Religious and Secular Paradigms of Addressing Pluralism

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ABSTRACT. The following essay looks at the religious and secular paradigms of addressing pluralism. Firstly we will look at religious pluralism from a Christian standpoint, considering its three major responses: particularism, inclusivism and pluralism. Secondly we present the secular perspective on religious pluralism, examining the way secular lifestyle and secular spirituality competes with institutionalized religion. This paper argues that secular spirituality, while encouraging respect towards the study of organized religion, promotes alienation and disregard for any type of religious participation. In addition, the secular rationale cannot applied to all humanity, because a rational, ethical or religious prescription for the humankind that would be in agreement with all people does not constitute reality, and so, the world ethos remains an abstraction. Also, the paradigms offered by inclusivism and pluralism are not compatible with traditional Christianity which affirms the objectivity of the revelation of God in the Bible, through his Son Jesus Christ who we believe is the sole Savior of every culture or religious tradition.

In the context of ethnical, religious, and cultural diversity we encounter questions concerning the nature of the society that comprises these differences. Specifically, we ask, how can Hindu polytheism, Islamic fundamentalism, Buddhist atheism and Christian monotheism dwell in proximity? How can religious pluralism unite Hindu’s preoccupation in exercising control over the universe\(^1\) with Confucianism’s preoccupation for the

welfare of humanity when both coexist in the same society? What about the Islamic *Jihad* and Jewish *Halakhah* or Hebrew law? From a historical and theological perspective, both the religious and secular world answered differently to the challenges brought by religious pluralism.

**Religious Paradigms**

From a Christian perspective, the relations between diverse religions can be addressed in one of three major ways: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. In *God Has Many Names*, John Hick writes about these approaches, without using the terminology,² but the concepts appear in 1983 in Alan Race’s book, *Christian and Religious Pluralism* and are largely used ever since.³

Exclusivism is a label that has been attributed to the traditional approach of religious pluralism by its critics with the purpose of placing it in a negative light. Exclusivists are frequently described as being dogmatic, narrow-minded, intolerant, and arrogant while its opponents are regarded as being open minded, intellectual, civilized and tolerant. In order to eliminate the prejudices toward the traditional approach, Dennis Okholm and Timothy Phillips recommend the term “particularism” instead of “exclusivism.” Particularism sustains that (a) the Bible is the only written, true and normative declaration of God’s revelation to human kind and when a Bible statement is incompatible with a statement found in another religious or sacred book, the Bible must be considered true; (b) Jesus Christ is the only Son of the true God, fully God and fully man and the only path for human deliverance; (c) God’s saving grace can not be mediated through other religious teachings, practices and institutions.

Particularism defines itself in theological terms and not through cultural or social exclusivism. This position shows respect

towards other traditions or cultures, but affirms that God’s revelation for humanity is through Jesus Christ who is the sole Savior of every culture or religious tradition. Harrold Netland argues that this attitude was prevalent in the Christian world up until the end of the nineteenth century. In the beginning of the twentieth century we find the first significant deviations both in the Protestant and the Catholic side, but most evidently in the World Council the Churches.

Inclusivism gained contour as the traditional perspective toward inter-religious relations adopted a more flexible approach. If until the 1950s, the majority of Christian scholars debated the relation between “Christ and culture,” today the preoccupation shifted towards the relation between “Buddha and Christ.”

In 1893, the First World Parliament of Religions, that took place in Chicago, brought to the West’s consciousness the piety and the sincerity of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and of other religious people that were, since not so long ago, the subject of speculation and rumors. One hundred years after this meeting, in 1993, at the Second World Parliament of Religions which took also took place in Chicago, Wilma Ellis, member of the Bahá’í Spiritual Association pleaded for the recognition of common ground between all faiths, insisting that the fundamental truth of all religious manifestations is the concept of peace that is found at the basis of every religion.

From a general standpoint inclusivism maintains that: (a) in a particular way, Jesus Christ is unique and superior to other religious leaders and in an undefined way humanity has access to deliverance through Christ; (b) Saving grace is in one respect tied to Jesus Christ, but it can be offered or mediated through

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other religions; (c) other faiths are perceived as being a part of God’s plan for humanity.

The statements of inclusivism are usually clad in ambiguity in order to accommodate the various opinions toward a series of traditional Christian doctrines such as: the Trinity, Christ’s double nature, sin and salvation. The common ground of all inclusivist views is the desire to somehow retain the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, but with the mention that God’s grace and salvation (regardless of how they are defined) can be found in other religions.7

Pluralism. In the western world, the ever growing diversity is tied, on one hand to the new demographic configurations due to the latest immigration patterns, and on the other hand to the general decline of the Judeo-Christian values. Brad Stetson, for example, feels that the pluralistic hypotheses originated in the interaction between Christianity and the other religions of the world.8 Also, Netland argues that religious pluralism was found, firstly as a consequence of the emerging Bible skepticism, and secondly, because of the rejection of exclusivistic claims.9 In these circumstances, during the last decades of the twentieth century, we witness a radical change in the debates concerning the relations between different religions. Accordingly a growing number of western theologians reject both the particularist and the inclusivistic positions regarding the uniqueness and the superiority of Jesus Christ. The publication of John Hick’s book, The Myth of Christian Uniqueness in 1987 is considered the moment in which the “theological Rubicon has been passed.”10 In the introduction of the book, Paul Knitter says that the collection of essays show the sketching of a pluralistic turn,

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supported by a large number of renowned theologians. His hope is that, as a consequence, this will prove to be a viable progress for Christians, even if it is still controversial.\textsuperscript{11}

The controversy was generated not by empirical pluralism, but by the egalitarian perspective of philosophical pluralism that maintains that all religious truth claims are equally true. Further more, philosophical pluralism argues that salvation, enlightenment or liberation are found in every religion. Form this perspective, no religion can claim exclusivity or superiority, because all religions are complex human answers toward one divinity, answers that are historically and culturally conditioned. For example, Christians can say that Jesus Christ is unique and normative for them but not for other religions because each religion has its own uniqueness and personal norms.

Ernst Troeltsch is one of the first Christian theologians that dealt systematically with the subject of religious pluralism. Troeltsch acknowledged both the strong tie between European values and Christianity, and the existence of other religions that comprise values and practices that are compatible with Christianity. As a result, towards the end of his life, Troeltsch reached the conclusion that all religions are historically conditioned and they each contain different portions of Divine manifestations that are also culturally determined.\textsuperscript{12}

Due to the impact of his works, John Hick is considered to be the main representative of religious pluralism. He argues that theology needs a “Copernican revolution.” In other words, John Hick reasons that in the same way that Copernicus rejected the Ptolemaic myth regarding the centrality of the Earth, society needs to categorically reject parochial conceptions regarding the centrality of our naïve faith. Quite the opposite, society needs to acknowledge the centrality of God in the universe of faiths. Hick explains that all religions gravitate around the same

\textsuperscript{12} Ernst Troeltsch according to Stetson, Pluralism, 6.
God, however, noticing that some religions do not even recognize the presence of a personal God, Hick replaced the term “God” with the term “Reality”—which is central to all faiths. Therefore, the visible differences between religious practices are not more than the result of human answers that are culturally and historically conditioned.

Ronald Nash responds to Hick’s arguments and says that if truth is culturally and geographically determined, than Nazism, cannibalism, infanticide and witchcraft are all equally valid choices. As a result, according to Hick’s proposal, any faith can be in the same time valid and invalid depending on the society, and religious truth is not epistemologically governed but is a particular trait of a particular culture in a particular geographical setting. Analyzing Hick’s perspective, Roger Trigg is asking if this position does not make us conclude that, in the end, religion is not in any way more authoritative than atheism. Hick, however, thinks that in the following decades, religions will continue to change, and with the use of dialogue, the labels “Christianity,” “Buddhism,” “Islam,” or “Hinduism” might no longer be used to describe the actual configurations of religious experiences as we move towards a new global religiousness.

For a significant number of pluralist theologians, religious knowledge is, in the end, the result of human effort in understanding reality. This concept does not leave any space for revelation, because revelation assumes that the religious object is known only with the divine accord which transcends the possibilities of human investigation.

16 Roger Trigg, Religion and the Threat of Relativism, 19, according to Carson, The Gagging of God, 177.
Religious pluralism constitutes to be not only a challenge for the traditional paradigm, but, according to some authors, is becoming a value in itself, even a priority. Oz Guinness notes that in today’s pluralistic society, the right to choose becomes a priority, the essence of life. Pluralistic theology considers that all religious traditions have the same likelihood of understanding the religious object. Pluralists have in common the fact that they approach religious knowledge pragmatically as evolving and as culturally determined. In this case, Wilfred Cantwell Smith argues that we develop a pluralistic epistemology that is in contrast with Hick’s pluralistic hope for a universal vision. As a consequence, Smith states that religions should not be evaluated in respect of originating events—which he calls “Big-bang theory of religious origins”—but with regards to the contributions they have on the lives of believers. Therefore, the world’s religions are encouraged to progress towards a “unifying pluralism” that will not, however, underestimate there distinctive elements.

The paradox of this proposal is that, on one hand, it advocates the value of religious diversity and, on the other hand, it shifts toward a new meta-narration. Thus, the true knowledge is the knowledge that is shared by all intelligent individuals, and is verified increasingly by observation and participation. This knowledge finds expression in global consciousness, and to share in this trans-cultural consciousness means to contribute to the citizenship of a religious world or to a post-conventional or universal religious identity, which is from Knitter’s point of view equivalent with “unifying pluralism.” Clearly, having the religious citizenship of the world represents the highest goal for

religious pluralism, and the most evident means of realizing this goal is the dialogue between religious people. Consequently, Knitter encourages religious people to experiment as many different religious practices as possible. However, the problem is that this value is not universally accepted, and so the humankind is confronted by the so-called war of civilizations, that is in its essence, profoundly religious and sustained by fundamentally opposing concept towards revelation, truth, morality, authority and the ultimate purpose of humanity.21

**Secular paradigms**
Another perspective on religious pluralism is offered by secularism. Most sociologists consider secularism not as an attempt to eradicate religion but as a struggle to marginalize religion.22 In other words, religious institutions can survive, or even prosper, but their influence on the culture is progressively diminished. Wallace believes that secularism signifies the reevaluation of religion in spiritual terms. Accordingly, the spiritual existence of the secular world requires the progressive integration of experiences, thoughts and practices of increased complexity through which a person reacts and relates to the proximate reality. Peter H. Van Ness notices that the secular lifestyle and secular spirituality compete with the world’s religious traditions, but this is not necessarily, says Ness, a negative point. If the adherents of those religious traditions discover the common preoccupations for tradition, community, ritual and morality the competition can become benefic.23

Secular spirituality, argues Wallace, has its origins in the European Enlightenment, as in this period a new belief has emerged that humanity must exercise its reason free from religious

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superstitions and political tyrannies. 24 Therefore, this movement is the very foundation of contemporary beliefs and practices both secular and ecumenical. From this enlightened paradigm regarding tolerance and inter-religious dialogue emerge the diversity of the liberalism and political pluralism that define the significant developments of the last century. The values and the ideals of the Enlightenment originate in the philosophical innovations of the seventeenth century. Especially, the writings of René Descartes and John Locke set the base for the concepts that define the next philosophical writings about venerating reason and promoting religious tolerance. 25

The influence of Descartes’ work on enlightened thinkers such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume and Kant is evident in the triumph of autonomous and procedural reason over the moral value of the Church in establishing the authority of religious or secular knowledge. Therefore, faith sustained only by revelation, miracles or church authority has lost its credibility, necessitating the consent of reason or experience. The influence that Locke has upon Enlightenment is also significant, but for different motives. His critiques of the traditional foundation of knowledge are more radical than those of Descartes’. As a result, Locke rejects the Cartesian theory of inborn ideas, arguing that all knowledge originates from experience. The mind is as a tabula rasa that passively records the numerous impressions that later become human experience. In other words, the primary source of knowledge is the sensorial experience of external objects. However, the author notes that a series of mental operations such as perception, reasoning, doubt, or willpower can, also, lead to valid knowledge. 26

26 John Locke, “An Essay concerning Human Understanding”, Alexander Campbell Fraser (ed.), in Great Books of the Western World, see also Robert
In spite of the fact that the Enlightenment is recognized through the fact that it planted the seed of modern atheism, most philosophers did not completely renounce their faith in God. Wallace observes that,

The Enlightenment is regarded, and rightly so, as a time of extraordinary latitude in matters religious, a time when men and women of letters openly declared their disgust with clericalism and wore their impiety as a badge signaling their emancipation from the past. Most early modern and modern philosophers, however, possessed at least a vestigial belief in divinity (although a belief often very far removed from Christian orthodoxy).  

One of the most prominent philosophers of the eighteenth century is Voltaire. His famous cry against institutionalized Christianity “Ecrasez l’infâme!,” proves his repulsion of the hypocrisy and immorality of the priestly religion. Voltaire’s attack is intended, however, only against clericalism and religious superstitions not against religious faith. His belief is that “natural religion”—which is a religion that has been rationally purified of all additional mythologies and immoralities—was compromised by the dogmatism of church hierarchy. Accordingly, while Voltaire considers non-compromising atheism as being in opposition with the moderate theism that he proposes, the true adversaries of faith are the institutionalized protectors of truth based on the Bible and church tradition. Also, Kant shows aversion towards institutionalized religion, while in the same time placing value on moral living.  


tion of the way that a large part of contemporary ethical activism wears the label \textit{spiritual}, but not \textit{religious}. David Hume offers a constructive argument in favor of the rationality of an "ambiguous faith"—a human and indistinct quasi-religious belief consistent with empirical principles. This faith refers to the probability that the origin (or originator) of the universe may bear some traces of intelligence analogous to human reason. It is likely, says Hume, though never incorrigibly certain in the manner of Descartes or even Kant, that the physical order of the universe is somewhat akin to the nature of human reason. Beyond this limited statement of probability, however, Hume is not prepared to go. Stripped of metaphysical and even moral content, Hume’s position encourages an attitude of vagueness, ambiguity, and humble openness toward the mystery and order within the universe.

In the United States the movement of secular spirituality was greatly influenced by the pragmatic naturalism of 1880-1930 through the writing of C. S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George Santayana, George Herbert Mead and Alfred North Whitehead. For these thinkers, despite their significant differences, the critique of supernaturalism was accompanied by a shift of focus to the transcendent qualities of immanent relationships in this world. No longer pointing vertically to infinite, absolute Being, transcendence came to signify the horizontal process of temporal movement toward an open-ended future state. Nancy Frankenberry, observes that,


Rejecting the ancient Parmenidean or ontotheological belief in an absolute, unchanging order of being that transcends the temporal world, pragmatic naturalism affirmed a risk-filled cosmos in which becoming has primacy over being. In place of a perfect God, one who creates and preserves the many, it proposed a view in which the many finite and free acts of individuals literally create the one complex cosmic whole, transfiguring or disfiguring the very face of the divine.33

The primary characteristic of pragmatic naturalism is the doctrine of internal relations developed by James, Dewey, Whitehead and Mead. These thinkers have contributed with a new understanding of the nature of self as being inherently social or relational. Thus, relations are considered to be internal, essential and constitutive, not just accidental or derived. In contrast to the liberal view that the individual is fulfilled through his or her participation in the lives of others, the theory of the social nature of the self emphasized, more radically, that relations constitute us as being who and what we are. It is not that the self first is and then secondarily has relations, but that in each moment the self is an emergent from a plenum or field of social relations and is nothing without them. The field is composed of event-processes in changing and overlapping patterns of interdependence, designated *matter* or *mind* according to context.34 William James proposed a relational theory of consciousness using the notion of a “wider self.”35 John Dewey elaborated a similar, biologically based model of the self in terms of organism and environment in continuous transaction. However, the most systematic demonstration of the progressive-relational nature of the self belongs to Whitehead. In his work *Process and Reality*, he uses a biologically based model of the self in terms of orga-

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nism and environment in continuous transaction.\(^{36}\) Mead was also preoccupied with the dialectic between the spontaneous individual-pole (“I”) and the deterministic social-pole (“Me”). The author proposed a middle position between individualism and collectivism. Arising out of the internalized community or “generalized Other,” subjectivity, in Mead’s analysis, was first of all inter-subjective communication.\(^{37}\)

During the nineteenth century the field of religious study was decisively influenced firstly, by the systematic translation of religious texts in European languages and secondly, by the social sciences’ accomplishments in gathering empirical data about the world’s religions—other then those already known in Western Europe. This facilitated the emergence of a conceptual synthesis of such magnitude as those of sociologists Emile Durkheim\(^{38}\) and Max Webber\(^{39}\) or anthropologists Edward Burnett Tylor,\(^{40}\) Branislaw Malinowski,\(^{41}\) Ruth Fulton Benedict\(^{42}\) and Claude Lévi-Strauss.\(^{43}\) Also, these works led to the completion of vast religious compendium written by intellectuals such G. Van Der Leeuw\(^{44}\) and Mircea Eliade.\(^{45}\)


Robert Cummings Neville offers four models for the relation between the spiritual study and the practice of organized religion. The first model is that of multiple religious identities. Scientists notices that in some cultures—such as procommunist China, or ancient Israel—there were attempts of integrating multiple religious practices in the same community. John Berthrong feels that achieving religious compatibility in an individual’s life that is found in a specific social location is a difficult challenge but not an impossible one. This solution recognizes the need for individual participation within a community. The second model is that of deconstructivism, which, on one hand nurtures respect for the study of organized religion, and on the other hand promotes alienation and auto-distancing with regard to any form of religious participation—encountered or acquired. The third model is that of abstraction of appreciation and secular syncretism concepts. Cummings considers that the majority of North Atlantic spiritual scholars exemplify this model. Due to the fact that they do not identify with any religious tradition, the spiritual scholars can make abstraction of certain elements of one or more religions and then rearrange them in order to create spirituality that is congruent with the spirituality study. The author argues that the strength of this model resides in its integrity towards the results of sophisticated spiritual study. The limitation of the model resides in its difficulty of de-

50 Neville, “The Emergence of Historical Consciousness”, 151.
veloping a specific custom that is not influenced by the so-called deconstructive practices or that does not turn into the model of multiple religious identities.51

The fourth model is that of the spiritual study’s first encounter with religion. A number of scholars—that either come from nations influenced by Marxism or from modernized North Atlantic countries—were educated in a secular atmosphere with no acquired family religion. Consequently, we have individuals that do not have an acquired religion, that have no religion to rebel to and that have not come across any challenging religious organization. For this particular segment, the spiritual study becomes a valid option with no other religious competitor. Undoubtedly, in the pursuit of knowledge, a certain scholar may come to respect or even sympathize with a particular religious tradition, but still decide not to belong to that particular religious community. Cummings observes that the public expression of this spiritual study model is not yet evident because of its recent nature, but it is becoming increasingly popular among the religious studies students.52

At the same time, several secular thinkers are beginning to realize that the European Christian past cannot be denied without renouncing, and possibly destroying, culture itself—and so are re-examining the role of religion in public. The core ideals of the culture, today framed in liberal secular terms, are rooted in Christianity. In consequence, a new thinking on the role of religion in the public sphere is beginning to emerge, led by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, and cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the present-day pope Benedict XVI. The debate, organized by the Katholische Akademie Bayern, München took place on January 19, 2004, and soon became renowned throughout the entire world.53 Jürgen Habermas is proposing a new model for

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51 See van Ness, *Spirituality*.
52 Neville, “The Emergence of Historical Consciousness”, 151.
citizenship and the church-state relationship in culture. Habermas is convinced that the ideals of the secular state—of goodness, dignity, and equality of human beings—are derived from Christianity, without which the ideals are being lost. This loss is evidenced in Western culture in 20th century wars, increasing moral decadence, and the rising threat of bioengineering. It is also evidenced in the growing clash between the secular West and more traditional, religious cultures, especially Islam, but also Buddhism and Hinduism.

The modern age encouraged an adversarial relationship between religion and secularity, based on the assumption that religion would die away in the face of what was thought to be superior secular rationality. However, this has not happened, and Habermas has concluded that not only has religion not gone away, but it is growing. Furthermore, and most importantly, religious reasoning has much to offer culture, and so must be taken into consideration in public discourse. Referring to practical consequences, Habermas portrays a post-secular society, in which the determination to learn and the will of auto constrain is found on both sides, reason and religion.

Joseph Ratzinger considers that the modern era formulated a series of normative essentials through different declarations of human rights and thus obtained elements from the contest of majority. Today, says the author, we prefer the internal marks of these values, but the gradual marginalization of religion, or even its loss, is not a necessary step to be taken by the humanity eager for freedom and universal tolerance.

Therefore, the existence of values that reside in themselves, that originate in the essence of humanity and that are inalienable for all those that possess this essence is real...[however] this evidence is not, at the present day, accepted by all cultures. Islam, for example, defined its own list of human rights that is unlike that in the West. China, is, certainly, marked, today, by a variety of culture born in the West, Marxism, as well as I am informed, asks itself if it is not possible, that as far as human rights are concerned, we
have a typical Western intervention whose presuppositions need questioning.\textsuperscript{54}

The secular rationale is limited and can not be applied to all humanity. Accordingly, a rational, ethical or religious prescription for the humankind that would be in agreement with all people does not constitute reality, and the world ethos remains an abstraction. Ratzinger takes as example terrorism which assumes moral authorization and the new threats of biotechnologies, and proposes that religion and reason, equally become positive moral forces that exercise mutual restraint and supervision. The author’s conclusion is that there are religious pathologies and reason pathologies. As a result, the solution is a necessary correlation between reason and faith, reason and religion that are called to simultaneous purification and recognition. Habermas’ hope is that during this universal purification process, values and norms, known or sensed, in one way or another, by all people, will obtain a new power of illumination, and that which keeps the world in one piece will achieve, ones more, a new vigor.\textsuperscript{55}

**Concluding Reflection**

Religions represent complex realities that include worldviews, religious experiences, narrations, doctrines, moral norms, institutions, rituals, and social patterns. Realizing that in pluralistic societies religions occupy a common social, political and economical space, we see that we are confronted by the growing diversity of the present-day culture. Because of rapid communication systems, education and migration, countries and cultures are brought together in dialogue and direct confrontation. Therefore, the ethnic and cultural homogeneity specific of modern national states is threatened by the rapid growth of the multi-ethnic and multicultural states. Taken by itself, empirical plura-

\textsuperscript{54} Habermas și Ratzinger, *Dialectica secularizării*, 104.

\textsuperscript{55} Habermas și Ratzinger, *Dialectica secularizării*, 114-115.
lism is not inherently positive or negative. However, if for those that prefer to live in a mixed racial society with a plurality of religions, the present developments are considered benefic, for those that prefer homogeneity, stability and the continuity of life norms, pluralism in not just uncomfortable but also threatening. Specifically, if pluralism has a positive aspect in eradicating prejudices, racial arrogance, and religious bigotries, it can also generate intolerance and tribalism. This last phenomenon is closely tied to ethnical and religious aspects, because the impact of this diversity has an effect on the way in which people perceive religion, in general, and the relations between different religions, in particular. This situation becomes increasingly controversial because of the relations that exist between religion, culture and morality.

This present-day context offers a large array of answers, from the Christian perspective to that of secularism. The secular perspective, especially secular spirituality, encourages the attainment of compatibility between religious practices, and cultivates respect towards the study of organized religion. In the same time, however, the secular spirituality promotes alienation and disregard for any type of religious participation. Consequently, the spiritual study becomes a valid option that does not necessitate (but discourages) any affiliation with a religious community.

From a religious perspective, the relation between differing religions can be considered on the basis of three major genres: particularism, inclusivism or pluralism. The problem with inclusivism is that it assumes that religions, in some way, refer to God in terms that Christians recognize that they are referring to the same God. If having some characteristics in common were a sufficient criterion for sameness, then the God of Mormons, is the God of Islam and the God of Christianity would, indeed, be the same. Consequently, Clark Pinnock seems prepared to say that people believe in some other God only if their God is unlike
the biblical God on every conceivable front.\textsuperscript{56} However, even if there are common features between different religion’s doctrines of God—for example, Judaism, Christianity and Islam speak of common monotheistic heritage—we must ask whether the pattern of how and why this God saves, including salvation’s basis and conditions, is the same in each system of thought. “We must not conclude,” writes Pinnock, “just because we know a person to be a Buddhist, that his or her heart is not seeking God.”\textsuperscript{57} True, but which God? At the end of the day, says Carson, it is difficult to see how this criterion is any different from the popular pluralist assurance that it is sufficient to be religiously sincere.\textsuperscript{58} The pluralist paradigm redefines religious pluralism so as to render heretical the idea that heresy is possible. Tolerance is radically redefined, and sometimes masks a brutal intolerance. Even the adherents of pluralism admit that there are immense dangers ahead and that signs of cultural decay abound. Where they differ from particularist Christianity is in both diagnosis and solution. What we must realize is that the paradigm offered by pluralism is, because of the relativism it generates, not compatible with traditional Christianity. Traditional Christianity offers the paradigm of particularism that affirms the objectivity of the revelation of God through his Son Jesus Christ and in Bible. Therefore, it states that Christians must recognize the distinctiveness of the entire Bible narrative which provides the framework for a comprehensive explanation of reality and truth.

\textsuperscript{56} Pinnock, \textit{A Wideness in God’s Mercy}, 112.
\textsuperscript{57} Pinnock, \textit{A Wideness in God’s Mercy}, 112.
\textsuperscript{58} Carson, \textit{The Gagging of God}, 295.