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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

paradigm.[1] Kenneth Surin's critique of the paradigm is of an altogether different nature.[2] Surin seems to redescribe the terrain so that there are no valid theological questions left, only political-sociological questions. While this materialist reductionism is powerful and incisive, ultimately it surrenders theology entirely into the hands of social and political theorists, recasting all theological discourse in terms of genealogical origins. And here we enter into a different debate which I cannot now pursue.[3] Surin therefore does not break the paradigm theologically, but rather introduces a new discourse into the debate and abandons theology altogether. How then does Markham's theological assault on the threefold paradigm fare?

Markham uses Hick's somewhat brief but accurate definition of the three approaches: '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).[4] Markham has two main arguments against the paradigm. The first is that these categories are unhelpful as they conflate 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. He says, 'The traditional paradigm emphasizes the first, is confused about the second, and, with regard to the third, links truth questions with soteriology. This is easily exposed as unsatisfactory' [p.2]. Undoubtedly!—and especially so in the way defined by Markham, but are these categories so defined by their defenders? It seems odd that the charge that the categories conflate three different questions is not carefully substantiated from the texts of those who employ these categories. Hick's quoted definition does not imply these three questions. In fact, the one text Markham cites in the notes when criticising this alleged 'conflation' clearly states that the categories are primarily employed to address the question 'whether salvation is possible outside Christianity'.[5] This is a strictly *a priori* theological question, whereas the question as to whether the major world religions are all worshipping the same God will in part depend on the answer to the conditions for salvation, and in part will depend on a complex *a posteriori* examination of the historical particularities of the religion being examined. This latter investigation will require linguisitic, anthropological, sociological, hermeneutic and other skills and should not be conflated with the first, exclusively theological, question. Markham misleads in suggesting that those who use these classifications do not recognize the different order of tasks. Some do—and others may not.

His one example of John Hick's contention that only pluralism

affirms one reality behind the major faiths thereby showing the inadequacy of the paradigm is problematic. This is not strictly true of Hick and such logic is certainly not intrinsic to the paradigm. Hick acknowledges, for example, that inclusivists affirm the possibility of one reality behind the major faiths. His real objection is to their theological and philosophical explanation of this phenomenon.[6] Hick may have been incorrect in classifying Ward as an uncomplicated ally as Markham observes [footnote 4] for Ward does not address the central question of the conditions of salvation in his *Images of Eternity*. However, on close inspection of the three references to Ward in Hick's book, all in brief footnotes, it is difficult to conclude that Hick sees Ward as an 'uncomplicated ally'. Rather, Ward is seen by Hick as showing a similar linguistic affinity towards the use of allegedly 'neutral' terms to describe the 'deity' and 'salvation' (two of the references), and as sharing William James' phenomenological approach to pluralism—which admittedly overlaps to some extent with that of Hick's. Nevertheless, Ward could be classified as a pluralist from his recent *A Vision to Pursue* where he does address this theological question.[7]

It is therefore wrong to imply, as Markham does, that the paradigm requires that it is impossible to hold that God is worshipped in all religious traditions without being a pluralist. In principle both an inclusivist and pluralist could argue for this and both would mean quite different things. The pluralist would not wish to ontologically relate non-Christian revelation with Christ and the Church and would grant such revelation independent authenticity. On the other hand, the inclusivist would wish to relate Christ and the Church to all such forms of self-disclosure for all holiness and truth are finally anchored in the God revealed in Christ, through the Spirit. The paradigm is concerned to address the question *if* God is salvifically present outside explicit Christianity, then how can we theologically recognize, articulate and explain this reality. Concomittant to the question is that *if* God is not salvifically present outside explicit Christianity, then what is the fate of those 'outside'.

Markham's definition of the third question that the paradigm conflates is rather ambiguous. 'The truth about the human situation' is surely intrinsic to the question of the conditions of salvation and is not strictly a different question or of a different order. If the truth of the human situation was that men and women are irredeemably wicked and evil and that only explicit surrender to Christ is the condition for salvation, then Markham's first and third questions are one and the same. Soteriology and anthropology cannot properly be divorced. Markham's discussion of the manner in which truth is appropriated and

lived (ie. propositionally, experientially, or in the practice of love) is actually a second order question and does not basically undermine the connection between truth and soteriology in itself.

At this point we are inevitably led to Markham's second major objection to the paradigm. If his first objection is faulty in its basic representation of the paradigm, how does this one fare? Markham assumes that the 'entire paradigm' depends on a duopoly in the way in which truth is related to salvation: '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' [p.3]. Again, this is a fundamental misrepresentation of the paradigm for the debate in the theology of religions has not assumed or operated with this duopoly. This can be clearly seen in the work of the major inclusivist theologian, Karl Rahner. Rahner's theology of the anonymous Christian bypasses this duopoly and is founded on the argument that in the simple *act* of true love, hope and charity a person is responding to grace even if they do not explicitly know (propositionally) or explicitly experience Christ.[8] Rahner of course grounds this insight in his transcendental anthropology, where he overcomes the traditional oppositional dichtomy between nature and grace. Rahner is not alone among inclusivists in exploring this route where action is the central location of grace. In fact the debate in this form goes back much further to the late nineteenth century to the work of Blondel[9].

This duopoly has also been overcome by pluralists with Knitter's liberationist approach and by Hick's soteriocentricism although in different ways. However, Hick and Knitter fail to ground their emphasis on loving action within Christology and ecclesiology in the way Rahner does.[10] They move beyond Christianity in this grounding exercise, which makes them pluralist, as opposed to Rahner who remains within Christianity, and is thereby inclusivist.

Markham's neglect of Rahner at this crucial point may explain his claim to introduce a fourth option which accepts 'the pluralist soteriological account, yet affirm[s] the Christian narrative account as true.' [p.3]. In a sense, pluralists and inclusivists both accept the Christian narrative as true (although in very different ways) and that God is at work, in varying degrees, within other religions. And herein lies the rub. They fundamentally differ in their explanation of the relationship of that narrative to the God encountered within the world religions. Inclusivists relate this saving presence of God to Christ or/and the Trinity and/or the Church. Pluralists do not. So the question one may ask is, given Markham's misrepresentation of the paradigm and

therefore his unsuccessful attempt to discredit it, where does his own option lead him? I want to suggest that it it not to a fourth or transcending option, but to an unresolved position which cannot yet be defined as it does not address certain questions. And it is precisely this threefold classification that facilitates an insight into these unanswered questions.

The outline of Markham's option is most interesting and one looks forward to seeing it further developed. I want to pose some critical questions which are generated by the attempt to see whether he has truly broken the mould. The central thrust of his position is that the condition for salvation is 'the realization of love and compassion in your life' [p.7] and this can be achieved by those of any or no religious persuasion. The justification of this assertion is that Christ so reveals this truth and this 'is the ultimate revelatory act'. [p.12] Markham indicates his preference for an exemplarist 'subjective' theory of atonement [p.13] where the incarnation is fundamentally understood as a revelatory action rather than as a transition which changes God's relation to his world. Hence we learn from this 'ultimate revelatory act' that love and compassion are the conditions for salvation and since love and compassion can be found within the world religions, salvation is not confined to Christ. If I have correctly shown that Markham has not fundamentally discredited the paradigm, we may ask where does Markham fit within its categories?

The answer is that he hovers between pluralism and inclusivism, not because he transcends these categories, but because there are certain unanswered questions. First, is Markham a Pelagian in suggesting that salvation is ultimately a matter of doing certain things? Rahner avoids this danger in showing the intimate causal relations of such acts of love to the empowering grace of God whose teleological end is the beatific vision. Hence, through the actions of love, hope and charity a person implicitly accepts the God revealed in Christ. Markham does not show what kind of connections there exists between Christ, God and such acts of love and compassion within the 'non-Christian' world. If he were to sever such connections ontologically and causally he would be a classical pluralist, affirming in Hick's already quoted words 'different and independently authentic contexts of salvation/liberation'. If on the other hand, he maintained such connections then he is an inclusivist, again in Hick's words, affirming that 'salvation occurs throughout the world but is always the work of Christ'. There are of course many differences in the way such connections are worked out among inclusivists.

Part of the difficulty here is that Markham's Christology seems to reverse the order of revelation, such that Christ becomes the best

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revelation of a truth that we already know: 'the truth of self-giving love, which is revealed with supreme force and clarity in Jesus, has been revealed to all cultures.'. Markham tends to treat 'love and compassion' as a neutral commodity where the best example of it is Jesus, but it has of course been 'revealed to all cultures'. [p.13]. This is pluralism. As an inclusivist I would suggest that the order of revelation is such, to use an analogy, that we are not simply discussing the question of the best image of God, as if we were choosing from different photographs the best likeness of a friend. Rather, Jesus is the friend that we know and in this respect all other images are judged by this one. Markham here is actually not very different from pluralists who tend to access God over and beyond the various revelations and can then weigh up one over against another, suggesting better or worse revelations. The point here, which distinguishes inclusivists from pluralists is that the world is inscribed within the Christian narrative, so that Christ defines normatively through his life the meanings of love and compassion and is the reality of the love and compassion of God. Hence, whenever love and compassion are truly found (and one should be a little more cautious than Markham in suggesting that it has been 'revealed to all cultures'[11]), then inclusivism inscribes this history as the one history of God's continuous and gracious love leading all people towards their final end: the beatific vision.

The purpose of this brief reply has been to defend the utility of the threefold paradigm in clarifying rather than confusing important theological questions regarding the status of other religions and their adherents. In so doing I hope also to have raised questions regarding Ian Markham's most challenging and creative suggestions for an alternative approach within the theology of religions.

1 See M Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation,* (London, SPCK, 1989.)

2 See K Surin 'The "Politics of Speech"', in ed. G D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered,* (New York, Orbis, 1991), pp.192–212.

3 See J Milbank, *Theology and the Social Sciences,* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) for one of the best discussions of this issue and an attempt to reinstate theology as the queen of the sciences.

4 Markham, p.1, quoting J Hick, review of G Richards, *Towards a Theology of Religions,* in *Religious Studies*, 26, 1, 1990, p.175. All subsequent quotations from Markham are in the main body of the text.

5 G D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1986), p.4.

6 See for example J Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths,* (London, Macmillan,) pp.127–28.

7 London, SCM, 1991.

8 K Rahner, 'Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God', in *Theological Investigations,* Vol 6, (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969,)

ch.16; see also Y. Congar, *The Wide World My Parish,* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), pp.104–21.

9 See M Blondel, *Action (1893)*, (tran. O Blanchette) (Indiana, Notre Dame University Press, 1984).

10 See my criticism of Knitter and Hick on this point. Respectively: 'The Reign of God and a Trinitarian Ecclesiology: An Analysis of Soteriocentricism', in eds. P Mojzes & L Swidler, *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue,* (Lampeter, Edwin Mellin, 1990), pp.51–61; and 'Taking Other Religions Seriously: Some Ironies in the Current Debate on a Christian Theology of Religions', *The Thomist,* 54, 3, 1990, pp.519–29.

11 See G Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine in a Post-Liberal Age*, (London, SPCK, 1984), p.42.

Reviews

REVELATION: FROM METAPHOR TO ANALOGY, Richard Swinburne; *Clarendon Press*; Oxford, 1991; 236 pps.; Hardback £35; Paperback £12 . 95 .

In the second volume of his tetralogy on Christian Doctrine, Professor Swinburne sets out to analyse the notion of revelation with characteristic rigour, lucidity and forthrightness. After a first part setting out with great clarity his basic philosophical positions on metaphor, analogy and truth, the second part examines the notion of the evidence of revelation in general, and a third looks at Christian revelation in particular. He suggests that if there is a God, there is some reason to suppose that God will provide a propositional revelation which will tell us what we need to know to be saved. God will provide a church to interpret that revelation for subsequent generations. God will guarantee that its interpretation is basically correct. Therefore we can know that the propositions of the Bible are basically correct. Indeed, Swinburne argues that they are all true, when interpreted in their total context - which may often mean, metaphorically. He also argues that only the Christian faith is a serious candidate for having a body of doctrines which are to be believed on the basis that they are revealed; for only the Resurrection is a miracle authenticating its basic teachings, which is what one should expect of revelation. Swinburne says much else, all of it worth while; but this gives the flavour of a book which defends unfashionable beliefs in propositional revelation, the truth of every part of the Bible and the absolute uniqueness of Christian revelation. It does so with great force

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