

Kowtowing to Cultural Gods: Knitter's Christ-less Christianity

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Abstract

This essay begins by providing a rudimentary sketch of the major components of Knitter's theological perspective, along with all of its central presuppositions and the theological premises underlying them. Then it proceeds to critically review and evaluate the basic arguments regarding the perceived weaknesses of Christianity from his point of view. It turns out that Knitter's foundational claim that Christians have been impeding authentic interreligious dialogue by being insufficiently sensitive to 'historical relativism' and 'contemporary pluralism' ends up being more of an apologia to modern Western cultural trends than an empirically verifiable assertion. No hard reliable and verifiable empirical evidence is presented to substantiate any of Knitter's theological claims against Christianity including the alleged 'insufficient sensitivity' to other religions. The bold assertion that major concepts within the Christian doctrine such as salvation, resurrection, revelation, and even Jesus, need to be 'reformed' strongly implies criminal wrongdoings by Christianity in general that are not empirically substantiated in the least in the book itself. The related suggestion that such concepts can also be found in the same form within other religions is also found seriously wanting. Knitter's own preconditions or presuppositions for 'authentic' interreligious dialogue are found to be based upon illogical premises which essentially negate the Christian biblical missionary mandate altogether. The suggestion that denying Christ's exclusive salvatory message is a necessary and sufficient precondition for effective and

authentic interreligious dialogue is also found to be illogical and empirically unsupportable.

Keywords: kowtowing; Protestant; Christianity; relational uniqueness; exclusivity; inclusivity; nonnormative view of Christ; religious pluralism; secularism; interreligious dialogue; historical relativism; cultural determinism.

Introduction

The basic arguments regarding the perceived weaknesses of Western Christianity as a religious belief system are set down in Knitter's book (1985), and can be viewed as a follow-up to the pointed criticisms of Western Christianity proffered before him, some of whom he draws upon such as Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, and Ernst Troeltsch. Very broadly speaking, Knitter argues that there are 'other' religious ways of living a loving, ethical life equally legitimate to Christianity. Therefore, he concludes, a fervent faith in Jesus Christ is not the only way to be 'saved'. In his opinion, it seems that what's most important is that people live their lives in practice in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Without providing any evidence, the clear assumption here is that those specific teachings are found in other religions with different historical traditions.

Essentially, Knitter argues there are many saviors but in the form of different religious traditions and experiences. Christianity exists within a pluralistic multi-savior cultural context all feeding from the same 'unconscious psychological source', he asserts. In his view, this fact makes it possible to be personally aligned with several 'saviors' at the same time, for example, Christ and Buddha. The fundamental claim here, then, is that "...a nonnormative, theocentric Christology does not contradict the New Testament proclamation of Jesus and therefore is a valid interpretation of that proclamation". What's more, Knitter does not perceive any inherent contradictions between these claims and established historical Christian doctrine.

A Non-normative Christ

What is a ‘nonnormative view’ of Christ? Well, this view understands Jesus not to be exclusively and normatively unique to Christianity but, rather, “...as a universally relevant manifestation of divine revelation and salvation”. In other words, the uniqueness of Jesus comes to be defined by the ability of Christianity “...to relate to – that is, to include and be included by – other unique religious figures from other religious belief systems, what Knitter calls a “relational uniqueness” rather than exclusive uniqueness. Christianity in these terms is relationally unique, not exclusively unique. Jesus Christ is simply just another unique religious figure in history.

Consequently, both the exclusive uniqueness (only Jesus can ‘save’) of the conservative Evangelical and mainline Protestant Christian religious models and the ‘inclusive uniqueness’ of the Catholic model are problematic to him in that they are ‘insufficiently sensitive’. The suggestion is that these religious models are deficient in human sensibility or not mentally or morally sensitive enough to the historical relativity of Jesus. Jesus was “...not unique among the religious figures of history,” Knitter proclaims.

Furthermore, he continues, they are also deficient because they do not reflect the reality of religious pluralism in contemporary society. This includes its widespread acceptance to varying degrees by the bulk of Christians themselves. In a word, Jesus does not possess any kind of spiritual monopoly or special particularity different from other religions and religious figures.

That is why these traditional Christian models cannot enter into a genuine dialogue with other world religions, says Knitter. Traditional Christian claims “...impede authentic dialogue with believers of other faiths”. Therefore, what is needed is “...a distinctive Christian contribution to the new dialogue among religions” based on Knitter’s proposed “theocentric model” for understanding religion. The major assertion here is that

Christianity needs to be 'reformed' or redefined before it can step up to the world stage to participate in an evolving pluralistic dialogue with other religions in the quest for the unity of humanity. Otherwise 'authentic interreligious dialogue' is not possible, Knitter states. More about interreligious dialogue later.¹

Cultural Determinism Unveiled

Earlier it was mentioned that Knitter cites Troeltsch² extensively in making the case for historical relativism as applied to Christianity, even though Troeltsch came to the opposite conclusion about Christianity (Troeltsch, 1992). Among many claims made about religion in general and Christianity in particular, Troeltsch is wrongly assumed to have personally argued that no religion has any special status and no religion can claim any advantage over any other religion. The reason is because all religions are cultural expressions of utility from within which they emerged, a theoretical perspective which makes material physical culture an obvious determining factor (Ibid., 1991).

¹ Basically, an interreligious or interfaith dialogue is a constructive communication and interaction between people deriving from different historical religious traditions and adhering to different religious beliefs (spiritual, humanistic, and so forth). The implicit goal is to promote a greater understanding, acceptance, and tolerance between different religions at both the institutional and individual levels. Knitter does not deal with more recently adopted terms which seek to address some perceived weaknesses contained in the term 'interreligious' such as interbelief dialogue, interpath dialogue, and transbelief dialogue, nor does he deal with important denominational differences in conceptions of interreligious dialogue. Consequently, they won't be addressed in this essay (Cheetham, 2013; Cornille, 2013; WCC, 2012).

² Knitter's consistent referencing of major Christian scholars to make unfounded claims about the history and nature of Christianity is simply astounding. Troeltsch understood 'God' to be the ultimate aim of history, viewing Christianity itself as the penultimate form of religion because he believed that Jesus restricted the absolute truth to be revealed in the world to come (Turner, 1978). It stands to reason that Troeltsch himself would not have concurred with Knitter's denunciations of Christianity nor his theological perspective.

So, then, for example, it is claimed that Christianity emerged from within Western culture only because it served and performed particular functions within that particular culture, and not because of other more causally significant reasons. Therefore, he assumes that concepts within the Christian religious model like incarnation, sin, and even superiority don't commonly accomplish or serve any kind of utilitarian function in the everyday lives of people from other cultures, and so, this is part of what effectively precludes any meaningful genuine dialogue between different religions.

Toynbee and Jung at the Launching Pad

The question arises, then, why do we have different religious belief systems? Indeed, why do we have such a panoply of different religious traditions at all? At first, Knitter tries to explain the need for religion by referring to Arnold Toynbee's famous commentary that all religions flow basically from the same needs (1956, 1953). This reference makes sense to Knitter since he believes that all saviors are the same in the sense that they contain a 'common essence' or experience or feeling of 'the spiritual presence' in everyday life.

Since Toynbee was a historian,³ he brought many historical insights into his analysis of various subjects including religion. One of his major claims regarding religion is that it is 'the heart of human life' or it imparts purpose and meaning to human existence. The assertion that all religions contain a common cultural essence led him to believe that everything in a religion considered to be nonessential should be discarded, a subjective

³ Toynbee may have been a historian who demonstrated the historical variation of religious belief systems, but that did not prevent him from believing that world history was subjected to the will of the Christian God. In fact, after writing several volumes of his magnum opus, *A Study of History*, after World War II, he became increasingly religious over time drifting closer to the Catholic belief system (Millar, 2004, p. 183). It is, therefore, highly doubtful indeed that Toynbee would have seconded Knitter's idea of a 'Christ-less Christianity', much less his other key conceptual components.

decision to be made by each individual. Therefore, he preferred religion to be what's left after this discarding process, a kind of leftover 'esoteric faith' as contrasted with the uniqueness of traditional Christianity, not meant to be shared universally but only by a chosen few.

At this point, Knitter uses Toynbee as a launching pad to engage the psychological perspective of Carl Jung in his continuing effort to secure further support for his 'common essence' theory of religion. In doing so, of course, he lays the foundation of religion firmly at the base of the human subjective 'psyche', a sort of self-regulating system striving to maintain balance between opposing entities or traits while simultaneously pursuing its own individuality. As such, it encompasses the 'totality of all psychic processes, conscious as well as unconscious', meaning all aspects of mental functioning, not just the conscious 'mind' functioning (Carl Jung, 1971, *Collected Works*, V. 6, para. 797).

Knitter is interested to know how Jung's ideas about 'psyche' were potentially related to God and religion in the present context. First of all, God is much too complex a mystery to be comprehended by human beings, he claims. Therefore, all symbols or images of God are woefully inadequate, including Jung's own version. Secondly, belief in God or beliefs in general, including transcendental beliefs, do not have to be 'facts' in order for people to hold them. In this way, he tended to hold belief in God and religious beliefs and behaviors in general in a positive light as going through various stages of development over time in the human striving for "wholeness" or completeness or healing.

In his comprehensive study of folklore, world mythologies, and the dreams of his own patients in psychotherapeutic treatment sessions. Jung broke down the various components of the 'psyche' into expressions of instinctual patterns or archetypes. When an individual gets overwhelmed by unconscious forces or alienated from meanings offered by supernatural forces, this

causes serious problems in the ‘psyche’ of that individual and prevents it from continuing to develop and strive for ‘wholeness’ or healing. It was Jung’s life endeavor to promote and facilitate this healing process.

So, then, according to Jung and Knitter, God exists as part of the unconscious ‘psyche’ of human beings and can be equated to and decoded as symbol or myth.⁴ For example, Jesus becomes the symbol of the Christ concept, and this Christ concept cum concept is assumed to exist in many religions. The real issue is whether or not a particular religion with its own symbol(s) of ‘Christ concept’ can and does actually function to help people develop and seek ‘wholeness’ and healing. If this is true, Knitter proposes, then holding to the Bible as ultimate authority and clinging to Christ as the exclusive source of salvation is arrogant, misleading and irrelevant to contemporary pluralistic society.

That would mean that concepts in Christianity such as ‘salvation’, ‘sin’, and ‘revelation’, for example, must be redefined before they can establish or attain any relevance to contemporary religious dialogue. Knitter argues that if we want to have a true ‘dialogue’ between religions, we need to realize and respectfully recognize that such concepts as ‘salvation’ and ‘revelation’ are not exclusive to one religion, but also found in other religions, a view called ‘theocentric’ rather than Christocentric.

Western Christianity Damned and Indicted

For all these reasons, he spends the last two chapters of his book citing one damning indictment of Western Christianity

⁴ Jung may have had many powerful dreams and ideas incredibly rich with meaning which led him to make important contributions to understanding the nature of religion better, but that did not press him into abandoning his Christian faith nor viewing it in a negative light, wholly unlike the atheistic Sigmund Freud and his followers (Clift, 1982). Again, it is doubtful at best that Jung would concur with what Knitter has to say about Christianity.

after another in a long list of denouncements of all Christian faith models. In this regard, Christianity viewed as criminal must be 'reformed'. He proposes new 'reformed' definitions for traditional Christian parlance which he insists would make dialogue with other religions more palatable to those religions.

Again, dialogue would not be fruitful because Christians at present are 'insufficiently sensitive' to 'historical relativity' and the 'pluralistic age' in which they live. This alleged insensitivity operates or functions to "impede authentic dialogue with believers of other faiths". It is an 'alleged' insensitivity because Knitter presents absolutely no solid verifiable empirical evidence to support the claim.

In any case, to make this dialogue 'authentic' and even 'possible', he insists that we first need to engage in a sustained process of 'reforming' and 'redefining' the components of the Christian faith model. A few examples will suffice to convey what he means by reform. For example, we need to redefine Jesus' incarnation as a myth with only personal legitimacy or value. We need also to redefine and emphasize Jesus' overall message as that of a minor prophet. As well, we need to redefine Jesus' resurrection as being simple figurative 'survival language used by a religious minority group at the time who were fervently trying to find their way back to God. In other words, we need to fully culturally relativize the Christian belief system.

Lastly, Christians need to reform and redefine Jesus' revelation.

Specifically, they should not dictate that only Jesus delivers 'God's definitive, normative revelation'. Here Knitter insists that a confessional approach is a preferred alternative. That is, when engaging with other religious faiths Christians can 'confess' to what they have experienced and witnessed and their beliefs about the truth of Jesus' revelation. However, they should but do it without passing any judgment about its superiority to other religions.

“In other words, the question regarding Jesus’ finality or normativity can remain an open question”, he says. That is, the central issue of Jesus’ uniqueness becomes “an open question” rather than an unalterable certainty. If Christians can engage in this reformed or redefined process, then Christianity and religion itself as a whole can ‘evolve’ into a new world order and make world peace a crowning achievement. Again, genuine interreligious dialogue is not possible in any other way, according to Knitter.

Christianity and the New Praxis Dialogue

In the last chapter of his book, Knitter goes one step beyond merely redefining the conceptual components of the Christian faith model in outlining preconditions for a meaningful and “authentic” interreligious “dialogue”. He argues that there must be a praxis of dialogue, a hermeneutics of praxis, that informs and infuses contemporary Christian doctrine.

That is to say, the truth of the Christian doctrine can only be discovered through dialogue with peoples of other religious belief systems. The confirmation of Christian truths, such as ‘revelation’ and ‘salvation’, for example, can only be rightfully achieved through “doing” a dialogue with other religions. These truths are NOT simply “given in the Christian scriptures and traditions”, he boldly asserts. This “praxis of dialogue” can provide Christianity with a “new originating and self-correcting foundation” in our “age of religious pluralism”.

However, in order to make this particular practice of dialogue possible and fruitful, we need to arrive at some kind of agreement about the nature of dialogue or what it means and about the presuppositions and premises it contains. The operational or working definition of dialogue that Knitter employs is that it is an “exchange of experience and understanding between two or more partners with the intention that all partners grow in experience and understanding”.

Once we accept this particular definition of dialogue, we then have to accept that it can only be carried out under certain conditions or what Knitter calls, presuppositions. Knitter lists three of these presuppositions, to be discussed momentarily. In turn, as mentioned earlier, each of these presuppositions necessarily contains certain ‘theological premises’ or attitudes which are contained within the theology of all the partners in the dialogue. These premises make possible the beginning and carrying out of a conversation with a believer of another faith.

Prerequisites for Interreligious dialogue

Then he puts forth the following three basic “presuppositions” that must be recognized in order for genuine “interreligious dialogue” to become a “possibility”, let alone actually achieved in practice.⁵

First, dialogue must be based on personal religious experience and firm truth-claims. The dialogue must only be conducted by ‘religious persons’, that is, those who have had ‘an encounter with the holy’. In other words, they must have had a personal religious experience. It cannot only exist in abstract form or rest upon an intellectual level of analysis or armchair philosophizing. As well, they must take firm clear positions on what they believe. Lastly, what is affirmed as “true” is also true for the other partners in the dialogue, not only for the person doing the affirming.

This basic presupposition is based on the theological premise that the participant in the dialogue belongs to a religious

⁵ What is most curious about Knitter’s whole approach towards interreligious dialogue is a notable absence of a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature on that topic at that time. Even by 1985, the publication date of his book, there was a considerable body of cross-disciplinary and cross-denominational studies on interreligious or interfaith dialogue and relations. After all, most biblical scholars and religious leaders recognize the 1893 meeting of world religious leaders in Chicago for the World’s Parliament of Religions as the virtual origin of interreligious dialogue. Therefore, the paucity of empirical and scholarly research bearing on the topic interreligious dialogue at the time of writing is inexcusable.

tradition. Another theological premise is that the participant's particular religion provides access to and contact with 'the universal reality of the divine' or the 'God...beyond my religion'. Second, dialogue must be based on the recognition of the possible truth in all religions; the ability to recognize this truth must be grounded in the hypothesis of a common ground and goal for all religions.

This means that the dialogue partners must listen authentically to each other. This authentic listening requires total openness to the other partner's truth, and vice versa. Evidently, authentic listening is not possible if one of the dialogue partners believes they have the complete truth and the other partner has the incomplete truth.

To start, this presupposition for dialogue requires a theological premise or belief that there is a common ground and goal for all religions, namely, to promote the unity of humanity and to avert or counter the danger of world destruction. Second, the dialogue partners must all believe that there must be the same 'ultimate reality', the same 'divine presence', the same fullness and emptiness, the same 'God', which energizes all religions and provides the foundation and goal for dialogue. They must also believe that one ultimate reality reveals itself through all religions in the form of a universal revelation.

The last basic presupposition is that dialogue must be based on openness to the possibility of genuine change/conversion. All participants in interreligious dialogue must be genuinely open to receiving divine truths they previously rejected or never considered. This means that, if need be, they must be ready to reform, to change, even to abandon or condemn certain beliefs in their own religion. In turn, this means that participants cannot engage in dialogue with people from other faiths if they enter the dialogue claiming that they possess the final or real truth.

There are many premises underlying this last presupposition. First, all participants must be open to being converted to the partner's truth. The possibility of conversion is always a two-way street in interreligious dialogue, he asserts. Second, the dialogue partners have to realize the difference between faith and beliefs, between the experience of faith and the articulation or communication of beliefs. Most religious persons feel "deep down" both the distinctions and the bond between these religious entities.

Faith points to a personal intuitive experience or contact with the ultimate. Usually, it means feeling that we are a part of a larger reality, something larger than ourselves, whether it is personal or impersonal. That feeling or faith talks to us and it tells us more than what we can ever fully know or state. Faith cannot exist without beliefs, but it is different from them. Beliefs are the cultural, intellectual, emotional efforts to state, to share, to make stronger what partners have experienced.

Next, all partners must believe that 'no belief or set of beliefs can say it all', as Knitter puts it. Because faith is transcendent and ever open, it cannot be fully, comprehensively, and definitively expressed in beliefs. That means that dialogue partners have to be ever ready to adjust or revise their beliefs and move beyond them. Lastly, the universal reality of the faith experience makes possible sharing and "double belonging", that is, entering readily into and feeling the deeper meaning of otherwise strange beliefs or religions.

A Few, Choice Critiques

Now, having demonstrated a rudimentary understanding of some of the main concepts and themes and inputs into Knitter's theological perspective, we are now ready to discuss a few choice critiques. Since each of these critiques, along with potential others, requires extensive elaboration and analysis, here they will only be briefly stated and discussed. There are

many more weaknesses contained in Knitter's theological approach than can be reviewed and evaluated here.

First, it should be recognized that there are several problems inherent to his method of diluting the fundamental uniqueness of conventional Christian doctrine so that, in his view, it may be capable of engaging other faiths in an 'authentic' manner. The basic problem here is that his basic hermeneutic of praxis, what he calls the "praxis of dialogue", is not applied universally and equitably and honestly to all other religions, thereby violating his own theological principles, presuppositions, and premises.

At best, then, the hermeneutic he devised is firmly limited by his own ideological biases. He conveys the picture of a contemporary age in which all world religions live side by side on some picturesque pluralistic religious fantasy island conversing openly with each other about their own religious identities, constantly adjusting their identities to take into account the divine "truths" gleaned from this conversation, and ultimately living in peaceful harmony with each other.

The strong implication is that the Christian doctrine as initially originated and presently established is not conducive to authentic interreligious dialogue, a foundational premise he has failed empirically to substantiate by any measurable terms. His answer to this problem is to carve out the heart of the Christian doctrine by 'reforming' and redefining its central organizing concepts to make it amenable to genuine "dialogue".

The assumption here, of course, is that (a) only the central religious concepts of Christian tradition need to be 'reformed', and (b) authentic interreligious dialogue cannot take place between partners in a religious dialogue that hold firm to the central tenets of the respective belief systems which differentiate them from other religious traditions. This is a philosophical assumption that needs to be tested, not simply asserted.

There is no necessary, logical, and sufficient impediment to dialogue between religions presented by the mere existence of differences between religious traditions, whether those differences are tertiary or major. Differences between religious traditions do not in and of themselves on the basis of principle effectively prevent or preclude interreligious dialogue from taking place. Differences are just as likely as Knitter's common essences or similarities to be the organizing principle of sincere and genuine interreligious dialogue. In fact, for many religious traditions, including Christianity, differences from other religious traditions is what defines their essence and at least partially fuels the motivation to interact peacefully with members of other religious faiths.

Therefore, to devise and employ a special hermeneutic that corrodes these differences by either emphasizing and/or imagining common elements between them can be construed as a vampiric methodological approach to religion in service of a political goal to forge a world church fundamentally unlike Christianity. Using such a theological methodology to scour the doctrinal terrain of different religious traditions poses a high risk of creating fictional similarities between highly different religious traditions that don't exist in concrete historical and factual terms. There would also be a high risk of glossing over or minimizing the existence and significance of mutually antagonistic or conflicting or contradictory elements contained within different religious traditions.

A Christ-less Christianity?

In order to demonstrate the importance of this point, let's take one of Knitter's central examples of what a redefined Christian tenet might look like. Arguing in favor of a Christ-less Christianity, he redefines the central aspects of it in such a way that allows for the continued evolution of the meaning of Jesus Christ for the world. However, the ultimate result of this evolution is a type of hollowed-out Christianity, a kind of religious pie shell void of any content or filling, if you will. He

understands that Jesus Christ made many specific claims as to his own uniqueness, but these statements have been misunderstood or misrepresented, he insists. Christ is not the one and only savior because many world religions contain the same salvific message, he claims.

It is this exclusive or constricted narrow Christian view of personal salvation that is standing in the way of saving world religions and even religion itself. The strong implication here is that Knitter assumes its religion that needs to be saved' rather than people. His narrow-minded assaults on particular claims made by Jesus Christ as the only possible way to achieve authentic interreligious dialogue and world peace is not only comical and vampiric, but highly methodologically suspect especially given that he does not perform any corresponding comprehensive theological surgery upon any other religions.

Secondly, Knitter's relentless efforts to identify similar elements contained in different religious traditions leads him to adopt and employ a form of reductionism that effectively extracts everything of value to those particular religious traditions, especially Christianity. In doing so, he does not promote the "interreligious dialogue" that he says he does. For example, his attempts to reduce religious dialogue to a common 'relativism' may effectively remove anything of substance or value that any religion could offer during the process of interreligious dialogue.

Why do we need a 'salvation' for all humanity if all 'revelation' is reduced to 'salvation'? When the central tenets of salvation contained in any religion are reduced to only its own formulation and application of 'revelation', if it exists at all in that religious belief system, then other central concepts of that religion also become superfluous. In Christianity, concepts like 'sin' or 'suffering' become meaningless expressions.

Thirdly, why is it that only or mainly Christianity requires psychotherapy or psychotherapeutic treatment? Surely there are serious to severe obstacles or limitations or antagonisms to

interreligious dialogue contained in other religious traditions? Why doesn't Knitter provide a more balanced comparative analysis and dissection of other religious traditions to demonstrate and prove sound objective analyses, interpretations, premises, presuppositions, philosophical assumptions, and religious methodologies, to say the least? Surely, mutual respect and understanding between different religious traditions should not only be predicated upon the dilution of central organizing concepts and principles contained in Christianity alone or especially applicable to the Christian doctrine itself.

Finally, Knitter's psychotherapeutic reductionism leaves him extremely vulnerable to a serious charge of cultural reductionism. In his overriding emphasis upon serving the contemporary cultural masters of historical relativism and pluralism, he unquestioningly and naively genuflects at the altar of Western secularization. Here Knitter can be seen as the unconscious product of the very culture whose problems he seeks to address while at the same time touting culture as the key determining factor in effective interreligious dialogue rather than the salvation message of Christ.

Rather than provide an effective theological analysis of the impenetrable lock that imprisons the "psyche" of people from different faiths within the self-reassuring, prideful illusionary thought systems of modern culture, Knitter would seemingly prefer to imprison those religious individuals not so easily deluded. For example, maintaining that a religion can only be truly judged in any meaningful capacity by an 'insider' or genuine member of that religion is a ridiculously facile and theologically primitive argument, not the least because it precludes or sabotages the possibility of rational discussions between opposing theological views. Such a perspective of interreligious dialogue certainly does not make him an insider to those he is addressing.

Kowtowing to Cultural Gods

His kowtowing to the modern cultural “gods” of relativism and pluralism does not end there, however. He meticulously scours the Christian faith hunting for any exclusivist theme or premise or concept it might contain in order to deflate or dilute it of any absolute truth elements either by artfully redefining it or by imaginatively ‘reforming’ into it a kind of religious relativism. For example, the resurrection of Christ is reformulated and redefined as a “myth” containing only subjective significance rather in absolute universal validity.

Yet, in working out this proposal he does not escape Western cultural emphasis upon linearity of linguistic expression and conceptual exegesis, building for himself a cultural prison from which his theological analysis cannot escape. Further, Knitter is so worried and preoccupied to construct a Christology which he believes is capable of conversing effectively with at least two dominant cultural trends, namely ecumenism and pluralism, that he fails to realize he hasn’t logically nor empirically demonstrated that Christian adherents have consistently not been engaged in genuine effective dialogues with people of other faiths at multiple levels of religious dialogue whether local, national, regional, or global.

In other words, the absolutely essential empirical evidence needed to prove and support his claim that Christianity has caused and/or is causing obstacles or limitations to interreligious dialogue is sorely absent from Knitter’s theological discussions and claims. Simply asserting a theological position does not constitute empirical proof of that position no matter how persuasive that position might be argued.

Conclusion

It is questionable whether employing a hermeneutic that effectively dilutes the exclusivity claims found anywhere within the Christian faith is a necessary and sufficient precondition for interreligious dialogue to take place. Obviously, one of the immediate effects of this dilution process is to relativize the salvation concept within the Christian doctrine if not the entire Christian belief system itself.

Another immediate theoretical result is to make it appear as if both exclusivity and inclusivity claims contained within different religious traditions can live side by side in peace and harmony without any degree of significant tension or conflict between them, a highly doubtful proposition at best.

The philosophical or logical error here is obvious. Knitter wants to adopt an 'either both/and OR nothing' theological perspective, even if he has to create fictionalized concepts by redefining terms contained in the Christian faith. By doing so, he defeats the very purpose for which he states he wrote the book, namely, to promote dialogue between different religious traditions.

In the end, he slams the door shut to the possibility that any openness may have been accomplished in the past and might be achieved in the future simply through a mutual respect for exclusivity. Dr. Knitter, you have misdiagnosed the patient's theological problem and, therefore, proposed the wrong prescription.

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