

(6) That the natures men and other animals have are consistent with the idea of a wise and benevolent creator (p. 79). The defence of this thesis is vague and somewhat rhetorical.

In spite of the difficulties and objections mentioned, Charlton is to be congratulated on producing a book which reveals pertinent philosophical insight, much acute argument, valuable models, considerable scholarship, a healthy scepticism of attempts to play down strong Christian tradition, some wit spiced with eccentricity and which, above all, is written by a convinced and devout believer. This shines through all the maze of argument.

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THE MYTH OF CHRISTIAN UNIQUENESS. TOWARDS A PLURALISTIC THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS. Edited by John Hick & Paul F Knitter. *SCM*, London, 1987. Pp. 227. £8.50.

This book marks the growing emergence of a particular attitude towards the world religions. The authors want to signal a crossing of the 'theological Rubicon' away from *exclusivism* (which affirms that only Christians will be saved) or *inclusivism* (which acknowledge salvation outside Christianity, but still hold Christ as normative for, or causative of, salvation). The *pluralists* on the other hand wish to suggest that these two options are unacceptable. Why?

There are *historical*, *theological* and *ethical* reasons why the old models will not work. The eleven main essays of the book are grouped under three such headings. Three initial essays by Gordon Kaufman, John Hick and Langdon Gilkey together suggest that given the historical-cultural nature of knowledge and belief, Christians are over-stepping the canons of permissible knowledge in claiming Christianity or Christ to be the 'only' or 'best' or 'truly salvific' means. Kaufman stresses that all theology is part of 'human imaginative creativity' and we cannot thereby promote theological statements to the status of universal truths when they are limited, contextual utterances. Hick argues that any claims to superiority must be based on an 'examination of facts' and the only permissible criterion would be in the promotion of humanity's welfare. Gilkey is far more cautious in recognizing the necessity of evaluation and critical judgement while at the same time acknowledging that no single revelation can be privileged over against others as the criterion by which to judge the others.

If theologies are rightly deemed 'human constructs', surely they are inadequately assessed if they are thereby rendered impotent? Truth claims are inevitably spoken by historically-culturally limited persons, but does the truth or otherwise of what they say thereby become relativised? And what of Hick's criteria: the promotion of humanity's welfare? This suffers from the vagueness of not clearly specifying the criterion by which such a process is to be discerned—thus inevitably leading back to the revelatory shaping events by which such criterion are generated within the various religions. But this is the point where the cat begins to chase its own tail if Gilkey's structures are taken seriously. Is it not imperialist to specify that no religion has the right to utilize its own revelation as a universal norm of judgement and evaluation? It may be more profitable to examine and criticise the way in which Christological and Trinitarian norms can be closed to correction and

development, rather than to dispense with the importance and necessity of such norms.

In Section II (theological assumptions) Cantwell Smith applies the notion of idolatry to Christian theology to argue against absolutist claims. Smith's thesis is pertinent to 'closed forms' of Christology and theology (which permits no development or change), but it is difficult to understand why he restricts the notion of idolatry to Christian theology. Smith's liberalism extends to the call for no evaluation—as there are no such things as 'religions', only people. However, people on behalf of their religions do make truth claims which require assessment—and Smith sidesteps real historical difficulties. There are three other essays in this section from Asian and Japanese theologians: Raimundo Panikkar, Stanley Samartha and Seicchi Yagi.

The final Section (III) of the book may be called a liberation theology of religions. The two feminine pluralists, Marjorie Suchocki and Rosemary Ruether, in different ways make the point that there are instructive chauvinist parallels in the manner whereby male experience is taken as the norm for humanity (within many religions) and the equally dangerously exploitative manner of using Christ as the norm for true religions. However, I do not think this shows the illegitimacy of inclusivist affirmations. To say that all salvation, wherever it occurs, is from God and that for Christians, God is known most decisively (*not* absolutely) in Christ, should not necessarily obscure the otherness of non-Christians. In fact it may make Christians receptive to the different ways that God has worked through the world religions.

Knitter picks up on the problem of criteriology in discerning the activity of God within the religions and employs a liberationist methodology, emphasising a preferential option for the poor. Aloysius Pieris' essay and the epilogue by Tom Driver all share this ethical and liberationist concern. For too long, inter-religious dialogue has been the concern of the academy, with an emphasis on conflicting truth claims and competing revelations. That dialogue truly takes place at grass-roots and has a positive function in the Church's striving for the kingdom of God has often been neglected. However, it is one thing to work for social and political justice with those of other faiths and another, although related, issue as to whether joint action involves the affirmation of pluralism in the way envisaged by some of these scholars.

The collection indicates that the Rubicon is a deeper and more treacherous river than initially recognized and that its contours are various, as is its direction. What is certain is that wherever one stands, this new theological current cannot be ignored.

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