

WORLD CHURCH THEOLOGY

Topic: World Church Theology and Terminology
Convener: Gerald M. Boodoo, Xavier University of Louisiana
Presenters: Stephen Bevans, Catholic Theological Union
Gideon Goosen, Catholic University of Australia

In his presentation on “World Church vs. Global Church,” Stephen Bevans spoke first about the importance of the reflection: feminist and postcolonial theologies have taught us that what a person or thing is named *does* make a difference. There is confusion, however, regarding the terminology of “world” and “global,” as reflected in a number of contemporary book titles. Lamin Sanneh of Yale University in *Whose Religion Is Christianity* (Eerdmans, 2003) has come down squarely in favor of “world.” A recent article by Todd Johnson and Sandra Kim, however (*International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, April 2005) takes issue with Sanneh and argues that *both* terms are acceptable, even though each carries with it some negative baggage. Bevans’s conclusion is that perhaps the time is not yet ripe for accepting one of the terms as better than the other. Further conversation is necessary nevertheless, because the issue is important: church life and theological reflection must be done today in a way that listens to all the voices and pays attention to local contexts. This is the main concern of “world” or “global” theologizing, however one names it.

The other presentation by Gideon Goosen, entitled “An Empirical Study of Dual Religious Belonging,” was a report on an empirical study of thirty-three cases interviewed in the greater Sydney region to investigate dual religious belonging. The aim of the study was to examine whether dual religious belonging existed and what its nature was. Dual religious belonging is loosely taken to mean belonging to two religious traditions (World Religions). The instrument used in the structured interviews was a battery of nine questions relating to dual religious belonging, the last of which was open-ended. The study found that in all cases the respondents belonged to one main religion and then drew on other religious traditions. The label “dual religious belonging” used in the literature is therefore somewhat misleading. All the cases were relatively tension free and those interviewed tended to think that all religions were not the same despite thinking that their goals were. Another finding was a spectrum of attitudes regarding the possibility of dual religious belonging, with fundamentalism/exclusivism at one end, and liberalism/pluralism at the other. Christianity (especially Catholicism) was seen as an exclusivist, harsh religion, whereas Buddhism and Hinduism were seen to be tolerant of other religions. Buddhism in particular, came over in the study as a religion with many attractive aspects.

The discussion that followed hinged upon the main points of both presentations. Arguments for and against the use of “world” vs. “global” church were expressed by many and questions about what is really meant by “dual religious

belonging” were raised and discussed. It became clear to all that much more research and studied discussion on the above-mentioned areas were required.

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