

# Evangelical Missiology and Theology of Religions: An Agenda for the Future

by *Harold Netland*

**D**uring the week prior to the ninth anniversary of the terrible attacks on Sept 11, 2001, the pastor of a small church in Florida suddenly became the center of international attention. The world watched with both fascination and horror as the pastor solemnly announced that God had instructed him to burn copies of the Qur'an on Sept 11, 2010.

Public reaction to the pastor was largely negative. Not only did the idea of burning the Qur'an strike many as being in particularly bad taste, but there was widespread apprehension about the violent response from radical Muslims that was sure to follow. The Vatican called on the pastor not to carry through his plans, and a host of U.S. government officials—including President Obama—publicly called for the pastor to desist. Just before Sept. 11, the pastor reconsidered, claiming now that God was instructing him *not* to burn the Qur'an. Despite some public demonstrations in Pakistan and Afghanistan, there was a global collective sigh of relief when Sept 11 came and went without the desecration of the Qur'an.

The relief was short lived, however, as the pastor changed his mind yet again and on March 20, 2011, he held a mock trial of the Qur'an and burned a copy of the sacred scripture of Muslims. Angry protestors rampaged in Afghanistan and elsewhere, with twelve people killed in Kabul.

This tragic event can serve as a kind of window into the messy and complex world of the early twenty-first century. First, this reminds us that religion is a very real and important part of our world today. Contrary to the predictions of classical secularization theory, much of the world today remains highly religious. Not that long ago champions of classical secularization theory confidently predicted the withering away of religion as more and more of the world came under the influence of modernization and science. That, of course, has not happened. Peter Berger, an early advocate of the secularization thesis, has more recently observed that, "The world today is massively religious,

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is *anything but* the secularized world that has been predicted (whether joyfully or despondently) by so many analysts of modernity.”<sup>1</sup>

### *The Globalization of Religion*

The incident also illustrates for us the challenges of living in a global world connected by technology that transmits images and messages around the world in just seconds. This did not occur somewhere in Africa or Asia, with a long history of religious tensions; it happened in the United States. Globalization, immigration patterns, entertainment media, and political realities have made awareness of religious others part of the normal experience of ordinary Americans. Fifty years ago the threat to burn the Qur’an would have prompted little interest by the media, and it would have taken days for visual images of the burning to spread worldwide. No longer. Globalization has produced a complex interconnectedness worldwide that compresses space and time, and is redefining our understanding of ourselves in light of our relations to global others. Anthony Giddens characterizes globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the actions of a pastor in Florida have instantaneous repercussions in Afghanistan.

One is also struck by the powerful emotions that were unleashed by the threat to burn the Qur’an. Religion is a potent, volatile social and political force, and social observers today are alarmed by the social tensions and acts of violence that have religious roots. Mark Juergensmeyer observes that, “Religion seems to be trying to tear the planet apart, even as other cultural forces seem to be trying to pull it together.”<sup>3</sup> While violence by Islamist radicals receives the most attention today, we must remember

that historically all the major religions have had their own problems with religiously sanctioned violence.

But why did the pastor burn the Qur’an and not other sacred texts such as the popular Hindu scripture *Bhagavad-Gita*, the Confucian *Analects*, or the *Lotus Sutra* of Buddhism? The idea that one might burn any of *these* texts seems ludicrous, and this surely suggests something about both the fascination and revulsion American Christians have with Islam. Images of Muslims provoke intense passions among many Americans that are generally absent when considering Buddhists, Hindus, or Daoists. Thomas Kidd’s superb



study, *American Christians and Islam*<sup>4</sup>, shows that there is a long history of American Christians vilifying Islam and Muslims.

Furthermore, burning the Qur’an was not simply a religious or theological act—a public demonstration of the pastor’s commitment to Christ and rejection of Islam as an idolatrous religion. In the context of post 9-11 American nationalism his action takes on powerful social and political significance as well; it was a reassertion of American identity and exceptionalism in the face of perceived threats to American culture and values. In much of the world today, religion is closely linked to issues of ethnicity,

nationalism, and politics, usually with unhappy results.<sup>5</sup>

The burning of the Qur’an is yet another reminder of the ambiguities and complexities of living in a free society characterized by religious diversity and disagreement. Legal observers agree that the pastor had the legal right to burn the Qur’an. But should he have done so? Here, as in so many cases, the rights of free speech and freedom of religious expression clash with what seem to be common sense and simple decency. There is an important distinction between what one is legally permitted to do in a free and diverse society and what one ought, as a good citizen, to do. Civic virtue sometimes means resisting what one has the right to do.

Most significantly, however, this incident raises questions for those involved in Christian ministry. The man who burned the Qur’an was a Christian minister. The sincerity of the pastor need not be questioned. But why would a Christian minister think that God had directed him to do such a thing? How should other Christians respond? The issues here are much broader and deeper than simply whether it is appropriate to burn copies of the Qur’an. The U.S. is rapidly becoming a religiously very diverse place. Christians in many parts of Africa and Asia also find themselves in societies with many different religious traditions. What is appropriate behavior for Christians with respect to religious others? What are appropriate forms of Christian witness in such contexts?

### *Formulating a Theology of Religions*

Implicit in the Florida pastor’s rhetoric and actions was a particular theology of religions—that is, an understanding of Islam in light of his theological commitments. In his case, it was apparently a theological framework that regarded Islam as

simply evil and which endorsed public desecration of the Qur'an as an appropriate Christian response to such evil. As growing numbers of ordinary American Christians have contact with other religions, they too will act on the basis of implicit theologies of religions. Missionaries also typically bring to their ministries implicit—and sometimes explicit—theologies of religions. As an academic discipline, the theology of religions seeks to provide a theological framework for understanding and responding to non-Christian religious traditions. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen defines theology of religions as “that discipline of theological studies which attempts to account theologically for the meaning and value of other religions. Christian theology of religions attempts to think theologically about what it means for Christians to live with people of other faiths and about the relationship of Christianity to other religions.”<sup>6</sup>

In the years ahead it will be important for evangelicals—missionaries and local Christian leaders alike—to formulate a biblically faithful and culturally appropriate theology of religions. The issues are unavoidable not only for theologians and missionaries but also pastors and laypeople. It is hardly surprising then that the Association of Theological Schools has made preparation for ministry in multi-religious contexts a priority for its member schools in North America.

Since the 1990s evangelicals have become actively involved in discussions concerning the theology of religions.<sup>7</sup> We can expect that traditional issues such as the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for our understanding of other religions, salvation and the unevangelized, general revelation and other religions, the place of the demonic in other religions, and so on will continue to be explored and debated in the years ahead. And of course it is essential

## *Should we understand religion strictly in biblical and theological terms ... or are other, non-theological disciplines also necessary?*

that in these discussions evangelicals remain unequivocally committed to the full authority of Scripture and to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### *Three Areas for Urgent Inquiry*

There are also other significant issues, not currently discussed much, that demand our attention. In what follows I will highlight very briefly three areas which require some careful reflection in the days ahead.

#### *1. Evangelicals need to think more carefully about what we mean by religion and the religions.*

The theology of religions involves theological reflection *about* the religions. But what do we mean by “the religions,” or indeed by “religion” as a generic term? Evangelical missiologists and theologians often seem to assume that the meaning is perfectly clear and that we can readily identify religion when we encounter it. But the concept is notoriously difficult to define and disputes over what counts as religion are common. Among the many relevant issues here I will note briefly two that are particularly significant.

First, clarifying what we mean by “religion(s)” forces a methodological question about how we should study the religions: Should we understand religion strictly in biblical and theological terms, so that all we need to formulate a theology of religions is the Bible and the exegetical skills necessary for it proper interpretation? Or are other, non-theological disciplines also necessary? In formulating a theology of religions it is of course necessary to have a proper understanding of the biblical data. Biblical and theological studies are thus essential and necessary. But are

they sufficient? Can one develop an adequate theology of religions without carefully observing and understanding the actual beliefs and practices of particular religious communities?

Religion is an explanatory concept that is used to help us make sense of certain phenomena in the world around us. If there were no religious phenomena, we would not have the concept of religion. Speaking of religions in the plural is a way of acknowledging the diverse ways in which religious communities live out their beliefs and practices. If it is really a theological framework for understanding the religious realities in our world that we are seeking, then our theological reflection must focus upon the actual lived realities of various religious communities. In other words, an adequate theological understanding of religion requires not only fidelity to the teachings of Scripture but also an accurate description of the institutions, beliefs and practices of actual religious communities. While a theological account must go beyond merely describing religious phenomena to offer a normative framework for interpreting such realities, in doing so it must build upon an accurate understanding of the beliefs and behavior under consideration. So a viable theological perspective on religion actually presupposes a phenomenological or descriptive understanding of religion.

On a phenomenological level, then, we might adopt Roger Schmidt's definition of religions as “systems of meaning embodied in a pattern of life, a community of faith, and a worldview that articulate a view of the sacred and of what ultimately matters.”<sup>8</sup> Religions thus involve

complex, integrative systems of meaning that are rooted in a particular understanding of what is ultimately real and significant. Religions are not abstract essences; they find expression in specific communities of people living out their values and ideals. Religions, in other words, include not only beliefs and doctrines but also social institutions and patterns of behavior. They provide an interpretive matrix within which particular groups of people understand themselves and what they regard as truly ultimate, and order their lives accordingly.

The multi-faceted nature of religion was emphasized by Ninian Smart, who suggested seven dimensions for understanding a given religion.<sup>9</sup> Particular religions include the ritual, mythological or narrative, doctrinal or philosophical, ethical, social and institutional, experiential, and material dimensions. Smart's seven dimensions should not be regarded necessarily as exhaustive. Perhaps in light of the growing political significance of religion globally we should add an eighth dimension—the political dimension of religion. For not only do religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism have internal mechanisms for determining legitimate exercise of power or authority, but they also have political implications globally for those outside the religion as they exercise influence in the public sector. This is especially the case in religiously diverse societies. Moreover, any understanding of religion in the past three centuries must include the troublesome relation between religion and nationalism, for modern nationalism often has a religious component.

Finally, in thinking about religion it is important to distinguish between what is often called formal or “high” religion and “folk” religion.<sup>10</sup> Formal religion refers to the official teachings and practices of a given religious

tradition—the institutions, beliefs, and practices enjoined by the sacred scriptures and official authorities of the religion—which serve to protect the orthodoxy of the tradition, establish necessary boundaries, and guide believers' conduct.

Folk religion, by contrast, refers to the religious beliefs and practices of ordinary people who are usually not particularly interested in a religion's formal teachings. Folk religion often acknowledges a realm of spirits and demons, and emphasizes the practical, existential concerns of everyday life. Folk practices often are at variance with the official teachings of high religion. But we should not assume



that folk religion is “primitive” or premodern, and that high religion is a modern innovation. Highly modernized societies such as Japan, Brazil, or the United States include folk religious traditions, and high religion flourished throughout Asia prior to the modern age. In understanding religion today globally we must pay attention to both formal and folk religion.

The multi-dimensional nature of religions raises a second issue: What is the relation between religion and culture? Can we always distinguish religion from culture? Comparison of Smart's seven dimensions of religion, which have strong social or cultural

components, with anthropologist Clifford Geertz's definition of culture indicates that there is significant overlap between the concepts of religion and culture. Geertz defines culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”<sup>11</sup> Although they are clearly related, religion and culture are not strictly coextensive and neither can be reduced to the other.

Evangelicals need to explore more thoroughly the interrelationship between religion and culture. This is especially significant for debates over contextualization. Often evangelicals assume that there is a clear distinction between the religious and cultural dimensions, and that what is cultural might be acceptable whereas what is religious is not. So debates over contextualization sometimes hinge on whether a particular ritual or term is religious or cultural—if cultural it is acceptable, but if religious it is not. But is it always possible to differentiate so neatly the cultural from the religious? In many cases the boundaries between religion and culture are fluid and imprecise, so that the distinction itself can seem artificial. Moreover, should we necessarily assume that what is religious is inherently more problematic for contextualization than what is social or cultural? Is the religious domain necessarily theologically more problematic than the cultural domain? Is the demonic or idolatrous really more prevalent in the religious than in the cultural domains? Answering this question will involve not only carefully looking at what we actually find in the religious and cultural dimensions of particular communities but also thinking carefully about what actually constitutes idolatry in Scripture.

In the twentieth century evangelical missiologists developed sophisticated understandings of culture as both the gift of God's grace in creation and revelation as well as the product of human sin, the demonic, and distortion of what God has created.<sup>12</sup> I suggest that evangelicals also need a more nuanced view of religion, recognizing in the religions elements of both goodness and evil, truth and falsehood. Our concern as Christians is with making disciples of Jesus Christ of all peoples, including sincere followers of other religions. Through God's guidance and power, we encourage those who are currently living in sinful rebellion against God to repent and become reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. To the extent that this requires rejecting belief and conduct normally identified as religious we can speak of rejecting aspects of the religions. Thus, patterns associated with what we commonly call Hinduism or Buddhism or Islam which inhibit a proper response to God must be rejected or modified. But where patterns of living and thinking identified as religious are either indifferent to the gospel or can be used in enabling a particular group to become disciples of Jesus Christ, then making disciples would seem to involve appropriating such patterns into that group's Christian identity.

*2. Evangelicals will need to find theologically and culturally appropriate expressions of Christian witness in contexts of religious diversity.*

A second broad area that needs careful exploration is how we as disciples of Jesus Christ should live and witness in societies marked by religious diversity. What does it mean to be salt and light in modern democratic societies that promise freedom of religious expression to all and which are increasingly religiously diverse? In particular, what should Christian witness look like? And what is the place of our Christian commitments in the public sector? These are issues

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not only for American Christians but for evangelicals everywhere who live in diverse, democratic societies professing freedom of religious expression. The issues are profoundly missiological, for they inform how we should understand what it means today to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

First, in obedience to our Lord and out of compassion for the lost, we are to "make disciples" of all people (Matt. 28:19-20). Thus, a biblically faithful theology of religions must include a commitment to Christian mission—including evangelism among sincere followers of other religions. But the world in which we are to make disciples is one marked by tensions, religious strife, and deep suspicion. We live in a post-colonialist world that is acutely aware of the injustices of four centuries of Western imperialism and that believes—rightly or wrongly—that Christianity bears much of the blame for this. All too often ethnic, nationalistic and religious tensions erupt into violence, causing many to despair of the possibility of different religious communities living together peacefully. Can Christians remain committed to Jesus Christ as the one Lord and Savior for all humankind, and to the need for evangelism among adherents of other religions, while also being appropriately accepting of religious diversity and working for harmonious relations among religions? We can and we must. This is a watershed issue for evangelicals in the days ahead.

In making disciples we are to teach them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. But what does a disciple of Jesus look like? Jesus' teachings in the Gospel of Matthew—in the great discourses such as the

Sermon on the Mount and the parables—provide a good picture of what a disciple is to look like. A disciple of Jesus is someone who lives his or her life in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, who follows what Jesus has commanded. Among other things, disciples of Jesus are to follow the Great Commandment of Matthew 22:37-40: we are to love God with our entire beings and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Our neighbors include followers of other religions. We are to love them.

Among the more significant of Jesus' many instructions to his disciples is the so-called Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." We are to treat others the way we would ourselves want to be treated. This concise summary of a basic ethical principle has tremendous implications for how we are to live among followers of other religions. How, for example, should we engage in evangelism among religious others? Well, how would we like to be treated by someone from another religion, eager to convert us to his or her faith? In our evangelistic efforts we should treat religious others the way we would like to be treated by them.<sup>13</sup>

But the issues here go beyond simply evangelism and witness. In democratic and religiously diverse societies, what is appropriate behavior with respect to religious others? How should Christians live out their commitments in society at large? What does it mean, for example, to be both a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ and a good citizen in America today? These are issues not only for American Christians but for

Christians in places such as Kenya, Nigeria, India, Korea, Brazil, Great Britain, Denmark and Indonesia.

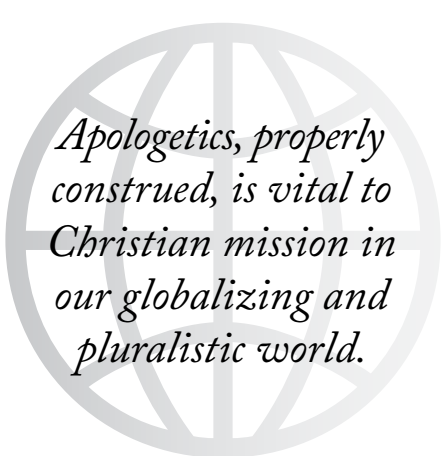
A comprehensive answer would address the issues on at least three distinct levels: First, there is the dimension of our interpersonal relationships with religious others—how we interact with our neighbors and colleagues at work or school who follow other religious paths. Second, there is the domain involving our presence and conduct as Christians in what is often referred to as the public sector. Finally, given our globalizing world, we must also consider the implications of Christian presence and conduct in a world of religious tensions. What is needed here is a comprehensive theological and political framework which enables us to deal with issues on all three levels. Moreover, the basic principles shaping the framework should apply in contexts where Christians are a small minority as well as those in which they comprise the majority.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus' teaching in the so-called Golden Rule not only should shape individual Christian behavior with others, it can also serve as a guiding principle for a social ethic in religiously diverse societies. It applies both to cases in which Christians comprise the majority and in which they are the minority, but it has special relevance to the former. Should the religious majority—Christians in the U.S.—determine public policy based *simply* upon their own religious commitments? What if the situation were reversed, and Christians were the minority in a society dominated by atheists or Hindus or Muslims—or as in Provo, Utah, by Mormons? At the heart of the Golden Rule is a thought experiment: If conditions were reversed, and I were to find myself in the position of the other, would I want to be treated in the manner in which I am considering treating the other? If not, then I should not treat the other

in this manner. This has enormous implications for public policy disputes.

### *3. Evangelicals must develop appropriate forms of apologetics for interreligious contexts.*

The third area demanding attention in the days ahead is the place of interreligious apologetics in a theology of religions. The Christian faith competes today with a bewildering variety of religious and nonreligious perspectives. Religious diversity and disagreement raise perplexing questions, both for followers of Jesus Christ and those still considering the gospel message. With the many alternatives available today, why should one become or



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remain a Christian? Given the widespread disagreement among religions, can one reasonably suppose that his own particular religious tradition is true and all others are false? Does not the fact of widespread disagreement undermine the plausibility of any particular claim to truth? Now missiologists generally have not been very favorable to the discipline of apologetics, viewing it as at best an exercise that might have some relevance in the West but which is irrelevant—if not actually counterproductive—elsewhere. To the contrary, I think that apologetics, properly construed, is vital to Christian mission in our globalizing and pluralistic world.<sup>15</sup>

John Stott saw clearly the need for a responsible apologetic in today's pluralistic world. In an essay in which he reflects back upon the twenty years since Lausanne 1974, Stott said,

We evangelical people need to repent of every occasion on which we have divorced evangelism from apologetics, as the apostles never did. We have to argue the Gospel we proclaim. We need to be able to say confidently to our hearers what Paul said to Festus: "What I am saying is true and reasonable" (Acts 26:25). We cannot possibly surrender to the current understanding of "pluralism" as an ideology that affirms the independent validity of every religion. Our task, rather, is to establish the criteria by which truth claims can be evaluated and then to demonstrate the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup>

The challenges to Christian faith today come not only from secularists and atheists, but also from intellectuals in other religions. Given globalization, people today are aware of religious diversity and disagreement as never before. Thus, Christian apologetics in the days ahead must contend with some fresh issues, including sophisticated challenges from intellectuals in other religions and a pluralistic ethos which rejects any particular religion as distinctively true.

There are many issues here, but let me make three brief comments. First, effective apologetics in interreligious contexts will require moving beyond simplistic stereo-types. For example, all too often we hear that the West is rational whereas the East is irrational or nonrational, and thus apologetics is irrelevant in the East. The problems with this stereotype are legion. For starters, categories such as "the West" and "the East" are themselves misleading abstractions. Not all in "the West" (whatever that is) are rational, and many in "the East" (whatever that is) are highly rational. Indian and

Chinese philosophical and religious traditions can be as analytic and intellectually rigorous as anything found in the West, and of course the West has plenty of irrational thinkers.

Second, in interreligious apologetics, both the questions addressed and the appropriate means of persuasion will vary from context to context. Some questions will be similar to those traditionally addressed by apologists in the West. The question of God's existence and the problem of evil will be central with Buddhists and Jains as well as with secular agnostics and atheists. But other issues also emerge in interreligious contexts. How is one to know which, if any, sacred scriptures are indeed divinely inspired? Why accept the Bible as God's Word but not the Qur'an or the Gita? Most religions include miracle claims. Why should we accept the miracle claims in the Bible but not those in other religious texts? Do certain mystical states provide direct access to ultimate reality? How should we assess reports of religious experiences in the many religions? Those influenced by Hindu or Buddhist metaphysics, which minimize the significance of the empirical, space-time world and locate religious truth in a transcendent dimension, will question the importance Christian faith places upon history. How can universally valid religious truth be based upon something as flimsy as the contingencies of history? (There are striking parallels here with eighteenth century Enlightenment thinkers such as Gotthold Lessing and Immanuel Kant, who also rejected universal religious truths based upon the "accidents" of history.)

Those engaging in interreligious apologetics must take the necessary time to study other intellectual and religious traditions carefully. Too often we dismiss them with simplistic caricatures. Responsible interreligious apologetics will be fair in its treatment

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of other religious perspectives and sensitive to culturally appropriate means of persuasion. What is appropriate in one context may not be in another.

Third, in today's post-colonialist world, the attempt to persuade religious others that they should change their fundamental beliefs and accept core Christian claims as true can easily be perceived as an inappropriate assertion of power. This is especially the case for American Christians, who are often associated with cultural, economic, political or military frameworks of power. Contexts in which Christianity has been closely associated with cultural superiority, racism, or economic exploitation make interreligious apologetics particularly problematic. Thus, Christian apologists should be humble and especially careful in encounters with religious communities, such as Jews and Muslims, which have suffered greatly in the past at the hands of Christendom. Christian apologists must be not only skilled at defending the truth of the Christian message, but they must also be winsome and gracious, serving as peacemakers and instruments of reconciliation.

These and other issues will require careful consideration as evangelicals continue to refine a theology of religions. A skeptical world is watching to see how evangelicals respond to the challenges posed by religious diversity and pluralism. Our perspectives and conduct must be disciplined by a theology of religions that is uncompromisingly faithful to the biblical witness while also informed by and relevant to the lived realities of the diverse religious communities in our world. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Peter L. Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) pp. 65-83.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990) p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, "Introduction: Ambivalence to Global Civil Society," *Religion in Global Civil Society*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, From Christian Militias to Al Qaeda* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003) p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> See Timothy Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); Winfried Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths: The Common Threads Between Christianity and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Christian and Other Religions: The Biblical Evidence," *Themelios* 9:2 (1984) pp. 4-15; Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? Jesus, Revelation and Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Ida Glaser, *The Bible and Other Faiths: Christian Responsibility in a World of Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005); Vinodh Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist*

*Paradigm* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); and *Christianity and the Religions: A Biblical Theology of World Religions*, eds. Edward Rommen and Harold Netland, Evangelical Missiological Society Series Number 2 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Roger Schmidt, et al. *Patterns of Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999) 10. See also Clifford Geertz's definition of religion in Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> See Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 11-22; and idem, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> See Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, eds. John R.W. Stott and Robert Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Charles R. Taber, *The World Is Too Much With Us: 'Culture' in Modern Protestant Missions* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1991); Robert J. Priest, "Anthropology and Missiology: Reflections on the Relationship," in *Paradigm Shifts in Christian Witness*, eds. Charles E. Van Engen, Darrell Whiteman, and J. Dudley Woodberry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008) pp. 23-28.

<sup>13</sup> For helpful treatments of Christian witness in multi-religious contexts see Terry Muck and Frances S. Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); and Vinoth Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict? Christian Integrity in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999) chapters 4-5. See also the document "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct,"

produced in 2011 jointly by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Evangelical Alliance, available at [www.worldevangelicals.org](http://www.worldevangelicals.org).

<sup>14</sup> See Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011). A thoughtful philosophical treatment of relevant issues is found in Robert Audi, *Democratic Authority and the Separation of Church and State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> See Harold Netland, "Interreligious Apologetics," in *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, eds. Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad V. Meister (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) pp. 39-45; and idem, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, chapter 8.

<sup>16</sup> John Stott, "Twenty Years After Lausanne: Some Personal Reflections," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, (April 1995) p. 54.