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The Insufficiency of S. Mark Heim's More Pluralistic Hypothesis

Michael D. Fegert

Pomona, California

Abstract

S. Mark Heim critiques religious pluralism on the grounds that pluralistic theologies of religions postulate a conception of salvation that is applicable to all religions. That is to say, religious pluralism is insufficiently pluralistic. In contrast, Heim proposes a more pluralistic hypothesis, which concludes in the postulation of multiple salvations. I critique Heim's historical frame, which is informed by postliberalism, on the grounds that it is essentialistic. This critique is applicable to his historical frame because he utilizes a cultural-linguistic theory of religion, which argues that religion is bound to its grammar, as rendered by its founding story. Heim's hypothesis is insufficiently historical because his theory of religion is essentialistic in nature and thus ahistorical.

Keywords

S. Mark Heim, religious pluralism, a more pluralistic hypothesis, postliberalism, insufficiently historical

Introduction

S. Mark Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis is a quintessential representative of post-pluralism in that it signifies a succession from (religious) pluralism and is influenced by postmodernism. With regard to the latter, postmodernism influences Heim's hypothesis, which results in an emphasis on the category of difference in his constructive proposal. His more pluralistic hypothesis is the

Corresponding author:

Michael D. Fegert, Pomona, California.

Email: michael.fegert@alumni.cgu.edu

postulation of multiple—different—salvations, corresponding to their respective religions.¹ In this article, I examine Heim's constructive proposal in terms of the historical frame he employs to advance his argument from religious means to religious ends, and I conclude that his historical frame is insufficiently historical.²

A More Pluralistic Hypothesis

In *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, Heim critiques the pluralistic theologies of John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Paul F. Knitter for being insufficiently pluralistic. These theologies are insufficiently pluralistic because they propose a conception of salvation that is a single point of reference in which the different religions unite. For Heim, this reveals a fundamental assumption of pluralistic theologies (or theologians): there can be one religious end shared by different religions. From this insight, Heim asks the critical question, "What would a truly pluralistic hypothesis look like, one that was interested in affirming—as religiously significant—a much more substantial portion of the various faith traditions?"³ According to Heim, the pluralistic theologies' (or theologians') inability to address this question is their principal failing. A superior theology of religions would consider the different religious traditions on their own terms rather than redefine them according to a predetermined criterion. It is in Heim's attempt to construct this superior theology of religions that he proposes his more pluralistic hypothesis as a corrective to religious pluralism. There are two parts to his hypothesis:

1. Following the explication of his more pluralistic hypothesis in *Salvations*, Heim develops a justification for his hypothesis from a Christian perspective. This justification is grounded in the principle of plenitude. S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Faith Meets Faith; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 163. He states, "Divine plenitude is a philosophical concept. For Christians its application is based on a more fundamental conviction regarding God's triune nature. The Trinity is a distinctively Christian template for diversity. Plenitude has to do with the provision of diverse possibilities for creation.... It takes on a particular complexion when rooted in the Trinity, deriving primarily from the freedom in relation of the three divine persons—a freedom in relation whose image is a watermark in creation.... Thus from a Christian perspective the plenitude of the universe and of human possibilities within it offer a reflection of its triune source" (166). In other words, the freedom inherent in the Trinity allows for diversity in its various forms, including religious diversity. For a more thorough treatment of this subject matter please see S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). Since my primary concerns are with Heim's constructive proposal (his "many salvations" thesis) and the historical frame he employs to advance his argument, and not with a Christian justification for his hypothesis, my focus is on *Salvations*, not *The Depth of the Riches*. By not including Heim's larger corpus, I understand that my treatment of his theology of religions is partial. However, given my concerns and the character of my critique, I think the narrow nature of this article is justified.
2. A historical frame denotes the place history plays in one's argument or, to be more specific, the use of history in the construction of a given theology.
3. Heim, *Salvations*, 130.

(1) a philosophical framework that justifies multiple positionality and religious diversity and (2) a historical frame, which grounds his hypothesis and affords him the postulation of multiple salvations.

Since my evaluation is a critique of the latter part of the more pluralistic hypothesis, I will grant Heim his proposal and employment of Nicholas Rescher's orientational pluralism and turn my attention to his historical frame. In the first part of his hypothesis, a philosophical framework for viewing the various religions, which, on the one hand, recognizes its own positionality, and on the other, retains its ability to make normative judgments, while recognizing those of others, is established.⁴ For Heim, the natural follow-up question to this philosophical framework, which results in a justification for a phenomenological religious pluralism, is "What theories or theologies of religion will allow for the maximum truth value in the specifics of the traditions and will most significantly ground the importance of concrete knowledge of them?"⁵ In essence, this is to ask, what theology of religions will allow the different religions to remain different—according to their dissimilar claims? Heim addresses this question by emphasizing "the fulfillment of various religious ends."⁶ The argument informing this conclusion is as follows: a means is constitutive of its end; if there are multiple means, there are multiple ends; a religious tradition is a means to a religious end; since there are multiple religious means, there are multiple religious ends, ergo multiple salvations. An assumption of this conclusion is that religions, in actuality, are different, and thus different religious ends may very well be available for their respective adherents.⁷

An analogy can help distinguish Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis from religious pluralism. A pluralist's conception of salvation is like a mountain that has many paths leading to the top. The top of the mountain denotes salvation, and the paths symbolize the different religions. The paths, being fundamentally different, lead to the top of the same mountain. Likewise, although the various religions are different, they direct and guide their followers in the same direction—toward salvation. In contrast, Heim's conception of salvation is like a mountain range; each mountain in the range has its own path leading to its own top. A given path represents a given religion, and a given top represents a given religious end. There is only one way to the top of a given mountain. If one wants to ascend to a particular end, he or she must take the path that corresponds to that end. Likewise, if one wants Christian salvation, he or she will be a Christian; if one

4. *Ibid.*, 144.

5. *Ibid.*, 145.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, 46. "It is important to point out that, for Heim, a plurality of religious ends does not automatically commit one to the view that these ends are all salvific, in the sense of being goals that are worth pursuing. Heim contends that one can justifiably think that some religious ends are forms of damnation." Richard Amesbury, email to author, March 3, 2010.

wants to attain Nirvana, he or she will be a Hindu or a Buddhist (depending on one's conception of Nirvana), and so on.⁸

There are two features of this hypothesis that Heim thinks add to its viability. First, the hypothesis points in the direction of the religious traditions and their respective versions of salvation.⁹ At variance with pluralistic theologies, this hypothesis does not redefine the different religions to make them fit into one soteriology but treats them as distinct phenomena. Second, the postulation of multiple salvations fits into a historical frame that emphasizes the historical aspects of religions.¹⁰ Heim states, "Religious ends are constituted by the meanings that the faiths bring to them."¹¹ His argument follows a means–ends sequence; means are historical happenings of a religion, which lead to religious ends. Of course, as a history of religions analysis shows, religious ends take many forms, depending on the religion informing the end. Some ends are wholly historical (e.g. actualized ethics), while others are historical and ahistorical (depending on what form of religion to which one adheres), and others are completely ahistorical (depending on how one defines salvation). From these two points, one can see how Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis coheres with his historical frame, since there is a necessary correlation between historicized (religious) means and their corresponding ends.

Postliberalism

Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis is influenced by postliberal theology, as argued by George Lindbeck in his book *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. By incorporating a postmodern point of view in the construction of the theology, postliberalism is informed by a particular theory of religion that attempts to account for the phenomenology of Christianity at this current point in history. Postmodernism, as described by Knitter, is a reaction to four Enlightenment tenets. Of particular interest to Lindbeck is the by-product of the fourth, "the quest for universal truths," which denotes positionality.¹²

The theory of positionality claims that individuals are positioned in specific historical locations, which are informed by their experiences. Since individuals are historically located, they cannot transcend their locations to see and evaluate

8. There is a problem with the logic of Heim's argument. "A person could not know about Christian salvation or Nirvana unless he or she had already learned a certain amount about Christianity or Hinduism and Buddhism. It also is reductionist to say that a person simply becomes Christian, Hindu or Buddhist because he or she wants to go to Heaven or attain Nirvana—there are other motivations for adhering to a religion." Tara Prescott, email to author, October 25, 2009.

9. Heim, *Salvations*, 147.

10. *Ibid.*, 149.

11. *Ibid.*, 151.

12. Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 175.

other locations without bias.¹³ This is not to say that individuals' locations cannot change, for they can change their positions through changes of mind (and situation). It is to say, however, that individuals necessarily have positions—no one is un-positioned. Since individuals are positioned, as informed by their experiences, and they have different experiences, they are positioned in different locations. Since individuals are positioned in different locations, there is a “dominance of diversity.”¹⁴ The dominance of diversity applies to a variety of things, but it is particularly applicable to a discussion on truth, for a singularity of truth does not exist, as postmodernists claim; truths do. Truth is plural because individuals are positioned, and knowledge is filtered through their positions. Since there is a plurality of positions, there is a plurality of filters. Applying this theoretic to religious truth justifies religious diversity.¹⁵ Since the plurality of social and cultural environments informs a plurality of religions that inform devotees' experiences, the differences between religions are quite pronounced. These differences make religions “incommensurable” in that they do not share commonalities so that comparison is impossible.¹⁶

Postliberalism is a type of theology, and as such it is a way of thinking about “religion and religious doctrine.”¹⁷ In *The Nature of Doctrine*, Lindbeck discusses three theories of religion, all of which inform different theologies. The first approach to religion he identifies as the “cognitivist” interpretation of religion; this interpretation views doctrine(s) as true propositions about objective reality in that there is a direct correlation between what doctrines proclaim and what is declared by God.¹⁸ This approach is usually used by conservative religionists. The second approach focuses on what Lindbeck terms the “experiential-expressive” theory of religion; this approach views doctrine(s) as symbolic given that they are representations of common religious feelings and attitudes.¹⁹ This interpretation is usually utilized by those adhering to liberal theologies. Both of these interpretations are problematic because they cannot account for doctrinal change, which is evident throughout the history of Christianity.²⁰ To address this issue, Lindbeck proposes a third approach, “cultural-linguistic” interpretation, which attempts to unite the emphases of the previous two since the propositional and symbolic characteristics of doctrine are seen as both important and legitimate.²¹ Since this approach is an effort to move beyond liberal theology, as informed by the experiential-expressive theory of religion, it is post-liberal, ergo postliberalism.

13. Ibid., 173.

14. Ibid., 175.

15. Ibid., 173.

16. Ibid., 176, 181.

17. George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1984), 7.

18. Ibid., 16.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 16–17.

21. Ibid., 16.

It is common in non-theological discourse to emphasize those aspects of religion that are analogous to language and that have an association with culture.²² The theory of religion that is informed by this trend, and proposed by Lindbeck, is the cultural-linguistic approach. The function of doctrine from this perspective is not propositional or symbolic but regulative in that doctrines are viewed as rules that are authoritative for their given religious communities.²³ Unlike propositions and symbols, rules remain constant throughout the developmental process of religious history, thus addressing the above-mentioned issue. For example, the rule “love your neighbor” has not changed because it has been informed by a religious tradition. However, the definitions of the words that constitute the rule have changed, since the definitions are particular to the culture that informs them at a given time. To be more specific, a neighbor in first-century Palestine is not necessarily a neighbor in twenty-first century United States. The correlation between religion and language shows the particularistic nature of religion, as opposed to any sense of universalism. This eliminates the postulation of an ahistorical common essence to religion, and thus is in stark contrast to the cognitivist and experiential-expressive theories of religion.²⁴

The cultural-linguistic perspective contends that religion is like a cultural or linguistic framework in which life attains meaning. Since this is the case, it is an oversimplification to say that religion produces experience; it is more accurate to say that a religious framework shapes experience, and one’s experience defines who he or she is.²⁵ Since there are different religions, there are different frameworks, and since there are different frameworks, there are different experiences (or similar experiences that are instilled with different meanings). In the face of such diversity, it is improbable, according to Lindbeck, that religions are different representations of the same experience, as argued by the experiential-expressive approach.²⁶

It is generally not the job of a theory of religion to argue for the primacy of one religion over others. However, for Lindbeck, if a theory of religion is to be useful to religious devotees, then it should at least allow for the possibility of primacy.²⁷ Depending on what theory one adheres to, he or she will compare religions, and determine primacy, in terms of “propositional truth,” “symbolic efficacy,” or “categorical adequacy.”²⁸ The cognitivist approach uses the first point of analysis, whereas the experiential-expressive approach uses the second. Since both of these approaches are determined problematic by Lindbeck, attention will be given to the third. From a cultural-linguistic point of view, religions are conceived of as

22. *Ibid.*, 17–18.

23. *Ibid.*, 18.

24. *Ibid.*, 23.

25. *Ibid.*, 33–34.

26. *Ibid.*, 40.

27. *Ibid.*, 47.

28. *Ibid.*

different ways of understanding reality, and as such, when it comes to thinking about religious truth in general, devotees develop categories for analyzing truth claims.²⁹ In order to establish primacy, focus is placed on the ability of these categories to accomplish their intended purpose. Lindbeck writes, “Adequate categories are those which can be made to apply to what is taken to be real, and which therefore make possible, though they do not guarantee, propositional, practical, and symbolic truth.”³⁰ A religion that adequately develops these categories is “categorically true.”³¹ A categorically true religion makes possible propositional truth (and falsehood). Since different religions have the ability to develop these categories, it is possible that different religions are categorically true. In this sense, primacy pertains to adequacy, rather than superiority; religions that are categorically true are truer than those that are not.

An attempt at comparison to determine primacy shows that religions are incommensurable. The language or culture of a particular religion does not compare to other religious languages and cultures. Unlike the cognitivist approach with its emphasis on propositional truth, and the experiential-expressive approach with its emphasis on experience, the cultural-linguistic perspective does not offer a collective framework with which to compare the different religions. There is no common point of analysis.

Sheila Greeve Davaney offers an insightful summary and examination of Lindbeck’s historical frame, which I think damages his argument. For Lindbeck, religions are interpretative frames.³² Because of religion’s cultural and linguistic nature, these frames are historical. Therefore, a person’s religiosity is contingent upon his or her participation in a given religion’s foundational story, not a belief in an ahistorical revelation, as cognitivists claim, or an unmediated experience of the divine, as experiential-expressivists claim. A person participates in a foundational story by becoming a practitioner of a religious tradition’s way of life.

Lindbeck argues that the grammar of a religion is composed of unchanging rules, which result in an essential core that does not vary over time, despite historical development.³³ Davaney writes,

Lindbeck proceeds to offer a view of grammar as those rules of a tradition located in its founding narratives. These provide the norms for the correct use of a worldview’s language, symbols, stories, and values. When applied to Christianity he concludes that

29. Ibid., 48.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Sheila Greeve Davaney, “Mapping Theologies: An Historicist Guide to Contemporary Theology,” in *Changing Conversations: Religious Reflection and Cultural Analysis*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Sheila Greeve Davaney (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 29.

33. Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 140.

the grammar of faith is to be found in what he terms “the self-identical story” found in the Bible.³⁴

Religious traditions change throughout history, but there is an aspect of each religion, at the center of its history, that does not change. Since a given religion’s foundational story has an essential core, the story is normative in relation to subsequent theological claims and religious praxis. For example, to be a Christian, one must use Christianity’s language correctly, and adhere to its practices in such a way that one is faithful to the rules as established in their initial formulation. As a result of this historical frame, theology or theological construction has to conform to Christianity’s grammar in order to be Christian.

According to Davaney, the account of historicism put forward by postliberalism (i.e. its historical frame) is inadequate since it is insufficiently historicist.³⁵ Lindbeck’s historical frame is insufficiently historicist because its version of historical development is too narrow. At this point, it is helpful to define historicism. In *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, Andre Lalande writes that historicism is “the view that the history of anything is a sufficient explanation of it, that the values of anything can be accounted for through the discovery of its origins, that the nature of anything is entirely comprehended in its development.”³⁶ Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck identify this definition as a general philosophical one that can be applied across the board to various disciplines.³⁷ Elsewhere, Friedrich Ingel-Janosi states, “That attitude which was centered around history, which saw most of the spheres of intellectual life as permeated by history, which make history the *magistra*, if not of active life, at least, to a great extent, of theoretical life, will be understood here under the term ‘historicism.’”³⁸ This definition has a different emphasis. Whereas the first definition describes historiography, the second identifies historicism as a worldview. Both definitions assert, however, that historicism is concerned with historical assessment and that “historical knowledge” is significant to humans.³⁹

Given both the methodological and the ideological aspects of historicism, Davaney’s aforementioned critique is supported by four points. First, postliberalism correctly identifies the traditioned nature of human existence but fails to recognize that humans are multi-traditioned in that they are proprietors of more than

34. Ibid., 139.

35. Davaney, “Mapping Theologies,” 30.

36. Andre Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie* (Paris, 1951), 416; trans. and quoted in Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck, “The Meaning of ‘Historicism,’” *The American Historical Review* 59.3 (1954): 568.

37. Lee and Beck, “The Meaning of ‘Historicism,’” 568.

38. Friedrich Ingel-Janosi, *The Growth of German Historicism* (Johns Hopkins University Studies in History and Political Science, 62.2; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1944), 13; quoted in Lee and Beck, “The Meaning of ‘Historicism,’” 569 (emphasis Lee and Beck’s).

39. Lee and Beck, “The Meaning of ‘Historicism,’” 569.

one strand of history. Second, given the first point, postliberalism seems to take an isolationist approach to other religious traditions. Lindbeck describes how the past relates to the present, and conversely, how the present relates to the past, but he cannot account for correlations among contemporary positions.⁴⁰ Third, there is a fixed, essential core at the center of postliberalism's proposal, which contradicts Lindbeck's claim of historical consciousness. This is particularly damaging if consistency is a gauge for viability. Fourth, due to the nature of the theological position, postliberals fail to critically engage political, economic, social, and cultural agendas of religious beliefs and practices and their repercussions. They are more concerned with how present beliefs and practices correspond with previous ones than with how present beliefs and practices are entrenched in historical actualities. Postliberals uncritically give the past authority by affording the founding story its position in the tradition. In Davaney's assessment, postliberalism offers a truncated historicism given that it draws one's attention to the past, but does so in a fashion that makes one's relationship to the past dependent on an ahistorical essence.⁴¹ The product of this is a stagnant view of tradition, which is unable to account fully for the historical development of religious traditions. For these reasons, in agreement with Davaney, I conclude that postliberalism is insufficiently historicist.

Insufficiently Historical

Heim's primary critique of religious pluralism is that it is insufficiently pluralistic. My critique of Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis is analogous to his critique of religious pluralism in that I contend that his historical frame is insufficiently historical. Although Heim claims that his more pluralistic hypothesis is grounded in, and therefore finds a justification through, Rescher's orientational pluralism, I think his proposal is also influenced by Lindbeck and postliberalism. It is Heim's utilization of the postliberal historical frame that allows me to critique his proposal. He is correct in claiming that orientational pluralism affords him a philosophical framework to warrant multiple positions, which he uses to justify a phenomenological religious pluralism. However, a justification of multiple positions does not merit a postulation of multiple ends. As Anselm Min writes, "Orientational pluralism reduces the issue of pluralism to the theoretical and intellectual question of the pluralism of perspectives and truth, and remains indifferent to the problem of the social, practical context and consequences."⁴² That is to say, although orientational pluralism justifies multiple positions, it is silent with regard to actualized history, or to be more specific, Heim's historical frame, which includes the causal argument that multiple religious means lead to multiple religious ends. The disconnect between orientational pluralism and the postulation of

40. Davaney, "Mapping Theologies," 31.

41. *Ibid.*, 32.

42. Anselm Kyongsuk Min, "Dialectical Pluralism and Solidarity of Others: Towards a New Paradigm," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65.3 (1997): 601.

multiple salvations prompts the question, what historicizes Heim's causal argument and allows him to propose his more pluralistic hypothesis? I suggest that he employs Lindbeck's historical frame to warrant his proposal.

Knitter alludes to Lindbeck's influence on Heim. In *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Knitter categorizes both Lindbeck and Heim's theology of religions as representations of the acceptance model. These two theologies are depictions of the acceptance model in that they "accept" religions on their own terms rather than redefine them according to a predetermined criterion. In addition, these theologies share an important commonality given that a central pillar of their respective positions is religious diversity—religions are wholly different.⁴³ Since religions are different, they are incommensurable.⁴⁴ In focusing on this commonality between postliberalism and the "many salvations" thesis, Heim's causal argument is, according to Knitter, a further development of the cultural-linguistic theory of religion informing postliberalism, since Heim's conclusion is resultant of a phenomenological religious pluralism.⁴⁵ Elsewhere, in *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*, Knitter explicitly identifies postliberalism as an influence on Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis.⁴⁶ Although Knitter draws one's attention to this relationship, he does not offer clear evidence of the fact.

Nowhere within Heim's corpus does he explicitly state that his more pluralistic hypothesis is influenced by Lindbeck's historical frame or postliberalism's theological posture. Thus, I cannot proof-text my critique using Heim's words. In *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Heim does discuss Lindbeck, but the discussion is in relation to Lindbeck's analysis of early Christians' treatment of the religious other, not Lindbeck's view of history and his use of the Christian narrative.⁴⁷ For insight into Heim's general theological position, one should look at a response he writes to counter James M. Gustafson's critique of postliberalism in *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt*. In this response, Heim's states, "postliberals are attacked by Gustafson because their approach is an expedient conformity to postmodern fads they have caught from other disciplines."⁴⁸ Elsewhere, he writes, "'Scriptural reasoning' or 'thinking through a tradition' may in his [i.e. Gustafson's] view be trendy excuses for insularity—telling our own story to ourselves and ignoring other voices."⁴⁹ Heim argues against Gustafson's critique by claiming that postliberals employ a

43. Knitter, *Introducing*, 175.

44. *Ibid.*, 176.

45. *Ibid.*, 177.

46. Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 197 (n. 6).

47. Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 271.

48. S. Mark Heim, "Doubting Theology: A Faith Worthy of Doubt," *The Christian Century* 121.13 (2004): 31.

49. *Ibid.*

theological method that is both multidisciplinary and centered on the Christian tradition. For the purpose of my argument, I am not so much concerned with Heim's counter to Gustafson, but I do want to highlight Heim's locating himself within postliberalism. With Heim's self-positioning, I think I have justification for contending that there is a correlation between Heim's theology of religions and Lindbeck's program.

Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis is influenced by Lindbeck's historical frame (with its cultural-linguistic theory of religion), given that Heim's causal argument is grounded in a conception of religion that presupposes an essentialist definition. Although Heim does not argue for an essentialist definition of religion as such (since he does not maintain that all religions share an ahistorical or metaphysical component as the experiential-expressive theory of religion asserts), his causal argument does find its impetus in the contention that each religion possesses an element that remains constant throughout its history and asserts that the element is constitutive in defining what the religion is. What each religion is necessarily informs what its end is; an end is structurally bound to its respective religion. Since there are multiple religions, there are multiple religious ends; therefore, Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis.

For Heim, the picture one receives of Christianity, as portrayed in the New Testament (particularly the story of the resurrection), supplies the lens for Christians to view reality.⁵⁰ The grammar of Christianity (i.e. its unchanging rules) extrapolated from the New Testament narrative is its essential core. For the sake of his hypothesis, he expands upon this thesis and argues that other religions, through their foundational stories, provide their own lenses to view reality. Other religions' grammars procured from their foundational stories are their essential cores. Heim writes, "The God in whom [Christians] believe is not quite the same as that of the Jew or Muslim, since our God's character is fundamentally defined by a different standard."⁵¹ He asserts that religions are different because they are "defined by a different standard." What is this standard? To address this question, another must be asked: what determines what a religion is? A religion is, according to Lindbeck, what its grammar says it is given that a religion's grammar sets parameters around and informs the paradigm by which it is defined.⁵² Religions are fundamentally different because the standards that define them are themselves (i.e. what they are). In following Heim's causal argument, a religion (i.e. what it is) is constitutive of its end. From this explanation, one can see why Knitter thinks Heim is influenced by postliberalism: Heim's causal argument is informed by something similar to a cultural-linguistic theory of religion.

50. Yong Huang, "Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue: Beyond Universalism and Particularism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 37.3 (1995): 131.

51. S. Mark Heim, *Is Christ the Only Way? Christian Faith in a Pluralistic World* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1985), 143.

52. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 80–81.

The cultural-linguistic theory of religion argued for by Lindbeck and employed by Heim proposes a fixed conception of religion. In order for Heim to argue that religious ends are a direct result of their respective means, he must contend that there are essential characteristics of religious means that define what they are and automatically transfer to their ends, thereby making the ends a necessary result of the means. Heim uses Lindbeck's historical frame to inform his characterization of religion, which affords him a fixed definition of religion (i.e. a historical phenomenon that necessarily partakes in historical development) and allows him to conclude that there are multiple salvations. For example, since different religions have different foundational stories, these stories relay different grammars—or rules. A given religion's rules are constant despite historical development. To be more specific, a vital component of Christianity's narrative is the resurrection of Jesus (no other religion shares this in the same sense). This component imparts the rule that belief in Jesus is necessary for salvation. Since no other religion shares this component, no other religion requires belief in Jesus (in the way Christianity does) for salvation. According to Heim's many salvations thesis, given that the resurrection conveys an essential rule in Christianity, one must follow the rule to acquire Christian salvation. Likewise, one must follow the rules of other religions if one wants to obtain the other religions' salvations.

In *Salvations*, a comparison that Heim makes between himself and Michael LaFargue supports my critique. Heim compares his more pluralistic hypothesis with LaFargue's critically pluralistic theory of religion. In agreement with Heim, LaFargue tenders an argument for multiple religious ends; but at variance with Heim, LaFargue constructs a thoroughly historical, historical frame, which means that LaFargue's account of religious phenomena is, in Heim's opinion, experiential.⁵³ In this experientialist view of religion, religious faith is essentially the experience of some good.⁵⁴ Religions are different systems built around distinct experiences of some good. The category "some good" is analogous to what Rescher means by orientation in that it justifies differential systems.⁵⁵ Religious

53. Heim, *Salvations*, 149.

54. *Ibid.*, 150.

55. *Ibid.* Heim's comparison of LaFargue's "some good" and Rescher's orientational pluralism is problematic in that LaFargue's "some good" is more than a justification for religious pluralism (phenomenologically speaking); it also has ethical implications, as the category indicates. LaFargue states, "'Religion' is a broad term, which can refer to concrete social groups and institutions, as well as to an *ideal* set of beliefs, experiences, attitudes, and practices. It is religion in the latter aspect that I intend here as an object of critical inquiry. In this respect I take as a central given a certain 'range of application' claimed for religious beliefs—namely their claim to describe what ought to be of overriding importance in human life. The question is then: What kinds of reality-constraints ought to govern our beliefs in this area? In the present view, the categoreal region involved here is included in the more general region of *phainomena*. Categories depicting ideals, obligations, importance, deserving, etc., are a subset of the set of possible categories describing the contents of reality-as-experienced. I will call the sub-region to which this kind of reality belongs the region of 'the good.' . . . I will use 'the good' here as a most abstract logical category of categories, to refer to whatever deserves our respect or our service for what it is in

ends are composed of meanings that religions bring to them. Since there are different religions, because there are different conceptions of the good, there are different (multiple) religious ends. In contrast to this wholly historical scheme, Heim argues that religious ends are more than cultural constructs since they are constituted by their religious means.⁵⁶

There are two points from this description that need to be highlighted, both of which bolster my critique of Heim. First, Heim juxtaposes his more pluralistic hypothesis with a historicized theory of religion and contends that his hypothesis is different than LaFargue's theory of religion given that religious ends, for Heim, are more than cultural (historical) constructs. Through this comparison, Heim reveals the ahistorical nature of his proposal—at least in terms of how he views his proposal. Second, a substantial difference between Heim's hypothesis and LaFargue's theory of religion is that religious ends, for Heim, are a direct result of their religious means, and thus are not cultural constructs; whereas, for LaFargue, religious ends are experiential, which means they are purely historical. This is problematic in that Heim's causal argument positions religion in history, which is necessary because religions are historical phenomena, and yet he argues for essentiality by contending that there is an aspect in each religion that is ahistorical given that there is a direct transference from means to ends. This shows that Heim's conception of history is too narrow, which parallels Davaney's critique of Lindbeck. Insofar as Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis is influenced by Lindbeck's historical frame, as I have argued, Davaney's critique of Lindbeck is applicable to Heim.

At this point, it is advantageous to illustrate what a non-essentialist view of salvation might be, which is to address the question, what would Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis look like if it was sufficiently historical? An appropriate answer to this question is primarily concerned with location. With respect to geographical location, it is possible, if not probable, that an affluent American man conceptualizes salvation differently than an underprivileged Haitian woman. Even if both individuals share the same religion so that they are both influenced by the same text and tradition, they have different contexts. Since theology is contextual, and soteriology is a theological matter, one's understanding of salvation is contextual by nature. For an American man, Christian salvation might correspond to a depiction as presented in John's Revelation, whereas for a Haitian woman, salvation might be enough food for her and her family for the night. This example shows the pluralistic nature of Christian salvation when fully historicized. Salvation is even more fragmented when the preview is expanded and applied to the different conceptions of salvation throughout the various religions.

Regarding historical location, a twenty-first century European Protestant's conception of salvation is different than a fourteenth-century European peasant's.

itself." "Radically Pluralist, Thoroughly Critical: A New Theory of Religions," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60.4 (1992): 702 (emphasis LaFargue's).

56. Ibid., 151.

Although they may share text and tradition (though the religious tradition has been expanded for the former), their context is different. For a modern European, salvation might take the form of a synthesis between religious tradition and secularism, which indicates liberation from mythological restrictions, whereas for a European peasant, salvation might be death, which indicates deliverance from bodily suffering. As these descriptions indicate, a truly historicized conception of salvation is even more pluralistic than Heim's more pluralistic hypothesis allows. That is to say, Heim's theology of religions, if it was sufficiently historical, would be even more multifarious than his many salvations thesis.

Conclusion

In this article I mention Heim's critique of religious pluralism and present his argument for a more pluralistic hypothesis. Heim critiques Hick, W.C. Smith, and Knitter's pluralistic theologies on the grounds that they are insufficiently pluralistic. These theologies are insufficiently pluralistic because they postulate a unitary conception of salvation that applies to various religions. I agree with Heim's critique of these pluralistic theologies but am critical of his more pluralistic hypothesis. Heim's hypothesis consists of two parts. In the first part, he employs a philosophical framework (i.e. orientational pluralism) to argue for multiple positionality and religious diversity. The second part is his historical frame, which informs his causal argument and affords him the postulation of multiple salvations. I agree with Heim's utilization of orientational pluralism but am critical of his historical frame for its essentialistic subtext. His constructive proposal (i.e. his postulation of multiple salvations) is insufficiently historical given that his hypothesis is a product of his historical frame.

Author biography

Michael D. Fegert is an independent researcher who recently graduated from Claremont Graduate University with a Ph.D. in religion. He is currently teaching English at a high school in Pomona, California.