

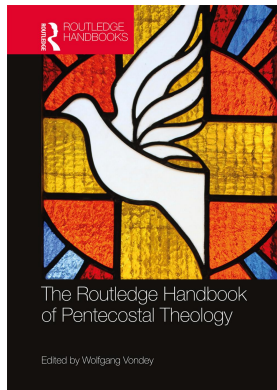
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 22 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology

Wolfgang Vondey

Theology of Religions

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429507076-47>

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

Published online on: 20 Apr 2020

How to cite :- Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. 20 Apr 2020, *Theology of Religions from: The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* Routledge

Accessed on: 22 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429507076-47>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

41

THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

Divine hospitality and spiritual discernment

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

Pentecostal engagement with theology of religions is a relatively recent endeavor that has raised both significant discussion and concerns. For a movement known for aggressive evangelism of people of other faith traditions, it would be of greatest importance to reflect carefully on the nature and role of religions, including the Holy Spirit's work among adherents of living faiths. The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the state, promise, and challenges of a distinctively Pentecostal theology of religions particularly in light of the deep and wide influence of religious plurality and forms of religious pluralisms today. Another way to express the intent of the chapter is to raise the question of "What would be a proper Pentecostal way to tackle the urgent interfaith challenge in the complex world of the third millennium?" In this essay, I argue that a proper Pentecostal way of dealing with religions is both hospitable in its attitude toward the religious other and keen on exercising spiritual discernment with regard to the value and role of religions. Continuing mission and evangelism, on the one hand, and delving into the complex interfaith issue should not be seen as antithetical to each other (see Chapter 26).

The essay is divided into three main sections. The first looks at the "default" Pentecostal attitude toward, and responses to, religions and religious plurality. This discussion is to set the stage for a consideration of the conditions of and prospects for a Pentecostal theology of religions to be attempted in the rest of the essay. In the second part, I take stock of emerging attempts by some Pentecostal bodies and individual scholars to tackle the challenge of religions from a theological perspective. I first consider the results of a couple of important international ecumenical processes in which Pentecostals have participated and thereafter assess some leading theologians' work in this area. The last major section is constructive in nature. Rooted in Pentecostal-Charismatic resources but also going beyond, I wish to suggest some directions for the next generation of Pentecostal theology of religions.

**Whether Pentecostal theology is sensitive to religions
and religious plurality—the challenge**

For most Pentecostals—at least outside the academy—the issue of religious plurality is not an important issue. They would either ignore it or, if pushed, probably deny its importance. Many others would even consider it dangerous and not a useful topic at all. By and large,

the typical Pentecostal considers other religions as erroneous and mistaken ways of searching for God. The default Pentecostal response in an encounter with the adherents of other faith traditions is to share the gospel and to persuade the other of the necessity of salvation through Christ. A typical conservative-fundamentalist exclusivism is taken for granted.

Furthermore, it has been common for Pentecostals to raise grave doubts about any kind of saving role of the Holy Spirit apart from the proclamation of the gospel. They have either tended to limit the Spirit's saving work to the church (except for the work of the Spirit preparing for receiving the gospel) or have simply ignored the question of the Spirit's work apart from the preaching of the gospel. Reasons for the hesitance toward interfaith engagement include the danger of a compromised Christology, the fear of going beyond, or against, the Bible, a distorted soteriology, and the neglect of mission and evangelization (Richie 2011). A case in point is the warning from a Pentecostal official in the USA: a religiously pluralistic approach (1) is contrary to Scripture, (2) replaces the obligation for world evangelism, and (3) fails the great commission (Carpenter 1995). Despite this resistance to interfaith issues, the continuing debate testifies to the fact that time has come for Pentecostals to take up seriously this vital issue. It has the potential of helping Pentecostals to live peacefully with the religious other while also continuing what they believe is the God-given mandate of mission.

The importance for Pentecostals to tackle the issue of religions

One of the leading figures in beginning to develop a Pentecostal theology of religions is Amos Yong, who lists the following reasons as to why Pentecostals should engage religions: (1) their international roots and global presence; (2) the presence of urgent missiological issues such as syncretism, the difficulty with dealing with questions regarding the gospel and culture (see Chapter 10), and so forth; and (3) the quest for Pentecostal identity and theological truth. According to Yong (2000), Pentecostal identity cannot be determined apart from relation to other churches (ecumenism) and other religions (theology of religions). And the truth question of any religion cannot be answered without the challenge of competing (or complementary) truth claims.

A similarly important figure, the late sympathetic observer of Pentecostalism, Clark Pinnock (1996, 274), urges Pentecostals to get involved:

One might expect the Pentecostals to develop a Spirit-oriented theology of mission and world religions, because of their openness to religious experience, their sensitivity to the oppressed of the Third World where they have experienced much of their growth, and their awareness of the ways of the Spirit as well as dogma.

Pinnock's appeal to conceive the Spirit's work in the world in wider and more comprehensive terms is echoed by the South African charismatic theologian Henry I. Lederle (1988, 338):

For too long the Spirit and his work has been conceived of in too limited a sense. There was a capitulation at the beginning of the modern era in which faith became restricted to the private devotional life, and the latter was then described as "spiritual." The Spirit should not be limited to spiritual experiences and charisms—even though it needs to be recognized that this element still awaits acknowledgment in much of Christianity. We need, however, to set our sights much higher. Not only the reality discovered by Pentecostalism needs to be reclaimed but also the cosmic dimensions of the Spirit's work. The Spirit is at work in the world and should not be degraded to an ornament of piety.

Although a full-scale Pentecostal theology of interfaith engagement is very much in the making, some promising signs are on the horizon pointing to new openings and opportunities.

What Pentecostals have done about theology of religions—the record

An important impetus for prompting Pentecostals to begin work on a theology of religions has come from ecumenical exchanges with older Christian traditions, beginning from the international dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church started in 1972. There was a tentative discussion on the possibility of salvation for those not explicitly confessing faith in Christ during the second quinquennium (1978–82) of the dialogue (Kärkkäinen 2000). As expected, the Catholic and Pentecostal perspectives diverged over the existence and meaning of salvific elements found in non-Christian religions (“Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness” 2010, no. 20). Pentecostals insisted that there cannot be salvation outside the church (“Final Report” 2010, no. 14). Most Pentecostals wanted to limit the saving work of the Spirit to the church and its proclamation of the gospel, although they were willing to acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in the world convicting people of sin (“Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness” 2010, no. 20). The rationale for this more exclusivist attitude is found in the fallen state of humankind, which for Pentecostals do not give much hope for non-Christians:

There was no unanimity whether non-Christians may receive the life of the Holy Spirit The classical Pentecostal participants do not accept . . . [the Roman Catholic Church’s inclusivistic stance according to which non-Christians may be saved under certain conditions] but retain their interpretation of the Scripture that non-Christians are excluded from the life of the Spirit: “Truly, truly I say unto you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

(“Final Report” 2010, no.14)

Furthermore, Pentecostals, like many of the early Christians, pointed out the demonic elements in other religions (“Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness” 2010, no. 21). However, there were some Pentecostals who would see a convergence toward the Catholic position in that the Holy Spirit is at work in non-Christian religions preparing individual hearts for an eventual exposure to the gospel of Jesus Christ (“Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness” 2010, no. 21).

The same stance was expressed by the Pentecostals in the conversations with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Pentecostals particularly emphasized the need for spiritual discernment:

On the whole, Pentecostals do not acknowledge the presence of salvific elements in non-Christian religions because they view this as contrary to the teaching of the Bible. The church is called to discern the spirits through the charism of the Holy Spirit informed by the Word of God (1 Corinthians 12:10, 14:29; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21; 1 John 4:2–3). Pentecostals, like many of the early Christians, are sensitive to the elements in other religions that oppose biblical teaching. They are, therefore, encouraged to receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(“Word and Spirit, Church and World” 2010, no. 12)

It is yet to be seen what the still continuing important ecumenical discussions will bring about regarding this vital theme. The ecumenical conversations foreshadowed greater interest in interfaith questions among Pentecostals (see Chapter 35). Ecumenical involvement gives them the needed platform to learn from those Christian communities, which have reflected on this complex issue for a much longer period of time.

Emerging Pentecostal explorations into the theology of religions

Theologically, the most significant first appeal for a truly pneumatological theology of religions for Pentecostals is the above-mentioned attempt by Pinnock. While not programmatically charismatic, the later career of this Baptist revealed a definite openness to the Spirit's work in a manner quite similar to Pentecostals. Pinnock (1988) advocated an Evangelical form of inclusivism, which is also at the same time harshly critical of pluralistic approaches. This maverick Evangelical started his move toward inclusivism mainly on a Christological basis but later shifted to a definite pneumatological view (Pinnock 1992).

Amos Yong, and other Pentecostal scholars, took a lesson from Pinnock, among others. In his first contribution, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (2000), and its sequel, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (2003), Yong argued for a uniquely Pentecostal pneumatology that, while holding on to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and trinitarian faith, would also be open to acknowledging the ministry of the Spirit outside the Christian church and among the religions. Yong's first step was to develop criteria for discerning the Spirit of God.

For Yong (2000, 24), a Pentecostal theology of religions can be best defined "as the effort to understand both the immensely differentiated experiences of faith and the multifaceted phenomena of religious traditions and systems that are informed by experiences of the Spirit in the light of Scripture, and vice versa." In his subsequent work (2005, 235–36), he deepens this distinctively pneumatological approach to religions and "spirits" of religions and argues that

a pneumatologically driven theology is more conducive to engaging [interfaith issues] . . . in our time than previous approaches. . . . [R]eligions are neither accidents of history nor encroachments on divine providence but are, in various ways, instruments of the Holy Spirit working out the divine purposes in the world and . . . the unevangelized, if saved at all, are saved through the work of Christ by the Spirit (even if mediated through the religious beliefs and practices available to them).

Yong's *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (2008) taps into the theme of hospitality, enthusiastically embraced by much of contemporary interfaith conversations, as a way to help his movement engage the religious other. Another innovation by Yong has to do with what is now called comparative theology. His recent contributions (2012a, 2012b) are groundbreaking, centering on pneumatological comparative theology in the context of Buddhist-Christian encounters.

Another significant contribution to a Pentecostal theology of religions comes from Tony Richie. His monograph, *Speaking by the Spirit: A Pentecostal Model for Interreligious Dialogue* (2011), builds on the core Pentecostal practice of testimony. Richie (2011, 3) considers it important to pursue this task in the matrix of Pentecostalism's "strong heritage of evangelism and missions, generally conservative ethical and theological history, and undeniable multicultural variety." He also takes lessons from some Pentecostal pioneers (Richie 2006) in whose ethos Richie sees seeds of openness to religions while at the same time faithfully representing tradition.

Among a growing number of other Pentecostal engagements of the interfaith challenge (Kärkkäinen 2009; Yong and Clarke 2011), the Hispanic Pentecostal Samuel Solivan (1998) offers several principles for relating to religious plurality: (1) the fact that the Holy Spirit is the one who leads Christians to all truth; (2) the importance of identification with the poor of the world and the need to bring their distinctive voice into the dialogue; (3) the conviction of the prevenient workings of the Holy Spirit in every human being; (4) the empowerment of believers for witness by the Spirit; and (5) the diverse and pluralistic character of the Spirit's manifestations across racial, class, gender, language, and religious boundaries. On this foundation, Solivan (1998, 43) is led to "examine the diverse ways the Holy Spirit is at work among other people of faith." Yet he does so critically, since there are always pitfalls—such as relativization of the truth—in an approach to mission in which dialogue is the *main* vehicle (44).

My own work in the field of interfaith studies has focused on developing a trinitarian understanding of the role of the Spirit in the world and among religions in the dialogue with Protestant and Catholic colleagues (Kärkkäinen 2004). In recent years, I have also attempted comparative theology, including in the area of pneumatology. On that project, I have engaged Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu views of the Spirit(s) and spirituality (Kärkkäinen 2016). This extended exposure to the teachings and "theologies" of other faith traditions has not only added to my own learning in religious studies but also helped clarify my deep Christian convictions. Particularly exciting has been the exploration into the "pneumatologies" of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism—and area in which Pentecostals could make a great contribution, as Yong's innovative work manifests.

Whither Pentecostal theology of religions—the vision

The sketch of a constructive Pentecostal theology of religions requires some terminological clarification. The English speaker typically knows the difference between religious "plurality" and "pluralism." Whereas the former merely denotes the existence of more than one faith in the same area, the latter is an ideological take on the diversity. From the fact of religious plurality (the existence of many religions) does not necessarily follow pluralism.

Furthermore, similarly to other loaded terms such as, say, postmodernism, pluralism is a contested and somewhat ambiguous designation. What most people think of when they hear the term religious pluralism is what I have named the "first-generation" pluralism, an offshoot from the Enlightenment that represents modernity's aversions to difference and to commitment. The Enlightenment epistemology is based on a mistaken idea of the neutrality of its own position—and the assumption that every other position is not neutral. It considers all religions and ideologies basically the same. Call it the idea of a "rough parity" of religions, it leads to the compromising or denial of any religion's claim to truth. In other words, no real differences are allowed. Doctrinal differences are superficial; they have to do merely with the surface-structure rather than the deep-structure. Instead of a fixed commitment to a particular truth, the first-generation pluralisms promise tolerance and openness and eschew all kinds of attempts to try to persuade the other. They consider beliefs as a metaphor with little or no cognitive content rather than a propositional statement.

A more nuanced form of pluralism, in my terminology the "second-generation" pluralism, is masterfully cartographed by the Catholic Paul F. Knitter (2002) in his *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Whereas his "mutuality model" represents the first-generation pluralist project, the "acceptance model" belongs to the second-generation, which not only accepts difference and alterity but makes it a major asset. One can call this a postmodern form of pluralism.

The “turn” to the spirit as the key to Pentecostal theology of religions

As mentioned, Pinnock found an opening to a more inclusive way of envisioning Christianity’s place among religions with a turn to pneumatology. In his view, counting against (what he names) a theological “restrictivism” is not only God’s nature as Father and the universality of the atonement of Christ but also the ever-present Spirit “who can foster transforming friendship with God anywhere and everywhere” (Pinnock 1996, 186–87). Indeed, Pinnock (49) contends, there is a “cosmic range to the operations of the Spirit.” He argues that by acknowledging the work of the Spirit in the cosmos (including creation), we are actually allowing a more universal perspective to the Spirit’s ministry in which the work of preparing for the hearing of the gospel is not set in antithesis to the fulfillment of the gospel in Christ: “What one encounters in Jesus is the fulfillment of previous invitations of the Spirit” (63).

A truly revolutionary insight of Pinnock’s is that religions, rather than being either futile human attempts to reach God or outright obstacles to a saving knowledge of God, can be Spirit-used pointers to and means of contact with God (Pinnock 1996, 203). Not only that, but everyday human experiences can likewise be means of divine contact, since human beings “as spirit” are created to be open to God (73). This is, of course, not to pit against each other the ministries of the Son and Spirit; rather it is a matter of “both-and.” Pinnock (192) claims that “Christ, the only mediator, sustains particularity, while the Spirit, the presence of God everywhere, safeguards universality.” Yong’s project essentially continues this line of reasoning.

This is all good and as it should be. That said, I wish to challenge and kindly re-orient that kind of project by advocating a robustly *trinitarian* view of the Spirit’s work in the world. I am not saying that either Pinnock or Yong were not trinitarian. What I am saying is that their enthusiastic turn to the Spirit could be liable to assigning some kind of secondary (if not, at times, a missing) role to the Son and particularly to the Father. I argue that whereas a solid pneumatological orientation to Pentecostal theology of religions is a badly needed corrective to one-sided theocentric (God-centered) or Christocentric approaches, in no case should it suffer from an inadequate trinitarian framework. That would result in a disconnection between the Spirit and Christ or the Spirit and the Father. These disconnections, in turn, lead to the separation between the Spirit and the church and the Spirit and the kingdom of God as has happened among “liberals” and pluralists (Wright 1993). Whenever healthy trinitarian controls are lacking, the Spirit turns out to be a sort of “itinerant preacher” who only occasionally visits the Father’s House; most of the time, the Spirit is doing its own business in the Far Country, as it were. A healthy trinitarian theology is the best safeguard against lacunae such as those. Below I suggest a few simple trinitarian “rules” or guidelines to that effect.

Trinitarian “rules” for a pneumatological theology of religions

I will only briefly introduce these trinitarian guidelines as I have developed them more fully elsewhere (Kärkkäinen 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). First, the Trinity is the Christian way of discerning and recognizing the God of the Bible among the deities of religions. Karl Barth (1956, 301) saw this clearly:

The doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian, and therefore what already distinguishes the Christian concept of revelation as Christian, in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God or concepts of revelation.

If this is correct, it means that every Christian approach to religions is ultimately triune in its form. Trinity is not an appendix, so to speak. To speak of the Spirit of God is to speak of God the Father and so forth. Even when, like in the encounter with other Abrahamic faiths, discussions on the Trinity might not serve as an ice-breaker, sooner or later the conversation has to be introduced.

The second rule says that, therefore, the mode of the presence of the Spirit in the world is trinitarian (see Chapter 17). There is an ancient rule according to which the inner works of the Trinity are separable and the outward works (*ad extra*) inseparable. This ancient rule is as acute as it ever was. In order to refer to the presence of the Spirit in the world with regard to any of the Spirit's many works, we are also referring to the Son and the Father. As the late senior Catholic theologian of religions, Jacques Dupuis, helpfully put it: the Trinity helps us avoid typical interrelated errors (Kärkkäinen 2004, 50–52). The first error puts Christ and God in opposition as if one could choose either a “theocentric” or “Christocentric” option. The other error is to champion that kind of pneumatological approach which tends to diminish the role of Jesus Christ as more limited than that of the Spirit. Even Pinnock quoted above made a careless statement to this effect, which has to be corrected. We cannot speak of the Spirit merely as representative of universality and the Son of particularity. Both of them, albeit distinctively and in their own unique ways, represent both universality and particularity. Think of the Spirit of God. Yes, the Spirit is everywhere, but the Spirit is also the Spirit of the Son and the Spirit of the Father. Not every spirit hovering above in the skies is the Spirit of whom Christians speak. So, there is also particularity to the Spirit. Similarly, we must think with regard to the Son. In his Incarnation, he bespeaks particularity, but as the divine Word, *Logos*, the creator and sustainer of the world, he stands for universality.

Related, according to the third rule, pneumatology (see Chapter 19) and Christology (see Chapter 20) make one divine economy. Just read the Synoptic Gospels: where the Son is, there is the Spirit and vice versa. In the New Testament, the Son and the Spirit presuppose each other. The Son would not be the Son without the Spirit and vice versa. The Gospels clearly show the influence of the Holy Spirit throughout the earthly life of Jesus, from his conception by the Spirit to his ministry through the power of the Spirit to his resurrection at the hands of God by the power of the same Spirit. The Son and the Spirit mutually inform and regulate each other, so to speak. I have developed a contemporary Spirit Christology from the perspective of Christology (Kärkkäinen 2013, 196–209) and from a pneumatological perspective (Kärkkäinen 2016, 33–38), respectively.

Fourth, in this healthy trinitarian grammar, the Spirit invites the church to “relational engagement with religions” as the British Catholic theologian of religions, Gavin D’Costa (2000, 109) helpfully puts it. It helps us further develop a robust pneumatological approach to religions from a solid trinitarian foundation. The reason I am turning to a Roman Catholic rather than a Pentecostal theologian with the hope of guiding Pentecostals into a more robust trinitarian pneumatological approach is simply because, at the moment, as my sympathetic critique of some leading Pentecostal scholars has evinced, a robust trinitarian Spirit-directed theology of religions has not been fully developed within the movement. This lacuna is also a reminder to Pentecostals that continuing ecumenical involvement with other Christian traditions serves well the theological maturation of the movement. The Roman Catholic tradition is particularly apt to assist Pentecostals not only because of their solid trinitarian orientation in all theological matters but also because of a vibrant missionary work and evangelism among people of other faiths—a task left behind to a large extent among mainstream Protestant and Anglican communities.

The Spirit's invitation to a relational engagement with the other

Naming it “the Holy Spirit’s invitation to relational engagement,” D’Costa (2000, 109) rightly argues that we should appreciate other religions as vital and important for the Christian church in that they help the church penetrate more deeply into the divine mystery. This way our own spirituality and commitment to Christ can also be deepened. While testifying to salvation in Christ, trinitarian openness toward other religions fosters the acknowledgment of the gifts of God also outside our own faith by virtue of the presence of the Spirit. At the same time, the Spirit guides us in a critical discernment of both virtues and evils among the religious other:

The [religious] other is always interesting in their difference and may be the possible face of God, or the face of violence, greed, and death. Furthermore, the other may teach Christians to know and worship their own trinitarian God more truthfully and richly. (9)

Thus, D’Costa (9) believes that trinitarian theology provides the “context for a critical, reverent, and open engagement with otherness, without any predictable outcome.”

This emphasis does not mean that other religions are salvific in themselves. But nor do they have to be sinful and corrupted to the core. The Spirit’s constant invitation to a relational dialogue and discernment may also help us Christians become more sensitive to our own failings and sinfulness. Again, citing D’Costa (2000, 115), we can say that

if the Spirit is at work in the religions, then the gifts of the Spirit need to be discovered, fostered, and received into the church. If the church fails to be receptive, it may be unwittingly practicing cultural and religious idolatry.

The church better be ready for surprises, since there is no knowing *a priori* what beauty, truth, holiness, and other “gifts” may be waiting for the church (D’Costa 2000, 133).

Borrowing from the biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, we can make the term “other” a verb to remind us of the importance of seeing the religious other not as a counter-object but rather as a partner in “othering,” which is “the risky, demanding, dynamic process of relating to one that is not us” (Brueggemann 1999, 1). What matters is the capacity to listen to the distinctive testimony of the other, to patiently wait upon the other, and to make a safe space for him or her. This kind of reverent, honest, and passionate Spirit-led engagement of the other also gives us an opportunity to hold in a dynamic balance postures that are often taken as valid alternatives: either witness/evangelization or dialogue, either exclusivism or tolerance, either proclamation or service, and so forth (see Kärkkäinen 2010, 2014).

Contrary to what the first-generation pluralisms contend, a true dialogue and relational engagement does not mean giving up one’s truth claims but rather entails patient and painstaking investigation of real differences and similarities. The purpose of the dialogue is not necessarily to soften the differences among religions but rather to clarify similarities and differences as well as issues of potential convergence and impasse.

Regretfully, the contemporary secular mindset too often mistakenly confuses tolerance with lack of commitment. That is to misunderstand the meaning of the term “tolerance.” Deriving from the Latin term meaning “to bear a burden,” tolerance is needed when real differences are allowed (Netland 2001). True tolerance is needed when two or more parties

honestly acknowledge their differences, even deeply held differences. Tolerance is of no use if we come to the dialogue table having already decided that no real differences exist or be allowed!

Furthermore, I argue that although too often juxtaposed with each other, the proclamation of the Christian gospel by the church and painstaking interfaith dialogue belong together and are not alternatives. This is a wide ecumenical consensus as affirmed by the World Council of Churches (2010, no. 61): “In mission there is place both for the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ and for dialogue with people of other faiths.”

Conclusion

That there are so many religions and ideologies with their own passionate claims for truth and salvation continues to be a major challenge for the church of the third millennium. The situation is particularly acute for an enthusiastic missionary movement such as global Pentecostalism. But what if religious plurality and pluralisms were not necessarily to be deemed as demonic or even enemies? This is what the British philosopher-theologian Keith Ward (1999, 25) believes, arguing that ultimately “for a religious person, to *accept* disagreement is to see it as within the providence of God” — even disagreement due to diversity of religious beliefs and convictions. Religions are not here without God’s permission and allowance. The continuing challenge, particularly for the staunch monotheist, is how to reconcile the existence of one’s own deeply felt (God-given?) beliefs with different, often opposite, kinds of convictions (Ward 1999). Sure, a theology of religions is a complex and painful task. But it can also be taken as an opportunity. The leading American comparative theologian Francis X. Clooney (2010, 7) speaks to the same issue:

If we are attentive to the diversity around us, near us, we must deny ourselves the easy confidences that keep the other at a distance. But, as believers, we must also be able to defend the relevance of the faith of our community, deepening our commitments even alongside other faiths that are flourishing nearby. We need to learn from other religious possibilities, without slipping into relativist generalizations. The tension between open-mindedness and faith, diversity and traditional commitment, is a defining feature of our era, and neither secular society nor religious authorities can make simple choices before us.

Tackling the complex and complicated issue of religions and religious plurality, while continuing faithful and enthusiastic work of evangelism and social service, the rapidly growing Pentecostal movement has the promise of taking leadership in this vital mission. The Pentecostal voice in the discussions on the theology of religions matters—and matters a lot!

References

- Barth, Karl. 1956. *Church Dogmatics*. Vol. 1, Part 1. *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, edited and translated by G. Bromilley and T.F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Brueggemann, Walter. 1999. *The Covenanted Self: Explorations in Law and Covenant*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.
- Carpenter, Howard. 1995. “Tolerance or Irresponsibility: The Problem of Pluralisms in Missions.” *Advance* 31 (2): 19.
- Clooney, Francis X. 2010. *Comparative Theology*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- D’Costa, Gavin. 2000. *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

- “Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness. Final Report of the Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders: 1990–97.” 2010. In *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Ecumenical Documents and Critical Assessments*, edited by Wolfgang Vondey, 159–98. Eugene: Pickwick.
- “Final Report of the Dialogue between the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church and Some Classical Pentecostals: 1977–82.” 2010. In *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Ecumenical Documents and Critical Assessments*, edited by Wolfgang Vondey, 113–32. Eugene: Pickwick.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. 2000. “‘An Exercise on the Frontiers of Ecumenism:’ Almost Thirty Years of the Roman Catholic–Pentecostal Dialogue.” *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 29 (2): 156–71.
- . 2004. *The Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- . 2005. “Trinity and Religions: On the Way to a Trinitarian Theology of Religions for Evangelicals.” *Missiology: An International Review* 33 (2): 159–74.
- . 2006a. “‘How to Speak of the Spirit Among Religions’: Trinitarian ‘Rules’ for a Pneumatological Theology of Religions.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30 (3): 121–27.
- . 2006b. “Trinitarian Rules for a Pneumatological Theology of Religions.” In *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, edited by Michael Welker, 47–70. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- , ed. 2009. *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- . 2010. “Dialogue, Witness, and Tolerance: The Many Faces of Interfaith Encounters.” *Theology, News, & Notes* 57 (2): 29–33.
- . 2013. *Christ and Reconciliation*. Vol. 1. *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- . 2014. “Divine Hospitality and Communion: A Trinitarian Theology of Equality, Justice and Human Flourishing.” In *Revisioning, Renewing, and Rediscovering the Triune Center: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. Grenz*, edited by Jason Sexton, 135–53. Eugene: Pickwick.
- . 2016. *Spirit and Salvation*. Vol. 4. *A Constructive Theology for the Pluralistic World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Knitter, Paul F. 2002. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Lederle, Henry I. 1988. *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of Spirit-Baptism in the Charismatic Renewal Movement*. Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Netland, Harold A. 2001. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Missions*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- Pinnock, Clark. 1988. “The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions.” In *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World: Theology from an Evangelical Point of View*, edited by M. A. Noll and D. F. Wells, 152–68. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- . 1992. *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- . 1996. *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.
- Richie, Tony. 2006. “Azusa-Era Optimism: Bishop J. H. King’s Pentecostal Theology of Religions as a Possible Paradigm for Today.” *Journal of Pentecostal Tradition* 14 (2): 247–60.
- . 2011. *Speaking by the Spirit: A Pentecostal Model for Interreligious Dialogue*. Lexington: Emeth Press.
- Solivan, Samuel. 1998. “Interreligious Dialogue: An Hispanic American Pentecostal Perspective.” In *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Responses to Religious Pluralism*, edited by S. Mark Heim, 37–45. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Ward, Keith. 1999. *Religion and Community*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- “Word and Spirit, Church and World. Final Report of the International Dialogue between Representatives of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders.” 2010. In *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Ecumenical Documents and Critical Assessments*, edited by Wolfgang Vondey, 199–227. Eugene: Pickwick.
- World Council of Churches, ed. 2010. “Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today. A Study Document, WCC, 2000.” In *“You are the Light of the World” (Matthew 5:14): Statements on Mission by the World Council of Churches, 1980–2005*, edited by Jacques Mathey, 59–89. Geneva: WCC.

- Wright, Nigel. 1993. "A Pilgrimage in Renewal." In *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, edited by T. Smail, A. Walker, and N. Wright, 22–32. London: SPCK.
- Yong, Amos. 2000. *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Theology of Religions*. JPT Supplement 20. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- . 2003. *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- . 2005. *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- . 2008. *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- . 2012a. *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow Through the Middle Way?* Leiden: Brill.
- . 2012b. *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Dialogue*. Leiden: Brill.
- Yong, Amos and Clifton Clarke, eds. 2011. *Global Renewal, Religious Pluralism, and the Great Commission: Towards a Renewal Theology of Mission and Interreligious Encounter*. Lexington: Emeth Press.