

Early Map Making

Introduction

While there are disputed questions *in* the theology of religions, there is in fact a more primary question: what *is* the theology of religions? In these first two chapters I will provide a survey of how the field of theology of religions is currently understood in contemporary theology by different groups that have a stake in the issues. During the survey, I will present arguments for why certain approaches are better than others. My critical analysis is of necessity underdeveloped, but this mapping is intended to help the reader gain a good overall picture of various developments, controversies, and discussions going on in this field. Further, these chapters will also help locate the various disputed questions I pick up in the rest of the book. However, I need to say a few words about the way I understand “theology” so that readers will appropriate the context of my criticisms and constructive proposals.

What is theology?

First, all theology is tradition-specific. That is, it is practiced by a theologian or theologians working within a particular/denominational Christian community, within a particular context, such as a university, seminary, or other religious educational setting. Admittedly, some theologians today do not associate themselves with ecclesial bodies, but most do, and nearly all I examine in this book do. Second, being tradition-specific shapes the manner of our theologizing, its methods, presuppositions, goals, and objectives. Fortunately, there is significant overlap in the manner of theologizing between different Christian denominations, but their differences will always also affect what they hold in common. For instance, a Baptist,

a Lutheran, a Catholic, a Greek Orthodox all hold scripture as authoritative, but the latter two might add to this other “authorities,” such as tradition (the teachings of the great theologians through history and councils) and liturgy (the prayers and formal liturgy of the church), which are not necessarily accepted or recognized by the first two as regulative authorities in the practice of theology. Further, to tradition and liturgy, theologians within Catholicism will certainly add the authority of the teaching magisterium, including papal authority, although there will be significant differences of interpretation regarding the scope and process by which papal authority is exercised. Thus, within a tradition-specific context, say Catholicism, we have some internal plurality. The limits of Catholic plurality are determined by the teaching office of the church, even when contested by theologians. The limits of plurality in another denomination might be more loosely or more tightly articulated.

Third, tradition-specific argumentation is conducted with what might be called “controlling beliefs,” so that creative, innovative, responsive, and faithful theological thought must remain within these controlling beliefs as specified by that community. Theological reflection is always controlled by certain parameters. When people refuse these parameters, for example the Creed, they might form new non-creedal groups (for example, the Quakers) or leave the Christian tradition entirely. Fourth, it is sometimes difficult to argue against those who do not necessarily share one’s controlling beliefs and authoritative sources, because the types of authority accepted in the process of theological thinking are quite different, as are the controlling beliefs. Matters are complex, and coming to decisive theological judgments is difficult without at least sharing closely in the tradition-specific manner of doing theology. Fifth, I need to declare my tradition-specific orientation so that the reader can understand the way I handle arguments and assess positions other than my own. I am a Roman Catholic who believes theology is an ecclesial discipline, accountable first to God (in His revelation to us), the church (traditions, councils, magisterium, the sense of the faithful, reason), and finally to all women and men who show any interest in what the church is about (“people of good will” is the novel jargon in official documents in the twentieth century). Hence, in what follows, I will assume that denying the Creed and its trinitarian dogmas is inadmissible. Just as I have never found reading Calvinists, Lutherans, Anglican, or Orthodox theologians a problem or that they are un-ecumenical by writing from within their tradition, I hope the reader will grant me the same freedom.

Christianity in a world of religious plurality

Christianity was born into a religiously pluralist world and throughout its history developed in that context. Sometimes it has been a persecuted minority (in its earliest days, and today especially in the Middle and Far East, in Asia and East Asia, and parts of Africa – see the “Christian monitor” website: www.christianmonitor.org – all websites cited checked in June 2008). At other times it has been part of, or allied to, strong political powers: initially through Constantine (ca 274–337); in the Middle Ages through powerful princes and kings or at times equally powerful popes and bishops; more recently it has been sometimes associated with European expansionism and imperialism. The mandate to go and preach the gospel to the corners of the earth (Matthew 28:19 – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”) has always ensured an active engagement with world religions, with very different theological and socio-political attitudes to be found in Christianity’s 2000-year history. These attitudes range from the mass enslavement of thousands of non-Christians in South America for not accepting the gospel (even though they knew no Latin, the language in which the gospel was preached to them); to the care of outcasts, the dying, and sick, and development of schools, colleges, hospitals, and infrastructures that were central in the independence movements of many colonized countries; to the partial conversion of whole continents or countries (the western Mediterranean world, southern America, and large swathes of Africa); and, some argue, to the attempted liquidation of the Jews in the Second World War. What should be apparent from this brief list is that we are talking not only about theology but about its social and political embodiments at different times in history.

A cursory look at some statistics may help, although their reliability is a problem, no less than their interpretation. Compare, for instance, a roughly 500-year gap: the difference between 1491 and 2001. In 1491 approximately 19 percent of the world’s population was Christian, while 2 percent of the non-Christian world was in contact with Christianity, and 79 percent remained entirely ignorant of its existence. Some 93 percent of all Christians were white Europeans. Compare these figures with 2001, when 33 percent of the global population were Christians, with 40 percent of the non-Christian world being aware of Christianity, while only 26 percent had no contact with Christians and the gospel. The numeric basis of Christianity has also radically shifted so that the largest Christian community is now to be found

in Latin America, only then followed by Europe, with Africa third (and growing much faster than Europe), followed by North America and then South Asia.

To get a sense of the broader picture regarding “world religions” it will be helpful to briefly survey the figures for 2001 regarding the numerical strengths of world religions. After Christians (33 percent of the world’s population), Muslims are the largest religious group (19.6 percent), followed by Hindus (13.4 percent), with Buddhists at 359 million (5.9 percent). In terms of the traditional five major religions, Judaism is in fact smaller than Sikhism (0.2 percent compared with 0.4 percent) and both are smaller than new religions, admittedly difficult to categorize at 1.7 percent. In terms of future projections, in 2050 it is estimated that the percentage share of the five major religions will be Christianity at 34.3 percent, Islam at 25 percent, Hinduism at 13.2 percent, Buddhism at 4.8 percent, and Judaism at 0.2 percent (Barrett 1991, 32–3; and Barrett *et al.* 2001, 4). Clearly, the number of Hindus is related to India’s population growth alone, whereas the numbers for Christianity and Islam relate to population growth and mission in a number of different countries.

There have been many different Christian theological responses to the world religions. To limit ourselves to the post-war period only makes things slightly easier. No set of categories is adequate to analyze and deal with the complexity of the topic, but it may help to label five types of theological response to other religions for heuristic purposes only. I will later be questioning the adequacy of this typology. The typology also historically reflects the movement of the debate through the last half century. There are of course considerable differences between theologians belonging to the same “camp” and many features of overlap between different approaches. Nevertheless, I shall call these five approaches pluralism, inclusivism, exclusivism, comparative theology, and postmodern postliberalism. I shall deal with the first three in this chapter and the next two in the following chapter.

1 *Pluralism*: This comes in three varieties. (a) *Unitary pluralists* hold that all religions are, or can be, equal and valid paths to the one divine reality. “Unitary” indicates a single unitary divine being behind the different plural religious phenomena. (b) *Pluriform pluralists* hold that all religions are, or can be, different paths to different plural divine realities. (c) *Ethical pluralists* hold that all religions are related to the divine inasmuch as they contain certain ethical codes and practices, and religions should not be judged according to the conceptual pictures of divine reality they profess. All three

varieties hold that Christ is one revelation among many different and equally important revelations; the religions can learn about the divine from each other; the days of religious imperialism and chauvinism are over, and mission is understood in terms of dialogue.

2 *Inclusivism*: There are two types of inclusivism alleged in the literature. (a) *Structural inclusivists* hold that Christ is the normative revelation of God, although salvation is possible outside of the explicit Christian church. Salvation is, or may be, available through other religions *per se*, but this salvation is always from Christ. This type of inclusivism contains the pluralist legitimation of other religions as salvific structures while also holding to the exclusivist claims of the causal saving grace of Christ alone. (b) *Restrictivist inclusivists* hold that Christ is the normative revelation of God, although salvation is possible outside of the explicit Christian church, but this does not give legitimation to other religions as possible or actual salvific structures. These theologians are careful to restrict the sense of God's inclusiveness to people and elements of their culture, but not their religions *per se*. In both, Christ is ontologically and causally exclusive to salvation, but not necessarily epistemologically. This is *solus Christus* without the *fides ex auditu*.

3 *Exclusivism*: This comes in two basic flavors. (a) *Restrictive-access exclusivists* hold that God elected some for salvation and others for damnation. Because God is exclusively revealed in Jesus Christ (*solus Christus*), we can at least tell that non-Christians (and varying numbers of Christians who are unfaithful – and destined to be so) are destined for damnation. This restricts the number of saved and damned based on God's election. (b) *Universal-access exclusivists* hold that because God is exclusively revealed in Christ, only those who profess Christ can be saved, who hear the gospel (*fides ex auditu*) and confess it in their hearts. The major difference within this latter group is between those who insist that this opportunity to confess Christ must take place for all before death, and those who argue that this can take place at the time of death or after death. Both types of exclusivists hold to *solus Christus* and *fides ex auditu*, and the former can also include *solus ecclesia* (salvation through Christ solely via his church).

Pluralism and structural inclusivism are recent developments in the history of Christian thought. It is for this reason that I shall give them special attention in what follows. All three positions mentioned so far have grappled with central dogmatic questions concerning creation, sin, God, Christ, the trinity, the church, sacraments, mission, and eschatology; in short, the contents of systematic and dogmatic theology. More recent positions,

examined in the next chapter, extend the scope of the debate and broaden the agenda most interestingly.

4 *Comparative theology, not theology of religions*: Comparative theology and postliberalism emerged in the late 1980s for three discernable reasons. First, in reaction to the central focus on the question of salvation that has dominated and characterized the debates between pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism, these recent movements have moved the agenda to address questions of readings of texts within other religions and their impact on Christian reading and practice, as well as the socio-political aspects of inter-religious meeting. Second, in reaction to the question of the validity (or otherwise) of other religions being discussed in abstraction from those religions, these movements have stressed the particular and contextual engagement with particular religions, avoiding generalizing from one particular to the general. Third, these shifts have also reflected changes in philosophical background beliefs and specialist interests. For example, specialists in the history of religions have shaped comparative theology, and the cultural-linguistic turn (with its neo-Wittgensteinian and pragmatist roots) has shaped many postliberals who have now entered the debate. Comparative theology holds that we should abandon the enterprise of trying to provide overall frameworks *about* religions. Instead, we should engage specifically with a religion in its particularity, not to judge it, but to see what Christianity learns from engagement with those particular sacred texts and practices. We do not need a theology *of* the religions, but multiple theologies *in* engagement *with* religions. The scriptural reasoning movement can be closely aligned to this movement, although its pragmatist orientation is quite different.

5 *Postmodern postliberalism*: Postmodern postliberals are to be distinguished by their drawing on both these philosophical traditions. They generally eschew overarching theological theories about how religions are related to Christianity and focus on the particular social and political engagement, but splinter into two distinctive groups. (a) *Ethical deconstructionists*, like ethical pluralists, want to shift the terms of engagement into politics, in part because some think theology is politics, while others think every theology entails a politics. (b) *Radical Orthodoxy* or *rhetorical out-narrationists* tend to argue that every theology entails a politics, although the two are not reducible to each other. The focus should be on theo-political engagements with a view to rhetorically showing Christianity to be the truth because of its beauty, constantly out-narrating other religions. It contends that only Christianity can produce and underwrite civic peace. Mission, not dialogue, is enjoined. I am sympathetic to some aspects of the latter group.

Pluralism

Pluralism is a very recent phenomenon within Christianity. This kind of approach has its strongest supporters among “liberal,” liberationist, process, and feminist theologians – and some “postmodern” theologians too. Although it has been prominent in Anglo-American circles, there are an increasing number of Asian and Southeast Asian theologians developing this approach. To illustrate the three types of pluralism, I will briefly inspect three illustrative representatives, without presuming that they encompass the rich diversity and tensions within the group they represent. My basic argument is that this position is inconsistent with orthodox Christianity and some of it is neo-Christian in its basic presuppositions. The good intentions of the various writers are never in question.

The unitary pluralism of John Hick

John Hick (1922–), a British Presbyterian, initially argued that the *solus Christus* assumption held by exclusivists was incompatible with the Christian teaching of a God who desires to save all people. There are many millions who have never heard of Christ through no fault of their own, before and after the New Testament period – the *inculpably ignorant*. It is therefore un-Christian to think that God would have “ordained that men must be saved in such a way that only a small minority can in fact receive this salvation” (1977, 122). Hick argued that it was God, and not Christianity or Christ, toward whom all religions move and from whom they gain salvation. Hick therefore proposed a God-centered (*theocentric*) revolution away from the Christ-centered (*Christocentric*) or church-centered (*ecclesiocentric*) position that has dominated Christian history. Hick’s emphasis on *God* at the center of the universe of faiths is a unitary pluralism, a theistic center, but what then of Christ? Hick argued that the doctrine of the incarnation should be understood “mythically” – as an expression of devotion and commitment by Christians, not as an ontological claim about the unique and exclusive action of God in this particular man, Jesus (1977, 165–77). Hick stressed an all-loving God over the *solus Christus* principle. Hence Hick’s initial pluralism is unitary theism, not trinitarian or Christocentric. Technically, it might even be called theistic inclusivism, indicating the ragged edges of these models.

An important later development in Hick’s position came in response to the criticism that his theological revolution was still *theocentric* and thereby

excluded non-theistic religions. Hick developed a Kantian distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal: between a divine noumenal reality “that exists independently and outside man’s perception of it,” which he calls the “Eternal One,” and the phenomenal world, “which is that world as it appears to our human consciousness,” in effect the various human responses to the Eternal One (1989, 233–52). These responses are then seen as including both theistic (e.g., trinity, Yahweh, or Allah) and non-theistic (e.g., *nirvana* or Nirguna Brahman) conceptualities and images. In this way Hick tries to overcome any underlying theistic essentialism or unitary pluralism. However, Hick is not a pluriform pluralist, because what unites both theistic and non-theistic representations for him is a deeper unitary reality, the noumenal Real, beyond theism and non-theism. It is this noumenal Real that forms the unitary pluralism of Hick.

Other unitary pluralists, who are basically theistic, are the English Anglican Alan Race (1983), the Canadian Protestant Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962), the American Jesuit Roger Haight (1999), and the German ex-Catholic, now Anglican, Perry Schmidt-Leukel (2008).

Critical comments on Hick’s unitary pluralism

Hick’s motivations are noble. He is keen to offer a fair and balanced philosophical appraisal of how to resolve conflicting religious truth claims, to bypass the “I am right, you are wrong” mentality, to overcome Christian triumphalism and imperialism. He has pioneered work in this area and has generated much reflective argument. But the first question to be asked is whether his unitary pluralism is not in fact a new form of triumphalism and imperialism, albeit of an agnostic type.

I contend that Hick is led into agnosticism when we press his Kantian distinction between the Real in itself and its various phenomenal manifestations in religions. Kant had similar problems with the relation of the noumenal and the phenomenal, which he had to make subject to the categorical imperative, so that religion eventually became a matter of ethics. There is a similar pattern found in Hick when he cannot specify doctrinal criteria for the truthfulness of a religion, but only ethical criteria. Hick’s sharp distinction between the noumenal Real and the phenomenal images raises the question of whether there is any real relationship between the two. Hick is so concerned to deprive any normative or ontological claim made by Christianity, or any other religion, that he insists there can be no real relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal:

It follows from this distinction between the Real as it is in itself and as it is thought and experienced through our religious concepts that we cannot apply to the Real *an sich* [in itself] the characteristics encountered in its [various manifestations]. (Hick 1989, 246)

This inability to speak of the Real or allow “it” the possibility of self-utterance leads into a cul-de-sac regarding any valid or normative reference for the Real. Agnosticism is the inevitable outcome of the trajectory of Hick’s flight from particularity, a flight helped by his use of “myth”: first, from the particularity of the incarnation; then from the particularity of a theistic God; and then from the particularity of any religious claim, be it Christian or non-Christian. The outcome of his escape from particularity leads to nothing in particular. Further, is it not “imperialist” to impose this “Real” upon all religions, even if they insist that the Ultimate Reality is ontologically theistic or non-theistic? Clearly, this is not Hick’s intention, but it is an inevitable outcome, despite his stated aims.

A second criticism is that Hick’s notion of “myth” employs a purely instrumentalist, rather than also referential, model of language. Take the statement: “Jesus is divine.” According to Hick it is mythologically true because it evokes “an appropriate dispositional attitude to its subject matter,” such as imitation and devotion, not the claim that Jesus *is* divine (1989, 248). Basically an instrumentalist view of language replaces a referential view. Even if one were to read Hick differently, at best the instrumentalist view that God *is* acting in Christ is emptied of any *sui generis* referential quality so that the incarnational claim relates to a general referential quality shared by all claims that God is acting in history. Hick rules out *a priori* the very possibility claimed by the entire Christian tradition: God becomes man uniquely and exclusively in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. But even this theistic referential view is undermined in Hick’s later work as noted above – and that is when his position collapses into agnosticism. For further elaboration on Hick, see D’Costa (2000, 24–30).

The burden of my argument is that Christian language about God is necessarily rooted in the shape of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the formation of the Christian community centered on the risen Christ. In theological terms, the trinity is the foundation of the church, or more elaborately: Christocentrism, pneumacentricism, and ecclesiocentrism are inextricably related. This in no way implies that God’s activity is restricted to these events or to the Christian church. Orthodox Christians do not compromise the incarnation in acknowledging God’s

activity in history, but argue it is of a different order to the incarnation – as I shall show. Further, Hick is left with a “pick and mix” divine, without the control of any authoritative revelation. One can simply choose which parts of which tradition one likes. Thus, like Kant, without any authoritative revelation, Hick ends up with authoritative ethics and principles – and, like Kant, with no adequate metaphysical grounding for either. Finally, in the process of depriving any and all revelations, Hick ends up mythologizing both theistic and non-theistic claims. Ironically, in his attempt to accommodate the world religions on an equal status within his pluralist outlook, he ends up accommodating none of them as he can only accept them within his system on his, rather than their, terms. This type of pluralism fails in relation to its own goals (granting truth and respect to all religions) and in its non-conformity to orthodox Christian dogmas regarding the incarnation and trinity. Clearly, the latter are not accepted parameters for Hick, although others like Schmidt-Leukel and Haight struggle (unsuccessfully in my judgment) to conform to them.

The pluriform pluralism of Raimundo Panikkar

The Roman Catholic Raimundo Panikkar's (1918–) early work (1964) represents the best in inclusivism. However, after 1973 he develops what I will call pluriform pluralism. Panikkar (1987) argues Christianity must shift in its view of other religions and uses the motif of three rivers to symbolize this: the Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges. The Jordan represents Christianity in its earliest days, fighting for survival, with a traditional exclusivist outlook. The Tiber represents the eventual imperial expansion into an inclusivist outlook. The Ganges, today, requires a new baptism in Asian waters, a crossing over into pluralism that makes Panikkar denote himself a “Christian-Hindu-Buddhist.” How can he be all three and a Catholic priest?

His answer lies in the cosmotheandric reality that underlies all things, in which the divine, the human, and the earthly are held together indivisibly, yet distinctly. The trinity is Christianity's way of framing this reality, but the reality of the trinity is certainly not exclusive to Christian revelation. Panikkar writes that it is “simply an unwarranted overstatement to affirm that the trinitarian concept of the Ultimate, and with it the whole of reality, is an exclusive Christian insight of revelation” (1973, viii). This is an apparent inversion of Augustine's *vestigia trinitatis*, as Panikkar wants to say that Christianity itself has vestiges of this reality that is far

greater and deeper than Christian revelation. Other pluriform pluralists are the American Baptist S. Mark Heim (2001) and the process theologians Methodist John B. Cobb (1982) and David Ray Griffin (2005, 3–66).

Panikkar wants to hold a robustly orthodox Christology that Jesus *is* the Logos incarnate, for he has no desire to dilute or water down central confessions of the faith. However, he also wants to steer clear of some implications “read into” this orthodox claim. First, he rejects that the Logos is restricted to Jesus Christ, for this makes the incarnation subject to a type of “Christo-idolatry.” This is the danger of exclusivism. Second, he rejects that all salvation comes from the historical Jesus Christ, such that other religions cannot be “saving” in any way. While Panikkar is deeply aware that “salvation” is a Christian term, he wants to speak of the reality of the divine transforming religious traditions, without imputing Christian realities present in a hidden way. This he does by means of a typological exposition of the trinity, not as the object of special revelation, but as a mode of divine action that is trans-Christian. Emphasis on the Son alone, which is currently a problem in the theology of religions debate, is as imbalanced as if theologians were to emphasize the Spirit or Father exclusively. In this cosmotheandric reality “it is our way of looking that causes reality to appear to us sometimes under one aspect and sometimes under another,” and Panikkar is happy not to fix God into a single aspect (1973, 75). He wants to emphasize all three modalities together as mutually correcting.

The Father represents the apophatic truth that the divine is utterly other, such that nothing can be properly said of “it” and silence is the purest way of responding to this unfathomable mystery. Allied to this path are the ways of mysticism and asceticism, which strip down the pretensions of the self in the light of the “nothingness” of the divine. This brings about a deep self-surrender or self-forgetfulness, and thus a profound compassion, love, and service. However, for Panikkar, there is always a danger of indifference to the world in this mystical path. He sees various strands of apophatic mysticism within Christianity, and most profoundly within Theravada Buddhism and Advaita Hinduism. The Son is an icon compared to the utter mystery of the Father that is beyond all forms. The Son represents the path of devotion and personalism, the ecstasy of love and joy, mercy and forgiveness, personal reconciliation and humanity. Indeed, Panikkar reads the *kenosis* of Christ, the self-emptying, in terms of the *sunyata* and *nirvana* of Buddhism. He also sees theistic Hinduism within this spirituality. If the danger of the Father’s path was worldly indifference,

the danger of the Son's path is anthropocentrism, making the human the measure of all things or, in its divine form, assuming God to be a "person" writ large. The Spirit represents the unseen mediator, which is only seen in its powerful effects. This path is also associated with power and charisma, and Panikkar relates this to the Shaivite Sakti tradition in Hinduism and within the Tantric Buddhist and Hindu traditions that map the deep powers within the human in which the divine resides, the *kundalini*. The danger of this path is that of idolizing works or rites.

Panikkar is content to allow the reality of each tradition to fructify and transform the others, while recognizing that none has the whole truth and all have some truth, a truth that is pluriform, not unitary. The trinity offers a model of this cosmotheandric reality.

Critical comments on Panikkar's pluriform pluralism

Panikkar's writings constantly defy easy classification. He writes out of a rare spiritual sensibility and has been an inspiration to many. His attempt to penetrate the depth of meaning within other traditions and to find parallels within Christianity is very attractive, as is his searching criticism of Christianity and other forms of religion. He sees the immensity of wisdom and goodness in all religions, as well as the dangers of myopia. However, there are three problematic areas in Panikkar's work.

First, Panikkar inadvertently prioritizes the transcendental Logos over the particularity of Jesus Christ, because for him the scandal of particularity belongs to the age of the river Jordan, not the Ganges. This is a stark change in his book, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, from its first edition (1964) to its second edition (1981). In the first edition Panikkar wrote that the Logos is revealed in Jesus Christ, thus Christianity is "the place where Christ is fully revealed, the end and plenitude of every religion" (1964, 24). In 1981 he changed this: "When I call this link between the finite and the infinite by the name of Christ, I am not presupposing its identification with Jesus of Nazareth" (1981, 27). In this move Panikkar equally disposes of the ecclesiocentric dimension of his early Christocentrism. There is no problem about acknowledging the activity of the Logos in history, in creation for example, as St John does in the prologue (John 1:1–3), but it is deeply problematic to sever the inextricable relationship between the eternal Logos and the incarnate Logos in Jesus Christ. This allows Panikkar to argue that wherever the Logos acts, the risen Christ is not necessarily present. St John's prologue goes in the opposite direction to

Panikkar, as does most of the Christian tradition, for the economy of revelation discloses the immanent relations within the divine reality. These relations are not known prior to revelation, such that it can be said that Jesus is one example of the link between the finite and infinite and that there are many other such links. Augustine, for example, would see vestiges that are anticipations of that reality known in the trinity. Panikkar instead sees images of the different aspects of the divine reality of which the Christian trinity is a vestige.

Second, this subordination of the “historical Jesus” to the “Christ principle” also finds a parallel in Panikkar’s subordination of the historical revelation of the trinity to the cosmotheandric principle. This is borne out in Panikkar’s unambiguous statement that the trinity is not a unique truth of the self-revelation of the triune God but an insight into a reality that is also equally, but differently, penetrated by the Eastern religions. One must be very clear here. It is permissible, in principle, to argue that the Eastern religions bear vestiges of the trinity, and in this sense, which is not Panikkar’s sense, his project might be fruitful. However, it is an altogether different matter to argue that, were the trinity not known in Christianity, then it would be known in these different religions – which Panikkar admittedly never argues explicitly, although it is the implication of his position.

Third, a related objection would be that Christianity and the other religions are being viewed from a place outside of any of the particular traditions through the forging of a kind of religious Esperanto that bears the name of “Christian-Hindu-Buddhist.” In some respects, if the control conditions for theology are so dramatically changed, there is nothing to say that within this new paradigm of religious confession such statements as Panikkar makes are problematic. Certainly, Panikkar is not the only Christian to claim such multiple belonging, so the problem is far more complex (see Cornille 2002). At least from the viewpoint of current Catholic orthodoxy, Panikkar’s position presents serious Christological and trinitarian difficulties. Paul Knitter, another Catholic, sees the difficulties of unitary and pluriform pluralists and develops an ethical pluralism.

Paul Knitter’s ethical pluralism

Knitter, like Hick, is dissatisfied with the usual approaches to other religions and is keen to overcome the alleged “imperialism” of starting with the church, Christ, or God. Like Hick, Knitter started out an exclusivist, went through a Rahnerian inclusivist phase, then a Hickian theocentric phase,

and currently holds a liberationist ethical stance. He is dissatisfied with unitary and pluriform pluralists for trying to resolve the problem on theological–philosophical grounds, and criticizes Hick's emphasis on reality-centeredness as it posits a “common essence” to all religions and is therefore prone to the imperialism of imposing a commonality, a oneness, despite real religious differences (Knitter *et al.* 1990, 47–8).

Instead, Knitter argues that all religions are to be judged by their truthfulness, their real responsiveness to what Christians call “God,” insofar as religions promote the “kingdom” through their social struggle for the values of “justice,” “peace,” “tolerance,” and “equality.” Because the kingdom is characterized by the fruits of the Spirit (for Christians), this pneumatological emphasis bypasses the Christological focus that has been so restrictive for Christians in granting equal status to non-Christian religions. One might say that Knitter takes the ethical emphasis in Hick as his foundational starting point but gives it a Spirit/kingdom basis. Knitter calls his position soteriocentrism, and sees it as an important move beyond Christocentrism, ecclesiocentrism, theocentrism, Hick's realocentrism, or Panikkar cosmotheandricism. While recognizing that the terms “kingdom” and “Spirit” are derived from his own Christian tradition, Knitter is confident that the reality denoted by the kingdom – the struggle for justice and peace – is not an exclusive Christian possession or derived exclusively from Christ or God (1990, 33–48). For example, when religions promote the oppression of women, they are to be judged as being against the kingdom. When they tackle the marginalization and exploitation of the poor and the weak, they promote the kingdom. For Knitter no religion is better than another except by these criteria, and under these criteria they are all in need of reform and mutual help.

Many Asian theologians, such as the Roman Catholics Aloysius Pieris (1988), Felix Wilfred (1991), and also Michael Amaladoss and Samuel Rayan, emphasize the imperialist and colonial patterns of exclusivism and inclusivism, but their basic position is similar to Knitter's in its liberationist orientation. Rosemary Radford Ruether, also Roman Catholic, has further argued that these imperialist patterns have been turned upon the Jews in Christian anti-Semitism, culminating in the Holocaust (1980).

Critical reflections on Knitter

Knitter is to be applauded for bringing the political and ethical dimensions of theology of religions to the fore, for restlessly thinking through the issues

and having the courage to change his position in the light of such discussion. But does Knitter's ethical stance bypass unitary and pluriform pluralism? What does soteriocentricism amount to? There are three problems in Knitter's solution.

First, soteriocentricism cannot escape the question of normativity, the framework of meaning that informs "soteria" and the ontological grounding of ethics. Knitter is aware of this, but seems to find "imperialism" on behalf of the poor and marginalized more acceptable than "imperialism" that acts on behalf of correct doctrine (1987, 26). Is this plausible? I think not. First, because Knitter is striving for a common place where differences of doctrine are bypassed, he fails to account for the way in which the paradigmatic and normative sources of a tradition shape the understanding of what "the human condition" is and what it ought to be, and what constitutes "liberative" actions. Hence, "promoting human welfare" is an unhelpful common denominator, as it specifies nothing in particular until each tradition defines the terms. For one tradition it can mean proper adherence to *jati* (caste), for another, it means obeying the most authoritative interpretation of *sharia* (Muslim law), for another, it means adhering to non-contraceptive forms of sexuality, and for another, it might mean opposing all of the above as contrary to liberative justice. In this sense there is no way in which theory can bypass praxis or vice versa. They are always in mutual interaction. And if theory cannot be bypassed, Knitter has not escaped the theoretical problems he found so intractable.

Second, Knitter's emphasis on ethics is deeply reminiscent of the Kantian ethical golden rule employed by Hick. Bluntly summarized: as we cannot agree on religious truths, let us agree on moral truths. The assumption here is that universal moral truths are easy to establish and religious truths deeply contested. However, this relies on two certain presuppositions. First, that there is such a thing as praxis without theory, or a priority given to practice that is able to establish justice. Second, Knitter's view presupposes that ethics is about acting on apparently self-evident right causes: equality, justice, liberty, and so on. This ethical stance is called into question from an Aristotelian virtue-ethics approach in which the relationship of action, theory, and goods is very differently construed. In the Aristotelian view, the *telos* of action is understood in terms of the goods that are internal to particular types of activity, not in terms of their outcome, which leads to consequentialism and pragmatism. Ethics is thus part of a cosmological narrative, inseparable from ontology and complex questions regarding the "good." There is, in effect, no such

thing as “action” without “belief,” a narrative form that makes it a “good” action.

Third, Knitter’s emphasis on the “kingdom” cannot bypass Christ through an emphasis on the Spirit instead. This emphasis on the Spirit as a way of endorsing other religions as God-given and inspired, without having to have an anonymous Christ present, is to be found in Haight and the work of Greek Orthodox George Khodr (1991). It is a problematic strategy for four reasons. First, it introduces a rupture within the trinity that is not to be found in the classical tradition: that somehow the Spirit is ontologically independent of the Son, and the Son’s actions are somehow independent of the Spirit’s activity. There is a danger of tritheism here. Second, it introduces separability between the kingdom of God and the person of Jesus, thus rendering the kingdom into an ideological programme or a product of human action alone. This is entirely unbiblical and possibly Pelagian in emphasizing salvation by good works. Third, the criterion for discerning the authentic activity of the Spirit is Christological, such that it becomes impossible to criteriologically identify either of the two persons without the other being co-present. Fourth, it is not clear why an “anonymous Christ” is imperialist and an “anonymous Spirit” is not. For an elaboration of these points see D’Costa (2000, 30–40).

Conclusions regarding pluralism

I have given pluralism extended attention due to its widespread popularity and its novelty within the Christian tradition, and tried to indicate various problems with the three types of pluralism I have considered. Unitary pluralism erases the self-understanding of the religions to which it is trying to relate, it provides a meta-solution that is finally framed and based outside any traditional religion – betraying its possibly secular pre-suppositions: in Hick’s case, his Kantianism; in Knitter’s, his Marxism. Pluriform pluralism either falls into a covert Christian inclusivism, which is contrary to its intentions, or ends up encoding other religions’ ultimate *teloi* within its own single *telos*, thus erasing the self-understanding of the other religion and finally thereby collapsing into a type of unitary pluralism. Ethical pluralism fails to escape from theory, for there can be no ethics or practices without metaphysics or ontology. Practice and theory are indivisible. So pluralism in its three varieties potentially fails according to its own standards and goals. It also seems to fail in violating the controlling beliefs of orthodox Christianity.

Inclusivism

Structural inclusivism is quite novel and has become increasingly popular since the mid-twentieth century. Restrictivist inclusivism has a longer lineage in the Christian tradition inasmuch as grace has been acknowledged to operate outside the confines of the visible church. A fair number of Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Reform, and Protestants adopt it. The main differences between the two forms of inclusivism revolve around: first, whether a person can finally come to salvation apart from explicitly confessing Christ; second, whether non-Christian religions can be said to have salvific structures, insofar as it is acknowledged that non-Christians can be saved as non-Christians. On this second issue, structural inclusivists affirm non-Christian religions as “salvific”; otherwise, on the first question we obtain varied answers from both types of inclusivist. I will first focus on the major twentieth-century structural inclusivist, Karl Rahner, a German Jesuit.

Karl Rahner’s structural inclusivism

Rahner’s (1904–84) theological anthropology shapes his brand of inclusivism, although he also argues his case from various doctrines. In the first case (1968) Rahner argues that the precondition of finite (categorical) knowledge is an unconditional openness to being (*Vorgriff*), which is an unthematic, prereflective awareness of God – who is infinite being. Our transcendental openness to being constitutes both the hiddenness of grace and its prethematic presence at the heart of our existence. Men and women therefore search in history for a categorical disclosure of this hidden grace. In Jesus’ total abandonment to God, his total “yes” through his life, death, and resurrection, he is established as the culmination and prime mediator of grace. Therefore Christian revelation is the explicit expression of grace, which men and women experience implicitly in the depths of their being when, for example, they reach out through the power of grace in trusting love and self-sacrifice or in acts of hope and charity. Rahner attempts to balance the *solus Christus* principle with the doctrine of the *universal salvific will of God*, so as to maintain that Christ is the sole cause of salvation in the world, but that this salvific grace may be mediated through history without explicit knowledge of Christ. The *fides ex auditu* is missing from Rahner’s position.

What of his second approach (Rahner 1966)? His theological arguments for the same conclusion draw on the history of Israel, which Rahner calls a “lawful religion” prior to the time of Christ. Rahner maintains that Israel remains a lawful religion for those who have never been confronted historically and existentially with the gospel – in effect, the inculpably ignorant. But for Jews who have heard the gospel historically and existentially and rejected it, Israel can no longer be judged “lawful,” and such people would be in a state of sin. However, by “historically” and “existentially” Rahner means that although a person might hear the gospel being preached historically (the preacher and the preached to being in the same time and place), that person may not have existentially been addressed for all sorts of reasons (e.g., the preacher’s life is dissolute and dishonest, so the hearer does not take the preaching seriously). Hence, the hearer cannot really count as having “heard” the gospel existentially, although historically speaking they will have heard it. If they reject it, they may still not be culpably rejecting it. To return to the argument: if Israel in a certain context had a “lawful religion” prior to Christianity, may it not in principle be the case with other religions of the world prior to their adherents being presented with the gospel? Rahner answers this affirmatively.

Rahner argues that if salvific grace exists outside the visible church, as he believes it does in the history of Israel, in creation, and through conscience, then this grace is causally related to Christ (always and everywhere – as prime mediator) and to his church. Rahner argues that Christology and the doctrine of God cannot be separated from the church, as Christ is historically mediated through the church. This means that Rahner must reconcile membership of the church as a means of salvation and the possibility that salvific grace is mediated outside the historically tangible borders of the church. He does this by employing the traditional Catholic teachings regarding the *votum ecclesiae* and the related notion of implicit desire. The *votum ecclesiae* (a wish or desire to belong to the church) was understood to count as baptism when for good reason – e.g., being run over by a chariot on the way to baptism, or being martyred before getting to the baptismal font – actual baptism could not be administered but was desired (Rahner 1963b). Furthermore, given the socio-historical nature of men and women, Rahner argues that grace must be mediated historically and socially. The incarnation is paradigmatic of this. Therefore, if and when non-Christians respond to grace, this grace must be normally mediated through the non-Christian’s religion, however imperfectly. Hence, non-Christian religions may be “lawful religions” analogously to Israel. Rahner

thus coins the terms “anonymous Christian” (this refers to the source of saving grace that is responded to: Christ) and “anonymous Christianity” (this refers to its dynamic orientation toward its definitive historical and social expression: the church).

Because God has already been active within the non-Christian religions, the Christian can be open to learning about God through her non-Christian partner. Furthermore, the Christian is free to engage in active social and political cooperation with non-Christians when appropriate. The structural inclusivist has a firm theological basis for fruitful dialogue. Given Rahner’s notion that grace must seek to objectivize itself, mission is clearly important as Christianity is the best expression of grace. Hence, Rahner is able to affirm that Christianity is the one true religion, while at the same time holding that other religions may have a provisional salvific status. On our two questions regarding other religions as provisional salvific structures and the possibility of salvation without explicit confession, Rahner answers that both are possible – the first to be corroborated by the history of religions, the second established through the analogy of implicit faith or *votum ecclesiae*.

Objections to Rahner’s structural inclusivism

Rahner’s influence is enormous and most inclusivists are indebted to him, even non-Catholics such as the evangelical, Clark Pinnock (1992). Rahner sought to correct a historical negative attitude to non-Christian religions and address the same scandal that pluralists rightly react to: that all non-Christians are damned. However, there are five objections to Rahner’s structural inclusivism. First, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1994a), a fellow Catholic, argues that Rahner’s transcendental anthropology is in danger of conflating nature and grace, and reducing revelation to a predetermined anthropological system. Balthasar is concerned that, by viewing supernatural grace as being part of the very nature of human action apart from revelation, Rahner minimizes both the transforming power of the glory of the Lord that shines forth in Christ’s revelation and the character of sin and tragedy. To Balthasar, Rahner has an impoverished theology of the cross.

Second, with respect to his primary analogy of Israel as a lawful religion, Rahner fails to highlight that Israel has this status because it is the “church,” not an independent religion prior to Christ, and is heir to the explicit covenant made to God’s people. In this respect, Israel should not be seen as an independent religion, nor can it be the basis of an analogy with other religions due to its *sui generis* status in the history of salvation.

Once this is emphasized, Rahner's notion of "lawful religion" collapses, for to allow any other religion such a status would require that it has an *explicit* covenantal relationship with the God revealed in Christ in the way that Israel is in explicit covenanted relationship. This is simply not the case, except possibly in a very deformed sense regarding Islam. Third, and relatedly, there is a further problem in Rahner's application of the *votum ecclesiae* tradition to persons in other religions. The "desire for the church" related to those catechemenates who wanted to become baptized and cannot be easily applied to non-Christians who may not even have a belief in God. Catechemenates were saved as their desire for baptism counted as implicit membership of the church. But requisite for implicit membership was explicit knowledge of God and Christ, not an implicit knowledge. Of course theology develops by analogical application and the application of tradition to novel situations, but one must question whether in this application, the point of analogy has been undermined. One can see how explicit theistic belief might be argued to be part of an implicit desire for baptism, as argued by the Jesuits Francisco Suarez (1548–1619) and Juan De Lugo (1583–1660) in the light of the discovery of the "new world" with millions who had never heard the gospel. Based on the minimum requirement of Hebrews 11:6, which calls for the necessity of believing "that God exists and that he is the rewarder of those who seek him," they argued that theism sufficed as an implicit desire for baptism. Hence, one could argue that a Muslim or Hindu theist who has not heard the gospel might have such a desire, and thus could not be counted "lost," but that is entirely different from saying they are saved through Islam or Hinduism *per se*.

Fourth, Rahner was always clear to emphasize the provisional status of other religions as salvific structures, fully recognizing that to do otherwise would posit another revelation alongside Christ's trinity. The removal of this "provisionality" in the work of the neo-Rahnerian, Jacques Dupuis, is one reason Dupuis' book was questioned by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF 2001). If revelation is the triune God, then the triune God must be proclaimed explicitly in other religions if Rahner is correct. But it is not. Further, the *preparatio evangelica* tradition taught that elements within a philosophy or religion held truths that led a person not to reject the gospel but to be receptive to it, not that those truths were the gospel. They were preparations for the gospel. Even though the *preparatio* was rarely applied to religions other than Israel and primarily to Greek philosophy, there is no theological reason why it should not be so applied. The same goes for the *semina verbi* (seeds of the Word) tradition, whereby Justin and other

fathers saw elements of truth found outside the gospel. Justin of course argued that any such religious truths were in fact unacknowledged borrowings from Israel, and any other truths were accessible to reason, leading such people to see the truth of the gospel when confronted by it (see part II for more on this). On these grounds one must question other religions as provisional salvific structures, which is not to say that they are demonic, bad, or incapable of bringing adherents to some relationship with God, but as a whole they are not properly speaking “revelation” and thus a means to salvation.

Fifth, Rahner’s own work in other contexts shows that he holds that salvation is the explicit beatific vision, and in earlier writings he developed a complex notion of the pancosmic soul, a communal redemption process *after* death, which has some parallels to DiNoia’s position (see ch. 2). What is significant is Rahner’s ambiguous position on this matter. He both requires explicit faith for the beatific vision and seems not to. Which is it? I would contend that when pushed, Rahner could not hold that the anonymous Christian who has never heard the gospel is “saved” in the proper eschatological sense, but is on the road to salvation. If he allowed that they were saved in the full eschatological sense, he would have to then provide some explanation as to how someone cannot know and yet can know at the same time the triune God in the beatific vision.

None of these objections are definitive, nor am I disallowing the prospect that God saves whomever he wishes to. One cannot restrict the freedom of God. The objections are based purely on tracing the contours of what scripture permits us to say: *as far as we know* the conditions of salvation require *solus Christus*, *fides ex auditu*, and *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Second, I am not suggesting that non-Christians are damned. I have made this clear above. Third, I am not arguing that other religions are worthless and have no theological interest. They do, as they are capable of transmitting truth, goodness, and beauty, three transcendental qualities all rooted in the divine nature.

Restrictivist inclusivism and objections

Restrictivist inclusivists hold that Christ is the normative revelation of God, the ontological and causal grounds of salvation, and that baptism is the normal means of salvation. However, they also hold that, because not all have had the opportunity to hear the gospel, a just God makes provision that all might freely accept or reject God through varying means: the natural law inscribed in the universe and in the heart through conscience, or the

good, true, and beautiful *elements* within non-Christian religions. They do not accept that other religions *per se* can be salvific means (for reasons given above in my criticism of Rahner), but at their best are preparations for the gospel. Christ is ontologically and causally exclusive to salvation, not epistemologically. This position is apparently advanced by many Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reform, and Protestant theologians and is sometimes (wrongly) attributed to their respective ecclesial bodies. This position is subject to the first, third, and fifth criticisms advanced above against Rahner. The fifth criticism is the most important: final salvation requires not only an ontological and causal, but also an epistemological relationship to Christ. If the beatific vision requires explicit knowledge and enjoyment of the triune God, then it is not strictly correct to say that such non-Christians are actually saved by these various means. Rather, these means are positive preparations. This is perfectly compatible with saying that these people are destined for salvation. Below, I shall be arguing that the mainstream churches are better seen as exclusivists in precisely this respect, for they clearly stipulate the final epistemic necessity of faith (*fides ex auditu*). One further criticism might be introduced. Restrictivist inclusivists want to affirm the possibility of salvation outside the visible church, which is why they are sometimes called inclusivists (they include non-Christians in the scope of salvation). The objection would be that certain exclusivists allow for this and better explain the epistemologically necessary relationship to Christ that is required as a final means to salvation. Further, positive preparatory status to other religions is entirely compatible with some forms of exclusivism. If both these are the case, the argument amounts to suggesting that the classification is problematic: restrictivist inclusivists are better grouped as universal-access exclusivists, for their aims and goals are fully attained under that heading. Whether this is the case or not will be seen in what follows.

Conclusions regarding inclusivism

I have given structural inclusivism extended attention due to its widespread popularity and relative novelty in the history of theology. I have argued that structural inclusivism becomes either a form of pluralism (as Dupuis so rightly notices in calling his own position inclusivist pluralism), or temporally limited pluralism (in Rahner's case). Both are unsatisfactory because they fail to explain how religious truths that are not the truth of the trinitarian God in Christ can be the means to salvation. Both fail as

there is, strictly speaking, no analogy to Israel, for Israel is part of the explicit covenant history of the church. While restrictivist inclusivists do not fall foul of these criticisms, they are still subject to the basic criticism underlying these: they fail to explain how non-explicit Christological means can bring about Christological knowledge that is requisite for salvation. Exclusivism is the only position that seems to hold together all that is required.

Exclusivism

Some argue that exclusivist theology leads to racism, imperialism, sexism, and Eurocentricism. Traces of this dark history cannot be denied, although the causal link is complex. There are persuasive arguments that much missionary work was not in fact pursued in tandem with empire building, but actually resisted it (Stanley 1990). Further, missionaries were central in developing respect and understanding for cultures, partly because of the importance of translating the Bible into indigenous languages, thus enriching local cultures rather than denigrating them. Lamin Sanneh (1987) criticizes the Western “guilt complex” underlying much European theology, which fails to note complex reciprocity. I have highlighted these issues to show the ways in which theological attitudes are indivisible from practices, but with no easily discernable causal links. Exclusivist theologies do not logically and necessarily lead to racist or imperialist attitudes toward non-Christians, although, contingently, they may on occasion. We have seen above how some pluralist theologies can be imperialist! I shall turn to two types of exclusivism, but give more attention to what both exclusivists hold in common, before focusing on the differences.

The exclusivist position was mainstream Christian orthodoxy until the nineteenth century. It is fundamentally concerned to affirm two or/and three central insights. The first is that God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to bring salvation into the world and that this salvation is both judgment and mercy to all human beings who are deeply estranged from God. Salvation therefore comes from faith in Christ alone – *solus Christus*. Second, this salvation won by Christ is only available through faith in Christ, which comes from hearing the gospel preached in this life or the next (*fides ex auditu*), requiring repentance, baptism, and the embracing of a new life in Christ. This second axiom distinguishes inclusivists from exclusivists. Third, because Christ is the cause of salvation, the church must also be the means of

salvation (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). This third view is more emphatically held by Catholics, although it is to be found among some Reformers. There is an important difference between exclusivists that gives rise to restrictive-access exclusivism (RAE) and universal-access exclusivism (UAE).

Restrictive-access exclusivists

RAE is held mainly by strict Calvinists, but also by non-Calvinist evangelicals. One of the best exponents is Carl Henry (1991). RAE has the following differences from UAE. First, it is held that salvation is restricted to those who respond to the preaching of the gospel in this life, which is seen as stipulated in the Bible. The concomitant is that those who do not hear the gospel are lost. Clearly, there is a great urgency for mission, for it is the sole means to salvation. Second, Christ dies only for the elect, not for those destined for perdition. This is the distinctly Calvinist contribution. Third, neither of the above can be deemed to be incompatible with the justice and mercy of God, which is the typical objection introduced by pluralists: an all-loving God could not consign the majority of people to perdition through no fault of their own. Hence this position contradicts God's mercy and justice. Henry replies to this in three steps. First, God's justice is not compromised because justice actually requires that all be damned and none saved, given the fall and rebellion of humans. All are justly damned. Second, God's mercy is seen in Christ's death for the elect sinners, who deserve damnation but are actually saved. We should stand in awe and thanks at God's merciful, free, undeserved gift of his Son. Henry says that the unevangelized are like the fallen angels, destined for damnation because of their rebellion.

There is a further defense on the matter of God's distributive justice, provided by a philosophical retrieval of the doctrine of God's "middle knowledge" in the work of William Lane Craig (1989). Middle knowledge combines a strong view of God's omniscience and an indeterministic view of human freedom. Divine knowledge has the following characteristics. First, God knows all that *could* happen in any possible world. Second, this means that God knows what free persons will choose in any possible situation, without compromising their freedom. Third, God knows all that *will* happen in this world before it has happened. God simply knows all possible outcomes of every possible free choice. Middle knowledge allows God's omniscience to be "expanded" without compromising human freedom. Craig thus argues that God knows that some will reject the gospel,

whatever their circumstances, even though they are truly free. So if one claimed a good God could not damn a pre-Christian Amazonian who had never heard the gospel and sought to do the good, Craig responds that this man would never have accepted the gospel even if he had heard it, so it is just, not unjust, that he is damned. "God in His providence has so arranged the world that anyone who would receive Christ has the opportunity to do so" (Craig 1989, 185).

This makes for a clean type, but it should be noted that RAE shades into UAE at certain points, because of various exceptions to the above. Calvin, the alleged master-type of RAE, in fact argues against the rigidity of the rules guiding this model as it would be a constraint on the freedom of God. He argues that the truly elect could be among the non-evangelized and, if this were the case, God would make sure that this person would receive the message of the gospel somehow (Sanders 1994, 57). Henry, for example, more significantly allows that pious Jews before Christ and unbaptized children before the age of reason will also be saved: the first because they have belonged to the "channel" of revealed religion; the second because "they are embraced by covenant theology as members of the family of faith." He argues, rather unconvincingly (given his initial premises), that "Other communions hold that, just as children are counted guilty in Adam without volition of their own, so God accounts them justified in Christ without personal exercise of faith" (1991, 247; better arguments are provided by William Shedd on this matter – see chapter 8).

Critical reflections on restrictive-access exclusivism

It is important not to caricature RAE, for there is no theologian I know who actually argues that God damns people against their will or that God damns people other than because God is just. Rather, what is at stake is a broad set of presuppositions involved in this basically Calvinist/Reform starting point, established at the Synod of Dort (1618) and given the delightful mnemonic of TULIP by J. I. Packer (1983, 4). TULIP stands for the five fundamental points established at Dort: Total depravity (justly damned), Unconditional election (some mercifully saved), Limited atonement (Christ only dies for the elect), Irresistible grace (God's sovereignty is paramount), Preservation of the saints (his restricted saving will must be accomplished). These are challenged from within the Reformed fold. For example, Arminians emphasize human freedom and responsibility in what is called a "libertarian" view of human freedom, which will not allow

that God “causes” human decisions. Further, the middle-knowledge claims have been criticized for their curtailment of human freedom (a form of philosophical Arminianism), or because God denies himself such knowledge, or because there is nothing for God to know before a free decision is actually taken (see Hasker 1986; Adams 1977). I am unable to assess these intra-Reform/Calvinist debates except to say that there is a compelling logical force in RAE as outlined above, and it is difficult to resist except in refusal of one or other of its TULIP petals. As a Catholic theologian, I am compelled to reject two in particular: total depravity and limited atonement. I will focus only on the second as, if it falls, then RAE is severely weakened.

Catholics and others reject RAE on the basis of scripture, tradition, and the teachings of the magisterium. I will simply indicate a few aspects of this rejection. According to 1 Timothy 2:3–6:

God our Saviour *wants everyone to be saved* and reach full knowledge of the truth. For there is only one God, and is only one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus, who sacrificed himself as a ransom for them *all*. (My emphasis)

According to Luke 5:31–2, “It is not those who are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the virtuous, but sinners to repentance.” These passages are read to imply that Christ’s atonement is for all and is not limited. The Reformers protested that, because universalism is false and God’s will cannot be thwarted, these verses do not refer to “all” meaning the damned, but “all” meaning all the elect. However, many of the early fathers, councils, and the magisterial tradition interpreted them otherwise. Ambrose certainly follows this line. The Council of Orange in 529 excluded the possibility of God predestining anyone to evil (Denzinger 1955, 200). Pope Innocent X condemned as heresy the proposition that Christ suffered for the predestined only (Denzinger 1955, 1096), and Alexander VIII refused the assertion that Christ had sacrificed himself for the faithful alone (Denzinger 1955, 1294). The controversy against Jansenism consolidated this position. This alternative reading does not permit universalism, but refuses to hold that God’s love and mercy is restricted, while allowing human freedom its tragic dimension. This does not mean that God’s will to save all is thwarted, because God also wills men and women to choose him freely. I noted at the outset that some differences between Christian positions were shaped by controlling beliefs, and here it is beyond my scope to argue against

the controlling beliefs of RAE. My starting point indicates the outline of a wider critique and means (in line with other denominational groups) that UAE is actually required to preserve the truth of revelation.

Universal-access exclusivism

This position is best defined through four rules, some or all of which are adopted by various UAEs and all of which can lead to optimistic or pessimistic outcomes regarding the majority of the unevangelized. The first is that, because not all have heard the gospel, but the *fides ex auditu* requires that all have this opportunity, there will be a chance to respond to the gospel and enter into salvation for all people at the point of death (Catholic: Boros 1965), after death in a post-mortem state (Protestants: Lindbeck 1984; Davis 1990; Fackre 1995), after death in a reincarnation as another person (Protestant: Jathanna 1981), or in purgatory (Catholic: DiNoia 1992). The second rule relies on a middle-knowledge form of argument, which runs like this (Lake 1975). Because God's middle knowledge allows God to know who would and would not accept the gospel among the unevangelized, God simply "applies that gospel even if the person never hears the gospel during his lifetime" (1975, 43). Lake's argument is analogous to the implicit-faith argument, without in any way attributing positive import to any elements within other religions. A third rule simply acknowledges that we cannot and do not know how God will reach the unevangelized who are to be saved, and we cannot exclude such a possibility, but he will do so and it is a legitimate mystery. The evangelical John Stott (Stott and Edwards 1988) occupies this position along with the Calvinist Paul Helm who speaks of "opaque exclusivism" (1991, 274), as does the bishop of the church of South India, Lesslie Newbigin. The fourth rule is that explicit faith and baptism are the normal means to salvation; there can be other means that act as a preparation (*preparatio*) to salvation, which will eventuate in final salvation. How this might happen (the means) varies: through natural revelation in nature (natural law – objectively), in following the good through conscience and reason (natural law – subjectively), or through elements within a religion, but not through that religion *per se*. This would conform to restrictivist inclusivism were it not for the qualification of a *preparatio* status and the further qualification that salvation entails a specific knowledge and full participation in the life of the triune God. These two qualifiers properly complement the restrictivist inclusivist position (but making it UAE as a result) and grant the possibility of a positive status to elements of

non-Christian religions. This is the official Catholic position (as I shall argue in part IV) and the position of a wide number of Catholic, Orthodox, Reform, and Protestant theologians. I shall look at one Lutheran and one Catholic to flesh out these rules in the work of actual theologians.

The American Lutheran George Lindbeck, for example, argues that because becoming a Christian is a process of being included into cultural-linguistic practices, then it follows that

there is no damnation – just as there is no salvation – outside the church. One must, in other words, learn the language of faith before one can know enough about its message knowingly to reject it and thus be lost. (1984, 59)

This position is deeply dependent on the postliberal emphasis on the cultural-linguistic construction of social reality, such that people are shaped by the sign-worlds within which they are raised and that they then subsequently shape. The relationship between different cultural-linguistic worlds is ambiguous. Lindbeck initially spoke about the incommensurability of different worlds, which some have taken to imply a deep relativism in his position. While this is an unresolved debate, I think Lindbeck's position implies that we cannot simply judge one world X, from the perspective of another world Y, in terms of that judgment being *meaningful* to those in X. Hence, what is required is that a Y learns the language of an X, like an Englishwoman might learn German, or better a Christian learns the language and practices of a Hindu so that they can understand the inner logic, the practices that are entailed by various beliefs, the way in which beliefs and practices evolve within the rules of the Hindu tradition. In this way a Christian might be able to make evaluative intra-traditional judgments about Hinduism (and vice versa). In terms of the metaphor of learning languages, in this process, both languages are being enriched, at least for person X. If Lindbeck really held religions as cultural-linguistic forms to be incommensurable, it would be impossible to understand another religion at all. It would make no sense for him to even suggest learning another language. It is very important for various aspects of our debate to understand this point. With no damnation outside the church in place, Lindbeck suggests a program of real engagement between Christianity and other religions in the spirit of open learning and mission. Lindbeck also holds out a hope, not a certainty, for the salvation of all and suggests a post-mortem confrontation with Christ (thereby satisfying the *fides ex auditu* principle) to allow that all non-Christians who have not heard the gospel in this life have a chance of salvation. Lindbeck

claims the benefit of this position is that it does not entail a negative judgment on non-Christian religions, nor does it imply that “below” or “above” their own self-knowledge, which is thoroughly cultural–linguistic, something else non-cultural–linguistic is going on, such as hidden grace or “anonymous Christianity” (Rahner). I find Lindbeck’s position deeply attractive and will develop it in part IV, closely following Joseph DiNoia.

The Roman Catholic DiNoia develops Lindbeck’s position in two ways. First, in terms of the doctrine of purgatory (a process of purification after death and prior to the beatific vision, which is the final eschatological enjoyment of the blessed trinity in heaven in communion with the redeemed) as the means whereby the non-Christian who has already responded positively to God in this life will be purified and will hear the gospel, thus satisfying the *fides ex auditu*. Second, DiNoia leaves it open as to whether other religions play a role in God’s plan of salvation – they may and they may not, but their different aims and means must be seen clearly for what they are. DiNoia is resolute that Rahner’s way of affirming another religion as a possible anonymous Christianity, as a possible means of salvation, is problematic in neglecting the explicit stated goals and the means for achieving these as taught explicitly by that religion. Rahner imposes a goal upon a non-Christian religion in calling it “anonymous Christianity,” which is “not the aim fostered by their distinctive patterns of life but that fostered by the Christian pattern of life” (DiNoia 1992, 77). DiNoia develops this point quite differently from Lindbeck due to his knowledge of Buddhism and also in his careful argument that Buddhism, for example, might be understood to be providential (indirectly contributing to final salvation) though not salvific (directly contributing) (1992, 92).

What unites Lindbeck and DiNoia is their concern to facilitate universal accessibility, not universalism, that satisfies the epistemological, ontological, and causal necessity of Christ for salvation, the necessity of baptism into the church (in differing manners), a respectful listening to other religions to see how they envisage reality and the means to attain that reality, and the possibility of affirming elements of both means and goal, but always recognizing that this involves Christian interpretation and appropriation.

Some criticisms of universal-access exclusivism

I support the first and fourth types of UAE and also, as argued, a modified form of restrictive inclusivism, which is best transformed into UAE. I am unhappy with rules two and three. I disagree with Lake’s position, not on

middle-knowledge grounds, but because it does not clarify itself from restrictivist inclusivism (which it could) and more importantly does not actually show why we cannot articulate the way this salvation might happen given a rich biblical and historical set of speculations (which it could). If it does do this, then it will move into either the first or the fourth rule-group. I disagree with Stott, Heim, and Newbigin on the same grounds. The premature resort to mystery is rather like the traditional Orthodox resort to mystery in explaining the change in the Eucharist when affirming "Real Presence." If one cannot give reasons for asserting mystery as an answer, then it is probable that mystery is a premature answer.

Between types one and four there is an important disputed question that I shall explore in part IV of this book. On the one hand, if a person's destiny is fixed at death and they can make no choice after death affecting their destiny, which is the teaching of the Catholic church, then what of the *fides ex auditu* principle? This is a particular problem for Catholic theologians. On the other hand, if a person's destiny is not fixed at death, allowing for a post-mortem "conversion" and thus satisfying the *fides ex auditu*, then what of the necessity of mission and the strong Augustinian tradition that a person's destiny is fixed at death? This is a particular problem for Reformed theologians. In part IV I shall suggest a resolution that allows for the *fides ex auditu* as well as the Augustinian prohibition that a person's destiny is fixed at death.

Conclusions regarding exclusivism

I have argued against RAE on inconclusive grounds regarding basic shaping doctrines. I have affirmed UAE on positive grounds, especially in terms of its forms in rules one and four. I have claimed that I shall attend to a serious issue among UAEs in the final part of this book and I have claimed that UAEs properly hold together a wide range of doctrinal teachings that constitute orthodoxy, while allowing for the salvation of the unevangelized without affirming other religions as means of salvation. UAEs can also affirm positive elements within other religions and acknowledge what is good, true, and beautiful within them. UAEs best advance the authenticity of the Christian tradition and in fact the position of the Catholic and Orthodox churches, and a number of Reformation communions.

This takes us to the end of our mapping exercise and discussion between the three emergent positions in the early period of the late twentieth century. I have also argued that all major forms of pluralism and inclusivism are

problematic in serious ways – which justifies the extensive treatment granted to them. No argument against these positions is decisive, as space has restricted the scope and extent of argument. I will be developing my form of UAE throughout this book, and extending its scope into social and political dimensions of religious pluralism. Let us now turn to more recent discussions in the theology of religions in the past twenty years to see how this map has been filled out or, indeed, been discarded.