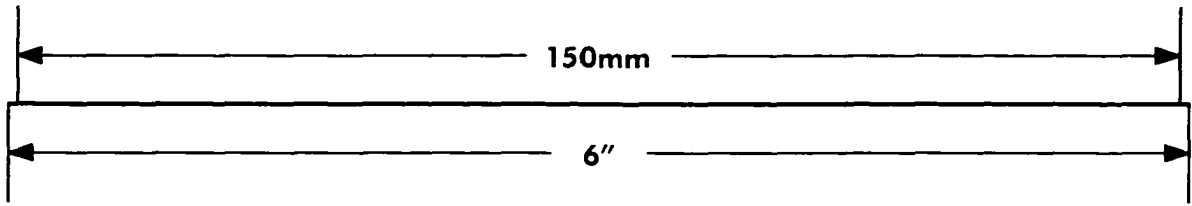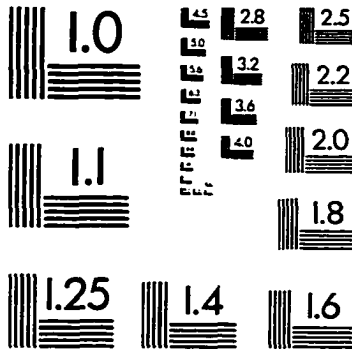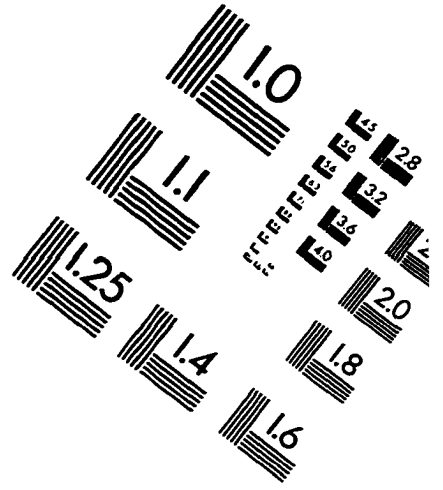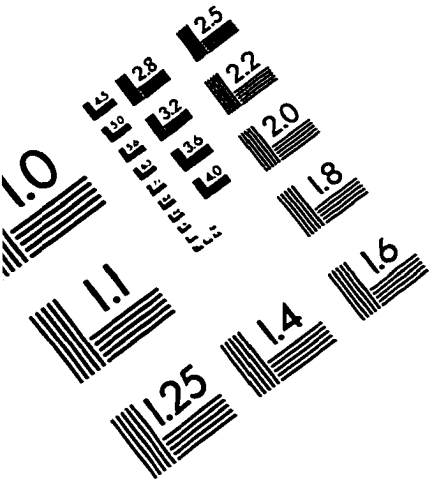
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