Jeffrey David Daniel
The Scandal of Constitutive Christology: A Critique of Schubert M. Ogden’s Christian
Theology of Religious Pluralism
(Under the direction of William L. Power)

According to Schubert M. Ogden, the fundamental construction of an adequate
Christian theology revolves around the twin criteria of appropriateness and credibility.
However, Ogden’s own employment of these criteria in constructing a Christian theology
of religious diversity or religious pluralism is inadequate. Through an explanation and
evaluation of Ogden’s approach to doing theology, both in terms of the criteria of
appropriateness and credibility and the three phases of historical, hermeneutical, and
philosophical theology, and through the employment of this approach in evaluating
Ogden’s own position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism in regard to constructing a Christian
theology of religious pluralism, I will argue that Ogden’s position of Pluralistic-
Inclusivism fails as an adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism because of its
inappropriate, representative Christology. I will further argue that the inappropriateness
of Ogden’s representative Christology stems for an overemphasis of the criterion of
credibility in his interpretation of the formal norm of apostolic witness and from a more
fundamental overemphasis of the criterion of credibility in his approach to doing
theology. From there, I will argue, towards the end of outlining work that must be done
in this area, that a more adequate construction of a Christian theology of religious
pluralism depends, fundamentally, on a more balanced employment of the criteria of
appropriateness and credibility, which will in turn result in a more appropriate,
constitutive Christology.

Index Words: Schubert M. Ogden, Religious Pluralism, Pluralistic-
Inclusivism, Christology, Willi Marxsen
THE SCANDAL OF CONSTITUTIVE CHRISTOLOGY: A CRITIQUE OF SCHUBERT M. OGDEN'S CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate the following to my wife, Melony J. Wilson. She has stood behind me throughout the lengthy process of writing this thesis. In addition to waking up at extreme hours of the morning and giving up any real use of the computer for the last 6 months, she has been the sounding board for my ideas, my arguments, and my struggles in putting this paper together.
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First and foremost, I am thankful for the opportunity to write this thesis. I am thankful for the intellectual struggle of researching and synthesizing and presenting an argument. Throughout the past several months, working for several hours in the quiet of the morning, I have experienced the pleasure of finally getting a sentence to sound just right and the frustration of being unable to get a paragraph or a chapter to fall together. As I have labored on this thesis, I have discovered a great deal, but mostly I have experienced the joy and contentment that comes from putting words to paper and finding that they finally say what I had hoped they would say.

I am thankful to Dr. Power for putting up with question after question in both the classroom and during office hours, for his guidance through my entire degree program, and for his guidance through my research. However thankful I am for these things though, I am most thankful to Dr. Power for his willingness to listen to my arguments and his encouragement of consistency in my disagreements with his own position. It is a sad but true commentary on the state of academia, that as it increasingly pushes the empty norms of tolerance and diversity it becomes less and less tolerant of that contingency which strives after exorcizing Truth from such a hollow agenda. Dr. Power exemplifies the Professor who is willing to maintain that there is Truth in the face of the degeneration of the search for it in academia and at the same time is not afraid to challenge his own assumptions about that Truth as he challenges the assumptions of his students.

I am thankful for the patience and willingness exhibited by those at University Church in our countless discussions that directly or indirectly involved the problem of religious pluralism. I am especially thankful, in this regard, to Dr. Orme, Lee Moody,
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I am much indebted to Dr. Ted Lewis and Dr. Sandy Martin for taking the time to read this thesis and serve on my committee. I also thank several of my students who have read portions of my thesis and made comments on it.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife for all the headache she has gone through in dealing with me as I have researched and written this thesis.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>v</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 AN ADEQUATE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology Defined</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Phases of Constructing an Adequate Theology</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with the Adequacy of the Three Phases</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Theological Options</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogden’s Pluralistic-Inclusivism</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 THE INADEQUACY OF PLURALISTIC-INCLUSIVISM</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Inappropriateness of Ogden’s Representative Christology</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overemphasis of the Criterion of Credibility</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 TOWARDS AN ADEQUATE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutics and Bias</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion of Appropriateness</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion of Credibility</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Initially, the issue of religious pluralism hardly seems to be an issue at all. Taken at its most basic meaning, religious pluralism is nothing more than the acknowledgement of the existence of a plurality of religions. Assuming a very basic and common sense understanding of what makes a religion and not investigating the matter much further by redefining religion to make only one particular traditional religion something other than a religion, as Barth often does in his discussions of Christianity or as a recent guest speaker in my classroom did for Hinduism, there is pretty much a consensus that there is more than one religion in the world. Of course, if this is all there was to do in an investigation of religious pluralism, the topic would center around a discussion of the definitions of religion and pluralism.

Identifying the world's religious traditions is fairly easy: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the various tribal religions of the Americas, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Of course there are various conflations, denominations, cults, etc. within all of these various religions, but by and large we can talk about some of the basics of each and be able to understand them, at least, superficially. From within one of these religions, that is, as a practitioner of one of them, the recognition of the existence of a variety of other religions poses something of a problem. This problem most basically stems from the fact that most practitioners of most of these religions, if not all of them, believe that their particular belief system is true, and, as truth, orients them to the natural and supernatural world in such a way as to either bring fulfillment in this life or the realization that fulfillment is for the life to come or in some combination of both. Thus, the
problem that presents itself is the question, "Are these other religions also true or in some sense true, or are they completely false?"

Asking this question is something quite different from actually answering it. Answering the question implies a great deal about the nature of truth, the possibility of knowing the truth, the possibility of moving outside of your cultural boundaries, or even being able to understand your own cultural boundaries. But before we get to these implications, and many more, which is the meat of this paper, I would first like to point out that most people's answers to the above question rarely carry with them any understanding of most of these complicated implications. Assumptions run rampant and rather than giving what I would call a proper, theological answer to this religious question, they simply respond to the problem. These responses vary, of course, but there are two easily identifiable extremes. One extreme is simply that all of the other religions are false. Coming from a Christian point of view (which, by the way, is the point of view that most of the academic literature is either coming from or responding to), it is not that uncommon for this extreme position to have absolutely no knowledge of any of the other religions and yet to pronounce them all false. The other extreme, also, often knows little to nothing about any of the other religions and yet proclaims, quite confidently, and usually with an air of sophistication and brilliance in the face of the other extreme position, that all of the other religions are true, a position sometimes referred to as Universalism.¹

While neither of these "responses" (as opposed to "answers") is without proper, theological underpinnings, one-to-one correlation of these theological positions with these more sociological responses would be problematic, to say the least. Given the fact that such responses don't have academic expressions, as such, it is difficult to give concrete representations without going into the correlative theological positions. Nevertheless, it is at least interesting to note that all of the above religions mentioned have some kind of view of the nature and presence of

¹ Actual groups or individuals that identify themselves as Universalists, in this pure sense, are rare, although there are several that come pretty close. These include, among others, the Unitarian-Universalists.
other religions in the world. These vary greatly among the different sects of the particular religions, making it practically impossible to actually discuss these different views. But, it should be made clear that the Christian position, or at least some of the denominations within Christianity, is not the sole representation of an exclusive point of view, nor is the Hindu position the sole representation of a universalistic point of view. There are exclusive Hindus and universalistic Christians.

One of the theological answers to the problem of religious pluralism that has recently received some attention is Schubert Ogden's position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism. In his book, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* Ogden argues that the position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism is novel and a new, logical option to be added to the three traditional options of Religious Pluralism, Religious Exclusivism, and Religious Inclusivism. Ogden's position has received attention partially as a result of its claims to novelty and partially as a result of the fact that Ogden is a Process Theist, and thus one of the first theologians to propose a theology of religious pluralism that is conscientiously rejecting a Kantian worldview. Ogden is quick to point out that his construction of a theology of religious pluralism is Christian and systematic. While Ogden's definition of what it means to construct an adequate Christian theology is mostly satisfactory and serves as an excellent tool for evaluating the adequacy of other theologies, including the three traditional options for religious pluralism, evaluation of Ogden's own position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism reveals an inadequate, Christian theology of religious pluralism. This inadequacy stems from the failure of Ogden's position to meet his criteria of appropriateness and credibility, which will be explained in much more detail later in the paper. Specifically, Ogden's position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism fails as an adequate, Christian theology because of its inappropriate, representative Christology, which stems from an

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2 Although Ogden prefers to be identified as a Post-Liberal, for all practical purposes and for the identification of someone that rejects Immanuel Kant's critiques of pure reason, he falls squarely into the camp of constructive, post-Modernism, or more specifically, Process Theology.

3 *Doing Theology Today* p.3. This will be explained in more detail later in the paper.
overemphasis of the criteria of credibility in his interpretation of the formal norm of apostolic witness.

Looking closely at Ogden's concept of theology and the construction of an adequate theology and then using Ogden's criteria for an adequate theology to evaluate the traditional theological options regarding religious pluralism will allow us to come to terms with the usefulness and insightfulness of Ogden's concept of doing theology. Using these same criteria to then evaluate Ogden's position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism will reveal some of the failures inherent to Ogden's concept of the phases of constructing an adequate theology, which will in turn reveal the inadequacy of the position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism as a Christian theology of religious pluralism.
CHAPTER 2

AN ADEQUATE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

*Pigmei Gigantum humeris impositi plusquam ipsi Gigantes vident.*

Dwarves, on the shoulders of giants, see farther than the giants themselves.

**Theology Defined**

Discussing the doing of theology is not an easy thing. Mostly, theology is a fairly recent phenomenon, that is, it has arisen as a discipline within the past 2000 years or so. This of course does not mean that there weren't people doing theology more than 2000 years ago, but to use that specific term in reference to what they are doing is to speak more or less anachronistically. Theology is essentially a Western phenomenon growing specifically out of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as it has encountered and adopted elements of Hellenistic culture. Even more specifically, the element of Hellenistic culture that has contributed to the creation and importance of theology in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is the systematic approach of rational examination. For the early Greek philosophers, such as Heraclitus and Parmenides, the examination was of the world around them in an attempt to create some kind of unified explanation for the origin and nature of its existence. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle continued this same kind of examination to varying degrees while emphasizing other elements of life, such as the individual, society, politics, ethics, etc. Superficially speaking at least, it is Plato and Aristotle that have had the most tremendous, albeit indirect, influence on the examination of Judaism and Christianity, most often examinations made by Jews and Christians. Extending through the first 1500 years of the common era in the Western world, the

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4 Didacus Stella (in Luc. 10, tom.2) as taken from Robert Merton's discussion of this aphorism in *On the Shoulders of Giants*. Although a somewhat difficult history to trace, and especially to footnote, Merton begins with Richard Burton and Isaac Newton and tries to move backwards from there.
dominance of this influence is overwhelming in the history of Christian, Judaic, and Muslim theology. And yet, perhaps one of the strongest modern arguments for the dominance of this Hellenistic influence in the history of Western theology is the extent to which it has been reacted against since the time of the Enlightenment and the Renaissance and the extent to which these reactions have been accepted, rejected, and used in more recent times, so that most of modern and post-modern philosophy and theology fall very neatly into the story of influence and reaction stretching at least back into the conflation of Plato and Moses in the writings of Philo.

Such a very brief history of the origin of theology should serve to shed some light on the nature of doing theology. First, it should be understood that theology is essentially about the application of systematic examination to a particular religion. Until very recently, this kind of examination was done mostly by the practitioners of that particular tradition. As such, inherent to doing theology is the doing of something confessional, i.e. the use of systematic reasoning to examine, evaluate, and ultimately judge the validity of your own particular belief system. For this very reason, the field of theology has often been criticized in the modern world of academia as being inherently biased and incapable of objectivity. The recent 'realization' that there is probably no such thing as true objectivity has sometimes led to the reinstatement of theology as a valid discipline in the world of academia. More importantly, H. R. Niebuhr's flavor of the constructive proposition is that all positions, all examinations, constitute some kind of belief, indeed, according to Niebuhr, some kind of belief together with trust in and loyalty to that particular position. Essentially, this means that any position is confessional, making the normative assumption that people are dealing with and writing about what they truly believe

5 Without going into this too much, I would like to point out that the oft cited praise to the post-modern world for accomplishing the deconstruction of objectivity is probably ill-applied. Although it is most certainly true that the deconstruction of objectivity and the realization of the necessity of recognizing your biases are essential to and have been popularized by the deconstructive criticism of the hopes of the Enlightenment, the hopes of the Enlightenment were, in and of themselves, flawed from the very beginning, depending altogether too much on the Platonic and monistic tendencies of the Christian world against which they were reacting. As will be discussed later in the body of the paper, the deconstruction of the possibility of objectivity among one branch of the post-modernists has gone well beyond validity and has resulted in a degeneration of rationality to an alarmingly and seemingly unexpected homogenization of the norm of epistemic agnosticism and rejection of the correspondence theory of truth.

and are using these beliefs to inform the way that they go about living their lives. All of this is said only to point out that the history of theology includes the history of all Western academic inquiry since well over 1600-1700 years of academics in the Western world were part of Judaism, the Christian Church, or the Muslim faith. Given a very broad conception of theology, the recent 300-400 years are only an aberration to the extent that the faith systems from which they are coming extend beyond the realms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to more secular faith systems like Pantheism, Secular Humanism, and even Atheism.

In his book *Doing Theology Today*, Ogden’s apparent recognition of a superficially similar concept of theology comes in his distinction between witness and theology and between systematic, Christian theology and just generic theology. First, regarding the distinction between theology and systematic, Christian theology, Ogden is in no wise making the argument that the doing of all theology is the doing of systematic, Christian theology. His only purpose is to identify the place from whence he is doing theology. Without making artificial distinctions, Ogden identifies three principle branches of Christian theology -- historical, systematic, and practical. While systematic theology will always depend on, and to some extent be a part of, historical theology and will always have practical theological implications, it is important for Ogden to make a distinction between the three in order to emphasize the prescriptive nature of his argument regarding the doing of theology. Further, the doing of Christian, systematic theology is the originating position that Ogden is taking such that Christian theology as driven by "that particular experience of Jesus as of decisive significance for human existence which somehow comes to expression in all that Christians think, say, and do" is distinct from the

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thinking, saying, and doing about only God of generic theology.\(^9\)

Secondly, Ogden wants to move away from the simplistic conceptualization of Christian theology as just the doing of something confessional that includes systematic reflection about the significance and decisiveness of Christ by identifying this kind of theology as witness. This, of course, means that theology properly conceived must have something to do with this witness and, according to Ogden, Christian theology should be understood as "critically reflecting on witness with a view to validating its claims to validity."\(^{10}\) Clearly the central point of such a definition of Christian theology is that of critical reflection.

As such, systematic, Christian theology is concerned with the critical reflection on witness and the validation of its validity through the proscriptive evaluative tools of appropriateness and credibility. An adequate, Christian theology will be that witness which meets the criteria of appropriateness and credibility to the greatest extent. According to Ogden, “the specific task of systematic theology is to reflect critically on the claim of Christian witness to be adequate to its content.”\(^{11}\) Indeed, the history of Christian theology as found in dogmatics and apologetics has been the very task of proving the validity of witness claims regarding appropriateness and proving the validity of witness claims regarding credibility, respectively; although, as we will see later, there is some degree of conflation between the two.

The evaluative benefit of using Ogden’s conception of doing theology can not be overemphasized. Time and time again an examination of a theologian’s work within the framework of this concept of Christian theology yields an impressive gleaning of that theologian’s particular bias or biases and his or her emphasis in any attempt at the systemization of the Christian Scriptures and the Christian religion. Ogden himself does this of Liberation theology in general in his book *Of Faith and Freedom: Towards a Theology of Liberation* when he criticizes the horrendous overemphasis of the criteria of credibility to the

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\(^{10}\) Ogden 8.

\(^{11}\) Ogden 8.
almost complete exclusion of the criteria of appropriateness among many Liberation theologians, which represents a rationalization and thus a fundamental confusion of witness and theology. Ogden does a similar thing in his evaluation of the traditional Christian theologies of Religious Pluralism in his book *Is There Only One True Religion?*, an evaluation that will be discussed and critiqued later in this paper.

Before moving along too quickly, though, with the application of Ogden’s concept of systematic, Christian theology to an evaluation of Religious Pluralism, it should be made clear that his proscriptions for going about the doing of this theology do not end with the employment of the criteria of appropriateness and credibility. Also, according to Ogden there are three phases to the construction of an adequate theology, all three of which strive after a balance between the criteria of appropriateness and credibility.

### Three Phases of Constructing an Adequate Theology

The first of these three phases, Ogden calls the historical phase. As the name would suggest, this phase deals primarily with the critical examination of the Christian witness to appropriateness, and, as such, satisfies the first condition of this criteria. Central to the historical phase is the identification and validation of the formally normative witness, “the witness with which any other has to agree in substance in order to be appropriate.” In other words, the central task of the historical phase of validating a theology as adequate is the discovering of the formal norm. Obviously this phase is historical in nature and includes the use of historical theology. The difficulty of this stage stems from the complexity of an accurate,
historical identification of a formal norm, which will become abundantly clear later in this paper.

After the identification of the formal norm, the hermeneutical phase combines the criteria of appropriateness and credibility in order to make an adequate interpretation, satisfying the second condition of the criteria of appropriateness and the first condition of the criteria of credibility. According to Ogden, the hermeneutical phase is driven by the hermeneutical method, which depends entirely on the insights of philosophy and philosophical inquiry. Such a dependence clearly implies that the proliferation of philosophies leads to a proliferation of possible interpretations of the formal norm. However, while Ogden clearly suggests this implication and later insists on the necessary limit on our ability to make any interpretation that is not simply “one among many,” it is very clear in Ogden’s philosophical approach to doing theology that he is firmly committed to the correspondence theory of truth and would not support the rational degeneration of much of deconstructive post-modernism’s hermeneutics. More will be said about this later.

The third and final phase of creating and/or determining an adequate theology is the philosophical phase, which meets the second condition of credibility. The philosophical phase is of course driven by the philosophical method and essentially consists in "determin[ing] both in principle and in fact what is to count as the truth about human existence."  

All three of these phases and the extent to which they try to balance the criteria of appropriateness and credibility are illustrated below:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases of Doing Theology</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Phase</td>
<td>Appropriateness</td>
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</tbody>
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14 Ogden 13-14.
15 See quote at footnote 16.
16 Ogden 15.
Problems with the Adequacy of the Three Phases

For Ogden, an adequate theology must, through the employment of these three phases, strike a balance between the criteria of appropriateness and credibility. The methodology for striking this balance, for Ogden, however, is inherently flawed. Although superficially identifying 4 conditions, two of appropriateness and two of credibility as distributed across the historical phase, the hermeneutical phase, and the philosophical phase, it is clear that the hermeneutical phase is driven by the criteria of credibility to the practical exclusion of the criteria of appropriateness. This exclusion is driven by Ogden’s tense acceptance of the overall approach of deconstructive, post-modern hermeneutics, which, despite Ogden’s clear level-headiness in maintaining the insights of this hermeneutic together with a commitment to the correspondence theory of truth, remains an interesting and somewhat ironic appropriation given Ogden’s presence in the camp of the Process philosophers and Process theists, who are usually construed as constructive post-modernists. Of course, it is not fair to suggest that constructive post-modernism has not accepted some of the insights of deconstructive post-modernism, and the deconstructive hermeneutics of this particular flavor of post-modernism is probably one of the most readily embraced insights of the Process Theists. Such an acceptance,

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[17] David Ray Griffin. "Introduction: Constructive Postmodern Philosophy." In Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy, David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb, et. al. (eds.) Albany: State University of New York, 1993. The terminological awkwardness here stems from what seems to be some pretty uncreative titles for things. I suppose the trouble began with the hubris of identifying one point in time as the Modern age without realizing, in all of its historical consciousness, that “modern” is a relative term. However, it is necessary to break Postmodernism into constructive and deconstructive so as to separate much of academia that has gleaned the good of the characteristically Postmodern insight regarding subjectivity and its pervasiveness and then moved on to affirm the necessity and possibility of being able to affirm universal truth from those in academia who insist that subjectivity is the measure of all things and that there is no such thing as universal truth.
However, is unfortunate and simply reveals a failure to realize the nature and purpose, not to mention the implications, of deconstructive hermeneutics, while ignoring and/or rejecting the hermeneutical work of Wolterstorff, Hirsch, Searle, and others.18 19

For Ogden, the hermeneutical method is necessarily driven by the plurality of philosophical approaches to the text. While this may not mean that there is no really true way to read the text, it very clearly means that to look at and interpret the formal norm is open to a very large number of possibilities.

The upshot of this is that no interpretation of formally normative witness today can expect to surmount this ever-growing plurality of other theologies and philosophies. At best, it will be but one interpretation among many; and if this need not preclude its being at least relatively more appropriate than other interpretations, the odds against its actually being so have never been greater.20

Thus, the interpretation of the text is not driven by the desire to understand the intention of communication of the author. Rather, it is driven by the philosophy of the individual doing the interpretation, which he or she possesses prior to actually coming to the text. Even the striving after authorial interpretation would be an a priori philosophy possessed by the interpreter prior to actually approaching the text. Notice the categorical agnosticism of the possibility or even the

18 See especially Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Divine Discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks.* Cambridge: University Press, 1995. For example: "Reflecting on how one interprets Scripture so as to discern divine discourse obviously requires addressing some fundamental issues in the theory of interpretation.... Contemporary hermeneutics doesn’t invite placing this topic on its agenda; it resists it. A pervasive theme in contemporary hermeneutics is that there is something deeply misguided about reading texts to find out what someone might have been saying thereby. But that is exactly what one does if one reads Scripture to discern what God might have said or be saying thereby." (15)

19 None of the above in Wolterstorff even explicitly mentions the problem of Ogden’s complete dismissal of the role of the Holy Spirit, which so clearly fits into his disavowal of the Trinity through radical monotheism, in the creation and interpretation of the Christian scriptures. Such a “mythical” approach to the Christian scriptures is so far afield from Ogden’s fundamental approach to Christian theology that he never even considers such a possibility. See the following for an excellent argument regarding a very different kind of hermeneutic: Mark D. Melean. "Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic." *Pneuma: the Journal of the society for Pentecostal Studies.* 6 (1984): 35-56.

value of understanding what the author intended for us to understand inherent to this hermeneutical method. Anticipating this kind of objection, Ogden is quick to argue for the parochiality of even suggesting that there is only one, or the authorially appropriate, reading of the text:

But if there ever was a time when theologians could have been excused for looking to some one theology or philosophy to provide such an understanding, it has long passed. We today are without excuse for all our traditional provincialisms, and we must scrupulously avoid even a hint of dogmatism in our attempts to formulate existential truth.  

Clearly, this understanding of the hermeneutical method and the practical exclusion of the very validity of the traditional approach, not to mention the approach itself, reveals a great deal about Ogden's understanding of Christian Scripture and fits squarely into his demythologizing agenda. One aspect of this demythologizing agenda is to deny the unique authority claimed for Christian Scriptures in traditional Protestantism and to locate it in a new source, the Apostolic Witness, which will be discussed much later. According to Ogden, his "thoroughgoing historical approach relativizes the classical Protestant claim for the unique authority of Scripture."  

As such, it becomes clear that Ogden's understanding of appropriateness has less to do with approaching the Christian Scriptures as the revelation of God and more to do with approaching them as an existential document containing historical information, which is effectively shielding the witness of some to the example of Jesus' authentic existence. It is perhaps for this reason that he can still claim that the hermeneutical method satisfies the second condition of the criteria of appropriateness, when the fundamental hermeneutical approach he takes seems to a priori relativize anything approximating appropriateness to the Christian Scriptures understood

21 Ogden 17.
as the revelation of God. It seems that appropriateness, here in the hermeneutical method, we might deduce, as well as in the historical method, is almost entirely dependent on the criteria of credibility. Given the fact that the formal norm is purely historical until interpreted and the fact that this interpretation is driven by the emphasis of the criteria of credibility in the hermeneutical method, it seems that Ogden is very much guilty of not only failing to strike an adequate balance between the criteria of credibility and appropriateness but also of masking this failure in a conceptualization of appropriateness that is itself driven and defined by the criteria of credibility.

The nature of this flaw reveals both a problem in the idealization of striking a balance between the criteria of appropriateness and credibility and the problem of Ogden's embracing of a relative, deconstructive approach to the text of Christianity. While striking a balance between the criterion of appropriateness and the criterion of credibility is admittedly idealistic, the employment of the criteria is not thereby rendered pointless. On the contrary, an evaluation of the very emphasis of the criteria helps to reveal the nature of a particular theological position. In Ogden's case, it becomes fairly clear that his Christian theology, i.e. his application of systematic reasoning to a critical examination and validation of the witness to the effect that "Jesus is of decisive significance for human existence," is driven by the nature of his application of systematic reasoning, as especially revealed in his understanding of the hermeneutical method and the necessity of this method's dependence on an a priori philosophical position among the plurality of possible positions. Said more simplistically, Ogden's philosophy is driving his examination of witness. In the specific instance of Ogden's understanding of the New Testament, as we will see in more detail in an examination of his Christology, this results, according to Loughlin, in Ogden having "imported into the past his

While it is absolutely true that any application of systematic reasoning to an understanding of the Christian Scriptures is going to be importing an ideal derived less from the Christian Scriptures themselves than from the general approach of philosophy, which is essentially an admission to the presence of an a priori agenda in any attempt at systematic theology, including this one (as will be explained in more detail later in this thesis), this does not therefore necessitate the myopia of forcing a square peg into a round hole to somehow be as systematic as possible. Although there is obviously not enough time to examine the entire Dogmatic and Apologetic history of the Christian church, it is almost certainly a truism to point out that this history has been made up of theologians who to varying degrees have imported their philosophy into the scriptures. One clear example would be the obvious Aristotelianism of Aquinas. Thus, in many ways, Ogden's approach seems to place him in the traditional line of many Christian theologians. In some, albeit few, of the approaches of this long line of Christian theologians, it has occurred that this application of a philosophy to the interpretation of the scriptures has resulted in a conception of Jesus the Christ that seems to fundamentally deny the very meaning of the title. However, in most cases, the philosophy itself has been tempered by the acknowledgement of the absolute appropriateness of understanding Jesus’ significance in the revelation that is clear in the whole of the New Testament. Perhaps the most interesting thing about the former theologians as contrasted with the latter is that history has almost always deemed them outside of the Christian tradition while the latter have remained inside of it.

While it certainly can not be maintained that the history of Christian theology has been dominated by even an attempt to accomplish a perfect balance between the criteria of appropriateness and credibility, when it has come down to the Christological approach of a majority of these theologians, they have deferred to an emphasis on the actual revelation found in the text. In other words, compared to the traditional interaction of appropriateness and

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credibility among Christian theologians regarding the issue of Christology, where the goal has been to make the most appropriate reading of the text possible and to use an authorial intentioned hermeneutics to interpret this text and use the knowledge thus gathered to inform what is indeed credible in this world, Ogden has transposed the emphasis of doing theology so that the criteria of credibility, through a philosophical position and an hermeneutic, constitutes the epistemological conditions by which the formal norm defining the significance of Jesus is interpreted as appropriate. Thus, while it is important to recognize and even detail the nature of all of our a prior agendas, it important in dealing with Ogden to see that such an agenda results in a very unorthodox Christology.

A closer examination of a particular example from Ogden will reveal that such a transposing of the criteria of credibility and appropriateness dealing with the place of Jesus in Christianity results in not only an unorthodox Christology but ultimately in an inadequate theology of religious pluralism. It will hopefully become quite clear that Ogden’s identification and interpretation of the formal norm results in a Christology without a Christ and builds on this a Christian theology of religious pluralism that is necessarily not Christian.
CHAPTER 3

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Traditional Theological Options

The problem of religious pluralism is far from a new theological topic. The history of society is full of, indeed, often driven by, the encounters of different religions with one another. From the Buddhist evangelization of Taoist and Confucianist China, Lamaist Tibet, and Shinto Japan to the Jesuit conversion of tribes in the Amazon to the massive conversion of much of North and Northeast Africa to Islam, the full knowledge of and response to the presence of other religions is far from a new phenomenon. Indeed, some of the more 'modern' religions, namely Islam and Christianity arose in an extremely diverse and pluralistic religious setting. Regarding especially Christianity, the dominant presence of Judaism in Israel was overshadowed by a polytheism and entrenched religion of the Romans, a polytheism that showed a variety of different emphases in cities even within Israel but especially outside of Israel in modern Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, all places that Paul, the Apostle, traveled on his missionary journeys. Given this very obvious historical fact, it is clear that the issue of religious diversity or religious pluralism has been a perennial theological issue in Christianity.

Even so, it seems to be the case that this particular issue has grown in importance over the past 100 years, dating back, probably to the World Council on Religions meeting in Chicago in 1892. More and more people do not make the very common mistake of referring to the different denominations of Christianity as different religions. More people know that Islam is not about worshipping Mohammed, that Buddhism is more than the presence of monks and nuns in protest of the Vietnam war, and that Christianity is not the only religion in the world. This “new found” knowledge has led, both recently and throughout the history of responses to
the presence of other religions, to a diversity of responses, ranging from a whole-hearted embracing of these religions being universally true to an insistence on the particular truth within traditional religions that necessarily makes other religions untrue, as already discussed.

Within the Christian church these extremes are best represented by the, Unitarian-Universalist and other liberal denominations, on the one hand, and, perhaps, the conservative, evangelical branches of the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Pentecostal denominations, as well as other denominations, on the other. Roughly in between these positions, we find the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, according to the Second Vatican Council, the position of Religious Inclusivism, which will be discussed later. From a universalistic or more nuanced position, in which religions other than Christianity are in some sense considered true, the conservative position is exclusive, fundamentalist, and ignorant of any real historical consciousness. From an evangelical, conservative position, any position viewing other religions and their founders or central figures as equally true with Christianity and Jesus the Christ is an heresy of the orthodox, Christian position. This issue is often very divisive and usually listed among the watershed doctrines that separate the Conservative church from the Liberal church.

The theological underpinnings of these extreme positions as well as the theological underpinnings of a host of other possible positions and responses have been elaborated and argued extensively in the recent history of Christian theology. The traditional options, already mentioned to some extent, as defined by the work of the premier Religious Pluralist John Hick are Religious Pluralism, Religious Exclusivism, and Religious Inclusivism. In his recent work, *Is There One True Religion or Are There Many?*, Ogden's primary task is to argue for the logical possibility of a fourth option, which he calls Pluralistic-Inclusivism. Before actually getting to this option, however, Ogden spends a great deal of time evaluating the traditional approaches, largely in terms of their theological adequacy as defined by Ogden himself and as already

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discussed. The principle division for Ogden, among these traditional options, is between religious pluralism and religious monism, where pluralism is obviously Religious Pluralism, primarily Hick's although his is not exhaustive of the possibilities, and where monism is the broad categorization for the other two traditional options, Religious Exclusivism and Religious Inclusivism.  

Before proceeding with an exposition of Ogden's evaluation of these traditional options, it seems necessary to spend a little time on the fundamental distinction being made between Ogden's employment of the categories religious pluralism and religious monism. Ogden's identification of the latter options of Religious Exclusivism and Religious Inclusivism as religiously monistic is primarily based on their affirmation of the constitutive necessity of the atonement of Jesus the Christ for the possibility of authentic existence. Because of this constitutive necessity and the logical implication that Christianity is, then, the only true religion, religious monism, in this sense, is essentially the same thing as Christocentric particularism or Christocentric singularity. Thus, Ogden's use of the designation of religious monism is a conscientious rejection of the Christology necessary for a Trinitarian view of God present in most of classical, Christian metaphysics, against which Ogden so strongly reacts.

While much of constructive Post-modernism, in the form of Process theology, can be thought of as the rejection of the identification, in much of traditional Christian theology, of God as Nous, "an incorporeal being, eternally changeless and incapable of being affected in any way," and the working out of the implications of this rejection, Ogden seems to conclude that this appropriate and worthy endeavor leads to the requisite rejection of a Christian doctrine of the Trinity via the disavowal of the particular, singular, constitutive atonement as accomplished by Jesus the Christ. Perhaps such a conclusion is indeed consistent within the theistic program.

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of Whitehead and, especially, Hartshorne, but such a judgment remains well outside of the subject of this particular discussion.

Nevertheless, in many ways, much of the history of Western philosophy and theology has been defined by the acceptance or rejection of and reaction to the Christian conception of the triune God, especially to the extent that this represents an attempt at balancing the ontic foundations of universal flux or plurality, on the one hand, and universal changelessness or Nous (roughly) or particularity, on the other, respectively proposed as far back as Heraclitus and Parmenides. A more modern, although prior and fundamentally more significant than that of constructive Post-modernism, reaction to the identification of God as Nous came with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and the almost universal rejection of Natural theology or metaphysics that followed. It wasn't so much that Kant had a problem with God construed as Nous; he just had a problem with the epistemological requirements of actually coming to the acceptance of the existence of such a God. While the problem of epistemic distance actually existed already, although implicitly, in the philosophical approach of the Israelites and the early Christians, its influence on the thoroughly Kantian John Hick, the theologian whose work on Religious pluralism has been extensive and definitive, becomes very clear in his Christian theology of Religious pluralism called Religious Pluralism.

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29 This is the argument made in Colin Gunton's work *The One, the Three, and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993). Whether one actually accepts the argument that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity does successively balance these two extremes, there seems to be little historical question that much of Western philosophy and theology has struggled to deal with these ontological extremes and can often be defined by their tendencies toward one or the other. Perhaps one of the most interesting insights of Gunton, in this regard, is that the modern and post-modern fascination with plurality stems from a gross collapsing of the inherent tension requisite to an adequate conception of the Trinity (not to mention the tendency to completely ignore the incredibly sophisticated balance of the value of plurality with the value of the One present in the Trinity as it is related to the Christian doctrine of the creation). And what follows is a plurality, especially as it receives expression in the media and political correctness of 'individuality', that quickly breaks down into a vicious, monolithic, and often self-destructive homogeneity.

30 Although an admittedly long thread to follow through the history of Western philosophy and theology, the fundamental connection between the construance of God as Nous and the Christian theology of Religious pluralism found in John Hick, as well as the Christian theology of Religious pluralism found in Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, and Schubert Ogden, not to mention many others, whether through acceptance or reaction, is important and will hopefully become clearer as I proceed. It is especially important because reading God as Nous is a conflation of Platonic monotheism with Israelite monotheism which can be avoided through an appropriate interpretation of the God of Israelite monotheism as found in the Hebrew Bible.
John Hick's interest in the theology of Religious Pluralism began early, largely as a result of his sociological experience of the treatment of non-Christians by Christians in Scotland as documented in one of his first and most autobiographical works, *God Has Many Names: Britain's New Religious Pluralism*. His adaptation of the purely phenomenological recognition of the plurality of religions as his position, that of Religious Pluralism, is in and of itself somewhat revealing, while at the same time confuses the entire discussion of the existence of a plurality of religions considerably. Prior to Hick, to identify oneself as a Religious pluralist would be simply to identify yourself as someone who recognizes that other religions are present in the world. Post-Hick, this situation changes considerably, since identification as a Religious Pluralist means to take a position regarding the truth and falsity of these other religions that are obviously present in the world.

Before actually investigating the nature of this particular position, it should be noted that the revealing aspect of Hick's adaptation of the phenomenological recognition of the presence of other religions as the label of his actual position is the assigning of value to the mere presence of a plurality. For Hick, the presence of the plurality of religions is an argument for his position because the underlying assumption is that there in no wise could be the existence of a plurality of religions if that plurality is not good, a point very aptly noted by Ogden. To some extent, Hick is correct in intuitively identifying plurality as good, but the nature of his correctness is based on a fundamental misunderstanding and displacement of the value of plurality, a point made abundantly clear by Gunton's more general critique of Modern and Post-modern understandings of the nature of pluralism. Hick's valuing of plurality is actually a valuing of the particular. The particular religious traditions, which, as we will see later, do not include all of the religions, with which Hick constructs his position of Religious Pluralism are of inherent value because of their particular view of truth. Not because their views of truth are all correct,

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33 Gunton 41-73.
but because their views of truth are all, almost equally, not quite correct; because none of the
their views are completely correct, the existence of the particular, incorrect religions serve as
further evidence of Hick's Kantian view of truth as only being truth of the human mind or the
collection of minds that we call culture, without ever extending beyond the space-time
epistemological barrier constructed by Kant's critiques of pure reason. All of these particular
religions are limited in their knowledge of the truth. None of them know the truth, nor do all of
them put together know the truth.

Hick's overemphasis of the value of the particular, which he construes as a valuing of
plurality, is merely a result of the modernist trend to celebrate everything plural, i.e. the
plurality of particulars. There are two major reasons to point out that Hick's valuing of plurality
is a valuing of a plurality of particulars. First, this will be very significant when we look at
Religious Exclusivism, which values one particular over all others. Second, valuing a plurality of
particulars is a failure to value the true plurality represented by creation and tends to result,
paradoxically, in the promotion of Parmenidean homogeneity both in the modern and post-
modern world as well as in Hick's religious pluralism.

The academic (mostly theological, but also philosophical and historical) literature
dealing with the problem of religious pluralism is full of speculations about whether
determining the truth of any religion, even your very own, is even possible, and this, of course,
takes us very quickly to an investigation of our epistemological foundations. Because the
epistemological foundations for the variety of religions vary, sometimes considerably and
sometimes not so considerably, one of the problems with the problem of religious pluralism is
the possibility of even being able to make a determination of the truth of another religion
without actually being a practitioner of that religion. While ultimately unsatisfactory and
entirely unpragmatic, this construing of the problem of religious pluralism depends on a view of
truth and knowledge that is often identifiable as very Modern, late Modern, or Post-modern, a construction of the problem that is especially present in Hick's theological position of Religious Pluralism.

It is well known, that Hick is working within the Kantian tradition. What this means in a nutshell, is that, along with Kant, Hick rejects the pure reason of natural theology and the possibility of using logical arguments to prove the existence of God. Based primarily on a critique of the ontological argument, Kant concludes that knowing is necessarily limited to the realm of space and time.34 This means that knowledge comes through the experience of sense data with categories and forms of intuition and the use of this data to make conclusions. There is no knowledge outside of this space-time realm. Employing Kant's epistemology and Kant's conclusions about the use of "practical" reason in postulating morality and God, among other things, Hick concludes that all religious knowledge is more a result of this same kind of "practical" knowledge and thus considers religious knowledge to be only knowledge about the space-time realm and speculation about everything else.35 This, of course, means that every kind of religious knowledge is speculation about things outside of the space-time realm, making all of them equally valid, almost.

The key term for Hick is Ultimate Reality. Any religion that has some conception of Ultimate Reality qualifies for his "true" religions. This includes, among others, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism with its concept of God and Buddhism with its concept of Nirvana. According to Hick, all religions with a concept of Ultimate Reality also have a methodology for being in right relationship with this Ultimate Reality. This is what he calls the "Salvation" emphasis of all the religions with

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35 John Hick. *God and the Universe of Faiths*. London: Macmillan, 1977. Hick consistently explains his epistemology in many of his works so that there is a great deal of repetition in other of his books such as *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* and *A Christian Theology of Religions*. 
an ultimate ineffable Reality[,] which is the source and ground of everything, and which is such that in so far as the religious traditions are in soteriological alignment with it they are contexts of salvation/liberation.\textsuperscript{36}

This emphasis on the existential nature of religion means that the extent to which the religion orients the individual toward living in right relationship to Ultimate Reality is the extent to which it is effective. Notice that this is all very "practical".

Numerous critiques have been leveled at Hick's Religious Pluralism. In many cases, these critiques come as often from theologians arguing that Hick does not go far enough toward Universalism as from theologians arguing that Hick is far too close to Universalism. In his exposition of Religious Pluralism, Hick also coined the other alternatives as Religious Exclusivism and Religious Inclusivism. It is from the two major representatives of each of these positions that we will hear the primary critiques of Hick's position, but before we get there I would like to elaborate on one more general problem with Religious Pluralism. This particular problem seems to generally be a component of the modern and post-modern culture to value plurality. Notice that Hick takes a very privileged position in his exposition of the truth of other religions. Although growing up in a Christian tradition and maintaining that he is still a Christian, Hick feels quite confident that he can move beyond his position to make an evaluation of the validity of other religions. On this point, I am not exactly in disagreement. But in order to be consistent in his position in Christianity, Hick necessarily creates a new kind of Christian. This new kind of Christian "knows" that God exists but also knows that this knowledge is not really of reality but only a knowledge of a shadow of the reality which we can not access, as is the knowledge of the shadow of reality that a Buddhist or Muslim is seeing. This new kind of Christian, indeed a Religious Pluralist Christian, looks very much like a Religious Pluralist Buddhist or a Religious Pluralist Muslim, all maintaining a parochial orthopraxy while all

\textsuperscript{36} Hick, \textit{A Christian Theology of Religions}, p. 27.
categorically denying the traditional orthodoxy. These new practitioners wear cloaks of religion across empty shells of belief -- a disturbing kind of homogeneity indeed.

Karl Barth, also influenced by Kant in many respects, holds a traditional, theological position regarding religious pluralism, which Hick labels Religious Exclusivism. The exclusive nature of this theological position lies, quite simply, in the claim that Jesus is the Christ and Savior of humanity, constituting the only possibility of the salvation and authentic existence of humanity. This is primarily the case for Barth because revelation, the Bible of Christianity, is the only source of any knowledge outside of the space-time barrier, the self-same ontological and epistemic limit resulting in Hick's agnosticism about the truth of any one particular religion as gathered from Kant's critiques of pure reason. The epistemological limits imposed on us necessarily as a result of our being in space and time limits the possibility of us truly knowing anything about God, but it does not limit God from telling us what we should know. As far as Barth is concerned, this knowledge is given to us through the Bible. Commenting on the traditional arguments for the existence of God, Barth "maintains that this is a radically wrong road which can never lead to God, but to a reality called so only in a false sense." Rather, the Bible communicates, quite convincingly (or not, as we will see much later), who God is for us and, within that communication, that Jesus is the Christ and the Savior of all humanity and that there is no salvation outside of Jesus the Christ and the Church of Jesus the Christ.

For many, this exclusive stance smacks of intolerance and everything very un-politically correct in our very politically correct world. This is partially a result of Hick's label for Barth's position and it is partially because the position is exclusive and being exclusive has become synonymous with being ignorant, parochial, and flat wrong. As the theological position representing the other extreme from Religious Pluralism, this is something that you might expect. But none of these constitute arguments against the position. This is a very important

38 Barth 65-87.
thing to remember: in the world of theology, feelings may count for something but they won't
hold much water when it comes to maintaining or critiquing a position.

What must be determined is whether or not Barth's position is true. Interestingly, Barth,
himself, would argue that we lack the intellectual capacity to determine whether or not the
Revelation of the Bible is true. Yet, we do possess the intellectual capacity to investigate the
Bible for what it says and for the practical knowledge of doing what it says. Although there will
be some existential benefits to doing this, it seems to be the case that much of it will come down
to some degree of faith.

Such an overemphasis on the practicality of Christianity as opposed to its theoretical
value obviously leaves it somewhat closed off to the possibility of theoretical dialogue. Perhaps
this tendency toward fideism is one of the strongest arguments against the position as it is
traditionally held by Barth, especially to the extent that this fideism results from the
epistemological agnosticism of Kant's critiques of the arguments for the existence of God.
Nevertheless, Barth's traditional association with the position of Religious Exclusivism and his
tendencies toward fideism do not necessarily make the position of a constitutive Christology
untenable from a more philosophical point of view. This point will be addressed more clearly in
Ogden's evaluation of Religious Exclusivism.

The last of the three traditional positions is known as Religious Inclusivism. As
mentioned earlier, this is the official theological position of the Roman Catholic Church,
according to the Second Vatican Council. The principle theologian at the Second Vatican
Council dealing with this particular issue was Karl Rahner. Usually introduced as the
theological position that falls between the two extremes of Religious Pluralism and Religious
Exclusivism, Religious Inclusivism contains elements of both but probably is less in the middle
than it is schewed toward Religious Exclusivism. According to Rahner, Jesus is the Christ and
the Savior of the world and remains the only true access to God outside of the, once again,

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Kantian space-time barrier. However, despite Jesus the Christ constituting the possibility of humanity being related to God, it is possible to participate in this salvation through the other religions as a result of a kind of overflow of grace through Jesus the Christ as an "anonymous Christian."  

Notice that Jesus the Christ remains the central savior and is the vehicle by which God makes salvation possible to other peoples in other religions, and yet people can participate in this salvation without ever knowing even the name of Jesus the Christ or the Christian church. While most Religious exclusivists argue that this position is far too liberal in its a priori estimation of the truth of other religions, most Religious Pluralists argue that the position is not liberal enough in its estimation of these religions because it necessitates the constitutive work of Jesus the Christ in making it possible for these practitioners to have any relationship with God.

Ogden’s Pluralistic-Inclusivism

Far from exhausting the possibilities for discussing the problem of religious pluralism, in the past 30 to 40 years these positions have served more as a skeleton for the proliferation of Christian theologies attempting to create an adequate conception of the relationship of Christianity to the other religions. While the listing and discussion of these positions is outside the scope of this paper, it remains important to understand that the issue is an extremely complicated one while also realizing that the three traditional option demarcate the appropriate spectrum of possibilities if not the possibilities themselves. It is here that Ogden steps into the theological milieu to make a calculated and well-argued case for the appropriateness of a 4th option that is not covered by the traditional options.

We should begin explaining Ogden’s Pluralistic-Inclusivism by explaining his understanding of the traditional, Christian theological options. Ogden categorizes Exclusivism

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and Inclusivism together under the heading of religious monists and then contrasts them with
the Pluralists by identifying them simply as religious pluralists.\textsuperscript{42} The religious monism of
Exclusivism and Inclusivism stems from their constitutive Christology and the belief that there
is only one possible way to God and that it is through Jesus the Christ. While obviously
Exclusivism and Inclusivism maintain differences regarding the truth of religions other than
Christianity, they both maintain a constitutive Christology. As will become apparent much later
in our discussion of the representative Christology of Pluralistic-Inclusivism, Ogden considers
this to be very problematic. Not only does Ogden’s position depend on a representative
Christology in contrast to the constitutive Christology of the religious monists, but, as would
probably be expected based on the juxtaposition of the categories alone, the religious Pluralists
also depend on a revisionist and representative Christology. Indeed, Ogden’s principle
argument against the position of Pluralism as it is generally represented in John Hick and in
Paul F. Knitter is that they present the position of Pluralism as a counterpoint to that of the
religious monists by claiming that there are true religions other than Christianity,\textsuperscript{43} but more on
this later.

There are at least two principle objections that Ogden makes to all three of the
traditional, Christian, theological options for dealing with the problem of religious pluralism.
The first of these, as already mentioned, is the failure to take into account the necessity of a
foundational metaphysics.\textsuperscript{44} Secondly, the positions of Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism
all approach the issue of religious pluralism assuming that a priori we can know the truth or the
possibility of the truth of the religions other than Christianity. According to Ogden, determining
the formal truth of a religion includes evaluating its claims and its consistency in terms of the
criteria of appropriateness and credibility and all that this includes.\textsuperscript{45} Therefore, it is necessary
to identify the formal truth of one religion and then use this as the norm for evaluating the other

\textsuperscript{42} Ogden 23.
\textsuperscript{43} Ogden 54-56.
\textsuperscript{44} Schubert Ogden. \textit{Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?} p. 17-21.
\textsuperscript{45} Ogden 20-21.
religions. In the case of all three of the traditional options, it is assumed on the one hand, in the case of the religious monists, that the establishing of Christianity as true and therefore as the formal norm automatically means that the other religions are untrue or untrue to some extent, and on the other hand, in the case of the religious Pluralists, that the counterpoint to the claim of the religious monists is that all or some of the religions other than Christianity are true.

It is from this last argument that Ogden identifies his position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism as the Fourth option, the logically requisite position that says that there may be other religions that are true, but that making this theological judgment from a Christian point of view is dependent on the empirical work of comparing other religions to Christianity as the formal norm.46 Because Ogden feels that there is a logically possible reaction to the religious monists that does not include the a priori claim that there are other true religions without first trying to show that there are other true religions, which is the claim of the religious Pluralists, he finds it necessary to argue for the Christian theological position that must actually precede the a posteriori comparison of other religions.

In many regards, Ogden’s argument is a good one. Without a doubt, the position itself, at least to the extent that it is represented by the claim that there may be other true religions, is a logical possibility alongside the traditional theological options. Further, his criticism of the positions of the religious monists and the religious pluralists in terms of the adequacy of their theological approaches is illuminating, albeit superficial at times, especially regarding the argument for the new problem of evil created by the religious Exclusivists. Additionally, Ogden’s call for inter-religious dialogue, historical investigation, and the comparison of other religions towards the end of truly understanding their claims to truth and then making the comparison of these truth claims to the formally normative truth of Christianity seems to be a legitimate and justified summons.

46 Ogden 83.
However, as will become clear, an evaluation of Ogden’s position in terms of his own concepts of what qualifies as an adequate Christian theology, especially in terms of the criteria of appropriateness and credibility, will show the inadequacy of Pluralistic-Inclusivism. This inadequacy stems from an inappropriate Christology and the overemphasis of the criterion of credibility and results in a Christianity, which Ogden identifies as the formal norm for the comparison of the truth claims of other religions, that is almost entirely reconceptualized and revisionary despite its use of the traditional terminology.
CHAPTER 4

THE INADEQUACY OF PLURALISTIC-INCLUSIVISM

It may appear that the argument we have sought to develop is nothing more than a somewhat ingenious tour de force in which we have made a virtue of necessity by pretending to discover some hidden and, as it were, pre-established harmony between the demands of the evangelium aeternum and the exigencies of our particular situation. This is, of course, a possible, and perhaps finally, even the only possible way to evaluate our argument.47

The Inappropriateness of Ogden's Representative Christology

As would be suspected in any self-respecting Christian theology, the foundation for Ogden’s position attempting to deal with the problem of religious pluralism is to be found in his Christology. The dual criteria of appropriateness and credibility, in and of themselves, as argued by Ogden and explained in detail already, require that a Christian theology not only deal with the credibility of the issue but also with its appropriateness to the Christian scriptures. As has been argued, the traditional options of Religious Pluralism, Religious Exclusivism, and Religious Inclusivism succeed in balancing these criteria only to the extent that they perceive one to be more important than the other. For this very reason, the authority of Scripture necessitates the overemphasis of appropriateness in the position of Religious Exclusivism; the authority of rationality and the limits of rationality, together with the inauthority of some mythological revelation, necessitates the overemphasis of credibility in the position of Religious Pluralism; and Religious Inclusivism seems to accomplish more of a balance of the two criteria, despite the fact that Scripture remains ultimately authoritative, meaning that the emphasis remains on the criteria of appropriateness. In many ways, as already argued, Ogden’s position constitutes a 4th

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option on the spectrum of possible positions dealing with the problem of religious pluralism, somewhere between Religious Pluralism and Religious Inclusivism, as the position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism might suggest, primarily because of its emphasis of the criteria of credibility over and against that of appropriateness without discounting the importance of the criteria of appropriateness altogether, as does the position of Religious Pluralism.

This, of course, is not exactly the way that Ogden formulates his position and therefore constitutes part of my own argument against the adequacy of Ogden's Christian theology of religious pluralism. The long road toward justifying this argument for the inadequacy of Ogden's Christian theology of religious pluralism began with an examination of Ogden's approach to doing theology, where we saw that three phases of doing theology, the historical phase, the hermeneutical phase, and the philosophical phase, in and of themselves constituted an argument for the failure in Ogden to balance the criteria of appropriateness and credibility leading him to overemphasize the criteria of credibility through his hermeneutical approach.

As might be expected, continuing the argument for this overemphasis of the criteria of credibility picks back up with Ogden's hermeneutical approach to the Christian scriptures. That credibility is even a criteria to be considered is a necessary argument, given the tremendous affect of Kant's critiques of Natural Theology as already mentioned. Of the four positions dealing with the problem of religious pluralism, Ogden's is the only one built upon a rejection of Kant's critiques of pure reason and so necessarily begins with an argument for the need for a metaphysics. Contrasting sharply with the claim of the authority of the Christian Scriptures and rejection of the need for a metaphysics in Barth, Ogden makes the logical argument that no authority can be claimed for this revelation unless there is some kind of metaphysical system validating this authority. While Ogden accepts appeals to the authority of

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48 Ogden makes this very point himself in *Is There One True Religion or Are There Many?* p.x (Preface)

Christian scripture for fixing beliefs, he rejects that this appeal can further establish the meaningfulness and truth of the belief:

Unless the assertions made by the authority are themselves already authorized as meaningful and true by some method other than an appeal to authority, no assertion derived from them or warranted by them can by that fact alone be an authorized assertion.\(^5^0\)

Basically, this argument establishes the need for making the theological bifurcation of authority already discussed and accepted in the majority of this paper, i.e. the twofold criteria of appropriateness and credibility, where the Christian Scriptures are necessarily outside of the sphere of authority in the branch of credibility while it may be the authority for appropriateness.

However, as Ogden continues to argue regarding the authority of Scripture for the criteria of appropriateness, the traditional conception of Christian Scripture is that it acts as the sole and primary authority for the criteria of appropriateness. The reasoning goes, traditionally, that the conception of Scripture as a unique authority derives from the fact that it acts as a norm without being normed (\textit{norma-normans, sed non normata}), i.e. "Scripture is unlike all other theological authorities in that what authorizes it is not itself a theological authority in the proper sense of the words."\(^5^1\) This, according to Ogden, becomes problematic as Scripture opens itself to the fairly recent historical investigation of modern Biblical scholarship.

The early Church's formation of the canon was based on the norm of apostolicity, to the extent that the apostolic witness was indeed congruent with the actual work and teachings of Jesus the Christ, in the case of the New Testament Canon, or to the extent that the Old Testament writings "bear witness to Christ prophetically."\(^5^2\) This means, essentially, that the

\(^{50}\) Ogden 244.  
\(^{51}\) Ogden 247.  
\(^{52}\) Ogden 251.
norm of apostolicity used by the early church in the formation of the canon was based on apostolic authorship as well as apostolic theology. According to Ogden,

The unique authority it recognized in the apostles was understood to be due entirely to their being the direct witnesses of this revelation. Thus, by asking whether a writing was apostolic, the early church asked, in effect, whether it 'dealt with Christ' in the unique sense of being authored by someone directly authorized by Christ himself.\(^{53}\)

However, Ogden argues, accepting this view of apostolicity and combining it with modern, historical, textual scholarship necessarily means being willing to recognize the canon within the canon, or the canon before the canon, of the New Testament. This, of course, stems from relatively recent textual findings in the field of Biblical scholarship that many of the authors of the writings of the New Testament were not apostles in direct connection with Jesus the Christ so that the witness of the New Testament, even the authentic writings of Paul, is based on an earlier, oral witness to the work and teachings of Jesus the Christ. This earlier canon, argues Ogden, is only accessible through reconstruction and will reveal something very different about Christology.\(^{54}\)

Traditionally, the apostolic witness has been the norm of appropriateness for all of the major branches of Christianity, i.e. Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism, but usually in different forms. Within Orthodoxy and Catholicism, the situation has generally been summed up by an appeal to both Scripture and Tradition, the former being the writings of the apostles in witnessing to Jesus and Jesus as the Christ and the latter being the continued witness of the apostles in the form of the Church. Within Protestantism, the continued witness of the apostles in the form of the Church has been more or less rejected and there is a reliance on Scripture

\(^{53}\) Ogden 251.
\(^{54}\) Ogden 252.
alone, often expressed as *sola scriptura*, where once again Scripture is the witness of the apostles to Jesus and Jesus as the Christ.

Originally, Ogden himself understood the original apostolic witness to be Scripture.\(^{55}\) But as he became more and more aware of the importance of our historical consciousness and the importance of the role of historical criticism, Ogden found "that view...untenable."\(^{56}\) However, this does not mean, for Ogden, that we should give up the principle associated with *sola scriptura*:

There remains the distinct alternative - and, in my judgment, the only correct alternative - of following the intention of the *sola scriptura* principle itself and relocating the *auctoritas externa* in the original witness that both constituted the apostolic church, and in another sense, was constituted by it. ...[This is] the apostolic witness as the true *norma normans, sed non normata*.\(^{57}\)

The use of Scripture and the principle of *sola scriptura*, though, must be preceded by the reconstruction of the earliest strata of witness, what Marxsen calls the Jesus-kerygma. Ogden’s appropriation of Marxsen signifies the acme of his employment of the historical method and is closely tied to his continued emphasis of maintaining an appropriateness to Christianity. He found that very easy to do by appealing to the original apostolic witness of the Jesus-kerygma as set forth by Marxsen. According to Marxsen, there are at least three different strata of kerygma within the New Testament; these are the Jesus-kerygma, the Christ-kerygma, and the Jesus Christ kerygma.\(^{58}\) Although Marxsen readily admits that you will never find any of these

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\(^{56}\) Gamwell 336.

\(^{57}\) Ogden 254.

kerygma in isolation from one another, it is possible according to Marxsen, to reconstruct these kerygma using form criticism.\textsuperscript{59} According to Ogden,

> It is in [Jesus-]kerygma that the Jesus who is the subject-term of all Christian witness, and hence the source of all theological authority, is attested without explicit christological predicates.... Therefore...it is the meaning to be discerned precisely in the Jesus-keryma, by which the appropriateness of all explicit Christology and, consequently, all other theological assertions is to be judged.\textsuperscript{60}

The fundamental conclusion reached by Ogden in identifying the Jesus-kerygma as the earliest strata of witness to the decisive significance of Jesus, as the new norm of the Christian principle of \textit{sola scriptura}, is that through the textual reconstruction of the earliest strata we can gain access to the most appropriate response to the teachings and work of Jesus and as such identify the most appropriate understanding of Christianity. Therefore, any Christian theology of religious pluralism which attempts to claim adequacy and through claiming adequacy strives to remain appropriate to Christianity while also being credible to the world is essentially striving to remain appropriate to the Jesus-kerygma, i.e. the earliest strata of Christian witness to the significance of Jesus and therefore the most appropriate witness.

It should be fairly clear by this point that even the historical, textual distinction made by Marxsen and appropriated by Ogden between the Jesus-kerygma and the Christ-kerygma means that the earliest strata of Christian witness or Ogden's new Christian norm is defined by the absence of any witness that identifies the work and significance of Jesus through the identification of him as the Christ. Although, as we will see as we continue to investigate Ogden's position, Ogden constantly employs the title of Christ along with the name of Jesus,

\textsuperscript{59} Marxsen 146-147.
what he means by Jesus the Christ is defined by the strata of witness that is defined by the absence of the title of Christ so that it becomes very clear that he is reconceptualizing the meaning of the term Christ. For Ogden, Christ is redefined as that person who is of decisive significance for re-presenting the possibility of an authentic existence through a relationship with God, not the individual that constitutes this possibility. Or, as David R. Peel puts it in defense of Ogden’s understanding of Christology: "As far as [Ogden] is concerned, nothing could have taken place in Jesus Christ that theoretically could not have taken place before or after his life." Notice that "theoretically" here means "credibly" or "philosophically;" it doesn’t seem to matter what the Christian Scriptures actually have to say regarding the event of Christ, just what seems credible to Ogden. While he is fairly clear about this being a new conception of the title Christ and therefore a new conception about Jesus and therefore a new conception about Christianity, Ogden feels that his employment of the traditional terms redefined is justified through his argument for the most fundamental level of the criterion of appropriateness at the earliest strata of witness, the Jesus-kerygma.

The line of reasoning, thus, runs as follows: the Christian scriptures remain authoritative, but only in reference to the criterion of appropriateness, and this authority is located most originally and most appropriately in the reconstructed Jesus-kerygma, which is the earliest witness of the apostles to the teachings and work of Jesus. Through evaluation of this reconstructed Jesus-kerygma, Ogden’s argument continues, it becomes clear that the apostles originally understood Jesus as a decisive re-presentation of the possibility of an authentic relationship with God. Therefore, Jesus in no way constitutes the possibility of humanity having

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61 Given the fundamental nature of this Christological claim to all of Ogden's theology, it is not surprising to find this definition of the significance of Jesus the Christ as a representative Christ throughout several of his writings. Indeed, there are few writings by Ogden that do not refer to this definition. For some of the more definitive ones see: Schubert M. Ogden. "The Point of Christology." The Journal of Religion 55 (1975): 375-395; Schubert M. Ogden. The Point of Christology. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982.

an authentic relationship with God; for Ogden, the possibility in fact already exists and always has existed\(^9\) so that we can identify Ogden’s Christology as a Representative Christology.

That a critique of the Christian theological position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism stretches clear back to Ogden’s Christology and indeed the origin of this Representative Christology in his norm of appropriateness and overemphasis of the criterion of credibility, as will be argued, is both confusing and at the same time a testament to the depth and complexity of Ogden’s systematic theology. If nothing else, Ogden’s theology is clear, logical, and systematic, so that a critique of his theology must necessarily reach down, metaphorically speaking, to the very foundations upon which he is building. This has been attempted primarily through an evaluation of Ogden’s approach to doing theology and through the employment of his own criteria in evaluation of both the traditional theologies of religious pluralism and now of his own theology of religious pluralism. However, employment of these criteria means reaching well beyond Ogden’s identification of the norm of appropriateness as the apostolic witness to the significance of Jesus the Christ and striving to get behind the meaning of these terms. Indeed, as has become hopefully clear and will be elaborated on more completely later in the paper, these terms are very meaningful, while at the same time being mostly revisionary. The argument for how these terms are revisionary and how the implications of these revisions result in an inadequate Christian theology of religious pluralism follows.

Perhaps the first thing to notice about Ogden’s argument for a new norm of appropriateness as located in the Jesus-kerygma is that many of his conclusions about the necessity of relocating the norm of authority are similar, superficially at least, to the

\(^9\) This fundamental point bears some elaboration and will receive it later in the paper. For now, though, I think that it is necessary to point out Ogden’s disagreement with most of traditional Christianity here, especially as indicated, for Ogden at least, in his disagreement with Bultmann in denying the logical distinction that Bultmann makes between ‘possibility in principle’ and ‘possibility in fact.’ (see John Young Fenton. “The Post-liberal theology of Christ Without Myth.” *Journal of Religion* 53 (1963): 93-104.) This distinction is made by Bultmann, apparently, in order to make an argument for the possibility of authentic existence as constituted by the salvation of Jesus the Christ. Ogden denies the distinction in order to make the argument that authentic existence is always a ‘possibility in fact’ and never dependent on the ‘mythological’ work of Jesus the Christ.
presuppositions and justifications of the quest for the historical Jesus. It seems to be the case that the argument has existed for quite some time that while it may be true that the Bible says such and such, it is not obviously true that this actually reflects what Jesus thought, or even actually taught and did. Fundamentally, the catalyst for making such an argument, usually at least, is that the person finds the content of the Bible unsatisfying or incredible but does not want to dismiss the significance of Jesus the Christ. Whether this actually constitutes the motivation of Ogden or not lies in our conclusions about the extent to which Ogden succeeds in balancing the criteria of appropriateness and credibility. As we investigate Ogden’s understanding of the formal norm of apostolic witness, it should become quite clear that what is couched in terms of the historical method and a striving after the most appropriate reading of the Christian New Testament is actually an hermeneutic driven by an a priori philosophical approach that leads to an understanding of Jesus the Christ as representative of the possibility of an authentic relationship with God, rather than constitutive of this possibility.

First and foremost, it should be pointed out that Ogden considers the quest for the historical Jesus, as understood as Jesus’ kergyma in the terminology of Marxsen, to not only be impossible but to also be irrelevant to the quest for the most original apostolic witness, that is the most original people’s understanding of the teachings of Jesus.64 Ogden’s point here is very important and successfully attempts to move historical-critical examination of the New Testament text back in the right direction. His argument in this context has brought sharp disagreement from scholars sympathetic with the quest for the historical Jesus. Among these, John Hick criticizes Ogden’s argument for the primacy of apostolic witness by concentrating on what appears to be Ogden’s need to legitimize the authority of apostolic witness by arguing that it is based on Jesus authorizing the witness.65 In this review article of Ogden’s Point of Christology, Hick largely seems to misunderstand Ogden, especially the basic fact that Ogden’s

apostolic witness gains its authority simply by virtue of being the earliest strata of witness to Jesus as being of decisive significance, and the furthest we can go back in our historical examination of the New Testament.

But, problematically, in claiming that it is irrelevant to search for the historical Jesus or Jesus’ kerygma, Ogden is not only disagreeing with many contemporary historical-critical textual approaches to the New Testament, such as that represented by Hick, he is disagreeing with the one that he is relying upon the most, i.e. Marxsen. In his essay "Fundamentum Fidei", Ogden criticizes Marxsen’s apparent confusion of the Jesus-kerygma with Jesus’ kerygma and attempts to point Marxsen towards the more important reconstruction of the Jesus-kerygma. However, Marxsen apparently tends to feel that the possibility of reconstructing the Jesus-kerygma makes it also possible to reconstruct Jesus’ kerygma, which he sees as fundamentally more authoritative than the earliest witness to Jesus.

Further, it is quite revealing that while Ogden criticizes the quest for the historical Jesus and in a very real sense bites the historical critic’s hand that is feeding his systematic, Christian theology through arguing that Marxsen’s most authoritative reconstruction is misdirected, he also very much glosses over the fact that all of his conclusions regarding the criterion of appropriateness as located in what he considers to be the earliest strata of apostolic witness, i.e. the Jesus-kerygma, are based on the reconstruction and redaction of historical critics whose primary purpose is getting at the historical Jesus. The reconstruction of what Gerard Loughlin calls the historiographical story of the Jesus-kerygma is only approached by historical critics, including Marxsen, who are interested in getting at Jesus’ kerygma. According to Loughlin the historiographical story is

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that type of story which, through a responsible use of critical methods, attempts to get behind the screen of historical data – the documents and artifacts of the past – so as to give us a straightforward ‘literal’ account of the events narrated. Such a story is held to be true; or better, to refer accurately to the past in so far as the methods used in its construction are considered legitimate and trustworthy.\textsuperscript{67}

Without even going into the complexity and plurality of techniques aimed at attempting to make such a reconstruction based on the evaluation of a text that has existed for over 1500 years and in so doing somehow managing to actually understand what was going on in the life and history about whom the story is being written, which in and of itself seems like a highly dubious task motivated by what must be some kind of disapproval or dissatisfaction with what the text itself actually says about the individual, the task set by Ogden for the reconstruction of this Jesus-kerygma is exactly, methodologically, the same task as the reconstruction of Jesus’ kerygma, which, again according to Loughlin, Ogden considers will be easy, when in actuality it will be almost the exact same task as the search for the historical Jesus, of which Ogden is so critical.

Indeed, Ogden is only proposing to replace one sort of historiographical story by another. Instead of going in quest of the historical Jesus we are asked to set off in pursuit of the ‘earliest Christian witness.’\textsuperscript{68}

While it is certainly true that Ogden’s fundamental argument for the authoritative priority of the earliest strata of apostolic witness is not dependent on the methodological problems of actually accessing this Jesus-kerygma, using this earliest witness as the measure for the criterion of appropriateness in writing a systematic, Christian theology does. And while it is equally true that Ogden’s argument for the unimportance of the authority of Jesus’ own kerygma

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is not based on the difficulties of methodologically reconstructing this kerygma but rather are based on a criticism of the value of knowing this kerygma, his conclusions about measuring Christian appropriateness against the Jesus-kerygma absolutely depend on a reliable reconstruction of this apostolic witness, and it is not at all clear that this is even possible. Certainly, argues Loughlin, Ogden’s own reference to the reconstruction in the *Point of Christology* as “the early followers of Jesus” proclaiming him to be the decisive re-presentation of “the gift and demand of God’s undoubted love” is far too simplistic. Or as Loughlin puts it, “[w]e do not have to be competent New Testament historians in order to be a little worried by such an easy account.”

Before continuing to discuss the manifold problems of the reconstruction of the Jesus-kerygma, a reconstruction which, it must be stressed again and again, is absolutely necessary for Ogden’s representative Christology to be appropriate to the Christian Scriptures, the appropriateness of which is, in turn, absolutely necessary for Ogden’s Christian theology of religious pluralism to be adequate to his own criteria for an adequate theology, something must be said about the fundamentally flawed theologically orthodox problems that seem to attach themselves to the norm of the Jesus-kerygma as argued by Ogden. As will be argued in more detail later, Ogden’s radical monotheism forces him into an understanding of the Christian Scriptures which has no room for a doctrine of revelation through any kind of inspiration of God, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, as understood in traditional, orthodox Christianity. Or, as Gavin D’Costa puts it in a different context, a context which will be referred to and explained in more detail later in this paper, Ogden “constantly divorces ‘God’ from Christ, not taking seriously…the required Christological and Pneumatological basis for his talk

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70 Loughlin 328.
of God.” For all its shortcomings, Charles R. Blaisdell’s article, “The Christian Norm: In Response to Williamson and Ogden,” does make the important point that

[W]ithout some kind of Logos of Deus-Homo Christology to function as the norm for the theologian, the ‘earliest strand of Christian witness’ remains – for and from our epistemic situation – always in principle corrigible, always standing on the edge of the latest archaeological dig to find the earliest norm.

Ultimately, these problems with Ogden’s definition of the norm of Christianity as the earliest strata of apostolic witness, and therefore the most appropriate reference for an adequate theology, become most obvious in the actual methodology and content of the attempted reconstruction of the Jesus-kerygma. Perhaps Ogden’s most basic assumption, according to Jeffrey Carlson, is that earlier necessarily takes precedence in terms of appropriateness. According to Carlson, history bears a tremendous amount of witness to the fact that the first and earliest impression of an idea or teaching is often the wrong and most simplistic understanding and that it is not until later that these ideas or teachings are truly appreciated for their depth. While this may or may not be the case for the proper understanding of the work and teachings of Jesus, it does seem to be important that we bear in mind the possibility that the earliest is not always the best. Bearing this in mind becomes especially important as it becomes clearer and clearer that reconstruction of this earliest witness is particularly problematic.

According to Carlson, Ogden’s fundamental approach to the New Testament, that earlier is better and that getting at this earliest witness can only be done through reconstruction, is one

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of mistrust, motivated, seemingly, by a desire to get at the essence of the New Testament, which is something different from and wrongly interpreted by the rest of the New Testament. Carlson’s principle argument for his understanding of Ogden’s approach to the New Testament comes from Norman Perrin’s definition of the methodological approach to reconstruction, which Carlson argues is normative for Ogden’s appropriation of Marxsen, despite dealing with the search for the historical Jesus, a point which has already been argued extensively in this paper. According to Perrin,

> the earliest form of a saying we can reach may be regarded as authentic if it can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases both of ancient Judaism, and of the early Church, and this will particularly be the case where Christian tradition orient towards Judaism can be shown to have modified the saying away from its original emphasis.

This means that that which Ogden considers to be a reconstruction of the first response to the Jesus-kerygma, as appropriated through Marxsen, is based on the criterion of dissimilarity. Thus, argues Carlson,

> What Ogden accepts as the norm of Christian theological reflection is...precisely that which is other than the Christian tradition. Thus the rather incredible implication of the logic of Ogden’s approach: only that which runs contrary to the Christian tradition is appropriately Christian!

This appropriated, reconstruction methodology of dissimilarity seems particularly problematic for the reliance of the adequacy of Ogden’s systematic, Christian theology on the reconstruction of the earliest strata of witness to Jesus, or the Jesus-kerygma.

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74 Carlson 21.
75 Carlson 21.
77 Carlson 22.
Beyond these methodological problems dealing with the reconstruction of the Jesus-kerygma, it becomes quite clear that the reconstruction itself is fraught with textual difficulties. That there is a plurality of Christ’s or Christologies in the New Testament itself seems to be fairly well argued by historical critics, and somewhat obvious from a reading that is anything other than rudimentary. From the Pauline Christology of the 2nd Adam to the Spirit Christology of the Gospel of Mark\textsuperscript{78} to many places intellectually and paradoxically in between, the New Testament itself bears the historical evidence that there was a plurality of understandings of the teachings and work of Jesus and the consequent giving of the title Christ. It is, however, far from obvious that the employment of the tools of historical criticism can result in an accurate reconstruction of these individual responses to Jesus, especially given their criterion of dissimilarity. Perhaps what is even more problematic, given Ogden’s dependence on not only a reconstruction of a response to the teachings and work of Jesus but also a dependence on the earliest response to the teachings and work of Jesus, is an historically accurate identification of the first witness to Jesus or the first Jesus-kerygma.

More than anything else, Marxsen’s confidence in the possibility of the reconstruction of the historical Jesus indicates his confidence in the reliability of his reconstruction of the Jesus-kerygma. While admitting that there were multiple responses to the teachings of Jesus as clearly portrayed in the Synoptic gospels, Marxsen’s reconstruction, as appropriated by Ogden, depends on the existence of only two communities: that community which responded to the teachings of Jesus prior to Easter -- the Jesus-kerygma, and that community which responded to the teachings of Jesus after Easter -- the Christ-kerygma. According to Marxsen, “the explanation closest to hand (and plainly demanded by the fundamental insights of form criticism) remains that of supposing that there were two early communities.”\textsuperscript{79}

However, it must be necessary for us to resist the temptation to oversimplify the issues at hand. It is easy to imagine something of the complexity of the textual situation that is faced by textual critics. What we have is a series of books canonized by the Christian Church sometime around the latter part of the 2nd century CE. Within three of these books, we have what are typically referred to as the synoptic gospels, which are clearly an expression of the Jesus-Christ kerygma, in Marxsen’s terms, and also clearly something of a conflation of the Jesus-kerygma and the Christ-kerygma. It seems obvious that there are two schools of thought within the synoptics based on the terminology alone, so it seems that one of the tasks of form criticism or any other literary critical form is to separate the two and identify or reconstruct them, first as the Jesus-kerygma and second as the Christ-kerygma.

But what of the historical situation of the time of Jesus as we can probably imagine it? There was a man around 30 CE who traveled throughout Israel, restricting himself mostly to the region of Galilee, teaching messages that seemed both traditional and non-traditional, both strange but somehow authoritative at the same time, and performing miracles of healing and raising from the dead. Despite the issues of the credibility and of what were actually the most original teachings of Jesus, we can easily assume that different people in different parts of the country and region responded to Jesus in different ways. It seems abundantly clear, both textually and credibly, that not all who heard Jesus responded to his teachings positively and thus accepted his authority as a teacher. But even among the positive responses alone, the different responses could have ranged from a simple recognition of some of the insights of the teachings of Jesus to a complete transformation of the understanding of the Hebrew Bible in light of the things that Jesus taught. Regardless of the nature of the response, it is easy to imagine and validate that there were multiple responses, not only to the teachings of Jesus, but also to the understanding of Jesus as the Christ, both before and after the events of Easter.80

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Automatically, this presents a problem toward reconstruction, specifically toward a reconstruction of both the Jesus-kerygma and the Christ-kerygma based on a simplified understanding of the formations of communities in response to the teachings of Jesus. Any reconstruction of the Jesus-kerygma has to be not only the reconstruction of the conflation of responses to Jesus as found in the synoptics. It also has to be a reconstruction of the most original, communal response to Jesus, including recognition of both the differences and similarities and how they related to the multiple, communal responses to Jesus before Easter and to Jesus as the Christ after the Easter event. Indeed, even the identification of the "Easter event as the point of disjunction between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christology of the Church" is a subjective point of view without a "historically firm foundation." 81

Given all of this, it is possible to level at least a basic criticism at Marxsen and his attempt at reconstruction of oversimplification and foundational subjectivity. Given such oversimplification and foundation subjectivity in Marxsen’s reconstruction of the Jesus-kerygma, Ogden’s appropriation of Marxsen’s reconstruction as the earliest strata of apostolic witness and thus authoritative for an appropriate understanding of the Christian New Testament becomes especially troublesome.

The philosophical problem of relying upon a norm of appropriateness that is inherently corrigible and relative, the methodological problems of appropriating the textual criticism of an author ultimately arguing for a different foundational authority, assuming that the earliest understanding is the best understanding, and being dependent on the criteria of dissimilarity necessary for making textual reconstructions, together with the practical and historical problems of actually identifying the earliest witness and then reconstructing this earliest witness given the complexity of the New Testament situation, all constitute an argument against Ogden’s dependence on the formal norm of apostolicity as understood as the earliest witness to the teachings and work of Jesus, or the Jesus-kerygma, and for the inappropriateness of this norm.

81 Schillebeeckx 86.
Thus it should be clear that in Ogden's representative Christology, there is no constitutive Christ, as Christ has been appropriately understood within the Christian tradition. Identification of Jesus as the Christ, in Ogden, rests solely on the significance that Jesus had in pointing to the ubiquitous presence of the redemption of God. As such, Jesus simply represents the possibility of humanity being reconciled with God through the redemptive grace of God; Jesus in no way constitutes the possibility of redemption. Hence, we get the terminology of representative Christology and constitutive Christology.\textsuperscript{82} The use of the terminology of Christology here, without the explicit identification of it as revisionary, constitutes something of dishonesty, although I hesitate to accuse Ogden himself of dishonesty, and at the very least can be extremely misleading. If what you mean by Jesus Christ is that Jesus was an individual who simply represented the possibility of humanity being reconciled with God, i.e. saved, a possibility that existed prior to Jesus and was only re-presented by Jesus, which gives him his significance and if what is traditionally understood by Jesus Christ is that Jesus constituted the possibility of reconciliation with God, i.e. salvation, through the death on the cross and the resurrection of the Son of God, you obviously are not talking about the same Jesus Christ. Indeed, given the assumption of the importance of terminology, there seems to be little to no reason to continue to use the term Christ in the theology of Ogden at all. If there is not a constitutive Christology present in the Jesus-kerygma, as Ogden argues, and the Jesus-kerygma is the most original and appropriate formally normative witness, talk of a Christ is irrelevant.

And yet, Ogden uses the terminology of Jesus as the Christ throughout his systematic theology. This revisionary Christology represents a fundamental criticism of the most basic tenets of traditional Christianity, as historically defined by the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon, but it does so under the guise of being appropriate to Christianity. Clearly, this reconceptualization of Christology ends up sacrificing the criteria of appropriateness in favor of the criteria of credibility when Ogden argues against a constitutive Christology and for a

\textsuperscript{82} Schubert M. Ogden. \textit{Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?} p.84.
representative Christology. More than anything else, though, the argument against Ogden’s
dependence on his appropriation of Marxsen and consequent argument for the appropriateness
of a representative Christology suggests the inherent subjectivity or overemphasis on the
criterion of credibility in Ogden’s approach to doing systematic theology.

**Overemphasis of the Criterion of Credibility**

This overemphasis of the criterion of credibility becomes even clearer in recognizing that
even granting the valid reconceptualization of both apostolicity and Christology in Ogden’s
appropriation of Marxsen and use of the norm of the Jesus-kerygma as the norm for the
criterion of appropriateness, it remains a re-conceptualization. Making the Jesus-kerygma the
norm of appropriateness for the Christian religion because it supposedly represents the most
original response to Jesus categorically denies the obvious historical fact that the Christian
religion is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus as the Christ and that apostolicity is only
to be understood as applicable to those who responded to the teachings of Jesus by assigning
him the title Christ.

Ogden emphasizes the controversial nature of understanding apostolicity and recounts
the traditional disagreements among Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox.\(^83\) However,what Ogden does not mention is that even within these orthodox, denominational differences,
apostolicity retains the fundamental Christian referent of being a testament to Jesus as the
Christ. Thus, according to Langford, "it is neither logically nor historically persuasive to locate
such [apostolic] authority singularly in the earliest Jesus-Kerygma."\(^84\) Rather, appeals to the
apostolic witness must include something of what was meant by apostolicity by the traditional
conceptions of the Christian Church.

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Unless, however, what is meant by apostolicity is intended to be part of a revisionary understanding of Christianity, which Ogden readily admits is a significant component of his systematic theology. But, as Ogden makes abundantly clear, this should only be done in subjection to the norm of appropriateness or the formally normative witness. But how can a revised conception of apostolicity, as not including the traditional referent of the affirmation of Jesus as the Christ but only the recognition of the earliest witnesses to the teaching and work of Jesus; how can such a conception of apostolicity serve as the norm of appropriateness if the conception is itself revisionary when revisionary theology can only be done from the standpoint of the criterion of credibility, not the criterion of appropriateness? When norms of appropriateness are couched in terms of revisionary conceptualizations, obviously the discussion of appropriateness is being subsumed by the issues of credibility.

It would be easy to construe an argument for Ogden’s overemphasis of the criterion of credibility over and against that of appropriateness as an argument questioning Ogden’s motivations for identifying the norm of appropriateness as the earliest strata of witness to Jesus as of decisive significance in re-presenting the possibility of having an authentic relationship with God, given that such a norm is beset with a number of fundamental and ultimately disastrous problems, as already argued. However, aside from the inappropriateness of questioning Ogden’s motivations, there is enough evidence in both Ogden’s fundamental approach to doing theology and in his revisionary use of the traditional Christian terminology to implicate his theology of religious pluralism as being inadequate not only because of its inappropriate norm but also because of its overemphasis of the criterion of credibility.

As already argued, Ogden’s approach to doing theology through the three phases outlined so clearly in Doing Theology Today fundamentally overemphasizes the criterion of credibility. Although it is fairly clear from Ogden’s affirmation of the possibility of discerning truth through metaphysics that he maintains some association with the correspondence theory

of truth, his hermeneutical approach to texts necessitates an a priori philosophical interpretation. While Ogden does continue to affirm that some readings of texts are more accurate than others, he is very insistent on the fact that there is no argument to be made for the right reading of a text, “at best, it will be but one interpretation.”

As an argument for the overemphasis of the criterion of credibility in the doing of theology, Ogden’s hermeneutical approach, as the second of the three phases, is without question the phase that tips the scales between the criteria of appropriateness and credibility. This, however, really says nothing about whether Ogden is right or not. In fact, it does seem to be the case that he has set his understanding of theology up in such a way as to fairly encompass most theological approaches. The problem lies in Ogden’s failure to adequately balance the hermeneutical approach itself with the criteria of both appropriateness and credibility. In Ogden’s approach, the philosophical phase together with the philosophical approach to hermeneutics defines the credibility of the hermeneutic, which in turn is employed to interpret the formal norm from the historical phase of doing theology. In many ways, this entire paper constitutes an argument for the fact that this is what Ogden is truly doing, which remains consistent with what he argues should be done. And yet, in this very approach lies the problem. Ogden’s actual doing of theology reorders the three phases so that the philosophical phase precedes the hermeneutical phase which in turn precedes the historical phase.

In truth, that is in order to remain both appropriate and credible, the hermeneutical phase must be balanced by the credibility of the philosophical approach together with the appropriateness of the philosophical approach. Such a balance of the criteria of appropriateness and credibility within the hermeneutical phase would mean that the approach as a whole would more adequately balance these same criteria. As I have suggested above in reference to Wolterstorff, the philosophical approach to interpretations of texts when balanced with reference to the appropriateness of approaching the texts, especially the Christian texts, will

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86 Schubert M. Ogden. Doing Theology Today. p. 17
necessarily take into account the historical approach to the texts, which will mean that an adequate, both appropriate and credible, approach to the Christian Scriptures must take into consideration that it is considered to be the word of God. Making this argument further, as must be done, would detract from the substance of this paper and therefore should be left at the conclusion that an adequate hermeneutic would look very different from Ogden’s hermeneutical approach.

That Ogden’s hermeneutical approach is indeed defined by the philosophical approach, both of which in turn influence his historical approach becomes very clear as we begin to successfully reach beyond the terminology of the norm of appropriateness as the earliest strata of apostolic witness to the significance of Jesus the Christ as a re-presentation of the possibility of having an adequate relationship with God. Reaching beyond this terminology clearly indicates Ogden’s revisionary agenda, despite being couched in traditional terms, such that Ogden’s a priori radical, monotheistic philosophy defines his historical understanding of Jesus the Christ as merely representative of the possibility of an authentic relationship with God and not constitutive of this possibility.

The most revealing and substantial arguments for this overemphasis of the criterion of credibility as revealed in Ogden’s revisionary agenda are to be found, firstly, in his disavowal of Bultmann’s logical distinction between ‘possibility in principle’ and ‘possibility in fact’ and, secondly, in a paper comparing and contrasting his and Frederick Denison Maurice’s theology, revealingly entitled “The Reformation that We Want.” 87 These two points, as will be argued, fundamentally define Ogden’s approach to Christian theology, as is most obvious in his revisionary use of traditional, Christian concepts and terms such as that of Revelation, Apostolic witness, an authentic relationship with God, and the title of Christ as applied to Jesus, both in terms of Incarnation and Resurrection, and yet depend entirely upon philosophical arguments.

Ogden's first major publication in the field of theology was a revised version of his doctoral dissertation, entitled *Christ Without Myth: A Study Based on the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*. As might be imagined in referencing someone's earliest work, there is some danger in making arguments about the adequacy of a theology based on its earliest exposition. But in this particular case, it is quite clear that Ogden maintains much of what he argues regarding the logical difference between 'possibility in principle' and 'possibility in fact.' Ogden himself makes the statement in an article written 17 years later, in 1978, "that there is little in *Christ Without Myth* that I do not still claim as my own." In his very clear but complex explanation of the existential theology of Bultmann, especially regarding his demythologizing agenda, Ogden argues that Bultmann is inconsistent by maintaining a mythological understanding of Jesus the Christ. Without going into too much detail, it seems to be the case that the fundamental, mythological error that Bultmann is committing, according to Ogden, is maintaining that Jesus the Christ constitutes the 'possibility in fact' of humanity having an authentic relationship with God, which, of course, means that the defining norm of the relationship of humanity with God is only one of 'possibility in principle.' For Bultmann, and indeed for most of traditional Christianity, maintaining the logical distinction, in regard to the possibility of an authentic relationship with God, of 'possibility in principle' and 'possibility in fact', at least as expressed by Bultmann, has been requisite in defining the need for a constitutive Christ.

However, it is not as important to side with Bultmann or Ogden on this particular issue as it is to realize that Ogden's objection is fundamentally philosophical in nature and seemingly has nothing to do with what the actual texts, in the form of the Christian Scriptures, have to say. Taken together with the agenda that Ogden identifies as being an important part in the doing of

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89 Schubert M. Ogden. "An Outline Still to Be Filled Out." *The Christian Century* 95 (1978): 538-539. He even makes the following offhand comment which certainly reveals something about his maintenance of his theology as a whole for a very long time: "It has cost me enough hard work to get the few theological insights I've got that I'm not about give any of them up unless there's nothing else to be done!" p. 538
his theology in evaluating Bultmann, namely his "concern to overcome the kind of exclusivistic christocentrism that...flawed even Bultmann's theology,"\(^91\) it becomes quite clear that Ogden's early objection to a constitutive Christology is purely philosophical in nature.

This philosophical objection to a constitutive Christology is further argued for in another of Ogden's early writings, "The Reformation that We Want." In this article, whether you know anything about Maurice and his theology or not, it becomes quite clear through Ogden's discussion that he holds a traditional, constitutive Christology so that "the sacrifice of Christ [has] alone made atonement between God and mankind."\(^92\) Very similarly, Maurice seems to hold fairly traditional views on the Incarnation and its significance for humanity, as well as Revelation and its authority and the implications that follow from this regarding his view of Apostolic witness. After allowing this quite forthrightly, Ogden proceeds to use Maurice's traditional terminology of revelation and incarnation to redefine them in light of his own theology:

Although it is often obscured in theological discussions, there is an important difference between affirming something to be necessary to the full and adequate *revelation* of our existence and affirming the necessity of that same thing for the very *constitution* of our existence in its authentic possibility.\(^93\)

As Ogden moves towards a reconceptualization of the meaning of revelation he justifies it through arguing that it is superficially similar to the theological program of which Maurice himself would have been in favor despite the stupendously shocking fact that revelation, incarnation, and Christ all take on the very opposite meaning that they held in Maurice's

\(^92\) Qtd. in Schubert M. Ogden. "The Reformation that We Want." p. 266.  
\(^93\) Ogden 267.
traditional theology. The result of Ogden's reconceptualization of revelation and incarnation is

that while

one may affirm...both man's need for revelation and the necessity of a real incarnation as alone
meeting his need, without in any way implying that any event of revelation-incarnation is itself
constitutive of our authentic existence. For one is always free also to affirm that our real
possibility of existing authentically in faith and love belongs to our very constitution as human
beings and that the whole end of any incarnation is to reveal that this is so.94

While one may be free to affirm this, that does not in any credible way suggest that it is or make
it true. And given the degree and the extent to which this understanding of revelation and
incarnation differs from that of Maurice's, it becomes quite dubious that Ogden should even be
making the comparison; or, if he persists in making this comparison, it seems that Ogden should
choose a different kind of terminology given the radical transformation of meaning that he is
trying to accomplish.

This becomes even more problematic when, after redefining Maurice's concepts of
revelation and incarnation, Ogden goes on to argue for a link between his and Maurice's
Christology, a link which is at least as entirely unsubstantiated and untrue as the link between a
representative Christology and a constitutive Christology given the obvious fact that the two are
at opposite ends of the Christological spectrum. Then, in what probably constitutes one of the
most fundamentally revealing quotes regarding Ogden's overemphasis of the criteria of
credibility, at least in this specific context, Ogden chalks up the dramatic differences between his
and Maurice's theology in terms of the time periods in which they were being written, so that
Ogden's understanding is better given the current times:

94 Ogden 267.
Whatever else our age may still be willing to accept from us, surely it will no longer hear of a Christianity that is little more than a tribal religion with universal pretensions. Even a sophisticated theology reflecting exclusivistic claims has now lost all hold on credibility.  

Add to all of this long and protracted argument for Ogden’s fundamental overemphasis of the criterion of credibility through locating the priority of his theological approach in the Philosophical phase that Christ Without Myth (1961) and “The Reformation that We Want” (1972) both precede the earliest work in which Ogden argues for the priority of the Jesus-kerygma as the norm of apostolic witness, as appropriated from Marxsen, i.e. “The Authority of Scripture for Theology” (1976) and it becomes quite clear that Ogden’s Christian theology of religious pluralism is inadequate not only because of its inappropriate Christology but also because of its fundamental overemphasis of the criteria of credibility.

From the traditional viewpoint of Christianity, the resurrection changes everything. Whether the most original components of the synoptics represent an understanding of Jesus as the Christ or do not, the fact that Jesus actualizes an authentic and perfect relationship with God, dies on the cross, and is resurrected three days later changes forever the way that Jesus is to be understood and clearly becomes the most important formally normative witness. You would expect the apostles to look back at their own experiences as disciples of Jesus or at the oral accounts of the experiences of other disciples of Jesus and see in them the experience of the teachings of the Christ.

It is not enough, as Ogden argues, for Jesus to be of decisive significance as a unique representation of the possibility for humans to have an authentic relationship with God. This is not Christology, as understood and defined by the witness of the apostle Paul and the other New Testament writing as they have been appropriated in traditional Christianity, especially as

95 Ogden 268.
formulated in the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds. Even beyond being inappropriate to the Christian tradition, it hardly seems credible to assign an understanding of Jesus as the representative of the possibility of humanity being reconciled with God to the same apostles that later found such tremendous significance in the Easter event and thus assigned to Jesus the title of Christ, if, indeed, they had not already done so. What need is there for a Christ if Jesus has re-presented the possibility of humanity being reconciled with God through both his teachings and his life and presumably passed this knowledge along to his closest disciples? It seems that any self-respectable disciple would have actualized the possibility of having an authentic relationship with God, assuming that this is actually possible without a Christ, and would only think of Jesus in terms of admiration and thankfulness. It would never have been necessary to construe the relationship of humanity to Jesus as the relationship of humanity to its Christ.

Indeed, the issue of Christology is only important in dealing with the problem of religious pluralism to the extent that the theology of religious pluralism is dependent on an understanding of the significance of Christ. To this extent, the issue of Christology is only important to understanding Ogden’s Christian theology of religious pluralism because his position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism is dependent on a representative Christology. The dependency of his position on a representative Christology stems directly from Ogden’s understanding of the authority of Christian Scripture as limited to the criterion of appropriateness as found in the reconstruction of the Jesus-kerygma, which is driven by an overemphasis of the criterion of credibility. So that the very thing that stimulates the majority of Christians to even think about “the salvation of religious aliens” and begin to deal with the problem of religious pluralism, namely that Jesus the Christ constitutes the possibility of the salvation of humanity, is the very thing that Ogden denies in his systematic theology of religious pluralism and, indeed, absolutely depends upon for the position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism.

Ultimately, in Ogden's Christology, we find a reconceptualization that seems to be more of a philosophical argument dealing with credibility than a dogmatic seeking after appropriateness to the Christian Scriptures, so that we can affirm, in more than one sense what Ogden himself admits regarding his argument for a representative Christology in his first book, *Christ Without Myth*, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

> It may appear that the argument we have sought to develop...is nothing more than a somewhat ingenious tour de force in which we have made a virtue of necessity by pretending to discover some hidden and, as it were, pre-established harmony between the demands of the evangelium aeternum and the exigencies of our particular situation. This is, of course, a possible, and perhaps finally, even the only possible way to evaluate our argument.\(^{97}\)

Indeed the issue of credibility seems to be emphasized to such an extent in the doing of theology that Ogden's idea of appropriateness results in a Christology without Christ. Ogden's insistence on a representative Christology pushes him back to an appeal to Marxsen's Jesus- kerygma, as being the most original apostolic witness and therefore the most suitable norm of appropriateness for Christianity despite the facts that the Jesus- kerygma never includes an understanding of the Christ and that the reconstruction of the Jesus-kerygma is tenuous at best and subjective at worst, taken together with a whole host of other problems, as already argued. Such problems with Ogden's appeal to a representative Christology result in a denial of what is appropriately Christian and seem to indicate Ogden's own failure to deal distinctly with the issues of appropriateness and credibility. The result of Ogden's inadequate Christology, i.e. a Christology that is both inappropriate (as has been argued extensively) and incredible, is an inadequate Christian theology of religious pluralism.

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That Christ’s incarnation occurred improbably, ridiculously, at such-and-such a time, into such-and-such a place, is referred to – with great sincerity even among believers – as the ‘scandal of particularity.’ Well, the ‘scandal of particularity’ is the only world that I, in particular, know. We’re all up to our necks in this particular scandal.\textsuperscript{98}

The scandal of inparticularity committed by Ogden in his Christian theology of religious pluralism falls under the aegis of two major problems: one, the failure to meet his own criterion of appropriateness in assigning to Jesus the title of a representative Christ, and two, the failure to balance the criteria of appropriateness and credibility through overemphasizing the criterion of credibility in the revisionary nature of his theology. However, it is not at all clear that this failure to construct an adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism through the overemphasis of the criterion of credibility means that the approach advocated by Ogden in the doing of theology is therefore to be dismissed. Indeed, the criteria of appropriateness and credibility together with a recognition of the specificity of doing Christian, systematic theology and the outline of the three phases of doing this theology all together constitute a valid and extremely useful approach.

Given that Ogden’s fundamental flaw in overemphasizing the criterion of credibility stems from his failure to balance the hermeneutical phase with the historical and philosophical phases, employing this same approach to attempt to construct an adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism allows us to learn from Ogden’s mistakes. Balancing the hermeneutical

phase with the historical and philosophical phases accomplishes an adequate balancing of the
criteria of both appropriateness and credibility.

The extraordinary difficulty of accomplishing this balancing act in the actual process of
constructing a Christian theology of religious pluralism can not be overemphasized. In fact, the
traditional options, as well as Ogden's logically accurate option in the debate regarding religious
pluralism, Pluralistic-Inclusivism, all fail to strike this balance. In this regard, Hick's and
Barth's positions still occupy opposite ends of the spectrum, so that whereas the former clearly
overemphasizes the criterion of credibility to the absolute detriment of anything even
resembling appropriateness, the latter is constantly occupied with arguing that there is no such
thing as credibility and that all truth comes through reference to the Christian Scriptures.
Interestingly, both these positions deny the role of metaphysics of having anything to do with
the construction of a Christian theology of religious pluralism, and thus categorically dismiss a
huge branch of consideration that would rightly fall under the rubric of credibility.

Within this spectrum as formed by the extremes of Hick's Pluralism and Barth's
Exclusivism, Rahner's position of Inclusivism occupies a position just right of center, closer to
Barth's position than Hick's, primarily through the maintenance of its constitutive Christology
and its fundamental insistence on the higher truth of the Christian scriptures. And Ogden's
Pluralistic-Inclusivism occupies a position just left of center, closer to Hick's position than either
of Rahner's or Barth's. This, hopefully, has already been shown in the main body of the paper,
but even if it hasn't, Ogden himself clearly accepts this categorization of his position.99 To some
extent, although admittedly not to a very great one and certainly less than the extent to which
the argument made thus far is convincing, Ogden's acknowledgement of the location of his
position closer to Hick's than to Rahner's and Barth's is revealing in terms of the degree to which
he has managed to balance the criteria of appropriateness and credibility. Thus, applying the
template of the criteria of appropriateness and credibility to the spectrum of Christian

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99 Ogden makes this very point himself in Is There One True Religion or Are There Many? p.x (Preface)
theological positions of religious pluralism, it becomes quite clear that while Barth’s and Rahner's positions tend to overemphasize the criterion of appropriateness, as Ogden himself argues, Hick's and Ogden's positions overemphasize the criterion of credibility. A similar spectrum is constructed by Gabriel Fackre in his article "Scandals of Particularity and Universality", an exposition of the traditional options together with some of the more nuanced positions toward the end of advocating his own position of Universal Particularity. This article will be discussed in more detail below.

There are two significant things to notice about the difficulty of balancing the criteria of appropriateness and credibility and the traditional approaches together with Ogden’s Pluralistic-Inclusivism as they have already been explained. Given the specificity of designating these theologies of religious pluralism as Christian inherently means that their most fundamental referent is Jesus the Christ and their particular Christology. While this observation is obviously not problematic for the three positions of Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralistic-Inclusivism, Hick, while certainly identifying himself as a Christian, usually intimates that his theology reaches far beyond the boundaries of any particular religion. While this may or may not be true regarding Hick’s theology, and I am quite convinced that it is not true, construing this theology as at all applicable to Christianity absolutely requires Hick to rework the traditional understanding of Jesus the Christ.

This means, essentially, that designating these as Christian theologies of religious pluralism necessitates an evaluation of their view of Jesus the Christ, as should be obvious from my evaluation of Ogden's position. Therefore, the template of Christology fits quite perfectly over the spectrum already discussed in terms of balancing the criteria of appropriateness and credibility. The result, as well can be imagined, is that those theologies which have tended to

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102 See the above citation for the Christology of both John Hick and Paul Knitter. Also see reference to Hick’s argument for the necessity of the search for the historical Jesus in criticizing Ogden’s The Point of Christology.
overemphasize the criterion of appropriateness have also depended more extensively on the foundational argument for a constitutive Christology. This dependence has reached such extremes in the theology of Barth that it sometimes becomes questionable as to whether Barth is exaggerating the function and role of Christ at the expense of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. As it turns out in most cases, he is not, but the point remains that his Christian theology of religious pluralism depends very heavily on a constitutive Christ. The very opposite can be said about the position of Hick such that his Christology is so entirely representative that any reference to Jesus as the Christ seems entirely disingenuous.

The second significant thing to realize in looking at this spectrum is that Ogden's conscientious rejection of Kant's critiques of metaphysics makes his position somewhat unique among the traditional options to the extent that it reintroduces the possibility of some kind of philosophical authority in dealing with this issue. It is at this point, though, that the spectrum breaks down somewhat since Hick is as far from accepting the validity of the authority of metaphysics as is Barth. In this sense, while Ogden considers metaphysics an important component of the criterion of credibility, Hick considers metaphysics, via Kant, to be entirely incredible while at the same time using credibility of a different sort, primarily that of religious experience, as the sole criteria for the truth of religion.

The conscientious rejection of Kant and the employment of metaphysics toward the end of using it as an authority within the criterion of credibility is an insight that should be appropriated from Ogden in any attempt at constructing an adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism given the fundamental necessity of balancing the criteria of credibility and appropriateness, without falling into the error of overemphasizing this authority, as Ogden does. As we will see, recognizing the authority of this philosophical approach is an important component in achieving this balance both because it has a dramatic affect on our hermeneutic and because it performs the task of convincing the world of the credibility of both the particularity and the universality of a constitutive Christ.
**Hermeneutics and Bias**

The obvious place to begin in attempting to adequately balance the criteria of credibility and appropriateness is at neither of the criteria themselves but at the very place that Ogden's three phases of doing theology attempts to balance the two, the Hermeneutical phase. While Ogden clearly fails to accomplish this balancing act at this point, it does not seem to be entirely impossible. The key lies in recognizing the fundamental insight of Ogden's that any hermeneutical approach to historical theology is philosophically informed without failing to realize that this philosophically-informed hermeneutic has to be tempered by an appropriately-informed history. What this does not mean is perhaps easier to point out than what it does mean granting the ambiguity of such a methodology. Within the approach to the Christian Scriptures, what this does not mean is that you slavishly approach the texts completely controlled by the historical approaches of traditional Christianity, nor does it mean that you come to the text as a reader using reader-response criticism to essentially bounce words off your experience and respond to the bounces. Again, these represent the two extremes. Further, but closer to a balanced approach, it does not mean that you approach the text with the traditional understanding of them as the inspired Word of God or as a series of documents which somehow conceal the true intention of the authors or the person about whom the text is being written. What it does seem to mean is that you must strive toward balancing these last two approaches through admitting that traditional Christianity has understood this as the inspired Word of God but being open to the possibility that this is a mistaken understanding, but not so mistaken that the redactors and compilers of the texts and canon were somehow attempting to conceal the truth of what was actually going on and granting that their experiences and insights as recorded in the text necessarily are going to be closer to the true experiences and insights intended by the subject of the text than any textual, form criticism is going to be able to somehow reconstruct. Albeit complicated and far from being systematically explained, it seems to be the case that the
purpose of such a superficially-conceived hermeneutic would be to strive after both the most appropriate reading of the text and the most credible reading of the text without forcing a reading into a preconceived mold of credibility or vice versa. Whether this is actually true or not though, is one of the first and most fundamental areas in which work must be done towards the end of constructing an adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism.

Achieving the balance of the criteria of appropriateness and credibility at the hermeneutical phase in the approach to doing theology, whatever flavor that actually ends up taking, accomplishes a point of origin for the construction of an adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism. Rather, though, than this point of origin being the actual beginning of the approach to the Christian text on the one hand, i.e. dogmatics, or the beginning of the approach to validating the truth of the Christian text on the other, i.e. apologetics, the hermeneutical phase functions as a balancing point in the same sense in which the climactic end of a chiastic structure serves as a balancing point. Thus, what you end up with, in sharp contrast to Ogden’s beginning point in the philosophical phase, is a chiastic approach to the doing of theology that might look something like the following:

Dogmatics

   Historical Theology
   Criterion of Appropriateness
   Hermeneutics
   Criterion of Credibility

Philosophical Theology

Apologetics

In many ways, this chiastic structure closely resembles the traditional approach to doing theology, but this resemblance is only superficial. In reality, the interesting function of the
chiastic structure is that the influence of the parallel approaches influence one another equally and seek to explain each other, unlike the traditional understanding of Apologetics as functioning within the specific context of construing Dogmatics as somehow philosophically credible. What this ends up meaning is that while Apologetics does certainly function in credibly validating the specific content of Dogmatics, the specific content of Dogmatics is constructed and interpreted through both an appeal to metaphysics and through a reliance on the hermeneutical approach, which holds an appropriate approach to the Christian Scriptures and a self-conscious philosophical interpretation in tension.\textsuperscript{103}

Of course, holding anything in perfect tension is probably oxymoronic, and it seems that it would be unrealistic and deceptive to suggest anything different. In admitting this and striving to take the necessary bias, which is indicative of the failure to perfectly maintain this tension, into account as we approach the doing of theology is perhaps the best way to both admit our inability to be completely objective and through this admission hopefully temper our approach with humility and openness to the approaches of others. In many ways, Ogden is doing just this in the construction of his Christian theology of religious pluralism, except in the places where he uses the traditional terminology of Christ (indeed, Christian), Revelation, Incarnation, Apostolic witness, etc. without clearly explaining how different his conception of these is from their traditional conceptions. In truth, Ogden rarely does this and is most careful to define his terminology in a very straightforward and clear way in most cases, even if it is only through reference to works in which he has done this more elaborately. Indeed, practical constraints keep us from completely recreating all of the foundations of our theology every time that we try and write something. However, when the theology is fundamentally dependent on what constitutes a reconceptualization of most of the basic tenets of the Christian religion but the terminology used remains the same, it becomes much more problematic to not come off, at

\textsuperscript{103} Indeed, the very presence of Dogmatic in the doing of systematic theology is a result of the influence of philosophy in looking at religion. There is nothing necessarily systematic about any of the Christian Scriptures. Applying systematization to our reading and explanation is itself a result of the tension being discussed.
some point, as seeming to be deceptive. While Ogden seems to have mostly avoided this himself, those whom he has influenced, both in academia and in the Christian Church, who then take his reconceived terminology as normative for the Christian religion and employ it as such without either defining it carefully or them themselves understanding the definitions as they should do a great disservice to their own profession and those to whom they will be held responsible for teaching and pastoring.

Having said all of this, it seems to me that the best way to actually explain this approach to doing theology is to at least draw an outline of how it might be accomplished. Before beginning the outline, however, in order to be consistent with what I think is the most adequate approach to the doing of theology, it is necessary that I admit my own bias, if it has not become tremendously obvious by this point already. Like many of Ogden’s critics, my most fundamental critique of Ogden, which lies behind those discussed above, is that he fails to truly recognize the necessity of identifying Scripture as authoritative in the terms in which it has been recognized by the Christian Church, especially as condensed in the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds. Without actually trying to expand on this in the form of a systematic argument, though, it only seems necessary at this point to say that much of what I have already argued works towards that systematic argument and that the suspicious dogmatics with which Ogden approaches the Christian Scriptures is necessarily going to be unable to take the Scriptures as a whole into account. There seems to me to be absolutely no need to actually quote from Scripture to establish that if one recognizes it as a whole canon there is no way of getting around the obvious fact that these Scriptures teach a constitutive Christology. While it may certainly be true that some specific aspect of them do not or even that some very specific reconstructive aspect of them do not, this must be tempered by the realization that the canon has a categorically different kind of authority when taken as a whole than it does when broken into real or reconstructed parts. This approach to the Christian Scriptures as a canon of course falls under the rubric of the hermeneutical approach and therefore constitutes the most fundamental bias
that I am here confessing. And yet, it must be recognized that this bias can be argued for through appeals that are strictly philosophical in nature and therefore fall into the criterion of credibility. This is what must be done, I believe, towards the end of justifying this particular hermeneutical approach which will come very close to the construction of an adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism.

The key to the construction of this Christian theology of religious pluralism, both in relation to the criterion of appropriateness and the criterion of credibility, is holding in paradoxical relationship the opposing concepts of the particular and the universal. As mentioned earlier in this discussion, Colin Gunton’s work, *The One, the Three, and the Many*, is an attempt to document the history of philosophy and theology as they have accepted and reacted against the identification of reality in terms of the particular and/or the universal.104 In many ways, the doctrine of the Trinity, according to Gunton, and the Christian philosophical and theological approach to the formulation of this doctrine and its close corollary, that of the Incarnation, falls squarely into this history and actually accomplishes a balance of the particular and the universal.105 While this characterization is far too simplistic to actually do justice to Gunton’s elaborate argument, some of the strongest empirical evidence related to the contention of the prevalence of the issues of particularity and universality is to be found in the tremendous preoccupation of society in general with the issues of religious pluralism. As mentioned at the very beginning of this discussion, few people, whether religious or irreligious, well-educated or poorly educated, don’t have an opinion about the validity of other people’s beliefs. Additionally, the only correspondence between education about these issues and opinions on these issues is the extent to which those opinions which are least informed fall under the two extremes, either

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105 Gunton 89-123.
universalism or pure exclusivism, the latter of which might be construed as an absolutizing of
the particular, and those opinions which are more informed tend to be more nuanced
understandings.

**Criterion of Appropriateness**

The amount of work to be done toward the end of constructing an adequate Christian
theology of religious pluralism includes a variety of dogmatic issues. These issues include,
among others, an investigation into the nature and scope of the particularity and universality of
the God of the Old Testament and the particularity and universality of Jesus the Christ as
conceived in the New Testament. The extent to which these characteristics of God and of Jesus
the Christ are dealt with in the Trinity and the implications which follow from this regarding the
relationship of the Trinity to the other religions are primarily a task that fall under the aegis of
the criterion of credibility. Of course, in addressing the issue of the criterion of appropriateness,
it is assumed in the specific context of constructing a Christian theology of religious pluralism
that the norm to which we are to be appropriate is that of the Christian scriptures. As we saw in
Ogden’s understanding of this particular norm, it was necessary to move beyond the authority of
the Christian scriptures to the norm of the earliest witness to the teachings and work of Jesus or
the Jesus-kerygma. Identifying the norm of appropriateness, however, with an eye toward the
kind of hermeneutic that has been discussed absolutely necessitates consideration of the entire
Christian canon, what will hence forth be referred to as the Christian scriptures.

As might be expected, the foundation of Christianity as gathered from the norm of the
Christian scriptures is that of Jesus the Christ, understood both in terms of the plurality of
witnesses present in the New Testament as well as in terms of the overarching purpose of this
plurality of witnesses, which is the identification of Jesus the Christ as constitutive of the
possibility of being reconciled with God. Obviously the identification of a constitutive
Christology as the most appropriate understanding of the authority of the Christian Scriptures is
an argument that can not be fleshed out adequately here. Before investigating this further, though, in terms of the paradoxical relationship of particularity and universality that Jesus the Christ represents, it is necessary and advantageous to look even further back than the New Testament and into the nature of God in the Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible, which is also a part of the Christian Scriptures.

It is in such an investigation that we will find that the conception of God gleaned from an appropriate understanding of the Old Testament leads us to the necessity of seeing God both as particular and as universal. Indeed there is no stronger argument for the particularity of the Old Testament God than the absolute, historical testament of the witness of the Hebrews that God is one. While there is absolutely no question that there is evidence for both the existence of Polytheism and Henotheism in the Old Testament, the overall philosophical stance of the writers of the Old Testament as reflected in the shape and scope of their redaction is that of Monotheism. This is not to suggest that deriving an adequate conception of monotheism from the text is not difficult. There is no denial of the presence of historically mixed texts or the difficulty of understanding the intent of the authors of those texts. It would be presumptuous and historically naïve to see in the details of the monotheism of Moses the same kind of monotheism as that of Jeremiah. It would be presumptuous and naïve only if an argument is being made about the monotheism of Jeremiah that depends on a detail of the monotheism of Moses. But if an argument is being made for the monotheism of the Hebrew Bible, then it is necessary not to look at the monotheism of Jeremiah only or the monotheism of Moses only; it is necessary to look at the whole. The hypothetical editor of the textual critic makes looking at monotheism in the whole of the Hebrew Bible easier since presumably the editors of the text sought to unify and make consistent the fundamental position regarding monotheism. Even if

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106 For the moment, it seems necessary to avoid the fundamental distinction between the Septuagint of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches and the Hebrew Bible of the Protestant canon. The apocryphal works included in the Septuagint do not bear that much importance on this particular topic and thus will be ignored, although a thorough investigation of the God of the Old Testament would necessarily include the consideration of both canons.
such an hypothetical editor remains nothing more than an hypothesis, an appropriate reading of the Hebrew Bible requires that the theologian attempt to take into consideration the whole of the text when looking at a particular issue. An adequate approach to the discussion of the issue of the emergence of monotheism requires that you approach the text in discerning this emergence not with a conception of monotheism derived from the philosophical confluence of Platonic monotheism and Israelite monotheism, for example, but with a conception of monotheism derived from an adequate reading of the Hebrew Bible itself. Such an adequate conceptualization of the monotheism present in the Hebrew Bible will show that the universality and particularity of God are fundamental and unique characteristics of Israelite monotheism. As such, with further investigation and argumentation, they will be found to set the precedent for the particularity and universality of Jesus the Christ and the Christian conception of the Trinity.

With few exceptions, Ogden never directly considers the witness to the nature of God as found in the Hebrew Bible, and yet at the very heart of his representative Christology and his desire to avoid any kind of religious monism, Ogden affirms a very stringent form of radical monotheism. It is important to realize the distinction between monotheism and radical monotheism to the extent that radical monotheism represents an argument against the traditional Christian affirmation of the Trinity.107

In these terms, understanding Jesus the Christ as actually constituting the possibility of reconciliation with God is significantly different, to say the least, from understanding Jesus the Christ as solely representing this possibility, which is fundamental to many of the tenets of radical monotheism. The difference lies most fundamentally in the difference regarding the state of humanity, so that, as we have already seen, it becomes important for Ogden in arguing for a representative Christology, indeed more important than actually being able to locate this

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Christology in his reconstruction, to make the philosophical argument that humanity’s reconciliation with God is not a ‘possibility in principle’ but always and everywhere a ‘possibility in fact.’ This quite simply means that Christ is not necessary for the reconciliation, only representative of the possibility of it occurring. The erosion of the particularity of Jesus the Christ is quite evident, so that he is just a good example of what can be done everywhere and always by other people, by all other people.

Although there is not enough time to adequately investigate the philosophical motivation that Ogden exhibits in making this argument as foundational for concluding a representative Christology, it is quite clear from many of Ogden’s works that the issue at hand is the universal availability of the possibility of being in a reconciled relationship with God. Indeed, Ogden’s critique of Barth’s Exclusivism is that it creates a unique form of the problem of evil in that it restricts this availability to only some people. Gavin D’Costa, who is somewhat representative of many scholars responding to Ogden’s criticism of Exclusivism, both from a conservative and liberal point of view, finds Ogden’s “case against exclusivism very unconvincing” primarily because it fails to take into account an adequate conception of revelation and because it fails to deal with the variety of different elements of universality present in many Christian exclusivist arguments.108

It is important here that we begin to make a distinction between Barth’s Exclusivism and exclusivism in general. Speaking of exclusivism in a religious context, for most people, automatically implies the claims of Christianity regarding Christ. Whether these claims are considered negatively because of the claims themselves or because of some much larger issue that has to do with the association of exclusivism with

bigotry is not really the topic of this paper but certainly bears on the consideration of exclusivism as a whole. Indeed, any discussion of any kind of Biblical exclusivism is automatically received with suspicion.

Nevertheless, exclusivism is an inherent part of any claim, i.e. a claim is about the truth of something and the truth of something is necessarily exclusive about the untruth of the same something. It really is as simple as that. Most people would agree with this kind of exclusivism, while they would have problems with the truth claims themselves. While one of the central tenets of deconstructive Post-modernism is the deconstruction of the concept of truth or at least the epistemic possibility of coming to truth, few people overall seem to disagree with the idea that truth is exclusive of untruth, as long as they accept the common-sensical and that truth is accessible to some extent. But in many cases, they would prefer to use some other word, primarily because of the negative connotations of the word exclusive.

The word exclusive itself, comes from the Latin, *excludere*, which literally means to shut out. We have become afraid, and rightly so, of shutting out many things. We do not want to shut out a person because of their race, their languages, or their beliefs. At the same time, we do want to shut out certain things, like the cold, the destruction of the environment, misunderstandings about people based on stereotypical judgments, and perhaps misunderstandings about the nature of reality. Within all of this, there are disagreements about what should be shut out and what shouldn’t, but we can all agree that certain things must be shut out. Thus, we could tentatively claim, that at some level or other, we are all exclusivists.

Within the realm of moral philosophy, the fear of exclusivism often results in ethical relativism. Within the realm of science, the fear of exclusivism often results in skepticism. Within the realm of politics, the fear of exclusivism often results in ambiguity. But such ambiguity is only a synthesis of the desire to please everyone with
concrete opinions that can never please everyone, and such skepticism is only a synthesis of caution taken together with very real applications of advanced technology. And the position of ethical relativism is almost always a striving after a justification of the moral code that none of us can get away from by misadapting the insights of cultural relativism as motivated by fear. This is the fear of being exclusive, of shutting out a morality, when practicality necessitates shutting out the “morality” of murderers, rapists, and thieves all of the time. We are all exclusivists.

The extent of our exclusivity varies widely across a very diverse spectrum; yet, the fact logically remains that anyone that makes any kind of claim about the nature of truth, of which, by the way, there is no other kind of claim, are making a claim that is necessarily exclusive of any other claim. For example, logical positivism, a particular claim about the nature of truth claims limits, at least in one of its forms, all truth claims to those claims that are either analytic or synthetic statements. And yet, this very position is a truth claim that is neither synthetic nor analytic and as such does the very thing, as a position, that it claims a position can not do. This kind of self-refutation would be characteristic of any truth claim that strives after not being exclusive.

Within this understanding, it becomes necessary to deal with the concepts of particularity and universality because it is when some particular becomes universal that it also becomes exclusive. Up until that time, most people have no problem with identifying things as particular, indeed post-modern society has gone about the business of lauding the particular to the practical exclusion of even the existence of the universal, nor do they usually have a problem with identifying some things as universal, but putting the two together creates all kinds of problems. It is, therefore, that at some level we must come to deal with the exclusivity of a constitutive Christ, simply because, as such, Jesus the Christ represents a particular individual (understood in the most basic way) with universal pretensions.
While a discussion of Ogden’s conception of revelation has occupied us considerably in this paper, there has been little opportunity to discuss aspects of universality within the typically exclusivist argument. While the exclusivist, speaking in general, finds it necessary to maintain the particularity of Christ together with the universality of Christ, the explanations of the nature of this universality vary greatly. In this regard, Rahner’s position of Inclusivism argues a constitutive and therefore particular Christology but further argues from there that the salvation thus constituted is available outside of the Christian Church and Christian religion. In this regard, the particular salvation as accomplished through Jesus the Christ is universally available.

And yet, most exclusivists would consider the particular salvation as accomplished through Jesus the Christ to be universally available but only through the Christian Church and the Christian religion. What this basically means is that rather than insisting, as Rahner does, that the form this universality takes is its presence in the other religions, is that it is through the missionary work of the Christian Church offered to everyone as a viable option, no matter what culture or particular religion that may have characterized their life thus far. This, of course, is a simplistic explanation, but in general accurately characterizes much of the traditional, exclusivist argument.

As may well be imagined, though, given the epistemological difficulties very briefly referred to towards the beginning of this discussion, much of modern, academic society questions the possibility of truly being able to communicate across cultural boundaries, at least in issues as complex as religion. This, again, is something that must occupy the theologian, very fundamentally, as they go about the process of constructing any kind of theology of religious pluralism. However, at least one step in this direction can be gleaned from all theologians of religious pluralism, whether Exclusivist, Pluralist, or somewhere in between, in that almost all argue for the possibility of a very real, empirical, dialogue and/or discussion between practitioners of different religions. Ogden himself participates extensively in such dialogue with
Where this is dialogue and/or discussion, there must be communication and there must be the possibility of us coming to realize what the other of us believe.

In addition to this problem, the exclusivist position is beset with the problem of the availability of salvation in time. One of the central clauses of the new problem of evil which is created by Exclusivism, for Ogden, is the fact that the availability of salvation is limited to those who have lived during the time and after the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. While traditional Christianity has usually offered an explanation of the proleptic availability of the atonement with God that Jesus the Christ accomplished much later in time, many, if not most, modern Christian theologians, both Exclusivists and Pluralists, have found this explanation to be problematic. For this reason, they have often offered up alternative solutions which vary considerably in their claims. The most interesting and widely discussed of these possibilities among modern Christian theologians is that of Universal salvation, in which all of humanity, not only those dead prior to the time of Jesus the Christ, will come, eventually, over perhaps a great deal of time, to accept the particular, constitutive reconciliation of humanity with God through Jesus the Christ. It is quite a fierce debate among Barthian scholars whether or not the premier Exclusivist himself held this position.

Among scholars currently dealing with the issues surrounding the tension between the particularity and universality of Christ, several seem to have synthesized an appropriate interpretation of the position of the Christian scriptures. Among these scholars, Gabriel Fackre’s position of Universal Particularity seems especially to be a move in the right direction towards constructing an adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism. One of the strikingly unique insights that Fackre brings to this discussion, through “the typology... [of]

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109 See for example, references to this throughout Ogden’s *Is There One True Religion or Are There Many?* or also in, Schubert M. Ogden. "Response to Gishin Tokiwa." *Buddhists Christian Studies* 5 (1985): 131-138.
reconciliation, revelation, and redemption” is that the universal component of Christ’s particularity, especially in regard to redemption, should be understood as the new life given to us as a result of our personal salvation together with the more base understanding of life and the transformation that occurs both during the life of Jesus, the healer, and through the effect that Christians and Christianity have had on the world. The result, according to Fackre, is that the results of Christ’s work, in some sense, are extended to all those who, through the Holy Spirit, work to save, improve, or just make tolerable the biological life of others:

This struggle of life against death includes commitment to all the facts of life, the true and the beautiful as well as the good. Wherever human beings participate in the processes that make and keep life livable, there is a universal christic grace.

While, without question, there is a lot of work to do in investigating Fackre’s understanding of the relationship of Christ’s universality with Christ’s particularity, it seems to have the particular insight of not only understanding Christ appropriately, i.e. constitutively, but also illustrating through reference to at least some of Christ’s own apparent preoccupations in Scripture how this may help us to understand the universal context which Christ has taken on in the world since his resurrection, through the Holy Spirit.

In most regards, the struggle to understand Universal salvation, how Christ accomplishes the salvation of humanity which lived prior to his time on earth, the possibility of communicating across cultures through evangelization, and all of the many issues not even mentioned that beset discussion about the relationship of Jesus the Christ to the world are attempts at understanding how Christ can both be particular and universal. While some have chosen to simply reject the possibility that he is both, others have stringently maintained that he

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111 Fackre 33.
112 Fackre 49.
must be both. This stringency stems primarily from an appropriate reading of the Christian Scriptures and it is most certainly within these that the answer is to be found.

**Criterion of Credibility**

However, it would be mistaken to think that it is only within the Christian Scriptures that this answer is to be found, since it is quite clearly not something that can be gained from a straightforward understanding of what is recorded in the text. Perhaps, as some argue, we simply are not meant to know what the relationship of Christ’s particularity is to his universality, only to know that he is both particular and universal. And finally, this may indeed be the case.

But, interestingly, the struggle to deal with this in terms of the criteria of appropriateness and credibility, whether attempted together or separately, have often and will undoubtedly continue to offer insights into both our relationship to God and our relationships with one another. It is in trying to deal with our relationships with one another, at least in the specific context of Christian theology, that we usually come to the field of Apologetics. Apologetics, however, should not only be understood as an attempt to explain what has already been gained as truth to those who don’t accept it as truth. Given the chiastic structure of doing theology, as already argued for, it becomes necessary that we also understand Apologetics as moving us towards a better, more systematic understanding of the nature of truth as gained appropriately from the Christian Scriptures. As is quite apparent, this systematization of understanding in and of itself moves us closer to understanding the nature of truth.

In this regard, and dealing specifically with the issue of the particularity and universality of Christ, much has already been said about the history of the in-credibility of an exclusive understanding in general. Since the very beginning of Christianity, the issue of exclusivity has occupied Christians in the secular world, primarily because of the claim that a particular individual, Jesus the Christ, has accomplished the salvation of the world. From Nikiprowetzky’s argument that the "indivisible conglomeration of particularism and
universalism...[that] is the major trait of the religion of Israel...[is a] powerful...generator of
group behavior to the supposed atheism of the first Christians among the polytheistic Romans to the
response of much of modern academia to the contention that there could only be one Savior, the
claim that Jesus the Christ is both universal and particular leading to some kind of exclusivism
has been perceived as absolutely and categorically in-credible. Perhaps this long history of
reaction and rejection should serve as evidence against the credibility of the concept of Jesus the
Christ being both particular and universal. Then again, perhaps it shouldn't. If experience has
taught the human race nothing else, indeed, if we can gain no other wisdom from that of our
ancestors and our past, we should have at least come to realize that things are not always what
they seem. While it is certainly true that this observation in no way constitutes even the
beginning of an argument for either of these two particular diametrically opposed
understandings of the world in which we live, it is something that we should constantly bear in
mind towards the end of remaining humble in the face of what seems so obvious.

In this regard, Alvin Plantinga’s defense of religious exclusivism moves us a long way
toward philosophically rejecting some of the most common, superficial criticisms of religious
exclusivism, some of them even leveled by religious pluralists. These criticisms include two
main categories: moral objections, “that the exclusivist is intellectually arrogant, or egotistical,
or self-servingly arbitrary, or dishonest, or imperialistic, or oppressive” and epistemological
objections, those of “irrationality and lack of justification.” While not as widely accepted as
Plantinga’s Free Will Defense against the charge of inconsistency regarding the problem of evil
and the existence of God, Plantinga’s defense against these superficial criticisms of
exclusivism is stringently logical in maintaining the credibility of the claim that Jesus the Christ
is particular, universal, and exclusive.

114 Alvin Plantinga. “Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism.” In The Philosophical Challenge of
115 Plantinga 179
This defense, however, is limited in scope, and does not in and of itself constitute the sole philosophical work justifying some parts of the exclusivistic position. Indeed, even a brief survey of the literature dealing with this issue would be far too lengthy at this point. The realization, though, that the literature exists and that there is a large body of philosophical work arguing back and forth over the credibility of these issues is very important.

Colin Gunton’s works, as mentioned already, at least some of the more recent ones, are an attempt to largely document not only this particular debate but also the foundational nature that the argument between the universality and particularity of the nature of the world has had on the history of Western civilization. In this regard, and as already mentioned several times throughout this discussion, Gunton’s argument, at least in *The One, the Three, and the Many*, is that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity serves to balance the tension between universality and particularity and that this function alone, given the implications of understanding this balance, acts as an argument for the philosophical necessity of the particularity and universality of God-the Father, God-the Son, and God-the Holy Spirit. Traditionally conceived, the doctrine of the Trinity, taken together with the doctrine of the Incarnation, is one of the most difficult concepts to understand in the history of Christianity. The extent of this difficulty is evidenced by the contention of one contemporary Christian theologian, John Macquarrie, that perhaps the most important task of modern Christianity is to recast these doctrines in language that we can understand, toward the end of accomplishing the same kind of thing that the Council of Nicea did in uniting and systematizing the teachings of the New Testament for the early Christian church. To this task, a number of scholars, many of whom are mentioned above, whether self-consciously or not, have set themselves. It is, perhaps, in working towards this goal that not only will the philosophical credibility of the particularity and universality of Jesus the Christ be constructed but that also the criteria of appropriateness will receive a new boost as the Christian

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Scriptures will necessarily be reaffirmed through an hermeneutic looking to them as the Word of God, as understood both in terms of a credible and appropriate conception of revelation. The adequate conception of the work of Jesus the Christ that must follow from this, not to mention a better understanding of the Father and the Holy Spirit, will in turn move us closer to the construction of an adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

While the presence of a tremendous diversity of religions in the world is certainly nothing new, and while some religions have even grown up dealing with this religious diversity, the theological issue of religious pluralism has been pressing itself up against the world more strongly since the advent of a technology that has essentially shrunk the globe. Although there certainly seems to be no need to refer to this world as a Global Village, however metaphorically the term may be used, there is most definitely a greater consciousness of cultural and religious diversity present in our society. Tragically, the response to this cultural and religious diversity, as has so often occurred in history, has not always been one of tolerance and the existential expression of living together despite our differences, of which tolerance was originally understood as a conception. Perhaps, given this unfortunate historical truth together with the realization that recognizing it as such does not do justice to those who have suffered as a result, it is understandable that the reaction of much of society and academia has been to move beyond just tolerance and into acceptance. Unfortunately though, this reaction has resulted in the construing of acceptance, usually expressed as “tolerance” misunderstood, as the norm of identification with different religions and different cultures. The fundamental, logical truth is, though, that “acceptance” can not function as a norm for either the philosophical identification of truth, and all that that includes, nor for the existential identification of truth without becoming relativism. A society which strives after living out “acceptance” as a norm and thus becomes relativistic inevitably does one of two things: disappears because of its absolute inability to pass laws and generally make decisions that are indispensable for the most basic level of functioning, a possibility which is only theoretical and entirely impractical; or, it creates
the façade of “acceptance” as the norm and vehemently opposes any philosophy that disputes this norm, then adds to this inconsistency an underground world of intellectuals and politicians pursuing the practical matters of maintaining a society in the face of the vast and far-reaching entropy and anarchy lurking in the very “norm” that it affirms. The spectre of double-speak and the prophecies of George Orwell in *1984* hardly even need reference.

It is not immediately clear, in reference to, specifically, religious diversity or religious pluralism, that the same insidious implications follow from the identification of “acceptance” and relativism as the norm. While the growing acceptance of the truth of other religions among much of society is certainly a characteristic of the modern and post-modern reactionary ethos, its academic expression can not be reduced to merely that. The necessity and importance of questioning the uncritical acceptance of the truth of all religions, given the implications that follow from the ethos of which it is a larger part, must be bolstered and tempered by the realization that the segment of society which dismisses the possibility of the truth of any religion other than their own is equally uncritical and ignorant. More importantly, though, it is necessary, toward the end of coming to a critical understanding of the truth of the religions, to investigate the philosophical and theological positions, which supposedly do, or at least should, undergird the understanding of the truth of the religions among society at large.

Ignoring the very obvious fact that the relationship of the critical investigation of any issue does not necessarily inform the uncritical understanding of the same issue, working toward a critical understanding of the truth of the religions begins with a survey of the existent literature on religious pluralism. While it is true that there are representatives from most of the religions dealing with the issues of religious pluralism, both in philosophical and theological terms, by and large the field is dominated by the presence of representatives from Western religions, and more specifically in the field of Christian theology.

In this respect, Schubert M. Ogden’s exposition of doing theology seems to be specifically conducive to an investigation of the truth of other religions, especially in terms of its self-
reflective, essentially a priori, criteria of appropriateness and credibility. However, Ogden’s fundamental approach to the employment of these criteria through the historical, hermeneutical, and philosophical phases fails to adequately balance the criteria of appropriateness and credibility and ultimately results in an inadequate Christian theology of religious pluralism, through both an inappropriate, representative Christology and the overemphasis of the criterion of credibility necessary for coming to this Christology.

Ogden’s foundational problem in constructing his position of Pluralistic-Inclusivism seems to stem from an overemphasis on the criteria of credibility and the resulting affect that this overemphasis has on his approach to doing theology and on his Christology. The resulting radical monotheism is inadequate as a Christian theology of religious pluralism and therefore can not be used as the formal norm in the evaluation of the truth of other religions. Capitalizing on Ogden’s mistakes and making a more balanced attempt at employing the criteria of appropriateness and credibility can move us towards an adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism. Approaching the historical phase, the hermeneutical phase, and the philosophical phase with the intention of establishing a more balanced employment of these criteria leads to the realization that the hermeneutic phase is the most adequate beginning point because it naturally combines both appropriateness and credibility. Although difficult to do and necessitating the identification of any biases with the intention of compensating for them as much as possible, this approach allows for a more adequate doing of theology in the terms that Ogden has provided.

Such an approach to doing theology moves us closer to a more adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism. In outlining some of the issues necessary for properly constructing this adequate Christian theology of religious pluralism, I have attempted to show what would almost inevitably be some of the foundational presuppositions, although admitting that such is not a thorough argument and calling for the necessity of making such an argument. The beginning of this adequate construction is an adequate conception of a Christian
hermeneutic, which must somehow manage to balance the requisite identification of the
approach as philosophical, including metaphysical, in nature while taking into account the
fundamental limits of our reason and dependence on God’s self-disclosure in the form of the
Christian Scriptures. This Christian hermeneutic must then be followed by a systematic
understanding and explanation of the whole of these Christian Scriptures, especially as they
indicate the particular, universal, and ultimately exclusive nature of God. This understanding of
God as indicated by an appropriate reading of the texts must then be bolstered by a credible,
philosophical understanding of the nature of God, which will necessarily include a programme
of synthesis similar to that accomplished at the Council of Nicea in the formulation of the
doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

While all of this is necessary to the formulation of an adequate Christian theology of
religious pluralism as a movement toward a better understanding of the truth of the religions,
specifically those religions other than Christianity, it has been and always will be, as validated
through this very process, the Christian understanding of the world through its dramatic
influence on Western history that has fostered an attitude of loving kindness, humility, and
tolerance in our approach to and treatment of others. While there is absolutely no question that
Christians have often failed to do this and that misunderstandings of Christianity have even
fostered the exact opposite kind of approach to humanity, the failure to live out the Christian
faith in no way constitutes an argument against the overwhelming presence of the values that
have become the norm of Western society, whether they be accepted or rejected. As such, at
least in this regard, it is through Christian theology that not only a more adequate
understanding of religious pluralism must be developed but also through Christian theology that
we must seek after and try to understand the dangerous and ultimately insidious identification
of the norm of “acceptance” and relativism as relating to humanity and society.


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