

established in Britain. *Sangha*—the community of those who practise the way of the Buddha—is often used to refer to the members of the ordained *Sangha*, but more accurately it includes those who practise in ordinary life as well. The Christian concept of the Church is thus similar. Lay members of the *Sangha* ‘take refuge’ in Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*, and are guided by five moral precepts.

- 3 *Dhamma* is the ultimate truth, the way things are, that which the Buddha realized and sought to teach through words and action but which goes beyond words and action.
- 4 Higher ordination: *bhikkhus* (monks), literally those who live on alms, and *dasasilavanti* (nuns), literally those living by the Ten Precepts, follow the detailed guidance of the *Vinaya*, the Discipline. The men wear a yellow robe, the women a brown robe. They are considered junior for their first five years after ordination.
- 5 *Anagarikas*: literally, a homeless one. A white-robed man or woman who takes eight of the Ten Precepts, but remains free to cook, drive, buy and sell (and own property), and so can help the ordained. They are expected to give themselves at least a year living under the Precepts, and before proceeding to higher ordination should complete two years.

Christianity and Other Religions: Is Inclusivism Enough?

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In the search for a theological response to the world’s multi-religious environment, Christian theologians and ecclesiastical reports are increasingly embracing the position known as inclusivism.¹ Both growing friendships with members of other religious communities, revealing to us the depth of religious enlightenment and transformation taking place in other religious contexts, and a firmer intellectual awareness of the historical nature of all religious belief, have initiated a shift away from the Protestant neo-orthodox stress on the discontinuity between Christianity and the other world religions and the Catholic pre-Vatican II platform that ‘outside the Church [there is] no salvation’. At root, inclusivism attempts to combine the traditional hold on the uniqueness of Christ, though often expressed less stridently in the term ‘decisiveness’, with the equally valid assertion that God must be at work for salvation in the non-Christian religions. In fact there are, broadly speaking, two versions of inclusivism, which I shall call inclusivism from above and inclusivism from below, after the familiar distinction in Christology. The term ‘decisive’ is used in both forms of the theory, and carries with it a subtle nuance in each case.

But the question facing inclusivists is whether their reformulated theories have accepted the full implications of the two factors of growing friendships and the awareness of historical conditioning attached to all belief. In order to illustrate why I do not think

inclusivism is enough in the Christian response to other religions, I shall examine the ambiguity of inclusivism from the writings of Hans Küng.² In fact, Küng changed his mind, thus providing us with a window onto the theological and other factors involved in the whole debate. *En route* I shall offer some critical observations on a recent vigorous defence of Karl Rahner's theory of 'anonymous Christianity' by Gavin D'Costa.³ Finally, I shall say why pluralism or theocentrism, as an option in the spectrum of theories now available, ought to be viewed in a more favourable light. Throughout, Christology will obviously occupy much of the limelight.

In 1964, Küng closely echoed Rahner's anonymous Christianity. The traditional model of preparation-fulfilment, already familiar to Christians in their designation of Jesus as the Christ-completion of Jewish hopes, was also applied to the other world religions. These religious cultures were 'pre-Christian, directed towards Christ'.⁴ The theory was essentially an extension of an old view. So Justin Martyr, speaking of the universal activity of the *logos* in creation, could write that 'those who do the good which is enjoined on us have a share in God'.⁵ All that remained for Rahner, and Küng, to add was the modern awareness of humanity's rootedness in history and the realization that a person's access to the divine must necessarily take a particular socially-conditioned form, and anonymous Christianity (in my terminology, inclusivism from above) could take shape. The awareness about history explained why religions as such could be accepted as vehicles of a saving encounter with God. But inclusivism did not mean that all religions were equally valid. The qualification 'from above' relates to the axiom that Christ is the author of salvation for both Christians and others. Thus the incarnation, as the *sine qua non* of the saving presence of God in all religious traditions, functions to link, inclusively, Christianity with the other traditions. What is experienced openly in Christianity is known hiddenly in the non-Christian traditions. Christianity, as Küng said, was the extraordinary way of salvation, and the other religions represented ordinary ways of salvation.

Anonymous Christianity has been criticized on many grounds, chief among them being the sense of Christian patronizing it suggests. By the time Küng wrote *On Being a Christian* eleven years later, he expressed his objection to it forcefully: 'This is a pseudo-solution which offers slight consolation. Is it possible to cure a society suffering from a decline in membership by declaring that even non-members are "hidden members"?'⁶ It seems that what was designed to overcome the arbitrary nature of exclusive absolutism in an age of inter-faith encounter, serves only to highlight the problem rather than solve it. So Küng turned to develop what I have termed inclusivism from below. Could other religious truth, he asked, 'be brought into its full realization in Christianity: without a false, antithetic exclusiveness, but with a creative rethinking, resulting in a new, inclusive and simultaneously critical synthesis'?⁷ The main components of Küng's

new 'critical synthesis' included: (1) mutual respect for, and questioning of, one another's religious truths, based on the principle of dialogue; (2) the common quest for new perceptions of religious truth; and (3) Christianity acting as a 'critical catalyst', whereby the other religions appropriate fully the salvation which is at work through them. The term 'inclusivism from below' is intended to monitor the shift towards dialogue as the basis for a 'new inclusive and simultaneously critical synthesis'.

Is this change in Küng's mind sufficient to solve the dilemmas at the heart of the older view? I believe there is an unresolved tension even with this new version of inclusivism. What Küng gives with (1) and (2) he takes back with (3). The stress on mutual respect and a common quest for greater truth takes more account of the two factors of spiritual knowledge through friendships and the historical conditioning of belief, but it is not compatible with the assumption (still) of Christian superiority.

The clue to why this is so lies in Küng's Christology. Christ, he says, is 'ultimately decisive, definitive, archetypal for man's relations with God . . .'.⁸ By 'decisive' here he means not unsurpassably unique, but acting as normative, the measure against which other religious revealers require to be tested. 'Normativeness' is a concept which fits in better with an historical age, as it seems to avoid conflict with *a priori* notions of religious truth. So Jesus, in this view, represents the clearest expression of God's love for the world, a love which is everywhere operative, yet not dependent on the *sine qua non* of the incarnation to be real and effective. The superiority of the Christian way is retained, but in the form of its being normatively decisive. But even this form of normative decisiveness in Christology remains problematic in an historically conscious age. For according to the historical method, the sense in which Christ can be said to be normatively decisive can only be established after a lengthy period of dialogue and mutual critical questioning. Küng saw this, and switched to dialogue as the means for establishing a new inclusivism. But he failed to follow through its implications in Christology when he assumed the superiority of Christ *a priori*.

Küng's change of mind provides us with clues to the factors which are pressing for change in the Christian theological appreciation of the other world religions. In particular, I have spoken of the knowledge which stems from friendships⁹ and the realization of the historical conditioning of religious beliefs. This last point can be expanded further in order to make clear the full implications of what it means to live in an historically conscious age.

First, we have come to feel more forcefully what Troeltsch called the 'fundamental historicizing of all our knowledge and feeling about the mental world'.¹⁰ This points to a dissonance between a theological interpretation of history and culture which is supernaturally grounded, and one based on the historical method itself. In the context of inter-faith relations it becomes frankly insufficient to appeal to the

supremacy of the Christian way over other ways, construed either 'from above' or 'from below', as uniquely decisive or normatively decisive. Interestingly, Troeltsch was someone who also changed his mind in his estimation of Christianity's relation to the other world religions. In *The Absoluteness of Christianity* (1901) he viewed Christianity as the normative religion, basing his claim not on miracles or the Hegelian idea that Christianity represents the concrete form of the essence of religion as such, but on the claim that it 'develops the personalistic religious idea and its liberating power to its maximum clarity and strength'.¹¹ And, in language remarkably parallel to Küng's inclusivism from below, Christianity 'must be understood not only as the culmination point but also as the convergence point of all the developmental tendencies that can be discerned in religion'.¹²

Troeltsch later developed a more pluralist theory as further research showed how culturally bound to European values Christianity was, and how oriental religions also contained within them personalistic and humane aspirations akin to those in Christianity.¹³ Moreover, the two factors of knowledge through friendships and the historical conditioning of belief, which I am employing against Küng, run parallel to the two points developed by Troeltsch against himself after 1901. What Troeltsch had anticipated in the earlier part of the century we now know more forcefully in the light of the experience of inter-faith dialogue and the more rigorous application of the historical outlook to theological work generally.

The second expansion of what is meant by historical consciousness concerns the distinction that we now make, hitherto unforeseen, between the experience of faith and its interpretation in limited and relatively conditioned historical forms. In relation to Christology, the question can now be raised whether the interpretation of Jesus as 'final' (decisive), an interpretation which was embodied later in the doctrine of the incarnation, is of the essential experience of Christian faith, or has its roots as part of the Jewish apocalyptic view of history, which was the matrix for Christianity at its origins. If the latter is the case, as I take it to be, then Christianity will be free to find its new form, appropriate for a historically conscious age, and Christian theology will be able to draw the relevant consequences in its relations with other religions.

Küng was aware of all this when he reinterpreted the incarnation in functional terms. Jesus, he says, is God's 'delegate', 'deputy', 'spokesman'.¹⁴ Yet he went further than this by adding the description 'decisive', to concur with the traditional requirement of finality. In terms of the historical method, however, this is a second step in Christology. If we reject this second step as unwarranted in an historical age, then we can celebrate the salvation available in following Jesus without pre-judging the source and nature of salvation in other times and places. Jesus can be saviour without being the uniquely decisive or normatively decisive saviour.

Some may feel at this point that I have leaned too heavily on historical considerations, and that a reckoning with history need not take us this far away from the inclusivist fold. Gavin D'Costa, for example, has recently reasserted Rahner's anonymous Christianity, on the basis that critics have paid insufficient attention to its grounding in theological dogmatics. What are we to make of such a claim?

D'Costa reminds us that Rahner's theory relied on his transcendental anthropology and his Christology. The former refers to the human openness to being, to the reaching out beyond ourselves to what is good, true and infinite, the acceptance of which constitutes the recognition of hidden grace. Christology is linked to this scheme in that Christ is the goal or completion of this transcendental openness, thus expressing in his person freely and explicitly God's definitive self-revelation. As D'Costa says: 'In Jesus' total abandonment to God, his total "Yes" through his life, death and resurrection, he is the culmination and prime mediator of grace.'¹⁵ It follows from this that all grace, which is present in the openness to being of the human spirit, is present anonymously as the grace which originates in Christ, who has defined the meaning and content of grace by embodying its goal. The incarnation is not the grand exception to human nature but is, as Rahner put it, the 'supreme fulfilment of what is meant by "human being"'.¹⁶

Rahner's Christology represents a profound attempt to reinterpret the incarnation in an age of historical consciousness, and to rid us from what D. M. Baillie called the hidden docetism of the Church. But in the context of inter-faith dialogue, it is important to be aware of the work which this form of the doctrine of the incarnation will not do. If Jesus is the goal of what it means to be human, then this is still a judgement from within one historical religious setting. Without showing how Jesus is such a goal, in comparison with other moments of revelation, the claim only reinforces the *a priori* nature of Rahner's Christology. D'Costa, however, does not apologize for the impropriety of Rahner's theory at this point; he seeks to supply what Rahner omitted, that is, some *a posteriori* historical backing for a rather abstract dogmatic argument. In spite of the obvious hermeneutical complexities of the task, it is possible, he believes, to discern that orientation towards Christ within the other religions, necessary in any full statement of the anonymous Christianity theory. Using work such as that of Raimundo Panikkar, he demonstrates this possibility in relation, for example, to Hinduism.

It is difficult to know what to make of this kind of argument at precisely a time when the historical study of Christian origins is showing up the oddity of the traditional Christian claim that the Jewish hopes and aspirations have been fulfilled in Jesus, as though that settled the matter of Christian superiority without further ado.¹⁷ If the traditional preparation-fulfilment scheme is proving less viable in Jewish-Christian dialogue than it used to be, it seems anachronistic

to want to apply it to other kinds of dialogue. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Panikkar himself has now abandoned talk of the 'unknown Christ of Hinduism', at least in the way he originally intended it, and has turned to a more pluralistic approach in the Christian theology of world religions.¹⁸

It is, of course, possible to claim that inclusivism is as far as it is permissible to go, for anything that can legitimately be called a Christian response to the world's multi-religious environment. If Jesus is not retained as decisively the Christ—either uniquely or normatively—then it is all up with Christianity. But this is to take too static a view of religious belief and practice. Revisions taking place in Christian self-understanding now make it possible to move beyond exclusive and inclusive absolutism to embrace a position known as pluralism or theocentricism. What is involved in this move?

A well-argued case for pluralism has been made recently by Paul Knitter in his book *No Other Name?* (1985). Knitter takes seriously what Bernard Lonergan has called the shift in our own day from a 'classicist culture' to a 'historical culture', from ontology as the primary mode of truth to the pervasiveness of the sense of movement in time. In historical culture God's ways are discerned by faith from within the historical process—what Troeltsch called the 'continuous connection of becoming'—rather than from without in terms of divine intervention. Historical culture is marked by change, movement and revision, and this means that there is unlikely to be one expression of religious truth which can be said to be absolute or normative. Religious truths are more radically human, coloured by varying times and circumstances, than we once thought. All revelation will be necessarily incomplete, in the sense that no religious view can ever contain the full reality of God. (In Christianity, the symbol for this incompleteness is the second coming.)

Given the above shift in mental outlook, it now seems feasible to suppose that God is known and worshipped in different ways and settings according to the many and varied cultural and historical responses to his saving presence. Indeed, all religions have as part of their structure the distinction between God-in-him (her, it) -self, and God-as-known-to-human-imaging, and it is this distinction which enables us to endorse the pluralist case. Moreover, Christians can assent to this theory because the true and reliable revelation of God in Jesus does not entail a belief in Jesus' decisive supremacy. For Knitter, Jesus is saviour not because he is 'one and only', but because he has universal relevance. And this last phrase signifies that the religious truth which comes through Jesus and the Christian tradition is neither the *a priori* (unique or normative) decisive truth over against other truths, nor the culturally limited, confined truth associated with extreme relativism. But the saviourhood of Jesus is a distinct truth, ready to make its own contribution to the growth in dialogue which is the locus for new further explorations into divine truth.

Knitter follows in broad substance Rahner's christological reasoning, but departs from him when he claims that such historicized Christology actually allows the possibility of other incarnations: 'The reasons why Rahner . . . cannot admit other incarnations leave me, and I think others, confused. It seems Rahner has not faced the question why the eternal Word cannot be fully incarnated in more than one person.'¹⁹ In historical culture incarnation is taken to refer not to a one-time event, but to the process whereby God continually seeks to express himself within creation and history. Therefore the way is open to accepting that there may be other moments, in addition to that in Jesus, where the divine-human potential has been fully realized. There may be many christs, but one Jesus.

I wish to make two comments on Knitter's pluralist model. First, the assertion of a non-normative, yet universally relevant, Christology is to be endorsed. Indeed, I argued for such a position in my own *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (1983), though I used the phrase 'universal intention' rather than 'universal relevance'. But I developed there a Christology which relied more on the concepts of parable and symbol.²⁰ Parabolic talk is, I believe, likely to be more consonant with the historical study of Christian origins and with historical culture generally, than talk of incarnation allows. Even Rahner's transcendental approach in Christology has not fully appreciated the implications of the shift to historical culture, and its focus remains the metaphysical nature of Jesus' person. Yet in most recent christological research, this clinging to a revised patristic mould is absent.²¹ Historical study of the person of Jesus, which then invites our faith-judgement about him, is replacing the old concerns. Though it may look as if this is a loss of hard metaphysical statement about Jesus, this is only because we have been tied to one particular philosophical and cultural mould for so long.

There are other advantages in using the looser concepts of parable and symbol. They draw attention to Jesus as a moment from which a new view of God's relationship with the world arises, and into which we can be initiated. The objectivity of this approach lies precisely in its power to evoke such a change in the human perception of God's relationship to his creation. Its subjectivity lies in our appropriation that this is in fact the case, that our experience of Jesus' way can be trusted as salvation-bearing. Jesus remains a parable of God's care for the world and the pattern of human response. In the theology of religions, to speak of Jesus in terms of parable clarifies the pluralist model, which accepts that there are other moments of divine-human encounter, other parables which speak differently of God's ways with the world. Knitter's use of 'incarnation' outside the Christian paradigm could have the effect of reintroducing him back into the inclusivist fold, in spite of his pluralist intentions.

My second comment on Knitter's approach is that the distinction he forces us to make between Jesus as 'decisive' and as 'universally relevant' enables us to overcome what I think is a false antithesis on the

part of many critics of the pluralist model. The objection is often put in terms of a choice: either Jesus is the incarnation of God (exclusively or inclusively) and Christology has metaphysical content worth proclaiming, or Jesus is not incarnate, and Christology is empty of metaphysical content, thus enabling an easy but false solution to the problems of inter-faith encounter to be reached.²²

To view Jesus as non-normative yet universally relevant is to hold together both the reality of God as glimpsed in Jesus (whilst also acknowledging some cultural limitations), and the necessity to witness to this in dialogue, without assuming Jesus to be the final (decisive) truth about God before the dialogue begins. Jesus will be central for the Christian understanding of God's ways with the world, but he will not be the 'norm above norms'. There will be other moments of 'universal relevance' which will make their own contribution to the dialogue. The purpose of the dialogue will be to develop criteria whereby a world ecumenism, which respects differences and yet encourages the 'sharing of truth that leads to enrichment',²³ can be pursued. Moreover, it must remain an open question whether or not one particular religious pattern will emerge as supremely normative for the other partners in the dialogue.

The kind of epistemology which will undergird this new venture in truth through dialogue cannot yet be fully appreciated, but there have been some valuable suggestions. John Hick has made use of Kant's distinction between the phenomenal world and the noumenal world, the latter applying to God in his (her, its) inner being and therefore strictly unknowable, and the former to God as imaged from within particular cultural and historical circumstances and therefore known in human response.²⁴ Cantwell Smith believes that an appropriate epistemology can only be hammered out in the process of learning to 'live in a world of mystery variously symbolized in various ways'.²⁵ Knitter calls for a model of relational truth, where one religious view of truth shows 'its ability to interact with other truths—that is, to teach and be taught by them, to include and be included by them'.²⁶ But we are still at the threshold of knowing how this might work out in practice. Certainly, part of the test for the pluralist hypothesis will be to show how the dialogue itself works out in practice. This is the new direction Christianity is being called to in the age of inter-faith dialogue.

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Notes

- 1 For example, the Anglican Report, *Towards a Theology for Inter-faith Dialogue*, CIO Publishing 1984, described its position as 'inclusivist with an exclusive loyalty to Jesus Christ', p. 35.
- 2 I do not consider here the position which holds that God's presence is reflected outside the Church in the lives of individuals belonging to other religious

- communities, but does not extend this to include the communities as vehicles of saving grace. For reasons why I consider this to be untenable, see my *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (SCM Press 1983), chapter 2.
- 3 Gavin D'Costa, 'Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christianity: A Reappraisal' in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 1, No. 2, January 1985.
 - 4 Hans Küng, 'The World Religions in God's Plan of Salvation' in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christian Revelation and World Religions*. Burns & Oates 1967.
 - 5 1 *Apology* 46, 1—4.
 - 6 Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Fount 1978), p. 98.
 - 7 *ibid.*, pp. 113f.
 - 8 *ibid.*, pp. 123f.
 - 9 It is of course possible to ignore one's friendships with those of other religious communities as irrelevant to these matters. In which case the final theology is likely to be very different from that envisaged here. See W. Cantwell Smith, 'The Christian in a Religiously Plural World' in *The Faith of Other Men* (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1972), pp. 135ff.
 - 10 Cited by A. O. Dyson, *The Immortality of the Past* (SCM Press 1974), p. 30.
 - 11 E. Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness of Christianity* (1901) (SCM Press 1972), p. 145.
 - 12 *ibid.*, p. 114.
 - 13 E. Troeltsch, 'The Place of Christianity among the World Religions' (1923) in *Christian Thought*, New University London Press 1957, and reprinted in Hick and Hebblethwaite, *Christianity and Other Religions*. Fount 1980.
 - 14 *On Being a Christian*, p. 449.
 - 15 'Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christianity: A Reappraisal' in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 132.
 - 16 Cited from an extract of Rahner in J. Bowden and J. Richmond, *A Reader in Contemporary Theology* (SCM Press 1967), p. 64.
 - 17 For example, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, SCM Press 1977, and R. R. Ruether, 'The Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism' in K. Leech (ed.), *Theology and Racism*. Board for Social Responsibility 1985.
 - 18 See his new edition of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. Darton, Longman and Todd 1981.
 - 19 P. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (SCM Press 1985), p. 191.
 - 20 See chapter 5. See also S. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, SCM Press 1983, and M. F. Wiles, *Faith and the Mystery of God*. SCM Press 1984.
 - 21 For example, Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, SCM Press 1980, and J. Mackey, *Jesus, The Man and the Myth*. SCM Press 1979.
 - 22 For example, J. J. Lipner, 'Truth-Claims and Inter-Religious Dialogue' in *Religious Studies*, Vol. 12, 1976.
 - 23 S. J. Samartha, 'Ganga and Galilee: Two Responses to Truth' in J. Hick and H. Askari (eds.), *The Experience of Religious Diversity* (Gower 1985), p. 102.
 - 24 Most recently in 'Religious Pluralism' in F. Whaling (ed.), *The World's Religious Traditions*. T. & T. Clark 1984. Also in *God Has Many Names* (American edition), Philadelphia 1982, and interestingly in 'The Philosophy of Religious Pluralism' in *S.J.T.*, Vol. 37, pp. 229–36.
 - 25 W. Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (Macmillan 1981), p. 96 and p. 189.
 - 26 *No Other Name?*, p. 219.