Abstract

The discussion of Christian theology of religions has focused primarily so far on the question of whether or not the Christian understanding of salvation is available through other religions to their adherents. The predominant responses of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism have shaped the debate and serve as a typology for organizing the various theologies of religions. While Pentecostals have generally fallen into the exclusivist category – e.g., that salvation is available only to those who have converted to Christian faith – there are also other resources related to their views regarding the universal work of the Holy Spirit that have not yet been adequately explored for the purposes of developing a more distinctive set of not only Pentecostal beliefs about other religions but also Christian practices related to people in other faiths. The first two parts of this essay survey the basic threefold typology and assesses the strengths and limitations of each position. The concluding section presents the contours of the emerging pneumatological paradigm informed by the “Pentecostal” idea of the Holy Spirit who has been poured out on all flesh, and suggests how this approach might enrich Christian beliefs about the religions and invigorate a more hospitable form of practices related to people of other faiths.

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Pentecostals have traditionally not given as much thought to the topic of theology of religions as to other theological loci.\(^1\) Part of why this is the case may be related to the fact that academic Pentecostalism is but a recent arrival to the theological scene, with her first generation of professionally trained theologians – as opposed to historians or biblical scholars – emerging only since the early 1990s.\(^2\) Yet Pentecostal scholars can no longer avoid giving serious attention to this topic for various reasons, whether that be because the Pentecostal commitment to carrying out the Great Commission leads many of her missionaries and ministers into environments and situations in which they are interacting with people of other faiths; because the question of how Christianity is to respond to other religions has become a more intensely debated social, political, and ideological question in an increasingly globalized world after September 11, 2001, or simply because they are led to engage any topic that is a live one (as is theology of religions) in the wider academic conversation. There is now no denying the need to at least think through the theological question of the religions from a distinctively Pentecostal perspective.\(^3\)

This chapter seeks to accomplish two broad objectives: to present the “state of the question” regarding the contemporary discussion of Christian theology of religions, and to provide some perspective on the emerging pneumatological approach to the discussion that is being developed among Pentecostal theologians. To fulfill our assignment, we will divide our remarks into three sections: 1) an overview of the theology of religions field, especially the dominant positions of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism; 2) an assessment of the limitations of these models; and 3) a presentation of an alternative approach to theology of religions derived from Pentecostal-pneumatological perspectives. Given the constraints of space that we have to work with, the following discussion will be sketched quickly in broad strokes.

**The Status Quaestiones of Christian Theology of Religions Today: Mapping the Field**

In one sense, Christian reflection on theology of religions goes back to the earliest Christians, insofar as there has always been some kind of understanding of the role of the religions of the world in relationship to the providential purposes of God.\(^4\) At another level, however, more in-depth theological thinking about the religions has emerged only during the modern period
when European colonizers re-discovered the rest of the world and its religious inhabitants, when the formal academic study of religion emerged in Western universities during the second half of the nineteenth century, and when Protestant missionaries were brought together in organizations such as the International Missionary Council where they began to debate the best approaches to evangelizing those in other faiths. During the last generation, the topic of Christian theology of religions has solidified as its own area of study — with theology textbooks now regularly including at least one chapter in which it is discussed — as well as expanded. The dominant categories for mapping the various theological views about other religions that have emerged are exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

The following overview of the current discussion of Christian theology of religions follows this basic typology. Our goal will be to provide some historical perspective on these various theological positions as well as outline their basic features. We will wait to raise critical questions about the models themselves until the next section of this essay.

Exclusivism, the Unevangelized, and the Religions

In one sense, it is arguable that Christian exclusivism regarding the religions was a feature of apostolic Christianity. The earliest Christians were convinced that Jesus was the way, the truth, and the light, and that none could approach the Father except through him (Jn. 14:6), and that “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). While there is a recognition that these oft-cited texts do not refer to the religions in their original contexts, theological exclusivists are convinced there are valid inferences to be drawn from these passages that are applicable to the discussion of theology of religions. It makes sense within the wider New Testament framework that if Jesus is the only way to salvation, then the disciples were told to “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mk. 16:15; cf. Matt. 28:19). For, as the Apostle Paul put it, “how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (Rom. 10:14).

The point was that all human beings should be told about the good news of God’s salvation in Christ. Not only has “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life,” but also: “Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (Jn. 3:16, 18). People of other religions are therefore unbelievers and excluded from salvation unless they are evangelized and converted to Christ.
The shape of Christian exclusivism, however, has taken various forms throughout the history of the church. During the patristic period, the axiom “no salvation outside the church” (extra ecclesiam nulla salus) emerged, but it was originally targeted toward “heretics” who were threatening the unity of the church. Based on the New Testament imagery of salvation as residing only within the ark of Noah, which prefigured initiation to Christian faith through the church’s sacrament of baptism in water (see 1 Pet. 3:20-21), the conviction arose that those who either knowingly departed from the church or rejected the church’s teachings and sacraments were likened to those in the days of Noah who were lost outside the ark.

During the medieval period, however, the reach of the “no salvation outside the church” teaching was extended so that it applied not only to heretics who were undermining the authority of the church, but also to all who, because of original sin, had not been properly initiated to Christian faith through the cleansing waters of the baptismal sacrament. Whereas during the Middle Ages it was the Muslims who were excluded from salvation because of their unbelief, other religious groups were added to this sphere of condemnation as they were “found” in the New World or later identified through the colonial enterprise as having existed “outside” the sacraments of the church.

The Protestant form of exclusivism shifted the Catholic emphases. Whereas “no salvation outside the church” highlighted the importance of proper (i.e., sacramental) Christian initiation as historically emphasized on the Catholic side, “how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?” focused on the importance of hearing and then confessing Christ as essential on the Protestant side. Especially in the case of evangelical Protestantism, the church’s key role was not that of mediating the salvation of the “outsider” through the sacrament of baptism, but that of proclaiming the gospel to the unevangelized through the preaching of the word. The pragmatic outcome, however, was similar: if “no salvation outside the church” required the priestly mediation of the sacrament of baptism for people of other faiths to be saved, “how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?” needed the missionary proclamation of the gospel for those in other religions to hear and believe in the gospel.

The central features of exclusivism regarding the religions can now be summarized. First, the uniqueness, absoluteness, and exclusiveness of Christ’s saving power are paramount. Insofar as other religious traditions are ignorant of Christ, reject Christ, or do not acknowledge his saving power – which by definition, is what it means to talk about “other religions” from a Christian point of view – to that same degree people of other faiths remain unbelievers and excluded from the salvation that is available through Christ. Second, from a historical perspective, exclusivism was based on the conviction that
salvation in Christ was mediated through the church, especially in the church’s holding the keys to proper Christian initiation through the sacraments. All who had not undergone baptismal initiation, whether pagan or people of other faiths, were excluded from the saving benefits of the sacraments. Finally, contemporary Protestants, especially of the conservative evangelical type, continue to emphasize the importance of evangelization for the salvation of all people, including those of other faiths. The unevangelized (including those in other religions), those who have heard the gospel but not responded to its call (including those in other faiths), and whoever finally rejects the gospel (including those who at one time or other considered themselves followers of Christ) – all are finally bereft of salvation apart from confession of Christ and Christian discipleship.

For exclusivists, then, other religions are not salvific because Christ is neither present nor proclaimed through those traditions. Rather, the religions might be misguided human attempts striving for salvation, or they might be the results of having suppressed the truth of God’s primordial (general) revelation. We should also not dismiss the possibility, going all the way back to the early church, that the religions are deceptive mechanisms of the Devil to keep the mass of humanity in darkness and therefore resistant to the light of the gospel. While these and other exclusivist explanations have been proposed, what is most important is that adherents of other faiths remain “outside” of God’s saving purposes unless they come into the light of Christ.

Inclusivism and Theology of Religions

At one level, inclusivism arguably has an ancient lineage connected to the post-apostolic apologists and Greek-speaking early Christian fathers who believed that the “seeds of the Logos” (logos spermatikos) had been planted throughout the world, even to the point of having illuminated every human heart (cf. Jn. 1:9). It was from this conviction that they thought the ancient Greek philosophers who recognized the form of the Logos in their philosophizing would have embraced Christ once they saw that the Logos had taken flesh in the life of Jesus. Inclusivists did not necessarily insist that the Greek philosophers were saved; however, their views at least opened up the possibility of the idea that the salvation of God was not narrowly restricted to the few who had access to the sacrament of baptism or the opportunity to hear, receive, and confess belief in Christ. Over the centuries, there have been others who have held inclusivist positions following somewhat in the line of thinking mapped by these apologists.

At another level, the inclusivist position was not systematically developed until the twentieth-century debates that surfaced amidst the aforementioned International Missionary Council. There are at least three basic types of
inclusivisms. First, inclusivists highlight the New Testament emphasis on
the universal salvific will of God: e.g., “God so loved the world that he gave
his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may
have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16); “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as
some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish,
but all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9); and “This is right and is acceptable
in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to
come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4). These texts are then read
alongside other texts such as those which indicate “God shows no partiality,
but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable
to him” (Acts 10:34b-35), toward the conclusion that the company of the
saved may be much more expansive than traditional exclusivist perspectives
have granted.17

So far, the inclusivist argument has remained simply at the level of
developing a wider soteriological vision. While even these proposals have not
gone unchallenged by exclusivists, things get much more heated when this
more inclusive theology of salvation is suggested to include people in other
faiths. Now exclusivists have been consistent all along that anyone who is
saved, even those in other faiths, are saved neither by their own doing nor
even through adherence to their non-Christian religious beliefs and practices,
but only because of the person and work of Christ. In other words, reading
further from the passage in 1 Timothy quoted above, exclusivists are careful
to acknowledge that “there is one God; there is also one mediator between
God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a
ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5-6a). In this way, inclusivism also remains more so
a theology regarding the salvation of the unevangelized than a theology of
religions.

A second version of inclusivism has thus emerged which has sought to
say more about the religions than simply that people of those traditions
might still receive salvation through the gracious work of God in Christ. For
these inclusivist theologians, while Christ may provide the ontological
grounding for salvation, how is the grace of God received by the unevangelized
if their seeking after God occurs within a framework of practices established
by their own religious traditions? Does it not seem reasonable to infer not
that the non-Christian faiths embody God’s saving grace on their own terms,
but rather that God may and often does freely choose to reveal himself to
and meet embodied social and historical creatures in and through the various
concrete and material practices that define their religious life? This is not to say
that all people in other religions are saved through their religious practices
since many do not respond even to the light they have. It is to say that if
people in other religions are saved, it is because God impartially judges them
according to their response to the light that they have (Rom. 2:5-16) and
determines that they have approached God through the faith requisite for salvation: for “without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6).18

This leads to the third type of inclusivist theology of religions, one which sees other religions serving God’s purposes similar to how the religion of the ancient Hebrews, as unveiled through the covenant of Moses, mediated the saving work of God to the Israelites before the coming of Christ. In this view, the religions of the world are completed by Christ in a parallel way to how Hebraic religion is fulfilled by Christ. Just as the coming of Christ brought about a fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, so also can Christ be understood as the “crown” of other religious traditions, realizing their highest aspirations.19 Again, this does not mean that all people in other faiths are saved; it does mean that until evangelization occurs, they remain under the tutelage of the non-Christian religious traditions (cf. Gal. 4:2). In this way, Christ comes as a fulfillment of their utmost religious hopes and desires only if and when the gospel is proclaimed with clarity and power. Until that point, people of other faiths remain, at least existentially and cognitively, in a “pre-Christian,” but not necessarily salvifically condemned, frame of reference.20

In summary, inclusivist theologies of religion do not deny the normativeness of Christ. They distinguish, however, between the ontological necessity of Christ’s life and work and such being the epistemic condition for salvation. Further, since God may have long been at work in non-Christian religious traditions, as God was indeed in ancient Israel under the Mosaic covenant, so also is it imperative that Christians learn as much as they can about other religions in order that they may more effectively bear witness to how Christ fulfills the aspirations of all people as well as their religious traditions. Interreligious dialogue is in this case essential, both for Christian understanding of their non-Christian neighbors and for more appropriate “contextualization” of the gospel message in a religiously plural world.

Pluralist Theologies of Religions

Whereas exclusivist and inclusivist theologies of religions usually attempt to make their argument from a scriptural starting point, most pluralist approaches start from other premises. Having emerged on the academic scene only in the last generation, many are motivated by post-colonial concerns. For pluralists, both exclusivism and inclusivism smack of colonial triumphalism, the former because of its dismissal of any form of legitimacy to non-Christian religions and the latter because it clearly subordinates other faiths to Christianity, even to the point for their being ultimately superseded by Christianity. Is it not the case, pluralists contend, that the various world religious traditions – especially Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam,
all of which have been around for centuries, with the former three having longer histories than Christianity itself – each mediate in their own way the saving grace of God?

As with the other two models, there are also various forms of pluralist theologies of religions. John Hick is probably the most eloquent spokesperson for what might be called epistemic pluralism. After a long period of wrestling with questions in the philosophy of religion (in which he was trained) amidst the multifaith context of Birmingham where he lived and worked, Hick came to argue for what he called a “Copernican Revolution” in theology and philosophy of religion – namely, the idea that just as humanity came at one point to understand that the earth was not the center of the cosmos but that it and the other planets revolved around the sun, so also people of faith are gradually coming to see that their own religion is not the only or primarily true one but that each religious tradition is in its own way a result of different conceptions, perceptions, and responses to the ineffable and transcendent ultimate reality (that Hick calls “the Real”). Two arguments motivate Hick’s Copernican shift: first, that since people are often born into religious traditions and most people live and die in such traditions without ever having had the opportunity to explore much less convert to other paths, they cannot be judged by religious norms that they have never had access to; and second, that the various traditions have each produced their exemplary saints who manifest what Christians have called the “fruits of the Spirit,” and that this is evidence of God’s (or the Real’s) presence and activity in their midst. Looking back historically, then, epistemic pluralists recall the classical image for this reorientation: that of the many blindfolded villagers who each touching a different part of the elephant’s body are led to conclude upon their discussion together that they are each interacting with different things, when in fact such is not the case, and that of mountaineers trekking up many different paths only to find they have converged at the top.

Others, however, insist that Hick’s proposal is not pluralistic enough since it actually denies what people in other faiths say about their own goals while claiming to know better than they about what is at the end of each religious quest. This imposes a homogenizing interpretive grid on all religious traditions that honors none of them. This criticism of at least Hick’s epistemic pluralism has led theologians like S. Mark Heim and Joseph DiNoia to present a theory of religious pluralism as grounded ontologically in the way things are and will be: that there may indeed be multiple religious ends, each achievable through the distinctive practices of the various faith traditions. The merits of such a proposal are at least twofold: first, that it grants to practitioners of the world’s religions pride of place to define their own faith and its aims on their own terms, and second, that it recognizes and is able to account for the important role of religious practices so that different practices both are shaped
by and generated from different belief (doctrinal) systems on the one hand, and also produce divergent goals and results on the other.24 This ontologically pluralist theory of religions, however, is nevertheless “grounded” in Christian faith since both Dinoia and Heim argue their pluralist hypotheses within a Christian theological framework.

A third kind of pluralist theology of religions is deeply informed by developments in liberation theology.25 Liberational pluralism, as such might be called, is focused less on the eschatological ends of the various traditions and more on how the products of the diverse religious soteriologies are manifest in history. Hence religious doctrines are important not for their own sake but for the sake of alleviating the suffering of human history and for achieving social, economic, political, and even ecological justice in the face of widespread abuses on each of these fronts. For these liberational pluralists, the criterion for judging the religions is whether or not they save by promoting human and planetary well-being. From the Christian perspective, then, Jesus is normative especially for Christians and insofar as the message of the gospel achieves such salvific liberative aims. But Jesus is not the exclusive or exhaustive truth of God’s revelation in human history inasmuch as other religious traditions have their own internal norms that also promote justice, and liberation.

Pluralist theologies of religions can thus be said to be theocentrically focused (or in Hick’s terms, Reality-centric) or even liberationally directed (soterio-centric). The shifts in Christian theology of religions can thus be observed, that whereas exclusivist theologies are ecclesio-centric (given the centrality of either the priesthood and sacraments for the mediation of salvation or of the evangelist or missionary for the promulgation of the gospel), and whereas inclusivist theologies are Christo-centric (since salvation may be widely accessible, but only because of the foundation laid by Christ’s person and work), pluralist theologies are either more abstractly oriented (toward God or the Real) or more liberationally normed (by the criterion of salvation defined in terms of eco-social justice). For pluralists, then, Christians interact with people from other faiths less to convert others to Christian beliefs and practices and more to learn from them, and especially to cooperate with them in the urgent tasks related to saving the world.

Critical Analyses of Traditional Theologies of Religions

The preceding discussion has proceeded basically at the descriptive level. It is important to understand these basic models in contemporary theology of religions before engaging critically with them. While the following are by no means knock-down criticisms of these positions – even if we note that the responses themselves are not definitive answers – our goal is only to understand the unresolved questions in order to set up the Pentecostal-pneumatological approach to theology of religions to come.
Exclusivism: Remaining Questions

As we have already noted, exclusivism does not really provide a theological view regarding other religions except to say that they are not salvific. In a sense, then, exclusivism is a negative form of theology of religions: it establishes criteria for salvation and concludes that the religions fail to satisfy such criteria. If we sought to understand exclusivism in more positive terms, it would be more accurate to identify it as a theology of the unevangelized. But even here, there are numerous unanswered (and perhaps unanswerable) questions.26

First, while exclusivists insist that Christ is the only savior of the world, they nevertheless grant that before the incarnation, the Old Testament saints were saved according to the faith principle identified in the letter to the Hebrews (11:6, cited above). We have seen that inclusivists suggest this text applies not only to the ancient Israelites, but also to people of other faiths who remain unevangelized. Now exclusivists reject this extension of the faith principle by claiming that with the coming of Christ, a fundamental change of dispensations occurred in human history so that while those who preceded Christ were saved according to the faith principle, those who come after Christ are saved only through encountering (being baptized into or confessing) him.

But at what point did the dispensation of Christ take effect? Was it at or after his conception, birth, baptism, death, resurrection, or ascension when the faith principle was abrogated and the new requirements effected? Even if we could answer this question—let’s say “the ascension”—to whom did the new salvific requirements apply: to those already living at that moment or only to those born after that moment? Let’s say the latter; in that case, then, is history divided into “BC” and “AD” so that, for example, my great-grandparents (to the n-th generation) who lived during the Han dynasty in China (206 BCE - 220 CE) who were born “BC” but died “AD” were judged according to the faith principle, while their children who were born “AD” were condemned because they were unevangelized and without access to Christian initiation?

But the questions get tougher. If from a Protestant point of view only evangelism opens up the possibility of salvation (for those who respond to the call of the gospel), then defining what it means to be evangelized is essential. This raises the question: what kind of content suffices for successful evangelization? As Arianism was condemned at the Council of Nicea, did evangelism by Arian missionaries followed by belief in and confession of (the Arian) Christ—as happened throughout what we now call Europe for centuries after the council—suffice for salvation? Similarly, was evangelism by the Nestorian missionaries to China—remembering that the Nestorian view of Christ was also condemned as heretical at the Council of Chalcedon—
followed by belief in and confession of Christ salvific? What about the
teaching and preaching of Roman Catholic missionaries, priests, and bishops?
Why would that have been adequate when we in conservative Protestant and
Pentecostal circles often hear testimonies to the effect that, “I grew up in the
Catholic Church, but I got saved later.”? Last but not least, what about
evangelism by Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, or Oneness Pentecostals?
What, if anything, separates the preaching of Christ through such missionaries
from Muslim understandings of Jesus derived from the Qur’an? If
knowledge of Jesus alone is insufficient for salvation, as most exclusivists
would insist when confronted with the Muslim example,27 then what kind
of knowledge of Jesus is required to be communicated so that one is able to
belief in, receive, and confess the true Jesus? And of course the Muslim
example calls attention to the fact that even when Christ is preached, we
cannot assume that those who are being evangelized will understand the
intended message; they will hear the words, but will interpret them on their
terms, not that of the missionaries or the evangelists.

This leads, finally, to asking when one finally understands enough to
either accept Jesus and be saved or reject him and be condemned in unbelief.
There are two sets of issues here. On the one hand is the question about the
fate of infants or children who die before they reach what many Protestants
call the age of accountability. While some believe that (a) such categories of
children or infants are all saved, others insist that (b) only those are saved who
either have been baptized or have believing parents (the appeal is made here
to 1 Cor. 7:14—“For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife,
and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your
children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy”—among other texts),
while a third group (in the Reformed tradition) suggests that (c) some, if not
all, are saved based on the gracious but mysterious election of God.28 With
guard to infants or children of parents of non-Christian faiths, only (a) does
not call into question the justice of God, but then families are eternally
divided simply based on the fact that their infants or children died before
reaching the age of accountability.

On the other hand, of course, what level of comprehension or knowledge
constitutes the age of accountability? Was I saved at any of the many times
during my younger childhood years when I went up to the altar and accepted
Jesus into my heart, repeating often the sinner’s prayer after the preacher? Or
did salvation come at my baptism in water when I was twelve, or later during
my teenage years when I submitted to the Lordship of Christ, or even later
during life when I rededicated my life to Christ after periods of nominal
faith? When did I finally attain sufficient knowledge of Christ—i.e., after four
undergraduate and graduate degrees in theology—so that salvation was finally
accessible through my belief and confession? And what about others, perhaps
those who are intellectually impaired—whether mildly, moderately, or even severely or profoundly—are such individuals cognitively evangelizable? If not, then what is their eternal fate?29

These questions reveal the difficulties attending the exclusivist position. I need to be clear that I am not claiming either that unevangelized people are saved or that there is no cognitive content to salvation in Christ. I am simply saying that all individuals have varying degrees of ignorance of or about Christ.30 Exclusivists thus seem caught on the horns of a dilemma: if such ignorance is not damning, then why are people of other faiths condemned because of the ignorance that defines their unevangelized state? If such ignorance is damning, then why doesn’t that apply to infants and children of Christians and of those in other faiths alike?

Inclusivism and Its Critics

The questions raised about theological exclusivism have led many to adopt the inclusivist position. However, the inclusivist theology of religions is not without its own difficulties. I raise and discuss three here.

First, arguably inclusivist proponents, especially those who affirm that salvation is mediated through non-Christian faiths, are too optimistic about the religions and that for at least three reasons.31 1) Religious traditions are diversified even within themselves, and it is premature to make wholesale generalizations about what inside practitioners themselves often do not agree on. 2) Even the Christian self-understanding would carefully qualify the claim that “Christianity saves”; rather, God saves through Christ by the Spirit. 3) If the practices of religious traditions are just as important as beliefs (doctrines), and if non-Christian religious devotees give reasons for their practices that do not include the obtaining of Christian salvation, then Christians who say otherwise would be imposing foreign interpretations on other religions against the self-understanding of its practitioners.

This last rationale raises the second set of questions about the inclusivist position: that its claim that Christ fulfills the highest aspirations of other religious traditions is problematic at least on two related counts. 1) It perpetuates the imperialist posture of the missionaries who brought a “better religion” than what had been available, but only this time, inclusivism grants some, if not a great deal, of legitimacy to the other faith; yet imperialism is imperialism, if in the end the self-understanding of people of other faiths is subordinated to the Christian explanation. 2) Conservative Protestants have long insisted that reductionistic explanations of their faith—whether to the economics of Marx, the sociology of Durkheim, the psychology of Freud, or even, more currently, the neuro-cognitive anthropology of Pascal Boyer32 (and note that these are reductionisms that have also been applied to Pentecostalism)—need to be replaced by Christian self-definitions; but to
then turn around and reduce other faiths to a secondary status of being fulfilled by Christ is to do to the “religious other” what we did not want done to us.

Finally, inclusivists insist that their position not only justifies but also encourages interreligious dialogue for the sake of learning about other faiths. They point out that for exclusivism there is no possibility for authentic dialogue since exclusivists are motivated at best to learn about other faiths ultimately for evangelistic purposes. While such purposes may be appropriate on some occasions (i.e., when interacting with lay people who are only nominally religious otherwise and interested in learning about Christianity), it is entirely ineffective at other times (i.e., when engaging with representatives of other faith traditions in an academic context). To put the shoe on the other foot momentarily, dialogue would never get off the ground if Christian exclusivists discerned that their interlocutors from other faiths were being friendly only because they were motivated to attain our conversion. But the irony is that inclusivist approaches to dialogue are hamstrung by similar if not identical issues since they already claim to know in advance that the highest aspirations of those in other faiths are potentially if not already fulfilled by Christ. Hence inclusivists are vulnerable to criticism from both sides as exclusivists and pluralists will deny authentic dialogue is possible in an inclusivist framework, if such dialogue is defined in terms of reciprocal give-and-take and mutual enrichment and transformation.

Inclusivists thus also seem to be caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, inclusivism provides a more expansive theological framework to account for the possibility of the salvation of the unevangelized and those in other faiths. On the other hand, such a theological position does not seem to be able to sustain the kinds of dialogical interactions between Christians and people of other faiths that inclusivists think are important. The latter horn of the dilemma raises the practical question: if it were indeed possible that people in other religions might be saved anyway, even through their own religious practices, then, as exclusivists wonder, does that not “cut the nerve cord of evangelism,” to the point of even undermining inclusivist motivations for dialogue altogether? The former horn of the dilemma points to a theological conundrum: is it possible for Christians to speak from out of their own confessional position (i.e., as inclusivists) in a way that yet allows and even invites people from other faiths to also speak from their own religious self-understanding?

Critical Questions for Pluralist Theologies of Religions

The question before us is the pluralist explanation for the many religions of the world, not the fact that there is a plurality of religious traditions. Yet interestingly, the pluralist position is susceptible to many of the same criticisms
as have been leveled against inclusivism.\textsuperscript{36} Again, let me identify four sets of questions.

First, if we recall the images associated with the pluralist theology – that of the blind men around the elephant, or of the many treks converging at a mountaintop – critics charge that pluralists adopt a transcendental position in the same manner as the exclusivists and inclusivists they disagree with. But in the case of the pluralist theology, this is doubly deceptive since their expressed motivations are to provide a robust a posteriori account of the diversity of religions on their own terms. Yet how then do pluralist theologians gain the “bird’s eye view” that allows them to see the entire mountain while the practitioners of the various religious traditions remain mired on the earthly treks below? This leads to the second set of criticisms: that pluralist theology ultimately denies the particularities of all religious traditions insofar as it claims the various traditions are finally convergent when this idea is not accepted by most actual religious practitioners. If pluralists charge that neither exclusivists nor inclusivists can properly respect and honor people of other faiths because their theological positions either reject the legitimacy of those religions or subordinate them to Christianity, then pluralists are similarly guilty of running roughshod over the self-understanding of all people of faith, including Christians, in telling them (us) that there is an underlying unity to what all people of faith believe and practice.\textsuperscript{37}

On the other side of the preceding criticism, there is also the charge that most pluralist theologians who have Christian backgrounds inevitably frame the pluralist vision in Christian terms. Knitter’s liberation theology of religious pluralism is deeply informed by Christian soteriology, and even Hick’s “the Real” resonates with the apophatic tradition of Christian theology, just to name two instances. The same is true even for those such as Heim: his allegedly more radical pluralistic theology of multiple religious ends is still articulated within a Christian trinitarian framework. These observations suggest that pluralism may be not much more than warmed-over interpretations of theological inclusivism since in the end, Christian ideas are drawn upon to make sense of the fact of religious diversity.\textsuperscript{38} So whereas the previous counter-argument says that pluralism disrespects the particularities of religious traditions, this one claims that pluralism may be Christian inclusivism in another guise.

The final set of challenges confronted by the pluralist project has to do with the question of relativism. How are we to adjudicate between differing epistemological, axiological, and moral visions of the world? If Hick’s epistemic pluralism were adopted, on what grounds would divergent notions of justice be arbitrated? When Hick does address this question by developing criteria to “grade” the religions, he emphasizes moral categories that come
close to Knitter’s project that understands salvation as eco-justice and liberation. But in doing so, we have just seen that Knitter blunts his pluralist position since such criteria are fundamentally informed by Christian convictions. So if we were to take religious pluralism seriously, can religious disagreements having moral, social, and political consequences be negotiated? The issue is further complicated if we factor in the interdependence between religious beliefs and practices: religious “outsiders” may not be able to render judgment on the beliefs of those in other faiths if they are not privy to or participants in their religious ways of life.

I have argued in this section that exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism are all problematic in some respect. For this reason some have called us to go “beyond the paradigm.” But there may be strong arguments to the effect that from a theological point of view, these may represent the logical options. If so, then, there may be at least two ways forward for contemporary theology of religions: either defend one of these positions as more satisfying than the other two, or develop an alternate framework for thinking theologically about the religions that adopts the best insights of each position without having to embrace their accompanying liabilities. I would like to propose a pneumatological approach to theology of religions in the interest of exploring the latter alternative.

**The Spirit of Encounter: Elements of a Pentecostal-pneumatological approach to Theology of Religions**

My goal in the remainder of this chapter is to present a Pentecostal-pneumatological contribution to the discussion of Christian theology of religions. I make no apologies for my distinctively Pentecostal perspective since there is no “neutral ground” — contra pluralist theologies — on which one can stand to make transcendentalist proclamations about the religions; hence, mine is a “confessional” approach in the tradition of “faith seeking understanding” (fides quaerens intellectum). At the same time, we have also seen that both exclusivism and inclusivism are unsatisfactory especially with regard to nurturing respectful interreligious dialogue (a practical matter) and registering insider religious perspectives on their own terms (a theological issue). Can a Pentecostal-pneumatological theology of religions succeed where others are found wanting?

My thesis is that Pentecostal-pneumatological perspectives can both advance the discussion at the theological level even while invigorating a wide range of Christian practices with regard to the contemporary encounter of religions. The two sub-sections that follow will focus, respectively, on the pneumatological-theological issues and on the performative-practical proposals. In the first, I will argue that the many tongues of Pentecost could represent even the religious traditions of the world, while in the second, that
this same multiplicity of tongues invites and empowers various kinds of practices for the interfaith encounter. While I do summarize some of what I have previously suggested elsewhere, I also introduce some new material, especially as related to the realm of interreligious practices.

*Many Tongues, Many Cultures: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*

One of the main problems that plague traditional theologies of religions is how to honor and respect the particularities of other faiths even while remaining committed to one’s own (in my case, Pentecostal Christianity). This is parallel to the perennial philosophical challenge, I suggest, of the relationship between the one and the many. Historically, responses have either privileged the one, which risks losing the many, or emphasized the many, which lapses into anarchy or relativism. What light, if any, does a pneumatological perspective shed on this ancient debate?

I suggest that the Day of Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 provides some perspective on this issue. St. Luke tells us that:

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power” (Acts 2:4-11).

Two observations can be made from the preceding:

First, it should be noted that the one outpouring of the Spirit did not cancel out but rather enabled an eruption of a diversity of tongues. On the one hand, there is a cacophony of tongues, yet on the other there is a harmony of testimonies, each witnessing in their own way to God’s deeds of power. Correlatively, there is both mass confusion but yet also an astonishment born of understanding. In these ways, Pentecost signifies, perhaps, a unique resolution of the one and the many: the many (tongues) retain their particularities even as they participate in the one (Spirit’s outpouring). Pentecostal theologian Jean-Jacques Suurmond thus identifies this outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17) as bringing about “a decisive new change in the relationship between God and the world and thus also in relationship
between human beings." Whereas before there were just the many tongues, now the many tongues are brought together, not so that they might cancel or drown one another out, but so that precisely out of the plurality of utterances strangers might be brought together and the goodness of God might be declared.

This leads, second, to the observation that the many tongues of Pentecost did indeed signify the many cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world. Whereas the cultural and religious domains of human life are neither identical nor synonymous, I argue that they are also not completely distinct. Rather, languages are related to cultures and both are related to religious traditions, even if each is a distinguishable aspect of human life. Given this interrelationship, however, might I suggest that the many tongues of Pentecost not only represent many cultures but also, at least potentially, many religious traditions? If so, then the outpouring of the Spirit then points not only to the redemption of the many languages, but also to the redemption of many cultures and perhaps even that of many religious traditions.

What I mean by redemption, however, should be qualified in two respects. First, my claim about the redemption of other faiths is an eschatological one: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17a). If the eschatological gift of the Spirit means, in part, that the outpouring of the Spirit has occurred, is occurring, and will continue to occur, then the redemption of any thing, the religions included, may have past, present, and, most importantly, future aspects to it. In that sense, then, every person, including those in other faiths, is a candidate for the future reception of the Spirit (if not already having been touched by the Spirit whose winds blow where they may), and such reception may depend in part on their interactions with us (as Christians). How we approach or respond to people of other faiths may determine if and when the gift of the Spirit will be given to them. And, given the fact that there are varying degrees of ignorance and knowledge about Christ, I would underscore God's redemptive work in the lives of individuals as a dynamic process: who is finally "in" (or "out") depends not on our certification of their salvation (or not), but on the gracious gift of God in Christ and the Holy Spirit. So in anticipating the possibility of the redemption of the religions, then, I am saying neither that Luke means every person since the Day of Pentecost has received the Spirit nor that all people of other faiths are already saved.

Second, in speaking about the redemption of cultures and of religious traditions, I am by no means suggesting that all cultures or religious traditions as wholes are now conduits of the saving grace of God. Cultures and religions, like languages, are not monolithic, and there are aspects of each of them that are antithetical to the purposes of God (hence their fallenness). But at the same time, neither are languages, cultures, and religions static, so that whatever
in them might be hostile to the purposes of God today might not be so tomorrow. In fact, the Day of Pentecost attests to God’s gracious and incomprehensible freedom to redeem – take up and use – the diversity of languages for his purposes. Similarly, I suggest, God has the freedom to do this redemptive work with the various cultures and religions of the world. “Judaism” is an excellent case in point: for some Christians, the redemption of “Judaism” is still to be accomplished so that the Christian mission to the Jews remains just as urgent as ever; other Christians, however, insist that Christ has fulfilled the Jewish religion and that in that sense, the redemption of “Judaism” is now accomplished. Any talk about the possible redemption of the religions in the providential purposes of God will be subject to these kinds of contested viewpoints.

But, further, we must also avoid any unqualified optimism, as critics of inclusivism have warned. Hence discussion of the redemption of the religions, even if understood in eschatological perspective, must provide guidelines for discerning engagement with them on this side of the eschaton. If our position is to avoid both a universalistic soteriology in which all people are finally saved (which I repudiate), and a blanket endorsement of the religions as already redeemed of God (which I reject, especially since, as we have already seen, religious traditions are not indivisible wholes), then what is the proper posture with which we should approach people of other faiths? For this task, I suggest, we must be discerning not only of the many tongues (beliefs or doctrines) of other religious traditions, but also of their many practices. Let me outline a pneumatological approach to discerning the religions, then, that avoids the pitfalls identified above in the traditional approaches.

To begin, a pneumatological theology of religions underwrites an a posteriori approach to interreligious engagement. Just as in a congregational context, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.” (1 Cor. 14:29), so also in the interfaith encounter: we must look and listen carefully before rendering judgment. The goal is to allow the tongues (testimonies) of other religious people to be heard first on their own “insider’s” terms (just as we have often clamored to be heard on our terms). Any theology of religions, even a pneumatological one, must be deeply informed by the empirical reality of the religions, rather than be an a priori projection of the Christian imagination.

Second, a pneumatological theology of religions engages in critical analysis (discernment) the religious phenomenon or teaching under scrutiny. Here we might bring to bear a multitude of disciplinary perspectives, even as we are cautious about not imposing a reductionist interpretation on what we are attempting to discern. Also here, we attempt to compare and contrast what we are looking at or listening to with our Christian convictions (beliefs and practices). Such analysis is not always straightforward. At one level, we might
be attempting to compare very disparate realities, and if so, any conclusions will have missed the point. Part of the task involves application of what might be called a “hermeneutics of charity” that attempts to empathize with the other faith perspective as much as possible from their point of view. Always at work, however, will be the Christian (and Pentecostal) “hermeneutics of suspicion” (regarding the other faith) that is vigilant about the urgency of the gospel.

At some point in the discerning process, we might have to “come to a decision.” So long as we remember that any such judgments are always provisional, subject to later confirmation (or not), we recognize that as historically situated beings, life requires that we discern the Holy Spirit’s presence and activity to the best of our ability. Decision is followed by action. The hermeneutical circle requires, however, if we are to be honest, that we then re-assess the process of discernment to see if we’ve missed the mark.

Many Tongues, Many Practices: The Spirit of Hospitality and Interfaith Practices

In the preceding, I have suggested that a Pentecostal-pneumatological perspective sheds new light on the perennial question of the one and the many in ways that allows us to affirm the diversity of tongues, cultures, and religions without being uncritical in our affirmation. Toward the end of that discussion, I proposed that our holding together, paradoxically, our conviction about Christian faith amidst the many religions invited a posture of engagement and discernment. In this final section, I expand on this by arguing that a pneumatological approach that begins with the many tongues of Pentecost opens up to the many practices of the empowering Spirit. More precisely, I argue that the Spirit of encounter is also the Spirit of hospitality, and that a pneumatological theology of hospitality nourishes many practices through which Christians can and need to bear witness to the gospel in a pluralistic world. I present this line of thought first by looking at the life of Jesus, and then that of the early church. As a good Pentecostal theologian, we turn to the two volumes of Luke and Acts.

Jesus himself can be understood both as the paradigmatic host of God’s hospitality, and as the exemplary recipient of hospitality. From his conception in Mary’s womb (by the Holy Spirit) to his birth in a manger through to his burial (in a tomb of Joseph of Arimathea), Jesus was dependent on the welcome and hospitality of others. As “the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk. 9:58), he relied on the goodwill of many, staying in their homes and receiving whatever they served. But it is in his role as guest that Jesus also announces and enacts the hospitality of God. Empowered by the Spirit, he heals the sick, casts out demons, and declares the arrival of the reign of God in the midst of the downtrodden, the oppressed, and the marginalized. While he is the “journeying prophet” who eats at the tables of
others, he also proclaims and brings to pass the eschatological banquet of
God for all who are willing to receive it. So sometimes Jesus breaks the rules
of hospitality, upsets the social conventions of meal fellowship (e.g., Jesus
does not wash before dinner), and even goes so far as to rebuke his hosts.
Luke thus shows that it is Jesus who is the broker of God’s authority, and it
is on this basis that Jesus establishes the inclusive hospitality of the kingdom
to the marginalized of his day (women, children, and the “disabled”).

This more inclusive vision of divine hospitality is most clearly seen in the
parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37). It is the Samaritan, the religious
“other” of the first-century Jewish world, who fulfills the law, loves his
neighbor, and embodies divine hospitality. What are the implications of this
parable for contemporary interreligious relationships? Might those who are
“others” to us Christians not only be instruments through whom God’s
revelation comes afresh, but also perhaps be able to fulfill the requirements
for inheriting eternal life (10:25) precisely through the hospitality that they
show to us, their neighbors?²⁴⁸

In Acts, the hospitality of God manifested in Jesus the anointed one (the
Christ) is now extended through the early church by the power of the same
Holy Spirit. As with Jesus, his followers are also anointed by the Spirit to be
guests and hosts, in either case representing the hospitality of God. St. Paul,
for example, is also both a recipient and conduit of God’s hospitality. He was
the beneficiary of divine hospitality through those who led him by the hand,
Judas (on Straight Street), Ananias, other believers who helped him escape
from conspiring enemies, and Barnabas. Then during his missionary journeys,
he is a guest of Lydia, a new convert, and has his wounds treated by the
Philippian jailer. Paul the traveling missionary is also a guest of Jason of
Thessalonica, Prisca and Aquilla and Titius Justus at Corinth, Philip the
evangelist (and his daughters) at Caesarea, Mnason in Jerusalem, and unnamed
disciples at Troas, Tyre, Ptolemais, and Sidon, etc. Along the way, Paul is
escorted by Bereans, protected by Roman centurions, and entertained by Felix
the governor. During the storm threatening the voyage to Rome, Paul hosts
the breaking of bread. After the shipwreck, Paul is guest of the Maltese
islanders in general and of Publius the chief official in particular, and then
later of some brothers on Puteoli. The book of Acts closes with Paul as host,
welcoming all who were open to receiving the hospitality of God. Throughout,
Paul is the paradigmatic guest and host representing the practices of the
earliest Christians who took the gospel to the ends of the earth by the power
of the Holy Spirit.

We can see that the Spirit’s empowerment to bear witness to the gospel
takes the form of many different practices in the lives of Jesus and the early
Christians, each related to being guests and hosts in various times and places.
I suggest that these many practices of the Spirit are related to the diversity of
tongues spoken on the Day of Pentecost. Even as the many tongues of the Spirit announce the redemptive hospitality of God, so also the many works of the Spirit enact God’s salvation through many hospitable practices. As believers interact with and receive the hospitality, kindness, and gifts of strangers of all sorts, even Samaritans, public or governmental officials, and “barbarians” (from the $\exists \mathcal{A}^{2+\mathcal{A}}$ on the isle of Malta, in Acts 28:21), a diversity of practices ensues. In short, many tongues require many hospitable practices because of the church’s mission in a pluralistic world.

How do these many practices redeem the traditional theologies of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism? I suggest that a pneumatological theology of hospitality allows us to retrieve and reappropriate the wide range of practices implicit in these models without having to endorse the full scope of their theological assertions. From the pluralist perspective, for example, I think that Knitter’s and Pieris’ emphasis on social justice are prevalent in Jesus’ concerns for the poor and the marginalized, and in the Spirit’s producing a new community, the church, in which the traditional barriers of class, gender, and ethnicity no longer hold; but their “all-roads-lead-to-God” idea can be rejected. The inclusivist insistence on dialogical mutuality is likewise preserved, especially in the miraculous gift of the Spirit that enables understanding amidst the cacophony of many tongues; at the same time, their crypto-imperialistic stance can be recognized and guarded against. And finally, the exclusivist commitment to the proclamation of the gospel is upheld since authentic hospitality is redemptive, and this includes declaration of the gospel in the proper time and place; but the unanswerable questions regarding the unevangelized do not need to be shouldered. In short, the practices of the models are redeemed without the theological liabilities.

Hence, a pneumatological theology of hospitality empowers a much wider range of interreligious practices more conducive to meeting the demands of our time. This is in part because Christians often find themselves as guest or as hosts, sometimes (as in the lives of Jesus and Paul) simultaneously. In these various circumstances, there are many socio-cultural protocols that will inform Christian practices. Sometimes, Christians will defer to their hosts, embodying the epistemic humility advocated by Hick, and in the process be enriched by their interactions with people of other faiths. In other cases, Christians are hosts, with the responsibility to care for their guests of other faiths, and to do so at the many levels at which such care can be given (the physical, the material, the intellectual, the spiritual, etc.). In all cases, however, the conventions of hospitality will resist triumphalistic or imperialistic attitudes, even as such conventions mediate honest dialogue (in which both sides hear the other’s religious testimony) and mutual interaction.

Yet I suggest that a Pentecostal-pneumatological approach to theology of religions is not saddled with the unanswered (and unanswerable) questions
posed to exclusivism, or with the imperialisms of either inclusivism or pluralism. This is because such an approach opens up to the kinds of Christian practices through which Christians themselves are transformed and even saved. A parallel parable to the Good Samaritan is that of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt. 25:31-46), and in this case, the salvation of the Sheep was mediated by their ministering to Jesus through their encounter with the poor, the naked, the hungry, and those in prison. Of course, many people of faith, both Christian and non-Christian, are poor, hungry, and marginalized. Will we who have experienced the redemptive hospitality of God in turn show hospitality to such people? And if so, the Spirit has surely empowered us to bear witness to the gospel in these encounters. But at the same time, such hospitable interactions might also be the means of the Spirit to lavish on us the ongoing salvific hospitality of God. In these cases, rather than “looking down” on those in other faiths because we have something they don’t, we are ourselves in a position similar to that of the Jewish man by the wayside in the parable of the Good Samaritan: thankful to the God of Jesus Christ for revealing himself to us by the power of the Holy Spirit in and through the lives of our many neighbors in a pluralistic world. 49

Notes


7 First developed by Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982).

8. The typology itself may no longer be as useful as when it appeared. For our introductory purposes, however, it will suffice. For more recent thinking about theology of religions that has expanded the categories, see Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

9. All biblical quotations will be from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

10. Inclusivists point out, however, that believing implies having been properly heard the gospel, in which case the condemnation of unbelievers does not apply to the unevangelized. This is, of course, a debated point, to which we shall return in our discussion of inclusivism.


12. The Catholic view of baptism is complex, weaving together with the Augustinian doctrine of original sin not only New Testament texts – e.g., Jn. 3:3-8, Acts 2:38-39, Rom. 6:1-14, Col. 2:11-13, Tit. 3:4-7 – but also convictions about the sacramental mediation of salvation and the role of the priesthood as holding the keys to the sacraments. For an overview, see Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), chap. 6.

13. After Vatican II, traditional Catholic exclusivism has itself been expanded toward a more inclusivist position (to which we will return in the next section). I should note here that there are others – e.g., Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), §5.4 – who argue that exclusivism with regard to the means of salvation is at least logically compatible with (if not actually productive of) universalism with regard to the extent of salvation. Because this is a rather rare position, akin to Barth’s exclusivist universalism, I will do no more than note it here.

14. Representative of this position are evangelical theologians like Millard
Erickson, Ronald Nash, and D. A. Carson. See also Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter (ed), *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religions Pluralism* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, and Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), and, more recently, David W. Baker (ed), *Biblical Faith and Other Religions: An Evangelical Assessment* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2004), among many others.

15. The role of the light-darkness motif in the New Testament in fostering the idea that Christianity is in the light and other religions are in darkness should not be overlooked; I discuss this idea in my essay, “The Light Shines in the Darkness: Johannine Dualism and Christianity Theology of Religions Today,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (under review).


17 Inclusivist readings of the biblical narratives can be found in the work of Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Leicester, UK, and Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1984); John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); and Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

18. Some inclusivists also suggest that the unevangelized are saved because they respond not only to general revelation, but also to special revelation made known to them by God; see Christopher R. Little, *The Revelation of God among the Unevangelized: An Evangelical Appraisal and Missiological Contribution to the Debate* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2000).


20. The most prominent Roman Catholic theologians representing this fulfillment trajectory are Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, and Jacques Dupuis; for an overview of their work, see Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, chaps. 21–23.


22. Hick is careful to insist that his is a speculative hypothesis, in response to detractors who ask how pluralist theologians have a transcendental point of view to know that the religions ultimately converge in the end. We will comment further on this matter in section II of our essay.

24. This latter consideration is especially pertinent in light of the emergence of the postliberal school of thought which views doctrines or beliefs in terms of being rule-shaped practices; see, e.g., George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).


26. In what follows, I spell out questions for the exclusivist position that I have not seen elsewhere in print, at least not in the way posed here. This adds to the critical observations I make in my *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 25-26.

27. Not to mention Jesus’ admonition that, “Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord”, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

28. These are, of course, only the dominant Christian opinions, not a complete list of theological options. For discussion, see Gordon Goldsberry Miller, “A Baptist Theology of the Child” (DTh diss., University of South Africa, 1992), §§2.1.5, 2.2, and 4.3.

29. These are some of the questions that led me to write *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007).

30. This is in part what lies behind my argument for understanding salvation as a process—I was saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved—and as involving the various domains of our lives (e.g., the affective, the cognitive, the moral, the relational, and the social); I sketch this dynamic and holistic soteriology in my *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), chap. 2.


35. Thus the rejection of pluralist theology is not the same as rejecting the diversity of religious traditions; on this point, see Sander Griffioen and Richard J.

36. The first incisive salvo was by the authors in Gavin D’Costa (ed), Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990). There have been many other critical responses since.

37. And this criticism applies to pluralist theologies and philosophies no matter where they may be found, whether of the “perennial philosophy” tradition which has Christian, Hindu, and Muslim versions, or even to the pluralist philosophy of religions advocated by Buddhist scholars like the late Masao Abe. For the argument that the plurality of religions is best explicated only from the standpoint of the Buddhist doctrine of nonduality, see Abe’s essay, “Two Types of Unity and Religious Pluralism,” in Masao Abe, Zen and the Modern World: A Third Sequel to Zen and Western Thought (ed) Steven Heine (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2003), chap. 1.

38. Again, this criticism of pluralism reducing to inclusivism can be lodged also against pluralistic views derived from non-Christian religious traditions. Advaita Vedanta Hinduism, for example, is notorious for insisting on the plurality of the many historical religious traditions, but in the end collapses these distinctions as illusory within the final truth of Brahman. Similarly, Buddhist soteriological visions that attempt to acknowledge the diversity of religious practices also ultimately account for them within a Buddhological framework; see, e.g., Kristen Beise Kiblinger, Buddhist Inclusivism: Attitudes toward Religious Others (Burlington, Vt., and Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005).

39. E.g., Terry C. Muck, “Theology of Religions after Knitter and Hick: Beyond the Paradigm,” Interpretation 61:1 (2007), pp. 7-22. I myself at one point suggested this same idea – as in Yong, Beyond the Impasse, pp. 27-29; more recently, I am not so sure, as seen in my response to Muck’s essay: “Can We Get ‘Beyond the Paradigm?’ A Response to Terry Muck,” Interpretation 61:1 (2007), pp. 28-32.


45. I describe the task of comparative theology in a religiously plural world in my Beyond the Impasse, chap. 7.


48. I elsewhere probe these questions at greater length; see Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), pp. 241-44.

49. A previous draft of this paper was presented to “The Interdisciplinary Study of Global Pentecostalism,” an international conference of the European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism (GloPent), Vrije Universiteit (Free University), Amsterdam, 27-28 April 2007 I am grateful to Professor Michael Bergunder (Heidelberg University) for his critical comments in response to the paper. Thanks also to Tony Richie (Church of God Theological Seminary) and Doc Hughes (my graduate assistant) for their feedback on a pre-conference draft of this essay.