

God, but God the only Son ...has made him known' (Jn 1:18). So Jesus could say: 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (Jn 14:9); and Paul could add that Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15). Similarly, the invisible God who made himself visible in Jesus Christ, continues to manifest/image himself in Christians when they love one another: 'No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made perfect in us' (1 Jn 4:12). To the extent that the body of Christ is transformed into a community of love grounded in truth, God visibly and audibly substantiates the credibility of his good news for all, opening the eyes of the blind and unstopping the ears of the deaf for the transformation of all humankind into a truthful and loving community.

The eucharistic community of faith thanks God for the gift of its life in the remembering Spirit of his word and image, Jesus Christ, the epitome of all communion between God and humankind. God's self-giving enables the eucharistic community to believe, to hope, and to love in its spiritual journey towards the fulfilment of God's promises in the kingdom. New Testament writers depict the community's response to the call of God in Jesus Christ and his Spirit as a life-long spiritual journey.

Creating Options: Shattering the 'Exclusivist, Inclusivist, and Pluralist' Paradigm

Ian Markham

Organization and classification of material is essential as an aid to effective communication. Good teachers and writers will use labels to organize material, which play a valuable role in simplifying a debate. They provide a way in for the student or reader. However, this organization and classification of material is not a neutral and objective enterprise. One's classification will hide certain basic decisions and options.

It is the argument of this article that the 'theology of religions' debate has been stifled by an over-emphasis on the standard threefold paradigm. I will be taking issue with John Hick's judgment: 'the

simplest and least misleading classification is the now fairly standard threefold division into exclusivism (salvation is confined to Christianity), inclusivism (salvation occurs throughout the world but is always the work of Christ), and pluralism (the great world faiths are different and independently authentic contexts of salvation/liberation).¹ I am not alone in wanting to point out the cracks in this paradigm,² but I want to go a stage further and attempt to formulate one option which cannot be embraced by the traditional paradigm.

The underlying problem with the traditional classification results from the conflation of three matters:

1. The conditions for salvation.
2. Whether the major world religions are all worshipping the same God.
3. The truth about the human situation.

The traditional paradigm emphasizes the first,³ is confused about the second, and, with regard to the third, links truth questions with soteriology. This is easily exposed as unsatisfactory. In the case of the second matter, for example, with the possible exception of Karl Barth, most Christian theologians and philosophers believe that the same God is partially revealed in the other religions of the world. This is the claim that lies behind the doctrines of natural theology [Aquinas] and natural revelation [Tillich and Brunner]. It is quite orthodox to talk of the one true God being worshipped in all religious traditions without being a pluralist.⁴ To imply, as Hick explicitly argues, that only pluralism affirms one reality behind the major faiths is not only untrue but illustrates the fundamental inadequacy of the traditional paradigm.⁵

So as we disentangle our problem, what further options emerge? In this paper I will argue for one option which transcends the traditional threefold classification. This option will accept the pluralist soteriological account, yet affirm the Christian narrative as true.

We begin with the nature of salvation. The debate concentrates on the traditional exclusivist formulation: Is Jesus the only way to salvation? As with the entire paradigm, the question is making certain assumptions which I want to challenge. As I will now show the question implies that salvation must ultimately depend upon the primacy of either beliefs (in the incarnation) or experience (of Jesus as saviour) or a combination of the two. I would want to stress rather the importance of actions.

To believe that Jesus is the only way presumably entails a certain commitment to the creeds, i.e. an acceptance by the mind of the truth of

the doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity. Indeed for St. Thomas the act of saving faith is precisely the acceptance of these propositions.⁶ There are three problems with this emphasis upon beliefs. First, it is elitist. If acceptance involves understanding, then many people will find salvation unattainable. The doctrines are easily misunderstood or beyond intellectual capacity. The Islamic criticism that Christians undermine their monotheism by the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation misunderstands the elaborate debates in the early Church; yet one can understand why this misunderstanding has arisen, for the doctrines are very complicated. To be candid, one has to be fairly bright to understand the distinction which the doctrines involve. To make an understanding of these beliefs essential to salvation will exclude all those with neither time nor intellect to get to grips with them. Second, all beliefs have a cultural history and context. If beliefs are essential to salvation then those born in the right cultural situation will have an enormous advantage. This is simply unfair. The third problem is that ultimately most people intuit that beliefs are less important than actions. When Jesus said, 'Not everyone who calls me "Lord, Lord", will enter the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matthew 7.21), he was implying that it is possible to have the right beliefs and still not 'be saved'. It is what one does that matters, not the believing of correct or complicated metaphysical doctrines.⁷ Protestants following Luther have tended to reduce the significance of propositional beliefs and emphasize much more the relationship with God. However, as H.H. Price has shown a relationship with 'anyone' will depend on a belief that 'someone' is there.⁸ Nevertheless there is a different emphasis from the Catholic here. It is an emphasis on the primacy of experience. Many in evangelical communities stress the need for a conversion experience even if you have always believed. There are similar problems with experience as with beliefs. First, once again, such an appeal is elitist. There is clear evidence that there are certain people who would love to have a religious experience but are not granted one. Such people have a religious sensitivity (i.e. an appreciation for the value of religious discourse and symbolism) but no religious experience. Perhaps the best explanation for this phenomenon is to draw an analogy between religious experience and musical appreciation. Just as certain people are granted a sensitive musical ear which enables them to pick up the subtleties of Mozart's operas and others are not, so certain people appear to be granted an experience of the reality of God while others are not.⁹ As experiences are given and presumably cannot be self-induced then it would be unjust to make salvation dependent upon such experiences. The second problem is again the culturally determined

nature of the interpretation. Clearly one will interpret any supernatural feeling in terms of the religious framework of one's culture. One experiences what one expects to experience. In India, it is Krishna; in Yugoslavia, it is the Blessed Virgin Mary; and in evangelical charismatic churches, it is the Lord Jesus. If an experience of 'Jesus as saviour' is essential to salvation, then clearly one will need to be in a christian community where the appropriate framework to interpret religious experience in this way exists. Again this is unfair to all those in other communities. The third problem with experience is the same as with beliefs. In the end experience must be secondary to moral action and attitude.

The alternative to attending to beliefs or experience is to emphasize actions. Following the liberation theologians (orthopraxis not orthodoxy) and John Hick, the best way to define salvation is as a turn from self-centredness to other-centredness. The realization of love and compassion in your life is the act of 'being saved'; it is the cultivation of a loving attitude expressed in actions. It is a disposition of openness to others. Young children, the very old and physically and mentally disabled will have their capacity for actions restricted, but they are still able to be 'open' to others.¹⁰ This makes salvation equally available to all religious traditions. Indeed the atheist and agnostic have as much potential for salvation as the religious believer.

So in answer to the question: what is salvation and how is one saved? I want to follow the pluralist argument and that the realization of love and compassion in your life is the central condition which is possible (but not equally so for reasons I will clarify later on) for all people regardless of religious affiliation.

Let us now turn to the third problem: what is the truth of the human situation? Underpinning this account of salvation is a truth-claim, namely, 'the discovery of love and compassion is the purpose of the human quest'.¹¹ But although I have *argued* that beliefs should be secondary to actions, this is 'true' only for psychological reasons and not logical ones.

Psychologically, the relation between beliefs and actions is complicated. Ever since Descartes systematically doubted everything and then made the mistake of arriving at 'I think therefore I am', we have found it difficult to be certain that our beliefs correspond to reality.¹² It is a post-Enlightenment 'liberal' discovery that complete certainty is impossible. This discovery is responsible for the awkward relationship between 'beliefs' and 'actions'. Three ways of understanding this relationship have emerged within our culture.

First, beliefs are integrated with actions. Some people manage to

attain this—logically desirable—state of affairs. Certain religious traditions emphasize the need for such integration, for it is part of orthodox Jewish and Islamic belief that one's faith creates certain otherwise inconvenient obligations, for example, not to eat certain types of food. From the other end of the spectrum Nietzsche was attempting to shatter the complacency of post-Enlightenment humanity and wake our culture up to the implications, in terms of actions, of the 'death of God'. Nietzsche argued that we should now invent our own morality, in which everything is an option, for everything is innocent. For both the orthodox Jew and the disciple of Nietzsche, world-view and actions are integrated into a harmonious whole.

Second, the relation of conscious beliefs to actions is undermined by unconscious presuppositions. V.A. Demant made this the theme of his work.¹³ Most people in western culture, argues Demant, have retained the Christian affirmations of human dignity and human rights, but no longer believe the Christian metaphysics which made sense of those affirmations. Demant believes that our cultural presuppositions are subjectivist and relativist. He believes that there are all sorts of dangers in this state of affairs. His rather apocalyptic vision need not concern us here. For my purposes Demant is right in discerning this awkward relationship between beliefs and presuppositions for many people, and the resulting inadequacy of connection between belief and action.

Third, beliefs have very little (sometimes no) effect on actions. This is a modern phenomenon which is generally unintelligible to an academic. But there are certain people who due to a lack of intelligence or to a general feeling that 'one belief is as good as another' decide 'to get on with living' and not worry about abstract problems or about the desirability of consistency in their patterns of action.

Now to argue that salvation is not dependent on beliefs means that a person in any of these categories who has discovered love and compassion is making good progress towards salvation. However, there remains a much more desirable state of affairs. For those with beliefs which either do not affect their morality or, as Demant claimed, undermine morality, there is a real danger of the crumbling of the moral structure. Obviously it is infinitely more desirable for one to integrate beliefs with actions, and to be able to show how one's belief structure justifies one's morality.

But is this highly desirable state of affairs possible? Does the human mind have the capacity to describe the world in better (or more appropriate) ways rather than worse (or less appropriate) ways? John Hick is, as many have pointed out, ambiguous on this point.¹⁴ Against the atheist, Hick wants to argue for a transcendent reality, which implies

that theism is a better description of the world than naturalism; but as regards the different religions, he wants to argue for a radical agnosticism which implies that one cannot have better or worse metaphysical accounts. He is inevitably open to attacks from both anti-realists and realists, and both will be more consistent than Hick. So the anti-realist Ken Surin (my label for him—but I do think this is the drift of his current position) wants to historicize and relativize the pluralist. Pluralism is a narrative, a tradition which reflects a culture. It is the latest form of imperialism, oppressing and denying difference, to emerge from the democratic and liberal culture of north America.¹⁵ And in the same volume, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic theology of Religions*, Lesslie Newbigin takes a realist stance, accusing Hick of needless relativist presuppositions. Traditions can grow, develop, and be 'more true' than other traditions. The fact of different cultural traditions, argues Newbigin, need not force us to a radical agnosticism.¹⁶

My sympathies rest, in this respect, with Newbigin. Mind does have the capacity to make sense of the world. Traditions as they evolve are competing attempts to explain the complexity of human life and experience. None is true in the 'absolute sense' (i.e. a complete description which corresponds with reality in every respect). Indeed this type of awareness is only available to God.¹⁷ But we are able to formulate better or worse accounts of the world. There is no reason to rule out the contention that certain strands of the Christian tradition make more sense of human life and experience than other traditions. If the suggested account of salvation is at all plausible, then clearly we need to reflect rationally on the reasons why morality is so important. Which is the world-view (or as I prefer world-perspective) or tradition that makes most sense of our moral experience?

At this stage it is necessary to outline how a theistic world-perspective makes sense of our obligation to be loving and compassionate. And then one must show how the cost and nature of self-giving love have been revealed in the Incarnation of God in Christ. It is the ultimate revelatory act. But clearly such detailed argumentation is beyond the scope of this paper. In brief, my argument would appeal to the 'objective' nature of moral obligations (sometimes known as 'moral realism'). Then I would argue that, of several possible frameworks for moral realism, a theistic framework makes the most sense. One could then argue that it is likely that the Christian claim that God has revealed the nature of love in the person of Christ is true. The ultimate revelation is that 'there is no greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends' (John 15.13); this embodies the truth about God.

Much of this is contentious and much more needs to be said. But I think it does illustrate a viable option. In affirming the Incarnation of God in Jesus it is exclusivist (for in that respect Christianity has a truth not found in other traditions), but in affirming the importance of actions it is pluralist. If one insists on a label this option can be described as a 'Christian pluralism'.

The one major difficulty with my account is that it does depend on an exemplarist 'subjective' theory of atonement. The language of an objective changed relationship with God made possible by Christ's crucifixion is inappropriate. Instead, in common with many twentieth-century atonement theories, this account emphasizes the revelatory nature of the Incarnation. It is the life of self-giving love that we are required to imitate. Those who are fortunate to be in a community meditating on the life of Jesus will consciously seek to reflect that life. However, the truth of self-giving love, which is revealed with supreme force and clarity in Jesus, has been revealed to all cultures. And many, outside the Christian tradition, have discovered the love truth and are realizing it in their lives.

It must be admitted that there is a tension between the Christian metaphysic and the major truth (in the sense that this truth is all-important) which emphasizes the priority of love and actions. Although the Christian metaphysic is true, it is treated in this context as secondary to the major truth of love. This distinction is vitally important because often Christian metaphysics, taken as primary in this context, can lead to intolerance, anger, division, imperialism, and arrogance. Right at the heart of the Biblical tradition, there are strands which point to an intolerant and divisive Christianity. Christians who develop these strands also develop a blindness to the major thrust of the tradition which is open and loving. Often the only way to shatter such blindness is to shatter their confidence in the Christian metaphysic. To open these people up to the major truth of love, and its implications for their attitude to others, sometimes requires, for psychological reasons, an erosion of their 'simple faith'. For God's sake, some people might be nearer salvation if they were converted to atheism.

The 'exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist' paradigm is, in fact, a less than useful classification. In conflating the three different issues, it distorts the options. Many people legitimately complain when they are offered this particular range of choices. As this classification loosens its grip on the debate, so a new set of options will emerge. The ultimate lesson we will learn from the 80s theology of religions debate is how important and difficult classification of material can be.¹⁸

- 1 John Hick, Review of Glyn Richards, *Towards a Theology of Religions*, in *Religious Studies* Vol.26, no.1, March 1990, p.175. Those working in the Theology of Religions who have emphasized the traditional paradigm include: Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986) and Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM Press 1983). Also one finds Paul Knitter, although less overt, is still working within this paradigm in *No Other Name? A Critical Study of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions* (London: SCM Press 1985).
- 2 Some who claim to be breaking the paradigm are in fact simply sophisticated inclusivists. Michael Barnes in *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation* (London: SPCK 1989) develops a trinitarian framework which is still Christian. Those more entitled to claim the destruction of this paradigm are scholars like Ken Surin in Gavin D'Costa (ed.) *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of the Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (New York: Orbis 1990).
- 3 This is what D'Costa considers central. See D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* p.4.
- 4 See for example Keith Ward, *Images of Eternity*, (London: D.L.T. 1987). Hick is wrong in *The Interpretation of Religion*, (Basingstoke: Macmillian 1989) to treat Ward as an uncomplicated ally. For all Ward has done is show the remarkable similar sets of ways in which orthodox accounts of the ultimate in each religion agrees. This should be treated as phenomenal evidence for the orthodox claim that the same reality is underpinning all the major religions of the world.
- 5 See John Hick, *The Interpretation of Religion*, p.233f.
- 6 See St.Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, translated T.C.O'Brien Volume 31, 2a 2ae Question 1, especially article 2, (London: Blackfriars 1974) p.11 ff.
- 7 One should note the sentiments in Matthew 25, where action to those suffering is the criteria for determining human destiny. Perhaps there is a divide between Pauline/epistles stress on belief and Jesus/Gospels' stress on actions?
- 8 See H.H.Price, *Belief* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1969).
- 9 The complexity of the nature of religious experience is beyond the confines of this paper. Perhaps the most public example of someone with a religious sensitivity but never granted an experience is Michael Goulder. See Michael Goulder and John Hick, *Why Believe in God?*, (London: SCM Press 1983) chapter 1.
- 10 Dr.Paul Avis finds this the weakest part of the paper. He argues that attitudes and dispositions depend on both experience and beliefs. It is to answer this criticism that the paper now goes on to develop a psychological analysis between dispositions/actions and beliefs.
- 11 This might seem much like Hans Kung ethical criterion which is his fourth ecumenical strategy. Clearly, there are similarities but Kung has not disentangled the questions in the way that I have done. For Kung see, *Global Responsibility*, (London: SCM Press 1990) p.77-90.
- 12 Few have developed the religious significance of the lack of certainty. Why has God allowed such significant epistemological problems to surround our metaphysics? This question is important for the faith and reason relationship. Alasdair MacIntyre has argued that it was always inappropriate to seek complete certainty: this was- and is the Enlightenment's error. Yet religious faith is precisely a certainty of belief which his 'tradition-constituted enquiry' will never justify. For A.MacIntyre see *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth 1988). For further discussion of this point see my article 'Faith and Reason: Reflections on MacIntyre's "Tradition-Constituted Enquiry"' in *Religious Studies* vol.27, no.2, June 1991 p.259-267.
- 13 For V.A.Demant see *The Religious Prospect* (London: Frederick Muller 1939).
- 14 See Keith Ward, 'Truth and Diversity in Religions' in *Religious Studies*, Vol.26,

no.1, March 1990.

- 15 For Ken Surin, see 'A "Politics of Speech"' in D'Costa, (ed.) *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* p.135f.
- 16 For Lesslie Newbigin, see 'Religion for the Market place' D'Costa (ed.) *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* p.135 f.
- 17 An important point made by B.L.Hebblethwaite in his presidential address 'God and Truth' at the S.S.T. Conference in Oxford 1989.
- 18 Mention must be made of those who offered critical comments on earlier drafts of this paper: Dr.Paul Avis, Dr.John Saxbee, Professor Leslie Houlden, and my colleagues at Exeter. Special thanks are due to Dr.Richard Burridge and the Chapel Society at Exeter University.

Creating Confusion: A Response to Markham

Gavin D'Costa

Ian Markham makes two basic contentions in his article 'Creating options: Shattering the "exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist" paradigm'. The first is that the threefold paradigm of approaches to the question of salvation outside explicit Christianity are flawed and therefore unhelpful. The second is that his own tentative proposal further indicates this point, for his own position does not fit neatly into any of the three approaches. I think that Markham's arguments for his first contention are not entirely convincing and therefore his own proposal fails to fit the categories, not because it has created a new option, but because it leaves certain questions unanswered and introduces a certain amount of confusion. In fact I will suggest that the usefulness of the three categories of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism allows us to see more clearly what type of questions he leaves unanswered and thereby justify themselves heuristically in providing a basis for criticising those who question their viability. This brief reply has as its main purpose to defend the threefold paradigm in the theology of religions.

This is not to say that these three categories are problem-free. It is simply the case that a sustained and convincing critique of them is yet to be produced. I agree with Markham that Michael Barnes develops a sophisticated Trinitarian inclusivism despite his claim to break the