



In search of a Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology of Religion

A critical investigation of the work of Clark H. Pinnock and Amos Yong

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Preface

This thesis is written as part of the master's program Cross-Cultural and Contextual Theology of the Free University, Amsterdam 2002/2004.

Within the general subject of the relationship between theology and culture, Christian theology of religions is one of the topics of this program.

From my interest in missiological questions and my Evangelical background, I chose as subject of this thesis an investigation of the development and debate of an Evangelical/Pentecostal/Charismatic theology of religions.

I would like thank Drs. J.D. Gort and Dr. C. van der Kooi for their stimulating teaching, encouragement and suggestions.

Miranda Klaver

Amstelveen, June 2004

Picture forefront: work of art by Els van Groenigen

Maar waar zijn de morsetekens van de Heilige Geest te horen en te zien?...Karl Barth zei aan het eind van zijn leven dat als hij nog eens zou moeten beginnen met de opbouw van een theologie hij meer aandacht zou schenken aan het werk van de Heilige Geest... een doorbraak in de TR zie ik niet in een theologie die de naam van Jezus Christus van een vraagteken voorziet, maar in een voluit trinitarische theologia religionum die uitgaat van het werk van de Vader, de Zoon en de Heilige Geest.

Johannes Verkuyl¹

1.1 Introduction

The development of a theology of religions from an Evangelical perspective has only recently begun with roots dating back to the late 70's.² While theology of religions has been on the agenda of many consultations in the ecumenical circles, Evangelicals tend to follow current trends and topics with some delay. The last ten years there is an ongoing debate among Evangelical theologians concerning the destiny of the unevangelized. Dealing with this question, deeper theological questions have come to the forefront: the discussion concerning salvation of those who have not heard, touches the relationship between Christianity and the other religions.

The traditional exclusivistic claim of the Evangelicals (salvation through Jesus Christ only) is challenged by new or neo-Evangelicals who move into the direction of an inclusivistic position. Salvation is then realized by confession of the name of Christ on the one hand, but can also be realized by other 'believers' by their faithful response to God, in accordance with the light they have. This means that people may be saved by responding in a positive way to general revelation (which exclusivists consider to be impossible).

The work of the Charismatic Baptist Clark Pinnock has strongly influenced the Evangelical exclusivist-inclusivist debate, especially his book *A wideness in God's Mercy; the finality of Jesus Christ in a world of religions* (1992). In his reflection on other religions, the Spirit plays a significant role. Indigenous traditions are no longer understood within a framework of *praeparatio evangelica* but are seen as the realm in which the Holy Spirit is at work. The pneumatological approach of Pinnock has also inspired Amos Yong, a Malaysian born, Pentecostal-Charismatic theologian. He developed a theology of religions from a Pentecostal-Charismatic perspective in his book: *Discerning the Spirit(s) a Pentecostal-Charismatic contribution to Christian Theology of Religion* (2000). He proposes that bringing together Christology and pneumatology is necessary to overcome the question of particularity of Christ and universality of the love of God. He addresses however the problem of discernment, when and how is the Holy Spirit present and at work in the non-Christian faiths.

In this thesis I want to address the following question regarding the emerging change in the theology of religions among neo-Evangelicals and Pentecostals.

What does a Pentecostal-Charismatic theology of the Holy Spirit contribute to the development of a Christian theology of religions?

My hypothesis behind this research question is, that a Pentecostal-Charismatic theology of the Spirit opens possibilities for a new interpretation of the relationship between Christianity and

¹ Verkuyl 1986, p.119,120

² Hesselgrave 1978

the other religions. In this investigation, theological questions regarding the presence of the Spirit in the world, in cultures and the religions will be addressed.

From a missiological perspective, these questions are not new. Evangelical/Charismatic anthropologists like Kraft and Hiebert have implicitly introduced theological positions concerning the relationship between revelation and culture. They are open and positive towards the possibility of the revelation of God through and in culture. But they are hesitant with respect to the possibility of revelation in or through other religions. In this thesis I want to investigate the work of Pinnock and Yong regarding their theology of other religions connected to their theology of the Spirit. In the final section the implications of a Pentecostal-Charismatic inclusivistic theology of religions will be discussed. Since evangelism is one of the trademarks of Evangelicalism, what does a Pentecostal-Charismatic approach to mission entail?

1.2 Thesis Outline

In chapter two an overview of the three main positions in the theology of religions will briefly be discussed: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Most attention will be given to the discussion among Evangelicals because of its relevance to the central thesis.

The inclusivistic position of Clark Pinnock will be presented in chapter three. His ideas concerning the other religions will be discussed in terms of his concept 'the openness of God', his soteriology and pneumatology with a view to gaining insight in his thinking regarding revelation and truth in other religions.

Chapter four will introduce the work of Amos Yong who, in his Pentecostal-Charismatic theology of religions, expands the pneumatological approach of Pinnock, by making use of Eastern Orthodox theology and the social sciences.

In chapter five a critical assessment of the thoughts of Pinnock and Yong will be made from a missiological perspective. By discussing the missiological consequences of their theology of religions, basic theological issues come to the forefront that will be addressed, followed by the conclusion of the thesis. In the epilogue suggestions for further research are given.

1.3 Method

This thesis is based on literature study, with the intention to present the findings in a way, which does justice to the intentions of the authors of the materials used. Since I am convinced that this investigation and writing is influenced by my experience and background, I want to give account of my engagement with the subject of this thesis.

1.4 Personal background

Reflection on the relationship between gospel and culture started already when I participated in a student-exchange program at the age of seventeen. Being raised in a Dutch conservative Pentecostal family, I moved to California USA to live with an American Baptist pastor and his family for a year. During that time, I was confronted with a different understanding of the bible, the gospel and various religious practises.

A few years later as a cultural anthropology student, majoring in religious anthropology, the comparative approach to religions and cultures was an enriching but at times, painful journey as well. Some precious religious experiences were not as unique as I thought them to be. The

insights from studying the subject of religion and power uncovered my naive understanding of the church and religious leaders. My research/project in the Philippines focussed on religion and the social context, had a deep impact on my life confronting me again with my naive understanding of mission, the meaning of the gospel, and my biased bible-reading. Living in a context full of poverty and injustice made me read the Psalms from a different angle. The call for justice for the poor, the orphans and the widows became and will always remain highlighted in my reading of the Psalms. I experienced how cultural context affects the understanding and practise of religion. Another influential period in my life were the years living with my family in Cairo, Egypt. In this exiting environment, a Muslim country with a Christian minority, the close relationship between religion and culture became very evident once again. Through friendships with Muslims, my own faith was often questioned. At times I felt like a secularised Christian when I compared myself with my Muslim friends who lived constantly in the awareness of the presence of God and were dedicated to fasting and prayer. New questions were raised: since I sensed I was learning from my Muslim friends, didn't I need to acknowledge that there is revelation of God in Islam, is that theologically correct? According to my Evangelical Pentecostal background I was supposed to believe that all other religions are false and belong to the realm of darkness.

As a student participating in the CCCT program, these questions led me to pursue an investigation of a theology of religions from an Evangelical-Charismatic perspective.

1.5 Definitions

Evangelicalism as one of the streams in Christianity is difficult to define. One of the working definitions of Evangelicalism and Evangelical theology was formulated by Strange³, who calls Evangelicalism a transdenominational community that is brought together by a number of family resemblances, both historically and theologically. He recognises four layers of tradition by which the main contours of Evangelical theology can be defined: first a historic orthodox Christianity; secondly, a reformation and the theology of the reformers (the sola's of the Reformation: sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus and sola Scriptura); thirdly, a layer of Puritanism and Pietism, and finally, various revival movements in the 18th and 19th century. The different currents and streams contribute in different ways and result in a great river called Evangelicalism. Within this river, the different origins of the movement are a cause for paradoxes, different interpretations and meanings, inherent theological and spiritual tensions, supplemented by additional factors including the cultural contexts in which Evangelicalism finds itself.⁴

The last ten years, a new stream, with sources in the 80's, is causing much debate.⁵ It is variously referred to post-conservative Evangelical theology⁶, the Evangelical left⁷ or ecumenical/new Evangelicals.⁸ According to Erickson⁹ this group of Evangelicals has the following theological characteristics:

- eagerness seeking dialogue with non-Evangelical theologians

³ Strange 2001, p.5

⁴ McGrath in Strange 2001, p.6

⁵ Strange 2001, p.12

⁶ Strange 2001, p.8-12 Within Evangelicalism different strands are recognised by Strange: the Reformed/Calvinist tradition, the Armenian tradition and the post-conservative Evangelicals.

⁷ Erickson in Strange 2001, p.13

⁸ Paul Knitter in Strange 2001, p.14

⁹ Erickson in Strange 2001, p.13

- broadening of the sources used in theology: Christian tradition, culture, contemporary Christian experience
- open view of God
- acceptance rather than rejection of the realm of nature
- hope for near universal salvation
- retaining belief in divinity of Christ, conceived more in relational terms than in substance and person categories
- synergistic understanding of salvation, more Armenian than Calvinistic

The theological position of the new Evangelical theologians has far-reaching consequences regarding the traditional view of Evangelicals concerning other religions. One of the main characteristics of Evangelicalism, the urgency of mission, seems in the view of many Evangelicals to have come under threat by this new theological thinking.

Pentecostal/Charismatic movement

The twentieth century witnessed the remarkable growth of a new Christian religious movement, which has a worldwide impact. The origins of the Pentecostal movement are found in the revival referred to as “Azusa Street” in Los Angeles. Having its roots in the Holiness movement, the early Pentecostal movement was characterised by its stress on ‘the second blessing’, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as a spiritual experience after conversion, followed by glossalia, speaking in tongues.

After World War II, the Pentecostal experience began to make itself felt in the mainline churches, where it brought about a renewal movement, called the Charismatic movement, characterized by an increase of personal piety, commitment to Evangelical witness and a renewed spirituality.

Nowadays, the great diversity of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements makes a definition as difficult as it is for the broad movement of Evangelicals. Regarding the identity of these movements, definitions come from the inside and the outside, are inclusive or exclusive, which leads Anderson¹⁰ to conclude that we are confronted with a ‘range of Pentecostalism’. With the global appearance of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, the local contexts lead to great variety from African Independent Churches to Korean churches with a high Shamanistic flavour.

Yong focuses on the phenomenology of the Pentecostal-Charismatic experience at the heart of this tradition. The experience of the Holy Spirit is central to both the expression of Pentecostal-Charismatic religiosity of the adherents of these movements and their being in the world.

In search of Pentecostal theology it needs to be said that theological reflection by Pentecostal theologians is at a relatively early stage. This movement, characterised by religious experience, has drawn its theological basis strongly from Evangelical theology, often reflected in a hermeneutics of fundamentalism. Generally speaking, the content of Pentecostal theology contains an Evangelical theology supplemented by the doctrine of the second blessing, which is the Pentecostal experience.¹¹

The relationship between Pentecostals, Charismatics and Evangelicals is also a matter of inside or outside views. Although the theology of the Pentecostals is clearly influenced by Evangelical theology, many Pentecostals are concerned to distinguish themselves from Evangelicalism. On the other hand, within the Evangelical movement a distinction is made between Charismatics and non-Charismatics, who agree on fundamental issues regarding the finality of Christ for salvation but differ in their understanding of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁰ Anderson 2002

¹¹ Hollenweger in Yong 2000, p.207

The experience of the Holy Spirit links Pentecostals and Charismatics together. It is the mutual experience of the Spirit that inspires what Yong calls: the “pneumatological imagination”.¹²

Religion and a Theology of Religions

Defining religion can be done within different disciplines and from various angles. From a theological perspective, religion can be described as involvement or relationship with transcendence.¹³ Paul Tillich speaks of religion as ‘the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question to the meaning of our life’.¹⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith argues that there is no such thing as the ‘purity of religion’, and speaks of subjective faith experiences of individuals within larger cumulative traditions.¹⁵ Traditions are understood as including theological systems, institutions, scriptures, rituals and other religious practises that can be observed historically and described empirically.

Various aspects of religion can be distinguished. Religion includes the religious beliefs and doctrines that are transmitted in a number of ways through history. They are part of dynamic historical processes which can be observed empirically. In this way we can speak of religious traditions. Apart from historical influences, religious traditions are always embedded in cultural and social contexts in a mutual relationship of exchange, competence or even conflict. Apart from the social and contextual side of religion, to many of the religious currents the faith experience is the heart of religion. So at the third level we can distinguish the faith experience of the actor or believer. Focus on the personal experience of the believing subject involves his or her social and cultural context: the context conditions the way religious symbols and experiences are structured, expressed and given meaning. So when we use the concept of religion, it needs to be related to different levels: that of tradition, context and the faith of the individual-levels, thus including the historical, cultural, social, experiential and symbolic dimensions of human life. This approach comes close to the influential definition of religion given by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who is often seen as a representative of the symbolic approach to religion. The way symbols are used by people to give meaning to the world, humankind as meaning-maker, is central to this view. He defines religion as:

*...a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men, by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, and clothing them with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.*¹⁶

The focus on religion is in this sense seen as a cultural and contextual phenomenon, including the aspect of the commonality of humans who, although from different cultures and religions, share the symbolizing capacity to meet the same basic problems of life. The solutions offered by the religions are not identical, but the underlying problems belong to the ‘existentials’¹⁷, the fixed features of human existence.

Thus, in the development of a theology of religions, first we need to focus our attention on the subject: the religious experience and relationship to the divine, the transcendent; secondly,

¹² Yong 2000, p.161

¹³ Berkhof 2002 p.6 *..relatie tot het Absolute..*; Vroom 1992, p.4

¹⁴ Tillich in Yong 2003 p.16

¹⁵ W. C. Smith in Yong 2003, p.112

¹⁶ Geertz, 1973, p.4

¹⁷ Vroom 1992, p. 9

these experiences need to be related to the historical, cultural and social bedding of the context in which they take place and, thirdly, the content of religious beliefs and traditions needs to be addressed.

In this thesis we will be dealing with theology of religions not in a general sense but from a specifically Christian perspective. Proceeding from a commitment to the Christian tradition Christian theology of religions will attempt to understand how the phenomena of human religiosity in all its complexity, relates to God. This needs to emerge from various lines of investigation related to the issues mentioned this far: scriptural analysis, the tradition of the church, contextual considerations and experiences in the world.

Since the framework and concepts for this thesis have been clarified, the three main positions regarding the theology of religions will be delineated in the next chapter.

Then I fell at his feet and thought, Surely this is the hour of death, for the Lion (who is worthy of all honour) will know that I have served Tash all my days and not him. Nevertheless, it is better to see the Lion and die than to be Tisroc of the world and live and not to have seen him. But the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, Son, thou art welcome. But I said, Alas, Lord, I am no son of Thine but the servant of Tash. He answered, Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me. Then by reason of my great desire for wisdom and understanding, I overcame my fear and questioned the Glorious One and said, Lord, is it then true, as the Ape said, that thou and Tash are one? The Lion growled so that the earth shook (but his wrath was not against me) and said It is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites, I take to me the services which thou hast done to him, for I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore, if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then though he says the name of Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted. Dost thou understand, Child? I said, Lord, thou knowest how much I understand. But I said also (for the truth constrained me), Yes I have been seeking Tash all my days. Beloved, said the Glorious One, unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.

C.S. Lewis¹⁸

2.1 Introduction

In the religiously plural world, the question of how a religion views other religions becomes more and more relevant. Due to globalization, growing interdependency and modern media, the world is becoming ever more clearly a global village and religions are being forced into new kinds of relationships with other faiths. Religious pluralism is for many parts of the world not entirely new; it is the Western world that is facing the challenge of other religions at a point in history where the impact of religion in the public sphere is diminishing due to secularisation. The ideology of multiculturalism (which seemed to flourish under the umbrella of culture-relativism) is being called into question by the influx of immigrants, bringing their religious and cultural heritage. The threat of fundamentalism and terrorism has led to a new search for Western cultural identity and reflection on the basic values of society.

This chapter addresses the debate in current Christian theology of religions regarding the different positions known as exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. The discussion will focus not so much on the latter, since pluralism is not an issue that plays a role in Evangelical theology of religions. John Hick uses this tripartite division¹⁹ that has become the standard taxonomy in philosophy of religion.

¹⁸ C.S. Lewis 1956, p.164, 165

¹⁹ Hick 1985, p. 28-45 From literature Hick is often referred to as the first to use these categories in 1985. Alan Race however uses this tripartite typology already in 1983 in his book, *Christians and Religious pluralism*, p.7.

2.2 Exclusivism

Traditional Evangelical thinking concerning the other religions can be characterized by the term exclusivism.²⁰ The exclusivist position designates the view that Christianity offers the only valid means for salvation; other religions are completely ineffectual for divine salvation and are largely seen as zones of darkness. There is a clear discontinuity between Christian faith and other belief systems. Jesus Christ as the definitive and final revelation of God is decisive for the salvation of men. Although exclusivism affirms the particularity and finality of Jesus Christ, it does not necessarily entail restrictivism, i.e. restriction of the hope for salvation to those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ. Some exclusivists are universalists, who posit salvation for all mankind, while other exclusivists affirm the opportunity for salvation after death. According to the view of restrictivism, God has divinely appointed the means of salvation, and that is exclusively through the preaching of the gospel; there is no other possibility.²¹ Barth, Kraemer and Carl F.H. Henry are exclusivists regarding the relationship of Christianity, understood as the gospel of Jesus Christ, and other religions, but they strongly disagree when it comes to people's destiny: Henry is restrictivist, Barth²² and Kraemer hoped for universal salvation.

Arguments for the exclusivist position are derived from the concept of general revelation going back to Augustine. Through creation, providence and the *imago Dei*, there is a possibility of knowledge of and witness to God (based on Rom 1, 18-23). Although the name of God is everywhere known and knowable, it has no value for salvation. Calvin made the distinction between knowledge of God the Creator and knowledge of God the Redeemer. Through His works and creation, God reveals Himself in this world. Due to sin, the fallen human state, people are not able to recognize this revelation of God in the world. The only way to know God is through the revelation in Jesus Christ, as revealed in scripture. Through Christ God is known as Redeemer and Creator.²³

Throughout the history of Reformation theology Calvin's distinction between God as Redeemer and Creator was expanded and developed in the direction of a more independent category of general revelation and natural knowledge of God as a point of contact in the encounter with people of other faiths.²⁴

From this exclusivist position, mission is defined in terms of urgency, proclamation and the prompting of individuals to make a decision to accept Christ as Lord and Saviour. The biblical references often mentioned in this context are: 'enter the narrow gate' (Matt 7,13) and 'yet all who have received him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God' (John 1,12). The other religions may be regarded as *praeparatio evangelica*, and approached in search of points of contact to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ. Motivation for mission is often the hopelessness of non-Christians facing eternity and its goal is then narrowed down to their deliverance from wrath.²⁵

²⁰ Some Evangelical representatives here are: H. Netland, A. Fernando, R. Nash

²¹ Fackre 1995, p.12

²² Barth's position is to be understood from the thought that there is no knowledge of God outside Christ, since all revelation of God is self-revelation. Barth, however, did not deny the universality of revelation outside the proclamation of the church (van der Kooi 2002, p.386).

²³ Van der Kooi 2002, p.80-83

²⁴ Dekker 1996, p.108

²⁵ Pinnock 1992, p.177

2.3 Inclusivism

Inclusivism is characterised by the coherence of two principles: universal accessibility of saving grace, the salvific will of God on one hand and the finality of the special revelation in Jesus Christ, the uniqueness of the gospel on the other. In keeping those two poles together in a dialectical way they act upon each other, each forming the ever-recurring abolition of the other, as it were in an unending process of creative tension.²⁶ The salvation offered in Jesus Christ is available not only for those who hear his name: saving grace must be available in all cultures, regardless of geography or time. The old qualitative distinctions between general and special revelation – between God’s universal presence and his personal action in Jesus Christ – are undercut. However the final expression and norm for this immanent revelation is still Jesus Christ.

One of the important representatives of the inclusivist position is the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. He classifies non-Christian religions as containing elements of sin and elements of grace. These supernatural elements arising out of grace are given to people gratuitously, as a gift on account of Christ and they may be recognized as lawful religion. For Rahner, lawful religions can be a positive part of God’s plan of salvation and a means of salvation. He uses the concept ‘supernatural existential’ to designate the direct access to divine revelation found in every human being. Within each person there is the capacity to respond positively to the grace of God without hearing the gospel. Insofar as this acceptance of grace is implicitly present in a person, he or she is what Rahner calls an ‘anonymous Christian’. Salvation comes through faith and if this salvation is the salvation of Jesus Christ - and it can be no other, Rahner argues - then it must be possible to be an anonymous Christian. Proclamation of the gospel will result in a person’s being changed from an anonymous Christian into a knowing or explicit Christian. Rahner reinterprets the classical catholic distinction between nature and grace stating that the former is infused with the latter: within every person there is the ability to respond to the offer of grace.

Those Evangelicals who can be considered inclusivists²⁷ have a more cautious outlook on the other religions. They are less optimistic about and more critical of the other religions. Like Rahner they consider them as wicked as well as noble. But the Evangelical inclusivists do not consider the other religions as salvific, but they can reflect truth since they, as part of culture, are in the domain of the Spirit of God. God may use religion as a way of gracing people’s lives and it is one of God’s options for evoking faith and communicating grace. This implies that grace operates outside the church and may be encountered in the context of other religions. Sanders provides the following explication of inclusivism:

*The work of Jesus is ontologically necessary for salvation (no one can be saved without it) but not epistemologically necessary (one need not be aware the work in order to benefit from it). Or in other words, people can receive the gift of salvation without knowing the giver or the precise nature of the gift.*²⁸

This means that inclusivism implies a clear distinction between God’s universal presence and God’s personal act in Jesus Christ, and thus must elaborate the relationship between the God the Spirit and the God the Son.

²⁶ Okholm and Philipps 1995, p.24

²⁷ for example: C.H. Pinnock, J. Sanders, S. Grenz

²⁸ Sanders 1992, p.215

2.4 Religious Pluralism

Pluralism represents a position opposite to that of exclusivism. The pluralist view denies that any one religion has an exclusive salvific content or standing, and therefore denies that adherence to any one religion is a necessary condition for salvation. The pluralist believes that the major world religions provide independent salvific access to divine Reality. It implies cooperation of all religions in the effort to discover the truth. In this sense Jesus Christ is just a specific revelation of God alongside other specific revelations. John Hick and Paul Knitter are two representatives of the pluralist position.

John Hick as a philosopher of religion moved from an Evangelical background with an exclusivistic position into a pluralistic view of religions. Especially the personal experiences and friendships with people of other faiths made him reconsider the uniqueness of the Christian tradition.²⁹ What he describes as a Copernican revolution in theology entails the replacement of Christ by God as the centre of religion. Since God is mediated by human experiences, human knowledge of God is always an *interpretation* of the divine Reality. One cannot point to the essence of the transcendent in one tradition; it is only in the plurality of religions that divine Reality is discovered, he says. This shift from christocentrism to theocentrism, however, has proved to be insufficient for traditions that are non-theistic. In Hick's later work the Kantian distinction between the Real *an sich* and the Real as humanly known is used to underline the commonality within the several religious traditions, some of which hold to personal God-figures and others to non-personal absolutes.³⁰ The implication of this for his view of the incarnation of Christ has led him state that:

*..the incarnation has a powerful metaphorical meaning in that Jesus was so open to the divine spirit, so obedient to inspiration, so responsive to the divine spirit, so obedient to God's will, that God was able to act on earth and in and through him.*³¹

Hick's work has led to a variety of pluralistic views of religion with different emphases. In 1985 the liberation theologian Paul Knitter published his book '*No Other Name?*', in which he proposes a model of non-normative theocentric Christology, stressing orthopraxis, themes such as the Kingdom of God and emancipation as common ground for interreligious dialogue. The concept of salvation is redefined in the context of other religions: it is not people's eternal destiny that is at stake but what Hick calls the 'transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness'.³² Within this framework, the moral and /or ethical criterion becomes the most important with regard to discerning the salvific power of the religious traditions.

2.5 The exclusivist and inclusivist debate among Evangelicals

The discussion among Evangelicals regarding Christianity and the other religions is often narrowed down to the question: "Who will be saved?" Thorough reflection and the development of an Evangelical theology of religions is being carried out by only a small number of theologians.

²⁹ Okholm 1995, p.39

³⁰ Hick in Okholm 1995, p.49

³¹ Hick in Okholm 1995, p.58

³² Hick in Okholm 1995, p.49

³² Hick in Okholm 1995, p.58

³² Hick in Okholm 1995, p.44

Issues at stake in the present debate among Evangelicals are strongly coloured by the various approaches to scripture including hermeneutic propositions, which can be traced back partially to the different streams within Evangelicalism itself. The Calvinistic Reformed tradition on the one hand and the Armenian, more pietistic tradition on the other, can be traced as two sides of a division line. Basic dogmatic choices and reconsiderations of the Christian faith result in a different outcome in the debate concerning the other religions. The nature of God, revelation, redemption and the person of Christ are prominent issues in the present debate.

Different theological commitments can be traced along two continuums: one stretching between God's transcendence and immanence and the other between man's sinfulness and likeness to God. The Reformed way of thinking stresses the distance between God and human beings, between the sinfulness and the transcendence of God, and includes a pessimistic view of general revelation. At the other end of the scale, a question is raised regarding the limits of general revelation, the likeness of humans to God is emphasized and the immanence of God in this world is stressed.³³

Also the shift in paradigm from modernism to postmodernism forms a contextual influence in the discussion of the hermeneutics and the status of scripture among Evangelicals. The propositional truths of the past are under debate and new horizons of interpretation have become visible. In addition, under the influence of the charismatic renewal movement and emerging Pentecostal reflection, an attempt is being made to integrate a theology of the Spirit into this discussion. The role of the Spirit in this world is an important element in any discussion of the immanence of God.

For a contribution from the Pentecostal-Charismatic side, we will look in the next chapter at the theological position of the inclusivist Clark Pinnock, including some key aspects of his soteriology, doctrine of God and pneumatology.

³³ D.K.Clark in Crockett and Sigountos 1991

When my grandfather passed away, I was a girl of eleven. As a family we were all very sad, especially my mother, who loved her father very much. At the funeral she spoke from Matthew 25 on, the parable of the sheep and the goats. Her speech puzzled me: my grandfather was a socialist and active in the labour union, but had nothing to do with religion or the church whatsoever. How could she relate his life to this story and with the strong Pentecostal message of conversion and having faith in Jesus? Was there salvation without knowledge of Christ I wondered? I never asked her that question..

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theology of Clark Pinnock will be discussed. Being probably one of the most radical Evangelical inclusivists, he is one of the most controversial and influential Evangelical theologian at the present time. Alister McGrath states that Pinnock 'has been the catalyst for much rethinking in the Evangelical movement'.³⁴ His approach is characterized by an openness to learn from other traditions outside the Evangelical world and by a radical rethinking of basic doctrines within Evangelical theology. He has written on a wide range of theological topics in a manner that does not always lead to comprehensive treatment of the areas he wants to cover.

In search of Pinnock's pneumatological inclusivism, we have to look into a few 'doctrinal positions' he takes: the concepts of the openness of God, revelation and salvation. This inquiry is necessary to understand Pinnock's theology of religions, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

3.2 Openness of God

In a personal article³⁵, Pinnock attempt to reconcile the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom, which lies at the heart of his concept 'openness of God'. Coming from a Calvinian dominated form of Evangelicalism, Pinnock speaks of a theological megashift when around 1970, he broke away from, what he calls, 'determinism and an all determining fatalistic blue-print of the world'. This also caused a paradigm shift in his biblical hermeneutics. Scripture was read from a different angle which led to a reinterpreting of the concept of human freedom in terms of humans being 'responsible' beings, able to respond freely to God's word and call. He redefines the relationship between God and man in terms of mutuality, reciprocity, and covenantal partnership in the flow of the history of the world. He concludes that continuing in the grace of God is something that depends at least in part on the human partner.

By pulling away one of the basic pillars of Calvinian theology, other insights in Calvin's coherent theological system came under threat. Reconsidering the concept of double predestination and divine election from another point of view made it possible to accept the universal salvific will of God for all people and to reinterpret election as a corporate category not oriented to the individual choice of individuals for salvation only.

The concept of freedom was the driving force behind his change from Calvinism to Armenianism. The basic metaphor of God connected with sovereignty and power changed

³⁴ McGrath in Strange 2001, p.42

³⁵ Pinnock 1989

into the metaphor of God as a loving parent. The personal, relational God is involved in reciprocal relations with His creatures. This led to the development of the theistic paradigm that Pinnock calls the 'Trinitarian openness of God'.

Divine sovereignty is redefined in the sense that God created humans with genuine autonomy and thus accepted limitations on His divine power. God's ultimate goals will be realized but sovereignty does mean that God will anticipate the actions and decisions of man: divine sovereignty is not a form of dominion. God has established a self-limitation by creating the free will of humanity. This leads to a related redefinition of God's divine omniscience. Pinnock believes that if future decisions were known, then our choice would not be truly significant. According to the self-revelation of God, God is not the 'Unmoved Mover', but the God of Jesus Christ, who comes to us and acts in history.

The picture of God that I receive from the bible is of One who takes risks and jeopardizes his own sovereignty in order to engage in historical interactions with created reality. The triune God pursues this path out of love that is fundamental to his very being. This does not make history the author of God. It portrays God as the author of history who delights in meaningful interaction with creatures as his purposes for the world are realized.³⁶

By presenting this dynamic picture of God, Pinnock uses anthropomorphic metaphorical descriptions, which refer to God rejoicing, repenting, grieving, and changing His mind. The immediacy of the text is brought into his description of the relational God. The way Pinnock uses metaphoric language in an uncritical way is to be questioned, for it can lead to a naïve reading of the text. Moreover this approach fails to deal with questions concerning the distance between God and His revelation expressed in human language.

3.3 Pneumatological creation and redemption

Pinnock's undeterministic stand and the concept of divine openness are given more content in his book *Flame of Love* (1996), in which he reinterprets creation and redemption history from a pneumatological point of view.

For Pinnock, the nature of God is grounded in the communion of the three Loving Persons in the Trinity, the overflowing shared life that creates and upholds the universe. On the basis of this concept of Trinity, the Creator is portrayed as relationally, One who loves. Creation as well as redemption is portrayed as flowing from the Trinity as a pure gift in which the Spirit has the central role of giver of life. Pinnock understands sin as the misuse of freedom, which caused things to go wrong, but through the sending of the Spirit by God restoration through the incarnation is brought into the world, so injury and brokenness might be healed. The coming of Christ is then placed within the mission of the Spirit. God did not invent grace when sin entered the world, according to Pinnock, but when that happened grace abounded all the more, since the goal of redemption is union with God, which is the outworking of God's original purpose. In this sense, the self-emptying of God in the incarnation is not a new event. Already in creation God's self-emptying and self-limitation is evident: God embarks on a risky adventure of creating a non-divine, significant created order and even wants to be involved in it.³⁷

³⁶ Pinnock in Strange 2001, p.54

³⁷ Pinnock 1996, p.56

History is then portrayed as a theatre, where the divine purposes are being worked out by the resourcefulness of God dealing with the surprises of a significant creation. Pinnock does not conclude that history is undetermined or random: the outcome is certain but the Spirit is active in ways that are respectful of the dignity of creation. The ultimate goal is union and community of humanity with God.

An important theme in Pinnock's writing is the unity of God's work in creation and redemption. The Spirit of creation and resurrection are the same. The Spirit is everywhere present in the world, in human experience and beyond it: he speaks of the 'world as a natural sacrament'.³⁸ The Spirit prepares the way for Christ by gracing humanity everywhere, and supplying prevenient grace³⁹ that draws sinners to God and puts them on a path towards reconciliation.

Pinnock does not elaborate on the problem of evil. It is not of human making, he says, because Genesis shows that even in the act of creation God confronted formlessness and darkness and had to establish a life-sustaining order against it. He leaves the origin of evil open, and speaks of a great mystery, which will be resolved in the future by the action of God.

3.4 Soteriology

In his Christology, Pinnock wants to stress the relationship between Christ and the Spirit and relates this to Irenaeus' image of the two hands of the Father: the mission of the Son and the separate mission of the Spirit. Both have a distinct role to play in the redemption of the world.⁴⁰ Pinnock proposes to enrich the Logos-Christology with a Spirit-Christology in order to overcome the overemphasis on the divinity of Christ, and to give attention to Jesus' humanity and the role of the Spirit in the life of Jesus. The relationship between Jesus and the Spirit is reciprocal; both can be understood in terms of the mission of the other.

Pinnock's model speaks of the 'last-Adam Christology'; Jesus is empowered by the Spirit to bring humanity to fulfilment. Through the Spirit Christ becomes, by means of His resurrection, the first-born of a new humanity. In Christ the last Adam, the union of mankind and God has come into being, which was the goal of creation from the beginning.

The concepts recapitulation and representation are central in Pinnock's model. Redemption is not in the first place for the transgressions of men (although Pinnock does not disregard this aspect) but redemption is attained through the representation of Jesus as last Adam: through this means humanity will be saved. The story of the prodigal son is used as reference here: Jesus as the true lost son, left his father's house, identified himself with sinners and surrendered himself and returned to the Father. In Christ, God took the lost case of humanity who rejected him and humiliated himself to save us. God needed to be represented in the midst of humanity, and man needed to be represented before God. Only in this way, was there a *momentum*⁴¹ to redeem the world. The meaning of the concept of salvation is not in the first place defined in legal but rather in relational terms. The goal of salvation is not only forgiveness of sin but also union with God and the transformation of life. This way of interpreting salvation is the consequence of Pinnock's consistent use of the metaphor of God

³⁸ Pinnock 1996, p.62

³⁹ Strange 2001, p.94 The concept prevenient grace is used by John Wesley, who developed it in the context of the discussion of predestination with the Reformers. Wesley's idea of prevenient grace is that through Christ's death the inherited guilt and total depravity of men are cancelled and that grace restores our ability to respond positively to God's offer of salvation. Pinnock does not define his meaning of prevenient grace.

⁴⁰ Pinnock addresses the *filioque* discussion and opts for the Eastern-Orthodox position. The *filioque* dispute is discussed in 4.4.

⁴¹ Pinnock 1996, p.94

as the loving Father bringing lost humanity into loving community with Himself. Pinnock presents salvation in terms of *theosis*, participation in the divine nature, but in such a way that the distinction proper to Creator and creature is preserved.

In distinction from Reformed theology, justification is not the central theme in salvation for Pinnock; justification is mentioned as a step along the road to salvation, a stage pointing to processes of transformation and union.⁴²

Pinnock's concept of human freedom and the use of prevenient grace implies the rejection of the concept of the total depravity of sinners. He points out that the parables of Jesus speak frequently of invitation to banquets and speak of people searching. People have the ability to call on God and are structured in such a way, that they are able to respond. Sinners are portrayed as responsible agents who can recapitulate Adam's decision. Faith is then understood as a human response to grace; and while grace is powerful, it may be refused. Pinnock recognizes that there are some instances in scripture where God does overpower people, for example in the case of Saul. 'God is not obliged to respect our freedom, even if he usually does so'.⁴³

It is interesting to note that Pinnock comments on the Evangelical shibboleth: 'salvation by receiving Christ'. He argues that this is not biblical language. Salvation is more than confessing Christ; it includes receiving the Spirit of re-creation, new life, and implies a process of transformation. It is more than a private matter; it has to do with regeneration of the whole cosmos, and makes people instruments in the ongoing process of the mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God.⁴⁴

3.5 Pinnock's theology of religions

So far, several building blocks have been presented that are necessary to understand Pinnock's inclusivist position regarding the other religions.

His position in the *filioque*⁴⁵ discussion is crucial: the mission of the Spirit is understood as separate from that of the mission of the Son. This implies that the whole world and history is part of the realm of the Spirit of God, who draws people's attention to the grace of God.

The emphasis on the continuity between the work of creation and redemption affects the content of the meaning of salvation and the coming of Christ. Salvation is broadened from forgiveness of sin and dealing with guilt, to a concept of atonement with a universal dimension, re-creation with an eschatological dimension, referred to as union with God. The strong emphasis on the coming of Christ as an event of the Spirit, influences the incarnational and Logos dimension of the mission of the Son. Although Pinnock wants to maintain the meaning of Christ as the Logos, and wants to add a Spirit Christology to bring in the human dimension of Christ, his emphasis is more on Christ as a human, full of the Spirit. It is clear that the content of Pinnock's Christology influences the meaning of the particularity of Christ. The two basic elements of Pinnock's theology of religions presented need further investigation: the global work of God and the particular salvation through Jesus Christ. Pinnock's biblical justification of universality and particularity are as follows.

⁴² Pinnock 1996, p.97, 150

⁴³ Pinnock 1996, p.162

⁴⁴ Pinnock 1996, p.164

⁴⁵ see 4.4

Universality

The universal element is founded in God's love for all humanity and in the Spirit, who safeguards God's presence in the world. Pinnock speaks of a hermeneutics of hopefulness, a basic optimism about the wideness of God's mercy (2 Pet 3, 9; I Tim. 2, 4).

The scriptural foundation for the universal salvific will of God is found in the covenants of the Old Testament. The covenant God made with Noah includes in Noah all people. Pinnock also points out that the Abrahamic covenant was made in the context of God's concern with the whole world. Both covenants are universal in scope. Moreover, the genealogies recorded in Genesis demonstrate that God is the God of the nations and not a tribal deity. And Christ establishes the third covenant in the New Testament.

*There is salvation for people in all three of the covenants .. there is a more complete saving knowledge of God in the new covenant... in all three, God justifies Jews and Gentiles on the ground of their faith.*⁴⁶

For Pinnock, salvation history is coextensive with world history and its goal is the healing of the nations. Continuity between the Old and New Testaments is of crucial significance to him. A corporate dimension characterizes election in the Old Testament and this remains unchanged in the New Testament. After the call of Abram, God is still active and in dialogue outside Israel. This is seen on the one hand in the lives of pagan believers such as Job, Melchizedek and Enoch and on the other in God's dealing with the nations around Israel, as portrayed in the story of Jonah.

In the New Testament, the universality of God's plan of salvation central is in the preaching of Jesus (Mk 1, 14-15). Several examples can be given: Jesus and the Samaritan woman, the Roman official, the Syro-Phoenician woman as well as the parable of the Good Samaritan. The vision in the book of Revelation, where a multitude of cultures, nations and people-groups are mentioned before the throne of God, indicates that nothing of value in human cultures is going to be lost or wasted.

The pagan saints of Hebrews 11 are for Pinnock the convincing example of the possibility that pagans can please God, because they sought him and responded with faith. The key verse in Pinnock's arguments is mentioned in Acts 14, 16-17, where Paul says "God has not left himself without a witness".

⁴⁶ Pinnock 1992, p.105

Particularity

In Pinnock's view the universal salvific will of God is normatively grounded in the person and work of Christ. The paradox is that the universality of God's love is known through the particular event of the incarnation. Reasoning from the interpretation of salvation as recapitulation, the corporate dimension of humanity is brought along in the atonement through Jesus Christ as the last Adam. Pinnock speaks of humanity that *de jure* is reconciled through Christ, but *de facto* needs to respond to the invitation of grace. In this way he distinguishes between the ontological necessity of Christ work of redemption from the epistemological situation of sinners. The patriarch Job was saved by Christ (ontologically) without actually knowing the name of Jesus (epistemologically). So the normativeness of Christ does not imply a narrowness of salvation. People may be outside the church but not outside the love of God.

Revelation and the religions

Pinnock's Trinitarian approach leads him to conclude that God's Spirit and evidence of His work are everywhere: God's actions pervaded history from the beginning and continue to do so. Doing justice to the twin mission of the Son and Spirit can ease the tension between universality and particularity. According to Pinnock the rejection of the *filioque* is an important move in the direction of an adequate contemporary theology of religions. He observes that:

..the Spirit is not tied to the Christ-event exclusively but rather can operate in the whole world, which is the Father's domain (...) God is active by his Spirit in the structures of creation, in the whole of history, even in the sphere of religions. The breath of God is free to blow wherever it wills (Jn.3, 8). The economy of the Spirit is not under our control, and certainly it is not limited to the church (...) There is no hint of grace of God being limited to a single thread of human history.⁴⁷

It is on the basis of the two axioms, which compose the soteriological foundation for his theology of religions, that he goes on to investigate the phenomena of religion and the biblical view of religion.

Pinnock distinguishes between the objective and subjective aspects of religion.⁴⁸ The latter refers to faith, piety and personal responses whereas the objective aspect refers to cumulative traditions such as Christianity and Buddhism as institutions, cultural movements, teachings, and symbols. The biblical concern is primarily with the subjective aspect of religion, Pinnock contends. With respect to objective aspects of religions, Pinnock recognizes a deeply ambiguous attitude in scriptural texts. There is a dark side to religion that is pictured as false and destructive when for example Canaanite religious practises are mentioned in the Old Testament. But the Old Testament also points to the fact that the religion of Israel, though founded in a divine covenant and election, was itself far from flawless. Religion can become corrupted and can keep people away from God. Also in the public life of Jesus religion is addressed negatively when He confronts religious leaders.

Pinnock's attitude toward the other religions is open: they are mixtures of truth and error, goodness and evil. He believes that God can use the positive aspects of other religions and a variety of other elements, specifically, the conscience, the human religious quest, angels and social interaction as means of grace. The requirement for salvation is simply to trust in God,

⁴⁷ Pinnock 1992, p. 78

⁴⁸ Like W. C. Smith

under whatever form God is known, and to be obedient. Perhaps some believers will receive explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and the basis of their salvation only later, after death.

The fulfilment paradigm of religion is in this sense not convincing for Pinnock. Religions do not point to Christ nor are they stepping-stones to Christ. But he does not agree with Rahner's concept of lawful religion: 'the idea that people approach God normally through the religions available in their social context is naïve speculation'.⁴⁹

Although human alienation appears in the sphere of religion, general revelation, through the mission of the Spirit, is also present in the religious realms. In Scripture, he finds also examples of forms of noble religion and religiosity outside the bounds of salvation history. Drawing from the 'holy pagan tradition', he mentions a number of believing men and women who maintained a right relationship with God and lived saintly lives under the wider covenant God made with Noah.⁵⁰ Religions can and should be appreciated as the expression of a valid response to God. They are universal dimensions of life within which questions regarding meaning, truth and value are asked: in this way they can be explained anthropologically. In a theological sense they can be understood to reflect both general revelation and the prevenient grace of God, Pinnock avers.

Pinnock uses the faith principle from Hebr. 11 to underline the universal accessibility of grace. Also the story of Cornelius in Acts 10 is paradigmatic for Pinnock, as illustrative of the fact that people outside the covenant of Judaism and Christianity may live in a right and acceptable relationship with God. God was present in the religious sphere of Cornelius' pagan life. From this text, he concludes that God accepts those who, like Cornelius, have faith in God, as Abraham was accepted on the basis of his faith.

As a means of recognizing these holy pagans, Pinnock gives two criteria, a cognitive one: does a person fear God, and an ethical one: does he or she do what is right?

The cognitive criterion, however, is problematic since not all religious traditions have a concept of a personal God. Pinnock does not really deal with this problem. In practice, the ethical criterion seems more important to him than the cognitive one. Pinnock concurs with the statement of the second Vatican Council II, that 'a person's orientation toward God may be revealed by moral actions alone, even if they are not accompanied by any confession'. Pinnock comments that although this statement goes further than what Peter says, given the mandate in the Old Testament, it may be justified (Jer. 22, 16). He concludes: 'A person may know God without it coming to verbal expression'.⁵¹ And: 'I think God would accept people whose beliefs fall far short of the complete truth because scripture often hints at how merciful God is, even in the realm of religion'.⁵² According to the bible, people are saved by faith, not by the content of their theology'.⁵³

With these statements Pinnock comes close to the position of Rahner and challenges the boundaries of Evangelical theology.

3.6 Religions and the truth

From the premise that religions are not outside the realm of the Spirit of God and religious experience may be valid outside Judaism and Christianity, Pinnock recognizes that there are positive features of other religions due to God's presence and revelation.⁵⁴ He concludes that there is a *via media*, a path that requires discernment to determine whether truth or falsity is at work, whether an individual is exercising subjective faith in God, or remains under demonic

⁴⁹ Pinnock 1992, p.91

⁵⁰ Pinnock 1992, p.92

⁵¹ Pinnock 1992, p.98

⁵² Pinnock 1992, p.101

⁵³ Pinnock 1992, p.157

⁵⁴ Pinnock 1992, p.94, 106.

or human delusions, whether the religious traditions help or hinder personal faith. The quest for discernment is answered in what he calls truth-seeking encounters, truth-seeking dialogue with respect for the possible truth of what others believe in. For Pinnock the context of the believing community is critical in these areas. Because the religions are a mixture of good and bad, truth and falsity, they should be confronted by the gospel in a variety of encounters that will transform both persons and cumulative traditions. Pinnock speaks of the truth incarnate as criterion for a testing of the spirits: 'We look for fruit of the Spirit and the way of Jesus, justice and care about community as in Matt 25; signs of the Kingdom have to do with the transformation of life'.⁵⁵

Questions remain when people are confronted with conflicting truth claims: How will they be adjudicated? Pinnock states that the truth will ultimately be resolved eschatologically. 'This means we will never fully resolve the conversation but patiently await the arrival of full knowledge from God'.⁵⁶

3.7 Evaluative remarks

In the proposal for an inclusivistic Evangelical theology of religion, Pinnock leaves many fundamental questions open, due to lack of precision but also to lack of theological coherence. Shifting the equation freedom and sovereignty, makes it possible for him to lay stress on the universal salvific will of God. The strong metaphor used for God as a loving Parent, a relational God, is attributable to the premise of universal prevenient grace.

All of which makes it possible to extend the meaning of salvation to include a corporate dimension and to view atonement as applicable to all humankind. The rejection of the *filioque* makes way for the Spirit to be active from the beginning; continuity between the work of creation and redemption is made possible. But inclusion of Logos Christology and orthodox models of atonement like the forgiveness of sins disrupts the coherence of Pinnock's thoughts. The eclectic use of concepts and models leaves the impression that although coherence is proposed, (especially in his book *Flame of Love* in which he attempts to present a consistent pneumatological approach of creation theology, soteriology and pneumatology) this is not accomplished.

A number of questions remain:

- When Pinnock refers to the Spirit, he does not clarify and define whether he refers to the third person of the Trinity or to the active presence of God in the world. Although he does make this differentiation⁵⁷ in the introduction of *Flame of Love*, he does not make clear in his writings what definition of Spirit he uses in different passages.
- The concept of general revelation and prevenient grace is used but not fully defined or specified.
- The meaning of being ontologically saved as opposed to epistemologically saved is briefly discussed but the meaning of the Cross in relation to these concepts is not made clear
- The strong emphasis on the continuity of creation and salvation linked to the history of the Spirit raises the question regarding the meaning of Pentecost within this history.
- The relationship between the mission of the Spirit and the Son are recognized as separate missions, but the connection between the two, is not defined. Pinnock suggests implicitly that the mission of the Son is included in the mission of the Spirit, while at the same time, the work of Christ is counted as normative.

⁵⁵ Pinnock 1996, p.210

⁵⁶ Pinnock 1992, p.146

⁵⁷ Pinnock 1996, p.24, 25

- The quest for discernment is not fully answered since the two criteria of the faith principle are problematic. Pinnock eliminates the role of the cognitive criterion (one who fears God) by on the one hand asserting that the Muslims, Jews and African traditionalists all adhere to a supreme being. And on the other, in his later discussion of the faith principle he asserts that people are saved by their faith, not by the content of their beliefs.⁵⁸ This leads to the question whether the ethic criterion alone (does he or she what is right) is sufficient: this leads to a natural morality, which can be substantiated apart from biblical Christianity. By accentuating the praxis conflicting truth claims and beliefs are neglected and not addressed. Pinnock's claim to maintain a high Christological point of view is not included in his discussion of the criteria for discernment and therefore runs the risk of subjectivism and ambiguities.

In his contribution to Evangelical theology of religions Amos Yong provides answers to these two questions: the relationship between the missions of the Spirit and the Son, and the quest for discernment. In the following chapter his model of theology of religions will be discussed.

⁵⁸ Pinnock 1992, p.157

4.1 Introduction

Amos Yong is the first Pentecostal theologian who has written a full-length theology of religions from a Pentecostal-Charismatic perspective. He is influenced and challenged by Clark Pinnock's pneumatology and Trinitarian theology. Yong's dissertation⁵⁹ is in part a response to Pinnock's proposal for a theology of religions.⁶⁰ He attempts to build on the insights of Pinnock, brings in his own Pentecostal experience and theology, and uses in an eclectic way, different theological and metaphysical sources, resulting in a creative new approach to a Christian theology of religions. In this chapter these sources will be discussed, his model will be presented and this chapter will close with an evaluation of his work.

The immediate cause of Yong's investigation is Harvey Cox' discussion concerning the Pentecostal spirituality in his book *Fire from Heaven*.⁶¹ From the analysis of Cox' concept of primal spirituality, Yong develops his pneumatological categories for discernment.

4.2 Harvey Cox's concept of primal spirituality

Cox's explanation for the growth of Pentecostalism is found in a restoration of a primal spirituality; all over the world, individuals and communities have been uprooted by modernization and industrialisation, and are receptive to new religious movements with a view to coping with personal and social changes. Three dimensions of religiosity are given by Cox to describe this global phenomenon: ecstatic speech (glossalia, or related utterance), mystical piety (trance, visions, dreams etc.) and a primal hope (eschatological orientation). This so called 'primal spirituality' in a Christian framework is capable of absorbing practical elements of indigenous traditions and local cultures around the world.⁶²

The general response from Pentecostals is that they are reluctant to accept Cox's idea that their spirituality is similar to that of ancient and local religious traditions. Yong however, gives a theological response to the implications of Cox's analysis, a theological understanding of other religious traditions outside Christianity, and a self-critical Pentecostal response. He investigates the implicit theory of religion of Cox, and questions whether this primal spirituality, by Yong called a 'common human religiousness' and its features, is sustainable as a theory of religion for the twenty-first century. He raises the question that, if there is a common spirituality between Pentecostalism and indigenous traditions, whether Christian theology can learn from this about systematic interconnections between human religiosity, salvation, the Church, the Holy Spirit and Christ. Yong believes that the Pentecostal and Charismatic experience of the Holy Spirit can provide a way by which a pneumatological approach to the non-Christian faiths can be constructed, which will complement and in some ways perhaps advance the discussion of a Christian theology of religions. From a theology of religions, he says, the need for inter-religious dialogue will follow. He is convinced that Pentecostals should be involved in these conversations.⁶³

⁵⁹ Yong 2000

⁶⁰ Yong 2000, p.202n: "...Pinnock has presented the scriptural arguments (...) what is attempted here therefore should be understood as complementing rather than supplanting Pinnock's labour..."

⁶¹ Cox 1995

⁶² Yong 2000, p.17

⁶³ Yong 2000, p.20

The investigation of Yong is remarkable in the sense that it differs from a classical understanding of the other faiths within the Pentecostal discourse: other religions are generally interpreted as realms of darkness, of demonic or even satanic origin. This interaction with the religions then, calls for bold evangelism leading to conversion and proclamation. Yong does not deny this call for proclamation and witness, but emphasizes that this needs to be held in tension with other modes of relating to people of other faiths, listening as well as speaking.⁶⁴

4.3 Yong's Method

Yong's approach is characterized by an attempt to understand both the phenomena and the religious experiences from the different religious traditions in the light of the experiences of the Spirit and of scripture.

From an investigation of the present state of affairs of the development of the several theologies of religions, Yong concludes that pluralism is not an option: the shift from christocentrism to theocentrism is insufficient since not all religions are theistic and furthermore this approach relativizes Christ as the core of the Christian faith.⁶⁵

Yong is sympathetic towards inclusivism, but recognizes the problem of formulating a theology of religions that upholds both the particularity of Christ and the universal love of God. Yong proposes a way out by means of a pneumatological approach to the religions which begins with the doctrine of the Spirit as a clue of bringing together the particularity and the universality.

Pneumatological approaches to the religions are not entirely new. Several pneumatological projects have already been undertaken by Knitter, Samartha, Dupuis and others. Based on an investigation of their insights, Yong concludes that in their pneumatological endeavours, pneumatology is used as detour and eventually leads to Christology. Although there is a movement in the direction of a Trinitarian theology of religions, they cannot get away from the historic tendency to subordinate the economy of the Spirit to that of the Son. The criteria for discernment of the Spirit are primarily Christological. This leads back to a Christocentric dead end in dialogue, and fails to take seriously the full implications of pneumatology. He concludes that their positions lead to 'Christological impasse'.⁶⁶

Yong proposes to move beyond the various contemporary Trinitarian theologies of religions by introducing theological and experiential categories, derived from the three features of Cox's concept of primal spirituality, which can be used as criteria to discern the presence and activity of the Spirit.⁶⁷

4.4 Sources of Yong's theological categories

Yong draws from the insights of Eastern Orthodox theology, especially that of the Greek-Orthodox theologian, George Khodr.⁶⁸ In his address to the Central Committee of the WCC at Addis Ababa in 1971, Khodr posits a distinction between the economy of the Son and that of the Spirit, which is derived from the specific Orthodox point of view regarding the

⁶⁴ Yong 2000, p.24, 25

⁶⁵ Yong 2000, p.46

⁶⁶ Yong 2000, p.70; 2002, p.85, 86

⁶⁷ Yong 2000, p.65

⁶⁸ Khodr refers to the Eastern Orthodox theologian Lossky

relationship within the Trinity. Eastern-Orthodox theology defines the Spirit as the Spirit of the Father, where Western theology speaks of the Spirit from the Father and through the Son. The *filioque* dispute, which caused the separation of the Western and Eastern churches in the year 1054, has led to far-reaching differences in the understanding of soteriology between the Western and Eastern churches, according to Khodr. In the West, the notion of the *filioque* has resulted in the limitation of the domain of the Spirit to that of the Son and his Body, the church; within the Eastern view there is no limitation to the working domain of the Spirit in the world. The distinct economies of the Word and the Spirit stand in a relationship of reciprocity and a mutual service. Khodr concludes that:

*.. the Spirit operates (...) in accordance with His own economy and we could from this angle regard the non-Christian religions as points where His inspiration is at work.*⁶⁹

The metaphor used in Khodr's model is drawn from Iraneus' two hands of the Father, picturing the double mission of the Son and the Spirit in this world. The mission of the Son is understood to be incarnate and to secure redemption through his life, death and resurrection; the mission of the Spirit is to apply the redemption secured by the Son to the world. Khodr suggests that this metaphor allows us to recognize the different economies of the Word and Spirit, by which we can understand the religions. Religions are in touch with God by the mission of the Spirit even if the name of Christ is never confessed. Khodr highlights the presence of the Holy Spirit in the other traditions and acknowledges the hiddenness of Christ as the centre of other traditions.⁷⁰

Yong objects to the spatial constructs of Khodr in which the mission of the Son is limited to that of the church, since the economy of the Spirit would then be broader than the economy of the Son, and the Son would be subordinated to the Spirit. According to Yong, it would be more appropriate to regard the economies of the Son and Spirit as overlapping dimensionally. In this way the interrelatedness as well as the distinction between the two economies would be safeguarded and the extra-Christian faiths could be understood as belonging to both economies but in different respects.⁷¹

Other sources Yong uses are Rahner and Tillich in search of the presence of the Spirit in this world. Both work within the parameters of Vatican II.⁷² Rahner's way of searching for the presence and activity of the Spirit is again a turn to Christology as central criterion, concludes Yong. Also Tillich's attempt to understand religious matters by use of his correlation method is finally answered by the revelation of Jesus Christ as the New Being. Problematic is that the Spirit in Tillich's model is not part of God but *is* God, which tends to a binitarian model of God in stead of a fully Trinitarian pneumatology.

The problem of current theology is according to Yong, that the concept of the Spirit's universal presence raises at the same time the question regarding the absence of the Spirit and does not adequately deal with criteria for discerning the Spirit and the spirits. Needed is a comprehensive doctrine of the Spirit within a framework of the Christian Trinitarian faith, which clarifies both the relationship between the Son and the Spirit, and the Spirit's presence and activity in the world. He starts this endeavour by developing a foundational

⁶⁹ Khodr in Yong 2002, p.88

⁷⁰ Khodr in Yong 2002, p.90,91

⁷¹ Yong 2000, p.62

⁷² Yong 2000, p.41 At Vatican Council II, inclusivism was accepted in terms for stages of revelation in the other faiths and although they are not equally good, some on occasion may reflect aspects of the fullness of divine revelation exhibited in Christ and the Christian church.

pneumatology in order to formulate normative criteria for discerning other spirits and the Spirit of God in other religious traditions.

4.5 Philosophical framework

Yong articulates his theoretical framework by giving attention to foundational pneumatology and he draws extensively on the thoughts of the Jesuit Donald Gelpi.⁷³

Yong uses the notion of foundation to emphasize the public nature of truth and to undergird the idea that the categories of reality developed are potentially universal in scope and application. He differs from Gelpi by not using 'Christian conversion' as a fundamental category of reality, but formulates instead 'pneumatological imagination' as a basic category of reality: a way of seeing God, self and the world, that is inspired by the experience of the Spirit.⁷⁴

Yong defines imagination as a synthetic process, which bridges the elements of perception and cognition in human experience. He uses the metaphor of 'shifting foundations' to underscore the dialectic of scripture and experience, thought and practice, reason and narrative, self and community in all knowledge. These are elements which combine to inform the foundational categories and are shaped by them.⁷⁵ For Yong a theology of the Holy Spirit emerges out of our experiences of God's presence and activity in the world while, on the other hand, it enables us to experience that presence and activity in more precise and true ways. The Spirit is the supremely mediational and relational symbol, he says.⁷⁶ The Spirit mediates between the mystery of the transcendent Father and the revelation of the immanent Son, between creation and redemption, between the world and the church, between nature and the Kingdom of God, and so on.

Yong elaborates this universal concept of 'pneumatological imagination' along the lines of a metaphysics of creation in a Trinitarian perspective.⁷⁷ In creation there is a relationship and connection between the Spirit and universality: there is a universal commonality in our createdness. In his discussion on Word and Spirit, Yong draws from the insights of Neville's creation theology the speculative thesis of the Trinitarian character of the created act: 'all created things can be considered a harmony solely on being what it [sic] is, and as such, normative in its [sic] unitive existence. In the secondary sense, things can be and are measured against normative ideals: we imagine things and they can and should be better harmonized than they are'.⁷⁸ Neville distinguishes theologically between these formal uncreated norms and normative measures by designating the first as belonging to the Word of God, Logos, and the second to the Word 'spoken' in creation. This results in God as the primal source, the Logos as the norm, and the Spirit as the power of the creative act, each relative to the created order.⁷⁹

This leads to the hypothesis that God, the immanent Trinity, needs to be located in the creative act and not apart from this world. God as the creative power is therefore present in each thing: 'all determinate things'⁸⁰ consist of both pneuma and logos'.⁸¹ This duality of

⁷³ Yong 2000, p.100-104

⁷⁴ Yong 2000, p.102

⁷⁵ Yong 2000, p.103

⁷⁶ Yong in Stackhouse 2001, p.45

⁷⁷ Yong 2000 p.105

⁷⁸ Yong 2000 p.108

⁷⁹ Yong 2000 p.108

⁸⁰ 'determinate things' understood by Yong as 'the essential determinations of being of which all reality consists' 2002, p.134

⁸¹ Yong 2002, p.130

Word and Spirit is based on the presence and activity of God in the world through the symbol of the Holy Spirit and secondly in the basis of 'imago Dei', since as humans, we all derive from the breath of life. This pneumatological vision of creation highlights the breath of life given to all human creatures, the universal anthropological structure of humanity and is connected with God's presence in the world.⁸²

4.6 Pneumatological theology of discernment

Yong attempts provide a systematic re-conception of the nature of spiritual discernment. Drawing upon the philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce, Yong constructs a 'hermeneutics of life', as an adequate ground for spiritual discernment, including the general features of experience, by assuming that all people experience the Holy Spirit in some way.⁸³

From Peirce, Yong learns that reality can be understood in three fundamental categories: firstness, secondness and thirdness. Firstness relates to pure potentiality, function and appearance of things; secondness to that by which they are related to others and thirdness mediates between the two: universals, laws, spiritual vectors or fields of force. This thirdness points to the normative dimension of reality and, concludes Yong, to the Spirit of divine wisdom.⁸⁴

In Peirce's epistemology perception is the mediation of signs of what is encountered in the world by way of its legal, habitual and general aspects. Interpretation of the world around us proceeds by the human experience, by which we, from perception to cognition, formulate hypotheses and test them by engagement in the world. This is a never-ending process, which assumes interpretation as an essential component of human life.

Yong brings together several elements of Neville and Gelpi to formulate his hypothesis that both Word and Spirit are universally present and active since they are at the heart of every what he calls, 'particular determination of being', although in different ways. The Word is the 'thisness and whatness' of things and the Spirit is the 'howness and relatedness' of things, their continuity and significance. 'Things are what they are because they are created by the Father, through the Word and by the power of the Spirit'.⁸⁵

*Each determination of being is what it is by virtue of the presence and activity of the Logos within the force fields set in motion by the Spirit, the supreme field of force. The Logos is the concrete form or pattern of each thing, even as the Spirit is the power of its actualization and instantiation.*⁸⁶

The Spirit is perceived as a symbol of mediation: on theological level, the Spirit is the divine person who mediates between the Father and Son (in Augustine's terms: the bond of love that binds together Father and Son); or in Peirce's framework: the Spirit interprets the Creator to creation (and vice versa).

Discernment, then, requires attentiveness both to concrete form of a 'thing' (event, ritual, symbol, natural or material fact) and to the inner spirit of a thing, which Yong calls 'dynamic vectoral trajectories... that shape, guide, and in some way manifest and/or determine its phenomenal or concrete behaviour'.⁸⁷

⁸² Yong 2002, p.131

⁸³ Yong 2002, p.150

⁸⁴ Yong 2000, p. 112

⁸⁵ Yong 2000, p. 116

⁸⁶ Yong 2000, p.118

⁸⁷ Yong 2002, p.130

Yong's thesis is that the inner spirit or force field of any corporate entity is what determines its shape, personality and activity, its relationship with other things and entities.⁸⁸ He therefore posits a so-called 'hermeneutics of life', i.e. a holistic interpretive exercise and activity focused on the various dimensions of human life, which includes the charismatic experiences of discerning the spirits by the Holy Spirit.

All experiences then can be understood as mediations of the Spirit. Yong wishes to speak of the religious dimension of experience rather than of religious experience, since our experience of God relates to the dimension of being that includes normal experiences.⁸⁹ An example of how Yong relates Word and Spirit in the experience of the world is found in the following text:

'..we experience first the Spirit's presence. Because experience does begin with our senses, our first engagement with the Spirit is with the concrete determination of being. This is the bodily, or incarnate aspect of the Logos. Yet, in and through this engagement, we come into relationship with an other. This leads us eventually to an experience of the 'more' that we intuit in our engagement with the world. There is an unfathomable depth dimension to our experience which calls continuously for a re-engagement with the other'.⁹⁰

This leads to the conclusion that when the presence of the Spirit is mediated by our being in the world, as humans we are all engaged in the Spirit by our createdness.

The model presented so far is determined by a strong emphasis on creation and the presence of the Spirit. Yong believes however, that there is a difference between the Spirit in creation and the specific outpourings on prophets, Jesus and at Pentecost. Yong presents his interpretation of the meaning of Pentecost in terms of the actualization of a force field, which was initiated by the configuration of forms, ideals and values centred in Jesus.⁹¹ In creation the Spirit determines the order of nature within which all things are related. The outpouring of the Spirit intensifies 'the personal dimension of the webs of relationships within which human beings find themselves constituted'. These created force fields of faith, hope and love and entrance into and participation in these fields, enable human beings to move from estranged, wounded, broken and destructive relationships into reconciling, edifying, healing and saving ones.⁹² The Spirit's role after Pentecost is not only as the giver of gifts and sanctifier, but also as that of the One working in the hearts of people, preparing them for a new birth. Although the Pentecostal experience has an ecclesiological dimension, the universal meaning of the Spirit remains in force: across time and space the Spirit is poured out upon all people and stretched out between Pentecost and the coming Kingdom of God.

The work of the Spirit is to integrate and bring created things to their created purpose, in relationship to others. In this way they bring honour to God. In distinction from things, people can choose to fulfil or not to fulfil their purposes and thus become authentic. To the extent that the world is being transformed from a place of lesser degrees of harmony to one in which harmony of things is intensified, to that extent we can say that the Spirit is at work in the world.

⁸⁸ Yong 2002, p.137

⁸⁹ Yong 2000, p.122

⁹⁰ Yong 2000, p.122,123

⁹¹ Yong 2000, p.124

⁹² Yong 2000, p.124

In this way, Yong speaks of degrees to which we can experience divine presence and activity in the world but also degrees of lack of divine presence.⁹³

Yong's explanation for the absence of God, related to his premise of the presence and activity of God in the world, following Neville's creation theology, is derived from a reinterpretation of Wink's demonology.⁹⁴ One of the constitutive features of the created world is the freedom of the determination of being. In the creative act of God, the integrity of freedom of created things is given, so that the subjective or spontaneous element is at the heart of everything. This metaphysical causation can be explained by God's determination of everything, a divine determination that provides for spontaneity, i.e., room for human beings to pursue self-determination. In this way the unintended outcome, derived from the freedom of things created, can be the absence of the Spirit. The demonic or absence of the Spirit then relates to the force fields of destruction that hinder created humanity and move away from the divinely ordained purpose of being. This results in a distortion of identity and a disruption of the network of relations. The demonic integrated in persons is expressed in self-seeking and is destructive. In this sense the demonic can be understood as a contrast symbol to the Holy Spirit.

*Our experience of the demonic reveals our inauthenticity, our failure to live in accordance with our divinely instituted purpose for being, and our refusal to contribute in harmony with others to their good, preferring instead to use them for our selfish ends...the demonic opposes the eschatological invasion of the Kingdom of God.*⁹⁵

4.7 Pneumatological imagination and categories of comparison

The developed foundational categories of the divine presence, activity and absence are functional in the search for normative criteria for discernment of the Spirit(s). Yong proposes to apply these categories to Cox' described three features of primal spirituality that characterizes the Pentecostal experience, but in a transformed and creative way.⁹⁶ He connects the foundational categories of divine presence, activity and absence to Cox' dimensions of religiosity: ecstatic or primal speech, mystical or primal piety and primal hope.

The category of primal or ecstatic speech is expanded by Yong to the category of religious experience and connected to the foundational category of the divine presence of God. Primal speech is, with regard to the Pentecostal experience, too restrictive to serve as a specific comparative phenomenological or theological category, he says. It is only one sign which points to the Spirit, among others that embody the presence of the Spirit and shape people's imaginative engagement with things of the Spirit. Religious experience is understood as an encounter with the Holy Spirit, which is characteristic for the Pentecostal-Charismatic way of 'being in the world'. So dialogue should be approached by focussing first on phenomenological commonalities that point to the divine presence.

⁹³ Yong 2000, p.125

⁹⁴ Yong 2002, p.137

⁹⁵ Yong 2000, p.132

⁹⁶ Yong 2000, p.220-243

Secondly, Cox's notion of primal piety can be understood as a specification of divine activity. Yong suggests using a second mediating category, that of religious utility, which interprets the phenomena of religious spirituality and practise.

Yong speaks of a paradox at the core of the Pentecostal-Charismatic experience.⁹⁷ On one hand, the Pentecostal-Charismatic encounter with the divine is often reported as a sovereign and gracious manifestation of the Holy Spirit. On the other, devotees respond to the leading and working of the Holy Spirit in their midst. The experience of the Holy Spirit emerges out of the conjunction of the divine initiative and the human response. The experience of the Spirit's presence leads to an expectation of the Spirit's activity and precipitates corresponding activity on the part of the believer, to 'get in step with what the Spirit is doing'. This experience brings believers into contact with the salvific work of the Spirit.

They are ... force fields of divine activity that liberate people at the individual level even while equipping them with charism for the edification of the community of faith and for the transformation of the wider socio-political milieu.⁹⁸ (...) The category of religious utility can help us identify in the abstract the general soteriological structures that devotees in different traditions strive to attain...⁹⁹

To determine the truth or falsehood in these structures, the category of religious utility is not sufficient. The category of divine absence will be of use in this perspective.

Cox's third category, primal hope, is transformed into the category of religious cosmology and linked within the foundational pneumatology of the absence of the divine. The hope mentioned is a supreme mediating category that struggles with the tensions of divine presence and absence, living in the eschatological 'already and not yet', and the existential situation. In this sense it confronts and articulates the reality of both the divine and the demonic.

The usefulness of the category of religious cosmology from the Pentecostal-Charismatic experience as a comparative religious and theological category is evident. Spiritual beings and the demonic appear in most of the religious traditions. This outlook on reality is often given as one of the reasons behind the success and growth of Pentecostalism. By naming the demonic 'forces of destruction', sin and death are recognized as a threat for human life, both at the personal level and in the larger context of the political and social sphere. The demonic can be understood as force fields that neutralize the presence of the Spirit and counter the activity of the Spirit, legal factors which shape the patterns and habits of human activity within cultural institutions, or socio-economic networks and political structures. They can however only be discerned from their effect on the concrete actualities of the world. Yong emphasises the larger as well as personal or individual dimensions of the demonic.¹⁰⁰

Yong keeps the foundational categories sufficiently vague, in order to be useful in interreligious dialogue. The revision of the categories of Cox from the foundational categories, bring in a normative aspect. Norms are built into the religious dimension of experience in such a way that processes of religious transformation exhibit either relational harmonies that grow out of spiritual grace, or provide room for force fields of the demonic that are destructive. Discernment is as much a matter of discerning the Holy Spirit as it is of other spirits. Divine presence and divine absence are therefore two sides of the same coin. In

⁹⁷ Yong 2000, p.227

⁹⁸ Yong 2000, p.233

⁹⁹ Yong 2000, p.234

¹⁰⁰ In Yong's interpretation of the demonic, the demonic is always connected to actualities. He differs from the interpretation of the Third Wavers like Wagner who speaks of the demonic as personal spiritual beings.

interreligious dialogue, issues of religious cosmology will need to be addressed in part to get at the norms of discernment.

To sum up, Yong presents a model of discernment as a three-tiered process by which the pneumatological imagination of Pentecostals and Charismatics can contribute to the activity of interreligious dialogue.

4.8 Yong's pneumatological theology of religions

Yong's pneumatology and Trinitarian theology, provides a basic framework for his theology of religions. Moving from the premise that the religions of the world, like everything else that exists, are providentially sustained by the Spirit of God for divine purposes, Yong contends that all forms of cultural expression, including the domain of religion, are within the reach of the presence and activity of the Spirit of God. He argues in this connection that religious traditions are dynamic and the difficult lines between religion and culture do not need to be drawn.

Yong develops a number of normative criteria for discerning the Spirit in the several domains of human life including the broad range of the human religiosity and experience. In Yong's model discernment means discerning the Spirit *and* the demonic in the religions. Given the nature of religions, all three categories of comparison, divine presence, divine activity and divine absence, should be kept in play in the exercise of discernment. Yong recognizes that testing spirits in other traditions from a Christian perspective can be problematic since Christian criteria cannot be avoided and at the same time, internal criteria from the other traditions have to be invoked at some level. Therefore, he maintains that an interpretation of religious symbols is necessary as a two-part process of interpretation and comparison, where other traditions need to speak for themselves and need to identify their own symbols and their references. Also, categories of comparison need to be identified to facilitate understanding and to adjudicate contrary theological claims. Thus discernment is an exercise in *comparative* theology. Both ways of investigation, from the outside and inside, are necessary to discern the greater or lesser presence and activity of the Spirit.

Discernment with a focus on the comparative category of religious experience is accomplished by the emphasis on how symbols function: it involves the entire range of phenomena in rituals, acts and symbols of religious experience. Questions regarding the meaning of symbols experienced, interpreted and assimilated by the devotees themselves, need to be addressed. The responses will always be subjective, but genuine experiences by focussing on the qualitative presentation of the experience itself and how it transforms the person, can indicate the presence of the Spirit.¹⁰¹

The activity of the Spirit is tracked by the comparative category of religious utility. This criterion entails looking for the concrete signs that follow claims of experiencing the transcendent and the evidence of divine activity in the life of the devotee or wider community. At this stage references of religious symbols come into play. Since symbols are multivalent and have networks of meaning, the emphasis needs to be on the understanding and meaning of the symbol for the believer, how people use religious symbols to reach goals and how they relate to other dimensions of life and transform the lives of people. Questions then asked are: do the symbols work and, if they do, how do they work and what is the effect of the religious symbols and symbolic practice over time in people's lives?

Movement into the direction of authenticity and answering to God's created purposes then constitutes a reliable measurement of the Spirit's activity. Yong illustrates this as follows:

¹⁰¹ Yong 2000, p.251

*Applied to non-Christian rituals, the issue here is whether the ritual in question actually results in the reception of the divine revelation, the experience of the divine presence, the regeneration of divine salvation etc. To the degree the objectives, norms and values of a particular ritual can be identified, and to the degree that such are achieved in the devotee, to such degree we can speak of how religious rituals symbolize and mark the Spirit's activity.*¹⁰²

In dialogue with non-Christian religions, the question is whether they evidence the Spirit's activity whereby lives are made whole and communal relationships are continually mended, formed and strengthened. Yong remarks: "If yes.. 'amen'; if not, ... let the Christian then be led by the Spirit in developing further strategies for witness".¹⁰³

In the process of discernment, the religious cosmological content needs to be an integrated element as third criterion, according to Yong. In order to properly understand the cosmology and references to transcendence as intended by the believers and their communities, it is of crucial importance to determine the meaning of the symbols they employ. What is involved here is more than a description of the cosmological world; the issue at stake is the question of how the symbolic perceptions of the believers function in soteriological perspective. This is related to the question of theological truth and is as such a normative criterion.

The ambiguity and complexity of the process of testing the spirits requires a dynamic approach that should not be limited to a certain place or point of time. Religious phenomena should also be traced through time, to follow their direction and historic development. As an example of this dynamic, Yong mentions a former New-Age group that moved toward Eastern Orthodoxy over a period of time.¹⁰⁴

Pneumatology serves in this way as a criterion of contextual rather than absolute validity, and more as a dynamic rather than static framework of discernment, a category of determination which recognizes the multilayered structures of meanings of which religions are made of.

Understanding the religions as an empirical reality therefore requires an interdisciplinary methodology. Testimonies from inside and outside are an important tool for understanding the traditions. 'A relevant and true theology of religions builds on empirical engagement with the world of the religions'.¹⁰⁵ Careful categorization needs to be made of the internal structures of the belief system in question. Points of convergence and divergence need to be identified, and through cross-cultural and cross-religious dialogue, hermeneutics and comparison, questions regarding the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit need to be answered.

*Theology of religions, therefore needs to be comparative theology of religions that proceed from multiple conversational starting points: that of the practitioners, ...a variety of scholars of various disciplines, that of a diversity of perspectives of theologians or intellectuals representing the various traditions, all of whom are reflecting from within and without the traditions in dialogue.*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Yong 2000, p.135,136

¹⁰³ Yong 2000, p. 253

¹⁰⁴ Yong in Stackhouse 2001, p.50 note 24

¹⁰⁵ Yong in Stackhouse 2001, p.54

¹⁰⁶ Yong in Stackhouse 2001, p.55

Yong's claims regarding his model are modest: he is very clear about the fallibility of the process of discernment. He considers it to be more than a rational exercise and speaks of a spiritual activity. Discernment of the Spirit(s) is in the end nothing more than an intuitive judgement that is inevitably imprecise, he says.¹⁰⁷ Engagement in the other faiths cannot avoid taking the risks involved in testing, naming and overcoming the spirits if it is to be true to the Spirit of God. These judgements need to be submitted to the larger Christian communities, and be open for correction. He regards the contribution of his theology of religions as complementing the current Christian theologies of religions rather than displacing them.

4.9 Pneumatological model applied to Umbanda

Yong puts his theory of pneumatological imagination to the test in discerning the spirits operative in a Spiritist religion in Brazil, called Umbanda.¹⁰⁸ The choice of a tradition that from the Pentecostal perspective is considered very negative and of great contrast with the Pentecostal experience is challenging. The phenomenological features of Umbanda show great resemblance to the Pentecostal ones: spirit possession vs. baptism with the Holy Spirit, emphasis on healing, problem-solving and orientation to everyday life. The pneumatological categories are applied to this case, to achieve a better understanding of the other tradition and discern the Holy Spirit and other spirits.

The religious experience that characterizes Umbanda is the experience of spirit possession, a holistic experience that mediates the divine. In Umbanda the basic outlook on human life is that it is experienced as a battle of forces. The ritual of spirit possession enables people to live in harmony with these forces. Another aspect of spirit possession in Umbanda is the healing and physical betterment of the situation of daily life.

The effect of ritual is that it can be understood as bringing a relative degree of harmony and healing the lives of practitioners and even communities. Yong suggests that, to the extent that these effects accompany spirit possession, they are potentially signs of the Spirit's presence and activity.

From an investigation of the Umbandist cosmology, questions regarding the truth behind the deities and spirits of Umbanda are addressed. Yong emphasises the historic development of the complex symbolic structure of the unseen world, and describes the ambiguous figure of the Exu, a spirit connected to life force, which cannot be characterized by either good or evil.

Yong's proposal for genuine dialogue between Pentecostalism and Umbanda is that it should focus on similarities and differences and the question as to what these traditions can learn from each other. Dialogue should stimulate critical self-reflection on both sides, leading to a process of mutual transformation.

From the investigation of the Exu spirit, Yong concludes that Pentecostals can learn a lesson regarding the ambiguity at the heart of the intersection between the finite and infinite, and of the relationship between the divine and the demonic. The Umbandist can learn from Pentecostals the further implications of the battle of and against Exu spirits.

In Yong's description of Umbanda it is a question whether he does not present too positive a picture of Umbanda. He leaves aside the element of manipulation as part of the Umbanda ethic referred to by Droogers.¹⁰⁹ The experiences and reflections of former Umbandists who converted to Pentecostalism are of crucial importance in this matter. However, in Yong's model this important category of religious practitioners is absent. Though in his theology of

¹⁰⁷ Yong 2000, p.254

¹⁰⁸ Yong 2000, chapter 8

¹⁰⁹ Yong 2000, p. 278

religions he argues that comparison of the religions needs to be done from a multiple conversational starting point, this group is not included. The inside perspective of those who have experienced and evaluated both traditions always needs to be taken account of in the attempt to discern the Spirit(s).

4.10 Evaluation of Yong's theology of religions

Critical remarks

Yong's theology of religions can be characterized as an attempt to formulate a fully Trinitarian approach, which recognizes the mission of the Son, and Spirit as separate and related, without giving priority to the one over the other.

At the same time, in order to do justice to the integrity of other traditions, Yong develops neutral categories from pneumatology for purposes of discerning the presence and activity of the Spirit in other traditions. The question is whether in his model the Christological criterion remains fully in force or rather is sacrificed to the neutrality of the categories. For Yong pneumatological and Christological criteria are related, they have corresponding dimensions, and the formal norm of Jesus Christ is applicable only by and through the power of the Spirit. Word and Spirit need to be viewed together as the 'two hands of the Father'. He speaks of a dialectical task that the pneumatology of religions has to work out continuously.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, this is something he leaves open for the future.¹¹¹ The crucial question is how the Christological criterion informs the discernment of the Spirit's presence and activity in the world of the religions. The tension in his approach is evident. To insist on a robust Christological criterion is to mute the identity of the other faiths and to act imperialistically toward them; to lessen the emphasis on the Christological criterion is to risk the loss of Christian identity in interreligious encounter.¹¹²

In his book '*Beyond the impasse*' (2002) he expresses his struggle with criteria by saying that the Christological criteria are necessary in the process of discernment but the integrity of the other traditions needs to be respected as well. He calls for beginning with what the other religion represents as being important about itself; and in concluding the search he insists one must ensure that nothing considered valuable on the religion's own terms has been lost in the process.¹¹³ The questions as to the way in which the Christological criteria should be applied and what their specific content is, are not answered by Yong.

His work amply evidences the tensions involved in approaching theology of religions from a fully Trinitarian perspective.

In the premise that 'all things created consist of both pneuma and logos', there is an implicit statement of the work of the Son and the Spirit. However, Yong fails to clarify his definition of the meaning of logos in his work. References to the concept of logos through church history are derived from the Greek philosophers who used this notion in the sense of an eternal ordering formula, which makes the world a cosmos. Later, for the Stoics the Word stood for the rational, ordering and divine principle that pantheistically penetrates and dominates all things.¹¹⁴ The static connotation of the term 'Word' in this sense is not connected to the aspect of speaking, which is implied in the semantic meaning of Word. Questions remain how this aspect of communication can be done justice in Yong's model,

¹¹⁰ Yong in Stackhouse 2001, p.56

¹¹¹ Yong 2000, p.315

¹¹² Yong 2002, p.103

¹¹³ Yong 2002, p.178

¹¹⁴ Suurmond 1994, p.40

when he distinguishes between the Word in the sense of Logos as the formal uncreated norms and the Word ‘spoken in creation’, the Spirit.¹¹⁵ It is not clear whether there is a connection or relationship between Logos and Christ. Since this speculative hypothesis is the foundation of his model, these questions need thorough investigation and explication. In this sense this hypothesis is the weakest chain in his model.

Another problem that arises out of the statement that “all things created consist of pneuma and logos”, is that the boundaries between Creator and created beings become vague. This could lead to panentheistic creation theology in which we as humans all partake in God or as humans are part of who God is.

The questions regarding the Christological criteria and the relationship between pneuma and logos are reducible to the pneumatology of Yong. In his writings, the Spirit is defined as a field of force, as power of God in creation and re-creation, as life force, and as the symbol of the presence and activity of God. The Spirit is perceived first and foremost as a mediating symbol between God the Creator and human beings. The absence of the personhood of the Spirit in Yong’s pneumatology is striking. This can be understood from Yong’s metaphysical hypothesis that discernment of spirits (including the Holy Spirit) requires focussing on concrete phenomena, since the inner powers, spirits, are revealed in outer concrete forms. Yong does not understand demonic forces as personal spiritual beings; and the personhood of the Spirit is similarly problematic in his thought. The Spirit is understood as God turning toward people and the world. He does, however, not address this issue at any length.

Yong affirms that we cannot speak of the Spirit without the Father and the Son. But the consequence of his theory is that the Spirit as force and as symbol seems to merge with God, and distinction between the Spirit and the Father is not maintained. Actually, God the Father is hardly mentioned in Yong’s work. The central metaphor used is God the Creator. In salvation history, creation is the central event in Yong’s work. The reflection on Neville’s creation theology, consisting of the premise that we cannot speak of God apart from creation, is clearly present.¹¹⁶ In a way, Yong presents an optimistic view of creation¹¹⁷ in which evil is dealt with as side effect of the given freedom of all created things. These unintended outcomes, force fields of destruction, are presented as autonomous powers working in this world. The emphasis on creation is problematic in the sense that because of that overwhelming emphasis the alienation of creation and the need for the redemption of creation (Rom 8, 22-23) are given little attention.¹¹⁸ Yong fails to clarify the soteriological meaning of the history of Jesus Christ in relationship to creation, the powers and evil. He does mention that he builds on Pinnock’s work, but the absence of any reference to Cross and redemption, especially in the context of creation, constitutes a shortcoming in his work.

In this way his model tends to present a more binitarian than a fully Trinitarian theology of religions. The relationship between the Spirit and the Son is seen more in terms of distinction than relation. The aspects of the Spirit referring to the Son, connecting to the Son and glorifying the Son, (in which the symbolic structure of mediation is also given) is not mentioned or worked out.

The work or activity of the Spirit is normatively defined by the process of integrating a thing or being to its created purposes, and Yong speaks of transformational events leading toward a more harmonious work as events in which we can see the Spirit at work.¹¹⁹ This highly abstract definition used to identify the presence of the Spirit in the world is again

¹¹⁵ see 4.4

¹¹⁶ Yong 1997, p.92

¹¹⁷ Yong is in this aspect closer to the Catholic Thomistic tradition of nature and grace than the Protestant view.

¹¹⁸ Van der Kooi 2002a, p.388

¹¹⁹ Yong 2000, p.125

disconnected from the work and person of Christ. What we encounter is a process or force of transformation, but the communicability of God to man is not included. The identity of the Christian faith is at stake here. Without personhood of Spirit and without reference of the Spirit to Christ how is communication with God possible? Is it not the distinctive feature of the Christian faith that we are drawn into a relationship with God who has revealed himself as person, in Christ?

The possibility of *neutral* pneumatological categories of comparison and discernment in a *Christian* theology of religions is then to be questioned.

Positive aspects of Yong's model.

Theological reflection on the Spirit within the Pentecostal discourse and practise brings new insights and valuable concepts derived from the specific Pentecostal religious experience. The positive to and open attitude toward the other religious traditions plus the willingness to learn from other religions is remarkable for a Pentecostal theologian. The modesty of Yong's endeavour deserves respect. Discernment, he recognizes, leads more often to knowledge with some assurance of where the Spirit is, than where the Spirit is not; discernment is an ambiguous affair.¹²⁰

His approach provides a way out of the supposed dualism between Christian faith and the other religions. God's Spirit is at work outside the realm of the Christian church. Moreover, Yong's model calls attention to the fact that alien spirits can be discerned in the Christian practise and the church. This means that dialogue not only leads to an understanding of the other traditions and recognition of the Spirit's presence outside the Christian faith, but also leads to self-criticism. Interreligious dialogue then, turns out to be intra-religious dialogue, the dialogue that occurs in the heart of every person who wrestles with two or more religious ways of being in the world and with the fact of religious plurality in general. Yong's pneumatological approach does away with attitudes of superiority and leads to sincere encounter and dialogue with the other, to recognition of the beauty and truth in other traditions and at the same time, the untruth and syncretism in the Christian traditions.

The creativity of Yong's work is interesting and stimulating. In his approach to the other religions, he focuses on the shared religious experience: religions are understood in terms of their symbolic structure and meaning. The way people use these symbols, create and recreate them highlights the dynamic of the human aspect of religion. Contextual influences are recognized and are of relevance for understanding the different traditions. By bringing in the central element of the religious experience of religious believers, possibilities for dialogue and encounter with the other religious traditions can serve as a starting point. The question how to maintain one's own religious identity in the dialogical situation, however, needs to be addressed. In the process of dialogue the experiences of those who have converted from one tradition to another needs to be included: the absence of this group is an important shortcoming in Yong's model.

The attention Yong calls to the dynamics of religions, to the transformation of traditions and person's lives, brings in an element of movement: all humankind is involved in the dynamic way of the Spirit in history and time. Yong's inclusive pneumatology highlights the work of the Spirit in this world and the involvement of God in the present age. Against the general opinion of the absence of God in current Western theology, he argues that the God of creation (not the history of Israel and Jesus Christ!), by His Spirit, is still active and transforming the world.

¹²⁰ Yong 2002, p.160

Implications of his model are that comparative theology and comparative religion are sources that are of use for a global theology. From the angle of the search for genuine contextualization of the gospel, engagement in other cultural and religious traditions is a premise.

Since a theology of religions can serve as a theoretical framework for the practise of mission, the missiological consequences of Yong's and Pinnock's approach will be discussed in the next chapter. In this discussion a review of criticism of Pinnock's and Yong's approach will be given.

Chapter 5 Review of Critical Assessment of Pinnock and Yong and Conclusion

A new form of Trinitarian doctrine is needed which links the force vitale and the appearance of God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament, the Spirit of life of the Old Testament and the Spirit as an aspect of Christ in the New Testament. Theologically, this is the question of the relation between creation and salvation.

Walter J. Hollenweger¹²¹

5.1 Introduction

In the discussion of Pinnock's and Yong's theology of religions several themes have come to the forefront. Their premise of the presence and activity in the Spirit in the world, including the domain of other religions, touches theological questions concerning the nature and content of divine revelation through culture, religion and history, questions bearing great implication for mission.

In this final chapter these issues are critically discussed by investigating the missiological consequences of Pinnock's and Yong's approach. It remains to be seen whether the inclusivist position of Pinnock and the pneumatological theology of religions developed by Yong undercuts the boundaries of Evangelical theology and practises of mission and evangelism.

The 'standard' Evangelical and Pentecostal discourse regarding the other religions, is characterized by a pessimistic outlook regarding the possibility of salvation and divine revelation through and in other religions. Evangelical mission, thus, is characterized by proclamation of the good news of the gospel: an approach geared to the conversion of the individual acceptance of the salvation wrought by God in Jesus Christ. Conversion is viewed in terms of discontinuity between Christianity and the other religions.

This chapter will begin with a brief discussion of the missionary and evangelistic implications of Pinnock's work, followed by those of Yong's theology of religions. Yong's model will be given more attention due to its elaborate scope. This is followed by a biblical-theological critique of Yong's theology of religions.

The chapter will conclude with a brief summary of the thesis.

5.2 Meaning of mission and dialogue in Pinnock's work

Pinnock's work does not comprehend a fully elaborated theology of religions. The major concern he expresses concerning missions is the question of salvation for those who have not heard the gospel. On the basis of his theology of the Spirit, he recognizes the presence of God in every sphere of life and every human context and quest, including the other religions. An important scriptural text cited in this context is found in Acts 14,16-17 where it is stated 'that God has not left himself without witness'. Pinnock recognises, on the one hand, the positive religious worth in other faiths and, on the other, the finality of Jesus Christ.

Mission consists of word and deed proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom of God. This leads to a multiplicity of activities like witness, church planting, social involvement and dialogue. Pinnock's interpretation of the Spirit present and active in the world addresses one of the shortcomings of an Evangelical/Pentecostal interpretation of mission: the individualistic and spiritualized understanding of missionary activity in terms of 'the saving of souls'. The traditional meaning of salvation for the individual can be expanded to include a

¹²¹ Hollenweger in Price 2002, p.131

corporate dimension: in this way the tension between proclamation and social responsibility can be eased. Mission also speaks of healing for the nations, the renewal of all things, including cultures and history. The theme of holistic liberation is central in Jesus ministry according to Pinnock; mission aims not only at saving souls but also at the transformation and redemption of creation. Thus mission includes bringing justice, mercy and love with a view to affecting the structures of the world.

When Pinnock speaks of mission as dialogue, he uses the term ‘truth seeking encounters’, in which the participants appreciate the other religion, honour the truth and are willing to learn. There should be room for the exchange of critical ideas.¹²²

Pinnock compares dialogue with the example of Paul in Athens. Like him, we need to seek redemptive bridges in various religious traditions, learn from other faiths, and be enriched by them, eager to find God's truth in other religions and cultures, but at the same time seek an opening for witness. Though Pinnock claims that there is truth in the other religions, he is not explicit on whether this is new revelation outside the revelation of God in Christ. He attempts to establish a balance between the universal presence of the Spirit and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, which is illustrated by his assertion: ‘We do not claim to know *how* the Spirit works among non-Christians, but only *that* He is active’.¹²³

Pinnock posits a closer relationship between the Spirit and Christ than does Yong. Like Yong Pinnock's understands the Spirit as force, power and active presence of God, but unlike Yong he recognizes the Spirit as person. The Spirit and Christ are kept in a reciprocal relationship which includes the function of the Spirit pointing to Christ.

5.3 Meaning of mission and dialogue in Yong's model

Continuity and exchange

Since in Yong's view the world and the religions are part of the manifold realms of the Spirit of God, the continuity between the world of the religions and the Christian tradition is one of the features of his model. The meeting place between the Christian faith and the other religions is situated in terms of dialogue. The task of Christian mission is first and foremost characterized by the ‘identification of the Logos that is already there who enlightens the hearts of all persons (Jn. 1, 9)’.¹²⁴

Recognizing the Spirit at work in other traditions implies that theological insights from other traditions need to be investigated seriously. Yong suggests that they may have a positive impact on Christian theology. Other religious text may also be divinely inspired in some way, and therefore extended investigation of these scriptures is necessary. In this way the premise of the universal presence and activity of the Spirit speaks of the universality of truth. As a consequence of the separate and almost independent mission of the Spirit, Yong leaves the possibility open for new truths and revelation outside the Christian tradition, outside Scripture and outside the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. In his view this is linked with the fallibility of our knowledge of God within the Christian tradition, it is partial and in need of correction. Yong recognises that it is only eschatologically that the truth will be known. Therefore, for him the ultimate significance of dialogue is the room and opportunity it provides for a kind of self-criticism that leads to the mutual and eschatological transformation of the various religious traditions, including the Christian faith. In this way Yong emphasises the dynamics of the processes of transformation of the religions and the world.

¹²² Pinnock 1992, p.142

¹²³ Pinnock 1996, p.207

¹²⁴ Yong 2003b, p.33

The picture Yong draws of the limited knowledge of God we have as human beings and the resulting need for dialogue as means to discover the truth puts all the weight on the mission of the Spirit in God's revelation in and to this world. It is questionable, however, whether dialogue can fulfil this purpose apart from the revelation of God in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ. Does this new revelation lead to a deeper understanding of the meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Christ or does it undermine the finality and crucial importance of the Christ event?

Cooperation with others

Yong feels that his theology of religions will free Christians to follow the leading of the Spirit in the world and to work with those who are in touch with the Spirit, in pursuit of the transformation of the world and the counteraction of the demonic forces in anticipation of the coming Kingdom of God. To the extent that religions are working in those directions, they can be acknowledged to be fulfilling their divine mandate for being. Non-Christian religions can be regarded as salvific when the Spirit's presence and activity in and through them are evident in terms of the fulfilment of their created purposes and their support and realization of greater degrees of harmony.¹²⁵ In this way, social action and political participation together with other religious groups are part of what Yong understands as integrated mission. Mission in terms of proclamation of the Kingdom of God leads to active participation in society: taking up social responsibility for the transformation of society and the world.

As discussed in Pinnock's understanding of mission, awareness of the mission of the Spirit in the world broadens the concept of mission to include social engagement, and then not as an exclusive internal activity of the church, but as cooperative action working with others for liberation, justice and human dignity, according to the values of the Kingdom of God. The prophetic role of the Spirit could be recognized in this aspect, but is not mentioned by Yong.

Proclamation?

Yong accentuates the need for dialogue. Dialogue to him consists of a combination of aspects such as truth seeking encounters, the service of Christian love, and proclamation of the redemption of the world from the force of the demonic.

The goal of interreligious dialogue is not agreement on similarities that ignores differences; rather the activity of apologetics needs to be included in such conversations if they are to be in the service of the righteousness, peace and truth that characterize the Kingdom of God.¹²⁶

Although Yong wants to include proclamation in dialogue, the content of the message is referred to in terms of the Kingdom of God in a general way. In his attempt to avoid the so-called 'Christological impasse' in dialogue, Yong is hesitant to speak about Christ. But is it possible to speak of the Kingdom of God without the One who proclaimed the Kingdom of God, without an encounter with the risen Christ? And is the eschatological perspective of the Kingdom of God not the total rule of the King in the whole world in which all people, powers, structures are subordinated to His Kingship so that He may rule in glory and His will may be done on earth as it is in heaven?¹²⁷

The absence in Yong's model of the Spirit's role as testifier to the risen Christ ones again comes to the forefront as problematic.

Dialogue and identity

Genuine dialogue presupposes several conditions such as openness to new understanding of the other, willingness to learn, but also, I believe, a clear awareness of one's own religious

¹²⁵ Yong 2000, p.312

¹²⁶ Yong 2000, p.313

¹²⁷ Gort 1996, p.197

identity -including the normative content of the traditions to which one belongs- on the part of the partners involved. Yong's pneumatological approach brings him to the position where he states, 'the question of the Christian identity can only be answered in dialogue with the non-Christian faiths (and with secularism)'.¹²⁸ He presupposes that believing in the final revelation of God in Jesus Christ necessarily leads one to view the content of the other religions as inferior and therefore constitutes a hindrance to dialogue. Yong's sincere attempt to do justice to the integrity of the religious other comes at the expense of Christian identity. When the normativity of Christ as the decisive revelation of God in human history is not upheld, the identity of the Christian faith is at stake. This does not imply that categories that are not appropriate should be imposed on the other, but the content of the different beliefs needs to be aired in all openness. Authentic dialogue also entails the possibility of change; authentic conversation is a mode of conversion. It is an endeavour that is not without risks: this cannot be done without being fully committed to Jesus Christ.

Yong's pneumatological theology of religions forms the point of departure for his development of comparative theology based on the commonality of religious experience in the several religious traditions. The need for comparative theology in dialogue is obvious from a missiological point of view. Unfortunately, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are often more interested in preaching the good news than in listening and engaging in the world of the audience to whom the message is presented. Genuine mission, communication and conversation starts with sincere interest and engagement in the other religion and culture. But the crucial question is whether in the end true dialogue can take place without doing justice to the revelation of God, by His Spirit, in Jesus Christ. The identity of the Christian tradition is not upheld by Yong, since the work and person of Christ is not of decisive significance and relevance.

Revelation and truth

The theological position derived from Yong's model is that through dialogue new truth and revelation can be discovered outside the revelation of God in Scripture and in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The question is whether the revelation of God in the other religions is something different from the revelation of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. There is sufficient evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in the world as He was in the history of Israel before Jesus. Therefore revelation is not exclusive to the revelation of God in Christ, but the issue is whether Christ is normative for our understanding of God.

The experience of the church through the ages is that the Spirit continues to give insight into the meaning of Christ, into who God is and into the destiny of humankind. This ongoing revelation is to be understood as new understanding of the revelation of Christ rather than 'new truths' outside God's final revelation. The implications of the gospel for slavery and the position of women were not seen by the church in the first eighteen centuries of its history. So as the Spirit has increased the church's understanding by illuminating biblical revelation, there is no reason to think that there can be no further revelation of a deeper understanding of Christ possible, even aided by insights from the other religions.

In this way the question how Christians can learn from the revelation and knowledge of God through the Spirit in the other religions can be answered. In dialogue we are confronted with the limitation of our understanding and our biased knowledge filtered through our culture and context. Based on the awareness of the Spirit's presence in the world and other religions we have to acknowledge that the religious other knows God and that from his or her experience

¹²⁸ Yong 2003, p.62

we may learn and hear God's word, just as Peter heard God's word in and learned from the encounter with Cornelius.

In the encounter with the other religions there is theologically speaking no objection to meeting the other religion with an open attitude and to searching for the revelation of God through His Spirit among people of other faiths.

5.4 Biblical-theological critique of Yong's view on revelation

There are a few stories in the New Testament that refer to revelation of God outside the Abrahamic covenant that led to an interreligious encounter between Jews and gentiles. Three stories will be discussed since they contain some interesting elements which can serve as a critique to Yong's model.

The story of the Magi in Matt. 2 is situated around the birth of Jesus. Outside the boundaries of Israel, these Magi from the East, most probably astrologers, notice a special star in the sky which they interpret as a sign announcing the birth of a King of the Jews. They might have been familiar with the Jewish expectation of a King to come. The interesting feature of the story is that the sign of the star was not only observed as an extraordinary astrological event, but that it caused these Magi to travel in a western direction. Through their religious worldview, something was communicated and revealed to these Magi, which resulted in the journey to Jerusalem. After arriving in the city, they inquire at the palace of Herod about the new-born King. Herod, anxious and worried, sends for the religious scholars. They search the sacred scriptures and give directions to the Magi for Bethlehem as the place where they will find the King of the Jews. Following the scriptural directions, the Magi continue their journey to Bethlehem while the star appears again and moves with them.

Several elements in this story are of interest. Through their religious belief system, which included observations of the stars, the Magi discover some kind of revelation of God by His Spirit. This revelation points to the King of the Jews, but the content is partially hidden and not fully understood or specified. It does however set these men into motion, causing them to undertake a journey to Jerusalem. Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, scripture is consulted for direction and used as a medium of revelation. At the end of the journey, Jesus is found and worshiped.

The second story, that of Cornelius, is found in Acts 10. Cornelius is presented as a devout and God-fearing man. He was not a Jew or proselyte but a man close to Judaism. The story begins with Cornelius' dramatic encounter with an angel while praying. This revelation brings Cornelius to send two of his servants to Joppa to fetch Peter. Peter's role in the story has two sides: he definitely had to learn about the universality of the gospel, but he was also used as a medium to communicate and introduce Christ to Cornelius. The story ends with the account of a powerful outpouring of the Spirit, similar to the experience on the day of Pentecost, and a ceremony of baptism.

The interpretation of this story is multifaceted but in the context of the present argument I want to stress that although Cornelius feared God and conducted himself righteously, God intervenes in the life of Cornelius by means of an encounter with an angel. Again, like the experience of the Magi, revelation is given in a hidden way and needs clarification. The message of the angel to Cornelius consists of no more than the instruction to invite Peter to his house. Again element of movement plays a prominent role: the servants travel to Joppa and Peter travels back with them to the house of Cornelius. When Peter arrives after several

days, he preaches Christ, His life, death and resurrection. Like the Magi, the element of worship is present.

The third story gives an account of the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian in Acts 8, 26-40. Once again, this is a story containing the aspect of travel. The Ethiopian high-ranking official, who had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship God, was on his way back home, while reading the book of Isaiah. Like Cornelius, here is a man who believes in God, who worshiped God in Jerusalem and is surprised by an intervention from God. The Spirit guides Philip to the road-encounter with the Ethiopian. In this account, no extraordinary events or experiences are mentioned on the part of the Ethiopian. He is reading the scripture, out loud as was common in those days, but suddenly Philip comes along and asks him the question: Do you understand what you are reading? Philip explains the passage from Isaiah by introducing the person of Christ and His history to the Ethiopian as the fulfilment of the passage he was reading. In this story the Ethiopian had a true knowledge of God but explanation needed to be given in order for him to understand what he read. His knowledge of God is expanded by introduction to the work and person of Christ who has become part of the history of God with mankind.

All three stories reveal the initiative of God in dealing with human beings. In different contexts God reveals himself, through His Spirit, in different ways and by different means, including people. God is present in a personal way, making use of nature, scripture and the extraordinary: visions dreams, and angels. When we look at the content of the revelation of God, its hidden and partial character is evident. The Magi had probably known something of the coming of a King of the Jews, and connected this to what they observed in the sky. Cornelius was close to the Jewish tradition, had knowledge of God, and responded in a faithful way to what was revealed to him. The same goes for the Ethiopian: standing outside the Jewish tradition he came to know the God of Israel in such a way that he was led to go to Jerusalem to worship Him. From the initial revelation and knowledge of God these men had, God intervenes in their lives with new revelation. In response to these revelations, people are brought into motion: the Magi went on a journey, Cornelius' servants were sent to Joppa. The Ethiopian was already on the move: from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship God and back, searching and reading the scriptures: Philip was the one who was led to travel along the road to meet him.

When people recognize something as a revelation of God by His Spirit, things do not stay the same; people are challenged to set off on a journey. Along the way God is involved, which eventually leads people into the direction of the person and revelation of Christ. The duration of the journey cannot be predicted. Paul on the road to Damascus received an immediate revelation of Christ, but this kind of divine self-disclosure is not so common. The journey in which people faithfully respond to the revelation received, ultimately depends on God's initiative and free will. But what these three stories indicate is that the history, the person and work of Jesus is inextricably bound up with the story of God.

In these stories the revelation of God can be understood in terms of an event in history but at the same time as God's message conveyed to human beings. Revelation and the acts of God can be observed in terms of the interplay between the Spirit and Word.¹²⁹ Word refers to the words spoken by the prophets, the person of Christ as the living and incarnated Word, the words of the apostles and Scripture and words spoken through the tradition of the church. Concrete events can indicate the work of the Spirit. The Spirit draws humankind in the

¹²⁹ Van der Kooi 2002a, p.384

direction of dynamic association with God through experiences mediated in numerous ways, ways related to creation, to our human condition and to culture and history. This mediating aspect of the mission of the Spirit between God and humankind is characterized by a measure of independence, but at the same time, bears a definite relationship with the Word, and calls attention to the Word. Ultimately the universal presence and dynamics of the Spirit in the world finds its criterion in the revelation and person of Christ.

In all three stories this interplay between Spirit and Word is visible. The Magi experience the event of a star and are directed by the words of the prophets in scripture; Cornelius experiences the event of an angel and the Word is spoken by means of Peter; the arrangement of the encounter between the Ethiopian and Philip is a Spirit event and the Word aspect of scripture and explanation of Philip are obvious. In all three accounts the Spirit and Word are connected and intertwined in a dynamic way, leading to an encounter with and worship of Jesus Christ.

In Yong's theology of religions the referential aspect of the mission of the Spirit in the world, in the religions and the lives of humankind, is separated too much from the Word. Yong's model does not justice to the identity of the Spirit as the One who glorifies the Son, promotes the glory of Christ and draws no attention to Himself (Jn. 14, 26; 16, 13-14; I Jn. 4, 2-3). From a biblical-theological view, Yong does not safeguard the identity of the history of God in Jesus Christ through His Spirit.

5.5 Conclusion

This thesis discusses the question regarding the contribution of a Pentecostal/Charismatic theology of religions.

One of the leading premises in this investigation is that a theology of the Spirit from a Pentecostal-Charismatic perspective brings new light and insight regarding the presence of God in the world, cultures and the realms of other religions. However, we have seen that a theology of the Spirit is connected with other domains in the theological landscape. Choices made and positions taken regarding the nature of the Spirit, affects Trinitarian symbolic constructions, the relationship between Spirit and Christ, questions regarding revelation of God and knowledge of God, and soteriological understanding. All these issues are intertwined in a web of meaning and are exposed in the work of Pinnock and Yong.

The contributions of Pinnock and Yong represent a portion of the attention given to the Spirit in contemporary theology. In the larger theological community there has been a shift from Christocentric theology to an emphasis on God as Spirit. This change in orientation, this new emphasis on God as the creating and re-creating Spirit brings some to consider this a shift from theology to a form of pneuma-theology.¹³⁰ Pinnock and Yong distinguish themselves from this position by virtue of their Trinitarian and Evangelical/Pentecostal point of departure for developing their theology.

From the premise of the universality of the presence of the Spirit in the world, Pinnock and Yong derive several theological implications. Religions viewed as part of cultures are within reach of the Spirit of God and comprise the domains of the Spirit's activity. Secondly, the continuity of the salvation history throughout the Old and New Testament is stressed: through the pagan believers in scripture and in God's dealing with the nations outside Israel, the universal significance of God as God of the nations is made clear.

Proceeding from the continuity of salvation history and the universality of humankind, attention is drawn to the act of creation and the continuity between creation and redemption. However, Pinnock and Yong fail to clarify the meaning of the Christ event: Cross, death and resurrection, in light of this continuity. Creation, re-creation, redemption and salvation have interconnected meanings and are influenced by the dominant religious symbols and theological discourse.

Pinnock tries to include several models and meanings from the different Christian traditions. His eclectic way of borrowing concepts leads to a patchwork blanket which is colourful, but at the same time dazzlingly confusing to the eyes. The tough questions remain open or at least are not answered satisfactorily. Religions are viewed as mixed bags, containing good elements, elements of truth but also bad or evil ones. The question how to discern the presence of the Spirit in the domain of the religions is not dealt with. Pinnock states that we know *that* the Spirit is present but not *how* the Spirit is present.¹³¹ The love, grace and mercy of God prevails over other biblical notions such as wrath, judgement and the Lordship of Christ. Pinnock speaks on the one hand of holding on to a high Christology (Christ as normative and decisive event), but on the other hand he is not consistent on maintaining this criterion in the outworking of his theology of religions.

Yong's theology of religions starts with high pretensions. From the specific Pentecostal experience he develops pneumatological categories for interreligious comparison to discern

¹³⁰ Van der Kooi 2003, p.6

¹³¹ Pinnock 1996, p.207

the presence, activity and absence of the Spirit. In his endeavour he aims to go beyond the Christological impasse of previous pneumatological theologies of religions.

Yong's approach is characterized by the concern to take the other religions very seriously and to understand religions in their own terms. Yong argues that from the need for engagement in the other religions interreligious comparison and genuine dialogue can develop. The strength of his argument is at the same time its weakness. His fully open approach toward the other religions and his strict avoidance of any feelings of superiority towards the other religions lead to a diminishment of the identity of the Christian faith. The *neutral* pneumatological categories of discernment featured in Yong's thinking lead one to question whether his is a *Christian* theology of religions.

In his attempt to do full justice to the mission of the Spirit which is separate from and at the same time connected to the mission of the Son, this dialectical relationship is not kept balanced: the emphasis is placed on the separate missions of the Spirit and Son. This is in part a consequence of his pneumatology in which the Spirit is understood in terms of force, force field, breath of life and power of God. The personhood of the Spirit in Yong's pneumatology is absent as is the role of the Spirit as testifier to and glorifier of the Son. The Trinitarian character of Yong's theology of religions is not upheld: Father, Son and Spirit are not the basic structure of his argument. The symbolic structure underlying his work is given in terms of God the Creator, and the Spirit as acting power of God in the world, which means that these two coincide. The relationship between Father and the Son is absent as is the relationship between the Spirit and Christ. The way Yong understands the continuity between creation and redemption and the significance of the mission of the Christ is not explained or worked out: this is a crucial omission in his work.

Despite the loose ends and incoherence of Pinnock's and Yong's work, several contributions are being made in the debate among Evangelicals concerning the other religions and the larger Christian community.

The focus on the working of the Spirit in the world brings in an openness for God acting and intervening in and being concerned with the world. This aspect compensates for the activism of Evangelicals who sometimes pretend that the saving of the world depends on their efforts only.

Pinnock and Yong stress the human aspects of religion, its dynamic nature, and the role of experience, and introduce sufficient arguments in support of the position that the sphere of religion is not outside the reach of the Spirit. The presupposed dualism between the realm of God within the Christian tradition and realm of darkness outside the Christian faith is done away with and the complexity of reality receives due justice in their theologies.

These positions and notions are important in and for interreligious dialogue and encounter. An attitude of respect and listening will emerge from the recognition of God's dealing with the other.

Based on the activity of the Spirit in the world, engagement with other religious groups in the area of social justice is justified. Recognizing the Spirit's work in the other tradition makes way for cooperation and mutual dedication. Learning from the other religions is also made possible. Notions of truth and beauty can be embraced and can function in interreligious dialogue as critique to one's own faith.

The question remains as to how the work of the Spirit in the world outside the Christian faith can be connected with the work of Christ. In a process way of understanding the Spirit revealing truth and knowledge in the world, when and where is there a connection but also a confrontation with Christ? New Testament examples of people outside of Israel who receive a

revelation of God through His Spirit, eventually have an encounter with the risen Christ and do not stay the same.

Finally, the movement of the Spirit in the realms of the other religions and in the lives of the religious other also addresses missiological questions to the Christian community: When, where and in what way are we engaged and do we participate in the work of the Spirit?

Epilogue

In the preparatory research of this thesis dogmatic questions regarding the theology of the Spirit, soteriology, Christology and the Trinity came up repeatedly. However, these questions are not sufficiently dealt with by Pinnock and Yong. After careful consideration of their work I want to finish with four statements that I consider of crucial importance in any attempt to tie up the loose ends of their thoughts, with an eye to the formulation of a biblically and theologically acceptable theology of religions from a Pentecostal-Charismatic perspective.

1. In a pneumatological Christian theology of religions the relationship between creation and salvation in terms of continuity or discontinuity needs to be addressed, including the soteriological meaning of the Christ event.
2. In the ongoing *filioque* debate concerning the relationship between the mission of the Spirit and the mission the Son the distinction and connection between Spirit and Son needs to be maintained in a dialectal (and a Trinitarian) way.
3. The premise that the Spirit is present and active in creation and in the world, needs to be related to the question of revelation: How does God reveal Himself, and what is the content of that self-disclosure?
4. A Pneumatological theology of religions that wishes to be Trinitarian needs to refer to the interrelationship between the biblical images of Father, Son and Spirit as model for the identity of God.

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