A Reader’s Guide to Interreligious Dialogue

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There is perhaps no more significant reality for the development of Christianity today than the resurgence of the world religions. Many observers claim that any theology that wishes to be heard in this day will have to take into account this ascendency of non-Western faiths. Yet, one must look long and hard to find any listing of resources on Christian dialogue with people of living faiths. While the literature on comparative religion and history of religions is readily accessible, little has been done to make available the burgeoning scholarship on interreligious dialogue.

The following listing is a modest effort to organize the vast new material on interreligious dialogue into a manageable form. It intends to put into the hands of the interested reader an outline that will provide ready entry into what has become a confusing array of books and periodicals. The listing is highly selective, including mainly works that introduce the general shape of the subject and its most recurrent themes. The arrangement is progressive, moving from introductory studies and broad overviews to special issues and particular dialogues. Bibliographic material for more extensive reading is reserved for the last section.

I. SURVEYS

Two excellent overviews of the discussions about mission and dialogue in the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church are available in Carl F. Hallencreutz’s Dialogue and Community: Ecumenical Issues in Inter-religious Relationships (Swedish Institute of Missionary Research and The World Council of Churches, 1977), and Robert B. Sheard’s Inter-religious Dialogue in the Catholic Church since Vatican II (Edwin Mellen, 1987).

II. CHRISTIAN APPROACHES

Much of the literature on interreligious dialogue concerns Christian approaches to other religions. Owen Thomas, in Attitudes to Other Religions (Harper, 1969), lists seven different approaches and provides sample readings. A primary text, No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions (Orbis, 1985), by Paul Knitter, outlines conserva-


The most familiar characterization of interreligious postures describes three stances—
exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Introductory descriptions and critiques of these positions are provided by the exclusivists, Arthur F. Glasser and Donald A. McGavran, in *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* (Baker, 1983), the inclusivist, Gavin D’Costa, in *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Basil Blackwell, 1986), and the pluralist, Alan Rice, in *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (Orbis, 1982).

A. Exclusivism


B. Inclusivism


“Christian Presence” series. Another spokesperson for tolerance was E. C. Dewick, *The Christian Attitude to Other Religions* (Cambridge, 1953).

C. Pluralism

The position that there are a plurality of saving faiths has been gaining in popularity in


For many recent theologians, pluralism is the position of choice; see *Religious Pluralism* (Notre Dame, 1984), edited by Leroy Rouner, and *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions* (Orbis, 1985), by Harold Coward. Basic tenets and applications of the pluralist position are described in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralist Theology of Religions* (Orbis, 1987), edited by John Hick and Paul Knitter.

**III. SELECTED TOPICS**

**A. Dialogue**

One response to the emergence of world religions has been an interest in conversation among the various faiths. This interest has produced both theoretical studies of dialogue and reports of actual dialogue. Among the former are Raimundo Panikkar’s *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (Paulist, 1978), and Donald Swearer’s *Dialogue: The Key to Understanding Other Religions* (Westminster, 1977). A very readable statement on dialogue as well as other topics is Willard Oxtoby’s *The Meaning of Other Faiths* (Westminster, 1983). A review of biblical material about dialogue is included in *The Bible and People of Other Faiths* (WCC, 1985), by S. Wesley Ariarajah. Authors who carry on dialogue with the religions in their writings include Ninian Smart, *World Religions: A Dialogue* (Penguin, 1960), and Arnulf Camp, *Partners in Dialogue*.

B. Christology

For Christians the major issue with interreligious dialogue is whether or not encounter and exchange with other faiths violates allegiance to Jesus Christ. In *The Finality of Christ* (John Knox, 1969), Lesslie Newbigin argues that, inasmuch as Jesus is God and the sole criterion of revelation, any contact with other religions must be for the purpose of conversion. More recently, Mark Heim argues for an exclusivist christology in *Is Christ the Only Way? Christian Faith in a Pluralistic World* (Judson, 1985). Kenneth Surin, in an article, “Revelation, Salvation, the Uniqueness of Christ and Other Religions,” *Religious Studies* 19 (1983), defends an incarnational christology in a world of many religions.


Alan Race favors an “action” christology in which Jesus embodies the broader salvific work of God (*Christians and Religious Pluralism*). There are degrees of incarnation, Hick argues, and Jesus is one outstanding instance on a continuum of revelation (*Problems of Religious Pluralism*). Paul Knitter argues that Christians can hold a non-normative christology (*No Other Name?*). Other non-incarnational christologies are developed by Don Cupitt, “The Finality of Christ,” *Theology* 78 (1975), and Howard Burkle, “Jesus Christ and Religious Pluralism,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 16 (1979). A position sympathetic to Hick and Knitter is developed by Lee Snook in *The Anonymous Christ: Jesus as Savior in Modern Theology* (Augsburg, 1986).

A criticism of non-incarnational christologies is available in Brian Hebblethwaite’s “Incarnation—the Essence of Christianity?” *Theology* 80 (1977). See also the perceptive criticisms of Knitter’s theocentric christology by Mark Heim and others in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Winter 1987. Related to the previous two positions but deserving special mention is a group of christologies framed around the concept of the Logos. Contending with Kraemer’s narrow interpretation of the Logos, A. C. Bouquot argues that it was through the notion of the Logos that Christianity approached other religions (*The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions* [Harper, 1958]). Robert D. Young, in his *Encounter with World Religions* (Westminster, 1970), also criticizes Kraemer and suggests a modified logos theology as a route to dialogue with other religions. Process theologian John
Cobb, Jr. explores logos christology in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Westminster, 1975). Among the many criticisms of logos theology, one of the most passionate is Robert Jenson’s “Religious Pluralism, Christology, and Barth,” in *dialog* 20 (1981).

**C. Truth**


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**IV. PARTICULAR RELIGIONS**

Among the major world religions, this bibliography will briefly document Christian dialogue with three: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. Claiming several hundred million adherents each, these faiths are perhaps the least known in the West of the truly large religions. At the same time, a considerable literature about them is now available.

**A. Buddhism**

Noteworthy from the early literature are B. H. Streeter’s *The Buddha and the Christ* (Macmillan, 1932), and F. H. Hilliard’s *The Buddha, the Prophet and the Christ* (Macmillan, 1956). A pair of books by George Appleton, *The Christian Approach to the Buddhist*
(Edinburgh, 1958) and on the Eightfold Path (SCM, 1961), are among the first in the new wave of literature in this field. Winston King’s Buddhism: Some Bridges of Understanding (Westminster, 1962), traces parallels between the two faiths on key concepts.


Donald Swearer’s Dialogue: The Key to Understanding Other Religions, shows how Buddhism can deepen and enlarge Christianity. Buddhism and Christianity (Seabury, 1979), by Claude Geffré and Mariasusai Dhavamony, brings together essays on the theme of suffering and liberation. John B. Cobb, Jr. develops his famous proposal for mutual transformation (“Buddhized Christianity” or “Christianized Buddhism”) in Beyond Dialogue (Fortress, 1982). Two recent collections of essays that underscore the problems and possibilities are G. W. Houston’s The Cross and the Lotus: Christianity and Buddhism in Dialogue (Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), and Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation (University of Hawaii, 1986), edited by Paul Ingram and Frederick Streng.

B. Hinduism

Early missionary activity in India is reviewed in Eric J. Sharpe’s Not to Destroy But to Fulfil (Gleerup, 1965), which notes, among others, the fulfillment theologies of missionaries T. E. Slater and J. N. Farquhar. The Christian Literature Society for India (hereafter CLS), located at Madras, published two works by V. Chakkarai: Jesus the Avatar (1926) and The Cross and Indian Thought (1932). Principal of the Christian College at that place, A. G. Hogg, wrote The Christian Message to the Hindu (SCM, 1947). His Karma and Redemption (1909) was reissued in 1970 by CLS. Rounding out this period is Jack Winslow’s The Christian Approach to the Hindu (Edinburgh, 1958).


Roman Catholic writers of that time include Raimundo Panikkar, The Unknown Christ of Hinduism (Orbis, 1981); Klaus Klostermaier, The Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban (SCM, 1969); M. M. Thomas, The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance (SCM, 1969); Swami Abhishiktananda (H. le Saux), Hindu-Christian Meeting Point (Bangalore, 1969); and Bede Griffiths, Christ in India (Scribners, 1966). Other writings from this period are N. K. Devaraja’s Hinduism and Christianity (Asia, 1969); Marcus Braybrooke’s Together to the Truth (Diocesan, 1971); Swami Satprakashananda’s Hinduism and Christianity (Vedanta Society of St.
Louis, 1975); and Eric Sharpe’s *Faith Meets Faith*.


**C. Islam**


Some special studies in the literature are Jacques Jomier, The Bible and the Koran (Desclée, 1959); Kenneth Cragg, The Privilege of Man (Athlone, 1968), Alive to God: Muslim and Christian in Prayer (Oxford, 1970), Jesus in Islam (Krishnagari, 1975); M. S. Seale, Qur’an and the Bible (Croom Helm, 1978); Geoffrey Parrinder, Jesus and the Qur’an (Oxford, 1977); J. I. Smith and Y. Y. Hadad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection (State University of New York, 1981); Thomas O’Shaughnessy, Word of God in the Qur’an (Rome Biblical Institute, 1984); and N. M. Vaporis, Orthodox Christians and Muslims (Holy Cross, 1986).

V. BIBLIOGRAPHIES

For those who wish to do more research, an excellent entry to the literature is available in Gavin D’Costa’s article “Bibliography: Christian Attitudes towards Other Religions,” The Modern Churchman, New Series 27 (1985). Eric Sharpe’s bibliographic essay, “Christian Attitudes to Non-Christian Religions: A Bibliographic Survey,” Expository Times 86 (1975), reprinted in Sharpe, Faith Meets Faith, provides a similar overview with a concentration on the meeting between Christianity and Hinduism.