

Robert McKim, Editor
Religious Perspectives on Religious Diversity
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FRANCIS X. CLOONEY
fclooney@hds.harvard.edu
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138

Religious Perspectives on Religious Diversity crosses the boundaries, too often strictly policed, that divide the philosophy of religion, theology, and interreligious learning. Robert McKim introduces the volume with questions that guide the nine essays: What do insiders to a religious tradition say about outsiders, in terms of rationality, virtue, and possible salvation? To what extent are those religions legitimate (at least for their members)? How are we to think of ourselves and our traditions in light of those other traditions, particularly when their members have in the past often been judged not entirely rational or wicked or liable to damnation? This book offers diverse responses to these questions regarding the religious other by scholars from diverse religious perspectives, including Jerome Gellman and Eugene Korn (Jewish), John Sanders, Daniel Madigan, and Diego Sarrio Cucarella (Christian), and Mohammed Khalil and Imran Aijaz (Muslim). The final essays by Paul Eddy, David Basinger, and Robert McKim are more pronouncedly philosophical, exploring how diversity is best negotiated religiously, in a way that is clear and consistent.

The essays by Sanders and by Madigan and Sarrio Cucarella review and rethink the theological positions and attitudes of Western Christians on other religions. Sanders, surveying a range of views in “Christian Approaches to the Salvation of Non-Christians,” focuses on universalist and inclusivist dimensions that are coherent and also attentive to biblical tradition. In their very fine essay, Madigan and Sarrio Cucarella re-read the major Catholic documents since Vatican II with a certain fresh serenity, attentive to how people of other faiths are presented in Catholic teaching. With respect to the Catholic inclusivist viewpoint, they argue that the core norms are health and the human good, orientation to the goals embodied in Christ, and human solidarity, all for the sake of fostering full and inclusive human communities.

Jewish scholars Gellman and Korn and Muslim scholars Khalil and Aijaz present their traditions’ views of the other, which will likely be less familiar to an English-reading audience. They also break new ground, pioneering territory less traveled in previous research. (Some important precedents to their work should be

noted as well. A 2003 issue of *Theological Studies* was dedicated to the theme, "The Catholic Church and Other Living Faiths in Comparative Perspective," on the theme of attitudes toward other religions. It contained substantive essays on Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, and Japanese perspectives. More recently, in 2012 Alan Brill authored *Judaism and World Religions: Encountering Christianity, Islam, and Eastern Traditions*.)

In "Jewish Chosenness and Religious Diversity," Gellman honors the core Jewish sense of divine chosenness, but in a way that refuses to privilege "ethno-centric supremacy, cultural isolation, and the defamation of other religions" since "God loves all nations equally" (p. 21). In "Extra Synagogam Salus Est?," Korn too keeps in play both particularist understandings and a sense of universalism, refusing to settle on one to the exclusion of the other. Khalil's "Islam and the Salvation of Others" charts a spectrum of Muslim views of the other, ranging from Ibn Taymiyya, to Ghazali, to Ibn Arabi, concluding that they and their modern inheritors are largely inclusivists. Aijaz reaches the same conclusion by a more constructive philosophical path in "The Islamic Problem of Religious Diversity." He shows how there is a growing consensus among Muslim intellectuals that despite some tensions with earlier Muslim teaching it is necessary to recognize that there are many people who are rational, virtuous, and yet not Muslim.

The final essays take a more philosophical turn. In "Typology and Terrain," Eddy wishes to defend the usefulness of the categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, even if they have been used excessively and sometimes in needlessly imprecise ways. He addresses a number of objections against them, including Gavin D'Costa's effort to collapse inclusivism and pluralism into a kind of exclusivist certainty about one's own position. Eddy argues for a constitutive inclusivism, in which Christ is absolutely central and decisive, but without reducing that centrality to a norm by which one can then rank and judge other traditions.

In "The Role of Religious Diversity in Meaningful Religious Belief," Basinger explicitly draws on his long experience in teaching to argue that students learn best both when informed about other religions and ideally in the presence of members of other religious traditions. This helps them to gain better understandings of their own beliefs. His pedagogical turn calls to mind the recent *Comparative Theology in the Millennial Classroom: Hybrid Identities, Negotiated Boundaries* (edited by Mara Brecht and Reid B. Locklin, 2016), and in particular Rita George-Tvrtkovic's "What Muslims Can Teach Catholics about Christianity." She explores how students learn differently when others in the class, coming from other traditions, provide them with information about their tradition as well as offer deeper insights into their beliefs. Since Eddy and Basinger make no specific references to non-Christian religious views, it was wise to place their essays at the end rather than at the beginning of the volume, lest learning within traditions appear supplementary to more abstract and formal considerations.

In the concluding "I'm Okay, You're Okay," McKim proposes an epistemic humility and magnanimity. Continuing with a theme addressed in earlier works

such as *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity* and *On Religious Diversity*, McKim argues that a measured acceptance of the religious other makes good sense, given the ambiguity of what we know and believe in relation to what others know and believe, and the fact that we can never know enough of the other. Hence, we are wise to be open to the religious other and ready always to keep learning.

Inclusivism (sometimes critiqued as ambiguous or too narrow) unsurprisingly turns out (rather than pluralism) to be the default position in this volume, since the authors insist on balancing attention to the religious other with fidelity to the inner requirements of their traditions. Inclusivism marks the right balance of tradition and the often strong views expressed in scripture, along with the recognition that other religions flourish and their believers cannot be written off merely as ignorant or ill-willed.

But if inclusivism emerges as the most persuasive position, this should then serve as the ground for a deeper learning from the other traditions. More sensitive and realistic theologies of religions do not replace, but only pave the way for, the work of interreligious and comparative theologies. While much work has been done in this regard, much more is required, particular beginning from perspectives other than the Christian. I think here for instance of *Same God, Other God: Judaism, Hinduism, and the Problem of Idolatry* (2016), in which Alon Goshen-Gottstein makes the case for how the Jewish prohibition of idolatry, properly understood, does not exclude entirely Hindu worship, properly understood. While a Christian response to Hindu image worship could be similarly nuanced, it would have different key features.

I conclude by wondering aloud how this important conversation might develop were Asian perspectives such as the Hindu and Buddhist, included, or voices from smaller and local traditions worldwide. We might expect similar philosophical and theological motifs to recur, but with still other nuances particular to the traditions involved. For now, though, we must be grateful for the breadth of this fine volume.