

REVIEW

Dermot A. Lane

*Stepping Stones to Other Religions:
A Christian Theology of Inter-Religious Dialogue*

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Dermot Lane, president of Mater Dei Institution at Dublin City University, has provided a thorough reprise of interreligious theology while arguing for a pneumatological direction going forward. He demonstrates wide-ranging acquaintance with pertinent literature of the past fifty years or so, going back to Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner and citing David Tracy, Walter Kasper, and Gavin D'Costa among many other contemporary theologians. This results in wide-ranging coverage of the terrain surrounding interreligious dialogue.

The book is organized largely, but not exclusively, historically. After a brief examination of the contemporary situation that invites a new Christian theology of other religions, Lane takes the reader through the development of Christian theology on interreligious dialogue. The uninitiated will learn why this area of theological development commands attention today, and the seasoned scholar will benefit from what can best be characterized as a growing chorus that calls for a Spirit-based theology of dialogue. The theological roots of such dialogue originate in the documents of Vatican II, in particular, *Nostra Aetate*, that were fostered, especially with the Jewish community, during the papacy of John Paul II, and then expanded largely to include Islam under Benedict XVI. Before his papacy, Benedict, in his work as the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and in a pointed way in the Congregation's document *Dominus Iesus* (2000), narrowed the theological possibilities for Catholics in dialogue with other religions by insisting on the preeminence of Christianity among religions.

The wide scope of theological terrain covered (theologians, church documents, and theologies) constitutes one of the virtues of this book. All of it, in one way or another, contributes to the thesis of the work that a Spirit-grounded theology provides the most beneficial lens through which to view Christianity's relation to other religions. This will be familiar to veterans of interreligious dialogue and theology of religions since a number of contemporary theologians such as Jacques Dupuis, Roger Haight, and Peter Phan, each in varying ways, rely upon pneumatology to construct their theologies of religions. These theologians have also encountered resistance to their ideas from those who guard orthodoxy within the Catholic Church. Lane works carefully to ground his understanding of pneumatological theology in the writings of influential thinkers within the tradition such as Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, and Yves Congar.

Much of the book understandably depends upon the original insights of these theological luminaries. However, such reliance tends to temper Lane's own contribution to the complex issue of Christianity's relation to other religions. In a number of instances, the author is tentative about advancing his own thesis. For example, he writes: "These developments call for a renewed fundamental theology of the Holy Spirit—a task that is beyond the scope of this chapter" (p. 169); "The Purpose of this chapter is not to answer these questions but to provide perspectives from

which we might address these questions” (p. 204); “Without pretending to present a full-blown Spirit Christology, we will offer a sketch of the shape that a Spirit Christology might take in light of the above principles and that might enable Christianity to enter into dialogue with other religions” (p. 249). The tentative nature of his position may simply be a humble acknowledgement that this complex theological terrain does not lend itself to simple solutions. It may also, however, signal a reluctance to proffer creative assertions that could invite unwelcome scrutiny from Church officials who take it as their charge to preserve definitive Christian theological claims when dealing with other competing claims, particularly about soteriology.

Even though Lane’s contribution may be viewed as derivative, his book moves in the most promising direction for dialogue. Pneumatology, coupled closely with a Spirit-Christology, provides a theological path for Christians to affirm the legitimacy of other religions by acknowledging the Spirit’s presence at creation, its identification within the Jewish scriptures, and its promise for connections with other religions, without denying central tenets of Christianity. Lane’s voice joins a growing community of theologians that takes seriously the theological claims of Christianity and respects the positions of other religions in relation to the Transcendent and the role of all religions in attempting to offer consolation, hope, and healing. After all, what counts is not only what they believe but what they do, and Lane, in the vein of Paul Knitter, is careful to attend to the effects of theologies and religions in the world.

This book provides a useful historical summary of Catholic theologies of religion. Lane also favors a Christian position that holds the most promise for the future of dialogue among religions.