

of scholarly apparatus already mentioned, *Wild Ivy* has seventeen reproductions of Hakuin's paintings and calligraphy, a map, a bibliography, and even a simple index (wonder of wonders). Reward the translator and publisher both, I suggest—and find yourself some inspiration—by adding *Wild Ivy* to your bookshelf.

FAITH AMONG FAITHS: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions.
By James L. Fredericks. New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999. pp.
vii + 186, with Index.

JOHN ROSS CARTER

In 1938, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, by Hendrik Kraemer, a noted Islamicist, was published, and thereafter, through his various writings, a significant contribution was made. A theological approach to the study of humankind's religiousness, it was argued, is as appropriate as a philological, a philosophical, an ethnological, a historical approach, and, today, one could go on to name other approaches. And, over half a century later, one applauds Kraemer for making the case and James L. Fredericks who, in his book *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*, continues the enterprise.¹

Fredericks proposes what he sees as a new vantage point in dialogue, "comparative theology," which goes beyond what is often categorized as exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. In moving to his proposal, he presents, in summary form, the "exclusivist theologies of religion," the "inclusivist theologies of religion" and the "pluralistic theologies of religions," and then offers "comparative theology as an alternative to the theology of religions and a way to get beyond the current impasse over the pluralistic model." (p. 10)

Fredericks proposes two criteria "for evaluating the adequacy of a theology of religions." He writes,

The first of the two is responsibility to the tradition. Any theology of religions must be accountable to the demands [*sic*] of the Christian tradi

¹ There is some difficulty in conceptualizing the situation today by focusing on what some of us, namely Christians, consider ourselves to have in a context in which others of us, Non-Christians, are understood in terms of what we are not and, for that matter, in terms of what they are not. On demarcating distinctions while conceptualizing "faith and faiths," compare Stephen Neill's listing of seven "certain basic convictions which must be maintained, if Christianity is to be recognizably Christian." (*Christian Faith and Other Faiths*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 229).

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tion.² The second of the two criteria is as important as the first. An adequate theology of religions must empower Christians to respond creatively to the challenge and opportunity posed by religious diversity today. (p. 52)

Fredericks introduces the reader to the exclusivism of Karl Barth, followed by the inclusivism of Karl Rahner. Their positions, in Chapter 1, are generally well presented. Because of limitation of space and the introductory purpose of this book, the critiques against Rahner by Küng and de Lubac might appear simplistic, but are on the mark and are generally helpful. In Chapter 2, the author presents key ideas proposed by John Hick, indicating Hick's movement from a theocentric model for interpreting religious pluralism (the often announced "Copernican Revolution") to reality-centeredness. Fredericks represents Hick well in writing:

there is a higher reality that is beyond all language and utterly defeats our ability to conceptualize; and, furthermore, enlightenment or salvation consists in conforming our lives to this higher reality. (p. 49)

But Fredericks says that Hick does not rise to meet the two criteria for a comparative theology of religions.

Fredericks gives his longest treatment to the thinking of Paul Knitter, in Chapter 3, "Liberation Theology of Religions," and returns to Knitter later in the book, in Chapter 6. Knitter's insight into the commonality of the religious quest is found in his sense of *sôtéria*, "'the well being of human beings and the earth,' or 'the ineffable mystery of salvation'." (p. 69)

It is extremely difficult to summarize Wilfred Cantwell Smith's thinking on this subject within ten pages of printed text, as in Chapter 4, "Other Pluralist Voices," a chapter in which Stanley Samartha's ideas are also presented. Fredericks does rather well in summarizing Smith, but one notes, perhaps due to a limitation of space, how subtle dimensions of Smith's observations remain just below the surface of the words chosen to convey the ideas.³ Fredericks presents Samartha's notion of tran-

² For a similar conceptualization and parallel concern, compare A. C. Bouquet's effort to preserve "'our precious Christian heritage'" in his *The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions* (Welwyn, Herts.: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1958, p. 429).

³ Fredericks writes, "Smith believes the world has developed to the point where we can now recognize the unity of all peoples in one common religious story based on the one faith expressed in the multitude of religious beliefs." (p. 80) Smith would have us see that humankind, in all our distinctive particularities, is approaching a self-consciousness based upon our awareness of our common global religious history. This is the historical account and as such is not based on a sense of "the one faith," since faith is immensely personal, new every morning as Smith somewhere puts it, nor would faith be limited to expressions having to do only with religious beliefs. Consider also, for example, music, architecture, poetry, art, and dance.

scendent Mystery as the center of humankind's religious pluralism. In his treatment of Smith and Samartha, Fredericks has a knack for finding and presenting key quotations from these authors, helping the reader to get a basic understanding of their thinking: Smith on faith (p. 83), on belief (p. 84), on an unfortunate tendency of some to identify one's perceptions as truth (p. 87), and Samartha on historical and cultural dimension of responses to Mystery (p. 96).

Having summarized some pluralist proposals—those of John Hick, Paul Knitter, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Stanley Samartha, “with very little criticism of their position” (pp. 98–99), Fredericks's task changes with Chapter 5, in which he asks “How Helpful Is Pluralism?” and concludes, not very. Take Hick's position. It is really a “raw assertion,” as Fredericks says, and not a hypothesis at all, since it cannot be tested, proved right or wrong. (p. 106) Pluralists, one reads, “claim to know more about other religious believers than these believers know about themselves.” (pp. 108–109) Hick “has recognized the problem of pluralism's ‘higher knowledge’ and has tried, unsuccessfully, to remedy the problem with his claim that pluralism is really a hypothesis.” (p. 110) But is not there another way to think of “hypothesis”? Rather than that which conceivably might be “tested” eschatologically, at the end-time, and hence, say, Buddhists might be right and Christians, wrong, could not Hick's thinking be tested in the meantime, in which we do our living and sharing with each other, in which we come to see wherein our lives of faith are converging with others into lives lived more abundantly in the here and now? This interpretation of hypothesis appears to make more sense as far as one can tell, but continue studying and praying one will.

And Smith? “Wilfred Cantwell Smith,” Fredericks writes,

is less aware of the difficulty and is not at all bashful in suggesting that his eyesight is God-like. ‘Evidently the new way that we are beginning to be able to see the global history of human kind,’ Smith assures us, ‘is *presumably* [italics mine] the way that God has seen it all along [i.e., has been the truth all along—my insertion].’⁴ (p. 110)

Fredericks is restless with what he calls “domesticating differences,” which he attributes to pluralism, and concludes, “This domestication of differences will result in a momentous loss for Christians.” (p. 114) He writes, “For a Christian who has adopted [*sic*] the pluralist program [*sic*], religious differences do not require us to

⁴ In the next sentence at the source from which Fredericks has excerpted this passage, Smith provides an elaboration of his meaning. Smith writes:

This much at least we may say: that the new empirical awareness of historical interrelations approximates more closely to the truth (‘the way God has seen’) than did the older, less well informed notion of disparate entities, each either given statically or developing, if at all, in sharply bounded compartments. (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, Westminster Press, 1981, p. 18.).

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change our minds about the meaning of a non-Christian's religious tradition, and neither do religious differences require Christians to reinterpret their own tradition." (p. 113) For such a person, a pluralist let us say, Fredericks asserts, "These differences are surprisingly insignificant for religious believers trying to take their religious neighbors seriously." (p. 114) And he offers several examples, two of which are:

A religion like Theravada Buddhism counsels giving up belief in God as part of the path that leads to bliss. In contrast, Christians are called to believe in God with all their heart and mind and strength. Shinto surrounds the Japanese with thousands of local gods. In contrast, Christianity calls its followers to faith in the one God, in keeping with its Jewish roots.⁵ (p. 114)

In setting the stage for the contribution of "theology of comparative religion," there is a tendency to make interpretive positions abstract and then to reify them: "Pluralism," he writes at the end of Chapter 5, "despite its claims for itself,⁶ is not helpful for Christians interested in responding to religious diversity in new and creative ways today." (p. 116)

Fredericks devotes Chapter 6 to the thinking of Paul Knitter, whose "kingdom-centered understanding of Jesus Christ is the most highly developed and best argued of all the pluralists." (p. 120)⁷ Knitter, we read, does not go far enough, though. His

⁵ Fredericks's point raises an important issue in comparative studies, namely, a process of multivalence of religious categories. Concepts have different meanings for different people, even for the same person in the course of studies or over a life time. One would want to consider the examples more closely to determine whether the idea of God with which a Christian scholar like Fredericks is working is the idea of God which a "religion like Theravada Buddhism counsels giving up" or whether a Buddhist might initially discern a Christian concept of God to be inadequate but later, after careful study and reflection, find that such Christian concept of God had been initially underrated. And one wonders whether "thousands of local gods" catches a discernment wherein divinity is present as averred by Japanese men and women. Our task in comparative studies is both complex and challenging.

Later in his book, Fredericks stresses the importance of friendship among persons of differing religious traditions (pp. 175 ff.) enabling a reader to understand that the primary focus should be on persons, not on systems, as implied in phrases like "Theravada Buddhism counsels," "Shinto surrounds," and "Christianity calls."

⁶ One notes a shift from scholars —Hick, Smith, Samartha, Knitter — persons of faith and of impressive intellectual rigor, to a system that now "claims for itself."

⁷ A significant concept of history is at work in this discussion. In one paragraph one reads "... Jesus . . . become present within history" "a real person within history," "The doctrine of the incarnation arose in the early history of the church in order to help Christians" (p. 123) This assumption of the centrality of history ripples through his later comparison, in Chapter 7, of Christ with Krishna (as we have seen utilized elsewhere, in Japan, with

emphasis on social justice and theology of liberation enables him to differentiate between religious traditions but, at the same time, might run the risk of developing a core concept for all religious traditions and give rise to an “easygoing relativism that can so easily become the fruit of pluralist theories of religious diversity that speculate about a transcendent Absolute behind all the religions.”(p. 132)

In order to make the relevance of his position clearer, his understanding of the contribution of comparative theology more immediately engaging, Fredericks appears to be working with a heuristic mode suggesting that dialogue is just beginning or, perhaps, implying, rather, that he is writing for one who is considering how to begin dialogue, i.e., addressing the question about what view one is to hold when one, for the first time, enters into dialogue. “Unlike theologies of religions [he is referring to Hick, Knitter, Smith, and Samartha], comparative theology [Fredericks’s term for his approach] does not start [*sic*] with a grand theory of religion in general that claims to account for all religions.”(p. 167)⁸ Part of the problem might lie in one’s lack of clarity about the reading public for whom this book is written.

It might appear to a reader that Fredericks is not aware that dialogue has been going on for over 70 years, and colloquia for a few decades, and that he does not know that the positions of the so-called pluralists were worked out *after* long years of engaged discussion with persons of other religious traditions and through careful scholarship. Fredericks, no doubt, is aware of this, but a reader might not spot it. He knows, too, that one does not just *adopt* one of these positions and then begin dialogue.⁹ That would hardly be a serious mode of reflection. A student of this subject

regard to Amida/Dharmākara and Christ), “Jesus of Nazareth was a real, historical human being. . . .” “A real, historical human being. . . .” “become divine within history.” “In accordance with the time-honored history of Christian belief.” (p. 145) It would be both engaging and informative were a Christian scholar like Fredericks to consider the valuation of history, human events in space and time, by Christians and the understanding of those events by others of us for whom history tends not to be so significant.

⁸ I note only a few passages. “Also like inclusivists, pluralists know this before ever sitting down and talking with these religious believers.”(p. 109) “Should Christians seeking to engage their non-Christian neighbors. . . .”(p. 112) “Adopting a pluralist position prior to entering into conversations with non-Christians, however, will not help” (pp. 112–113) “Many of the pluralists presume that a pluralist theology of religions is necessary for Christians to enter into dialogue with non-Christian believers authentically.” (p. 115) “Requiring religious traditions to revise their teachings prior to entering into dialogue may do much to render encounters between believers of differing religious traditions polite, though shallow, exercises in diplomacy.” (p. 126)

⁹ Fredericks use of “adopted” (as also at p. 108, “adopt the pluralist model,” and at pp. 112–113) might communicate his restlessness with the thought that pluralist positions could represent, willy-nilly, a preference with which one begins dialogue. Religious Studies in a religiously plural world, we surely agree, demands more.

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reads of these positions advanced by scholars addressing this matter, seeks to understand the arguments presented, becomes engaged with them as that student, in his or her own thinking, becomes engaged with issues of religious diversity.

In any case, what does Fredericks propose as an alternative to what he judges inadequate? It is “comparative theology.” “Comparative theology,” he writes,

is the attempt to understand the meaning of Christian faith by exploring it in the light of the teachings of other religious traditions. The purpose of comparative theology is to assist Christians in coming to a deeper understanding of their own religious tradition. (pp. 139–140)

Fredericks provides examples. He draws from the account of Krishna and the *gopis* and applies a message to the story of the Prodigal Son, and he draws from Dōgen’s consideration of “life and also death” (*shōji* 生死) and discusses life and resurrection, eternal life in the here and now.¹⁰ Fredericks is aware that resurrection, in Christian theology, involves hope, a future event, an eschatological moment and such would not be commensurate with Dōgen’s understanding of *shōji*. Comparative attempts also confront subtle differences difficult clearly to discern as, for example, when one recognizes Dōgen’s insight into radical impermanence and the absence of any substantial self. Perhaps Fredericks will lead us to consider a more engaging comparison of *shōji*, long understood in China and Japan as *samsāra*, with Dōgen’s sense of *shōji*, and Fredericks’s commitment to history as a meaningful concept, as a fundamental category in Christian theology.

James Fredericks has provided a service by demonstrating afresh the practice of engaged comparative studies, as has been done by others in continuing Christian attempts to marvel at the notion of divine grace, as expressed by Maṅikkavaṇṇar in his *Tiruvāṇṇam*, at the calming and prayerful centering of meditation, as Buddhists have shared it, at dimensions of radical monotheism as Muslims (and H. Richard Niebuhr) have expressed it, and in *bhaktigī*, as Christian evangelicals and Hindus have sung. A question today is whether Rāmānuja will be viewed as a theologian for all persons seeking to know God or must he remain bound by the adjective “Hindu” (a term he would have found vague). Fredericks reminds us of the value for Christians in exploring literary metaphors or themes from stories in other traditions to enhance the faith of Christians. And, of course, one applauds.

But should Christian theologians stop with this? Is one to refrain from asking whether, indeed, Krishna is God, God as some Hindus aver, an affirmation that tells us something different, new, even more, about God as Fredericks and other Christian

¹⁰ This approach appears to be primarily a kind of utilitarian heuristic approach — what is useful for Christian reflection is good. One notes the recurring sense of “using,” of taking stories from other religious traditions as resources, in this section of the book (pp. 140–144, 151, 155, 158).

thinkers have been enabled to discern God and so to respond? One wonders whether the crisis confronting us today—Historians of Religion, Christian Theologians, persons of faith around the globe—is that we might be losing a sense of the convergence of truth, an awareness that, in the final analysis, Truth is One. Perhaps a creative development stemming from the use of stories from other traditions as resources for enhancing one's own faith, as Fredericks recommends, will press afresh the question of truth. A Christian theologian might do well to keep before the inquiring mind: *deo ac veritati*, "for God, indeed, for Truth."¹¹

One does not have to agree with Fredericks's analysis of the current situation or that there is an impasse beyond which we must move, nor does one have to be persuaded that Fredericks's attempts at comparative theology are entirely new in order to appreciate the service he has rendered in writing this book. His obvious Roman Catholic assumptions about commitment to the tradition, the role of belief, the centrality of doctrines, the magnificent authoritative role of the Church (the Roman Catholic Church), although never explicitly addressed in a sustained way, remind us all that we all come to questions of religious pluralism today as our religious traditions have brought us.¹² And this helpful reminder can assist us in understanding, too, persons whose lives and study have led them to a pluralist position. Perhaps Christian theologians would do well also to engage pluralists in an attempt to enhance the faith of Christians.¹³

¹¹ This motto of Colgate University is engaging in that the force of the Latin *ac* is to underscore the intimate association, even the inseparability, of the two nouns, hence the translation "indeed" rather than the simple conjunction "and" (*et*).

¹² Perhaps Fredericks will address this issue leading us to understand the particularity of which Roman Catholic theologians might be aware in developing theological positions in a religiously plural world, issues neither assumed nor thoroughly addressed by Protestant Christian theologians. Reading a careful study by James Fredericks of the work of Raimundo Panikkar, for example, would be something to which to look forward.

Seeing himself among the comparative theologians, Fredericks writes "These comparative theologians, and not the pluralists, will be decisive in the future." (p. 165) He lists Donald Mitchell, John Cobb, Leo Lefebure, John Keenan, Francis X. Clooney, David Carpenter, John Berthrong, David Burrell, and says of them, "These theologians are not particularly interested in the question of a theology of religions. Instead, they are exploring their own Christian faith in dialogue with another religious tradition." (p. 165) And, of course, we wish them and James Fredericks well in this important task.

¹³ John Hick did not "adopt" pluralism and then start dialogue, he came to it from Birmingham and the engaged religious pluralism there. Wilfred Cantwell Smith did not start with an abstract "transcendence." He began in preparation to go to Pakistan as a teaching missionary later being led to his position through decades of study. Stanley Samartha did not start out with "Mystery" behind it all. He, being no doubt aware of D. T. Niles's observation that Christianity, being like a seed, would be expected to take on the qualities of the soil, began not at a table for dialogue but within the context of his own life.

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Fredericks, in presenting the case of pluralists and his own, lets us see that some intellectuals of religious faith have moved in their theological reflection, through the years of careful study, beyond more customary theological positions endorsed by their denominational congregations, their initially particular Christian constituents. His own position of comparative theology is instructive in reminding us of the importance of continuing a dialectical process of (1) maintaining one's penetrating insights into the religious heritage of others, (2) with one's articulation of a theology that incorporates all religious men and women, and (3) with one's reflective awareness of one's own religious pilgrimage in its delightful particularity, shared, in this case, by Christian men and women: Roman Catholic, Church of England, United Church of Christ, Church of South India, and Baptists, too.

WISDOM, COMPASSION, AND THE SEARCH FOR UNDERSTANDING: The Buddhist Studies Legacy of Gadjin M. Nagao. Edited by Jonathan A. Silk. Studies in The Buddhist Traditions. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000. pp. LX + 420, with Index.

TOM J.F. TILLEMANS

This collection of essays is a tribute, by many of the leading scholars in Buddhist Studies, to Professor Gadjin M. Nagao, surely one of the greatest scholars in the field and an individual whose wide-ranging intellect, character, lifestyle and longevity never cease to fascinate and inspire. Jonathan Silk, the editor of the volume, introduces Nagao's life and works in a "Short Biographical Sketch," from his birth (in 1907) in Sendai, through his education in Kyoto, his connections with Susumu Yamaguchi and other teachers, his professorial career at Kyoto University, numerous positions of responsibility in learned societies, academic awards, his unique interpretation of Yogācāra Buddhist thought and his other research in Indian, Tibetan and Chinese studies. Thereafter follows an extensive, and no doubt complete, bibliography of his publications, from his books, articles and reviews to rare miscellany.

One somewhat unusual feature of this *Festschrift* to Gadjin Nagao is that it begins with a hitherto unpublished article by Nagao himself, "The Bodhisattva's Compassion Described in the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra*," a summary and précis of this practical, rather than theoretical, aspect of Asaṅga's thought. This is followed by an article by Noritoshi Aramaki, "Toward an Understanding of the *Vijñaptimātratā*," in which the author seeks to explain the "whence" of this doctrine by situating *vijñaptimātratā* (Aramaki's translation: "truth of appearing-conscious-