

THEOLOGIES OF RELIGION*

Exclusivism

- “My religion is the only way to truth and salvation.”
- Examples: Karl Barth and most Evangelicals
- Some scholars believe that Barth was a Universalist. Nonetheless, for Barth, universal salvation is through Christ. No other religion is sufficient. Moreover, Barth claimed that Christianity is *not* a “religion” by defining religion as working one’s way up to God and Christianity as God coming to us. (Note that there is *NO* final, agreed upon definition of religion.)

Inclusivism

- “My religion is truest, but seeds of truth can be found in other religions.”
- Examples: The Roman Catholic Church and Karl Rahner (“Anonymous Christian”)
- The Second Vatican Council teaches that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men” (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 2).
- The distinction between this view and theological pluralism is that, here, the truth found in other religions is the truth of Christ, even if not identified as such.

Theological Pluralism

- Each religion is a different way to the same goal.
- Examples: John Hick, Huston Smith
- Metaphors: Different paths to a mountain peak, different wells to one underground water source, tree with one trunk but different branches, different prisms refracting one light in different ways

Civic Pluralism

- Respect, relationships, and cooperation for the common good across lines of religious and worldview difference (Interfaith America).
- Examples: Eboo Patel, Diana Eck
- Metaphor: There may be a whole mountain range rather than one mountain with one peak, but we can be good neighbors and collaborate to improve our community.

*Alan Race (1983) was the first to describe exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism in the book *Christians and Religious Pluralism*. Along with others, I have distinguished two kinds of pluralism, “theological pluralism” and “civic pluralism.”