

BOOK REVIEWS

KNITTER, PAUL F., *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985.

The reality of religious pluralism is very much with us these days. American courts are attempting to determine how public schools are to be operated in this pluralistic society even as newspapers and television overflow with international confrontations which are portrayed as religious battles between Jews and Christians, on the one hand, and Moslems on the other. Alongside the legal, political, economic, and military complexities of religious pluralism, Paul Knitter opens again the theological questions which this pluralism creates for Christians in our time. His book is the 7th in "The American Society of Missiology Series," but Knitter's concern is not proselytizing strategies. Knitter believes that Christians are now, more than ever, forced to recognize that religious pluralism constitutes a theological challenge to the traditional claims for the normativity and universality of the Christian message.

On one level, the challenge arises out of the vitality of Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and other religious traditions that continue to lessen the percentage of the world's population that would consider themselves to be Christian. More to the point of Knitter's book, however, is the matter of adjudicating competing truth claims across cultural and religious boundaries. Traditionally, this has not been a problem for Christians, but such questions have provided another opportunity to claim that truth and salvation are found only within Christendom or only through Christ. Knitter believes that we have now come to a new *kairos* for Christianity, a genuine opportunity for pushing the evolution of Christian faith and doctrine into a new form more suited to genuine dialogue and interaction in the world religious arena. What Knitter seeks is a "unitive pluralism," a kind of unity that affirms the personality and truth of each faith tradition while opening each tradition to the critique and transformative forces of other traditions.

Knitter surveys the history of Western approaches to a unitive perspective on world religions and finds three main trajectories. The argument for a radical relativity of religions, arising from historical consciousness, is represented by Ernst Troeltsch. Toynbee and Wilfred Cantwell Smith are summoned to defend the second line which affirms a common essence or common purpose to all religions. The third contribution, represented by Jung and others, identifies a common psychic origin for all religious expressions. Knitter critiques all

three of these lines of argumentation, but he also distills the three perspectives for insights which may be used within Christian theological conversations relating to world religions.

The subsequent section of *No Other Name?* attempts a survey of attitudes within the Christian tradition towards religious pluralism. Here Knitter suggests that there has been an evolution of attitudes, moving from a rigid perspective which finds no revelation or salvation outside of one's own faith community to a more moderate "mainline" approach, and then to the progressive post-Vatican II Catholic "inclusive" model. It will come as no surprise that the major impediments in all these views to a genuine and open dialogue with other religions are the christological claims of normativity and universality in the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church. Christology, therefore, becomes a central concern in *No Other Name?*.

The most promising Christian approach to a unitive pluralism is represented by what Knitter identifies as the "theocentric model" for christology which offers a solution to the impediments of normative claims while maintaining a salvific sufficiency for Jesus. Common to those who fit this model is an appeal to the primacy of the revelation of the divine (or Ultimate Reality) which arises in the life and witness of Jesus over any claims for the normativity or exclusivity for the person of Jesus as the Christ. That is, theocentric christologies focus on the message of Jesus which points to the divine rather than the proclamation about Jesus as the Christ. To illustrate the theocentric possibilities, Knitter summarizes the writings of John Hick, the Presbyterian theologian; Raimundo Panikkar, a Roman Catholic priest from India; and Stanley Smartha of the World Council of Churches. All offer, from within the Christian perspective, a way of thinking and speaking about Jesus and the Christ which is sufficient for faith and hope but which does not, thereby, deny the truth, beauty, and faith of other traditions. Neither do these approaches find it necessary to presume that the faithful of other religions are really "anonymous Christians" or yet to be fully enlightened. No theological necessity survives for presuming that truth and salvation are found only in or through Christ.

The force of Knitter's book cuts in two directions. First, Knitter presents to the Christian church a strong case for the affirmation of a non-normative, theocentric christology. While there is exegetical and theological support for such a view, it is also clear that these ideas challenge some of the most cherished beliefs that have become a part of the western Christian tradition. The theological and liturgical territory between a vacuous, powerless christology and an idolatrous, normative Jesusology is treacherous and little explored. This is the

territory where Jesus is critically appropriated with all of his contextual particularity without the tortured linguistic constructs of the Chalcedonia formulas. It is where the uniqueness and salvific power of Jesus is celebrated without claims for normativity. Knitter does not make a substantial contribution to the mapping of new territory, but he does survey the best that is available, and he demonstrates courage in directing our attention to the necessity of going forward on this path.

Second, Knitter appeals for "dialogue as a hermeneutics of praxis" for Christian theology. In his view, religious truth ceases to be a function of defining by exclusion, but truth is more relational, dialogical, and not simply two-valued. For Knitter, the future of Christianity depends on a genuine openness to the critical, as well as the beautiful, insights of other religious traditions. What Knitter seeks is not the homogeneity of the least common religious denominator, but a new depth and vitality for each tradition through a hermeneutical process which requires dialogue. It should no longer be possible, therefore, to do Christian theology without entering into the world of Buddhism. Knitter's word for missionaries, therefore, is that their task is the announcing of a gospel which makes Christians into better Christians and Buddhists into better Buddhists.

While *No Other Name?* is not focused solely on the matter of christology, the centrality of this topic requires a broader treatment. Scholarly exegetical work on the multiple christological trajectories of early Christianity is most helpful, but practically no attention is given to challenges and possibilities that feminist theology brings to christological questions. Knitter shows no acquaintance with Rosemary Ruether's systematic treatment of christology from a feminist perspective, for example, although her insightful treatment of the Jewish-Christian dialogue is noted. Little is offered from third world perspectives nor is there any consideration of what a theocentric christology might mean for the radically different religious and political circumstances of Central and South American Christians. It would also have been helpful to deal with the differences in christological expressions between black and white Christians in the Western tradition or to explore the critique of normative christology that Native American perspectives bring to the dialogue.

For Christians who are interested in what follows from a genuine dialogue, Knitter reiterates a crucial point made by others whose works inhabit the pages of *No Other Name?*. The traditional normative, exclusive christology is not an ethical christology. The truth and import of this observation can be seen daily as western "Christian" cultures attempt to deal honestly with their histories and with the deepening alienation from eastern and southern cultures. It is clear that the ethical

implications of a theocentric adjustment to Christianity are in need of urgent exploration and implementation. *No Other Name?* provides a very useful basis for such work.

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment/La Presencia Hispana: Esperanza y Compromiso*. Publication #891. Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1984. 73pp.

In November, 1982, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops authorized the "preparation of a pastoral letter on the Hispanic ministry." At their meeting in November of the following year, they approved the final draft of the letter. It was published a few months later as *The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment/La Presencia Hispana: Esperanza y Compromiso*. In it we have a succinct summary of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Hispanic-American people of the United States today.

The work is divided into four main "chapters" and a brief conclusion. The first chapter is entitled "A Call to Hispanic Ministry." It mentions some of the values held by Hispanic Catholics and then begins to describe some of the problems and needs within the context of this country. It includes sections on "Hispanic Reality" and "Socioeconomic Conditions," each of which gives important statistical and demographic data. The second chapter is entitled "Achievements in Hispanic Ministry in the United States." It is two pages long.

The third chapter deals with "Urgent Pastoral Implications." It covers a great number and variety of what the authors call "creative opportunities." These include: Liturgy, Catholic Education, Migrant Farm Workers, Prejudice and Racism, and even *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (Base Ecclesial Communities). Unfortunately, each is only a few paragraphs long. The fourth chapter, entitled "Statement of Commitment," describes what the Bishops plan to do about the situations they have just outlined. They end with a call for the 3er *Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral* (which took place in August of 1985), which is to serve as "a basis for drafting a National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry." The conclusion of the work offers a positive and hopeful outlook for the future.

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