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The four essays in this issue show that theological engagement is more than a nuanced description or sympathetic appreciation of a religious phenomenon. Each is critically reflective in its own way, neither mincing words nor pulling punches in articulating what matters contextually.

Consider the essay by José María Vigil, a well-known Latin American theologian. It calls for a new self-understanding on the part of the Church in the face of the theological crisis brought about by religious pluralism. The Church, he argues, has to rethink its Christological dogma, its claim to uniqueness, and what it means to be a chosen people. It must come to an understanding of itself as one among many instruments of salvation. In short, revelation must be seen as a human process taking place within human societies, and hence creating the possibility of comparative study. Lee Cormie, professor at the Toronto School of Theology, introduces this essay, which has been translated from Spanish into English.

In the next essay, Néstor Medina serves as a town crier, giving notice that Latin American Liberation Theology has not run its course nor lost its raison d’être. Remaining fervently committed to the struggle against injustice and oppression, its theologians are now engaged in redrawing the boundaries and redefining the scope of the theological task to include ethnocultural diversity. It is, in short, developing new theological categories and broadening its network to remain relevant to the concerns that truly matter.

For Scott Dunham what matters is that biblical theology has an internal consistency. He charges that Boff overlooks this in his proposal for an eco-theology. The connection between oppression of the poor and exploitation of the earth requires more than the cause and effect analysis put forward by Boff. For him to successfully interpret and link Genesis 3:17 to Romans 8:20, as he attempts to do, he would need to take into account the coherence of Scripture and tradition that forms the basis of the Church. In this sense, Boff’s proposal, in Dunham’s trenchant critique, is oblivious to biblical theology possessing an internal consistency.

The next article is also about oppression, considered by juxtaposing Moltmann with Marx. For Daniel Rossi-Keen, the socio-political thought of Moltmann is a continuation of Marx’s critique of religion, the former seeking to overcome the weakness in Marx’s critique by employing the doctrine of the Trinity. To what end is the juxtaposition? Accepting the premise that ideas have power, central to Marx, Moltmann maintains that it is monotheism that has validated structures of
political oppression. There is unfortunate suffering, religious hope notwithstanding. As Rossi-Keen argues, Moltmann invokes the doctrine of the Trinity not just to speak about hope and progress for the future but to show that Christ’s death serves as both a protest to such suffering and a longing for the future.

All that said, do the essays bring anything fundamentally new to theological discourse or reflections? Not quite, but each in its spirited way is occupied with the notion of the other and the overcoming of oppression and injustice and thus has its merit. Together, they are reminders of what matters in theology, offering readers an opportunity to revisit and rethink some contemporary issues to which the theologically minded must not become oblivious.

Abraham H. Khan
Trinity College
University of Toronto
Foreword

The theological currents of liberation theology in Latin America and interfaith dialogues in Asia are widely perceived to have developed along separate tracks, with Asian Christians, comprising tiny islands in great seas of Asian religions, focusing dialogue across faith traditions, and the Latin Americans focusing on political and economic issues. Some commentators have claimed that early Latin American liberation theology (LALT) was primarily focused on economic and political issues, only turning in a subsequent paradigm shift to questions of cultures, spiritualities and cosmovisions.

However, this separation of culture and religion from economics and politics reflects North American, or Eurocentric, categories more than it does Latin American or Asian realities or ways of thinking. From the beginning, significant Asian voices were interested in both interfaith dialogue and political economic liberation. And from the early days of LALT, significant voices were studying Latin American religiosity. But this interest did not proceed in the framework of interfaith dialogue or of the theology of inculturation developing in African contexts.

Rather, it proceeded in terms of interest in popular religiosity. At first this interest was inflected with some suspicion of what were presumed, by both liberals and radicals alike, to be the inherently conservative tendencies of popular religious expression in festivals, pilgrimages, local devotion to saints, etc. And

José María Vigil is the editor, with Pedro Casaldáliga, of Agenda Latinoamericana, and a member of the Latin American Theological Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. This article was translated by Richard Renshaw, CSC.

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it focused on the question of whether popular religiosity was liberating and would naturally align poor communities with the movements struggling for liberation (as then defined). But research programs were often linked to pastoral programs. And the experience of working in poor communities, attempting to live out the option for the poor, provoked deeper appreciation of the mysteries of popular religiosity, along with deeper probing of traditions sustaining poor peoples in their struggles to survive. Accumulating experience and study also encouraged deepening awareness of the diversity of religious expressions, in the campo and in the city, in different countries, shaped by different traditions both official and popular.

In contexts with significant indigenous populations—like Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, Chiapas (Mexico)—pastoral and scholarly interest quickly turned to indigenous traditions. Deepening appreciation of the horrors of European conquest, and of 500 years of colonialization which continues in different forms today, has nurtured deeper dialogue with these “others” whose languages and traditions are so diverse and appear so strange to the eyes and ears of those schooled in European categories, frameworks and logics.

Meanwhile, indigenous movements were erupting and growing stronger in many contexts. And indigenous theologies began to emerge, too, rereading in their own terms the spiritual traditions which had nurtured them before Columbus, their encounters with widely diverse expressions of Christianity over five centuries, their experiences in Christian churches today. Indigenous voices began to speak for themselves of their sufferings and hopes, and the Spirit who sustains them.

Few of the many articles and books on these themes produced in Latin America over the last twenty-five years have been translated into English. So few North Americans have had opportunities to learn of the expanding choruses of Latin American voices, their deepening dialogues with other theologians around the world, the major developments in their categories and frameworks, their evolving interpretations of changing local and global contexts and possibilities. Or to learn of the way in which developments in Latin American theologies have provoked many of the same questions being addressed by those working in the streams of interfaith dialogue and inculturation—for example, the shifting contours of hope and faith over 2000 years, and the diverse expressions of Christianity in different contexts; the many encounters with so many others and the ways these have transformed all involved (though in often uneven ways); the ways in which official dogmas and creeds are formulated, and the limits of classical European formulations; the incommensurabilities in translating across traditions; the significance of irreducible diversity in theology, ethics and ecclesiology in a globalizing world where communities and their traditions are increasingly encountering one another and all face threats of growing gaps between rich and poor, increasing social turmoil, deepening fears of pandemics, climate change and other pestilences.
The following essay offers an excellent introduction to the burgeoning interest in religious diversity and pluralism among Latin American theologians. And there could be no better guide than its author, José María Vigil, himself a major contributor to expanding “plural, liberating, intercontinental” theological dialogue in these “axial times,” and editor of a number of recent collections on these themes (http://www.latinoamericana.org/tiempoaxial/).

Vigil was born in Zaragoza, Spain (1946), ordained a Roman Catholic priest (1971), studied theology in Salamanca and Rome, and taught theology in the Pontifical University of Salamanca. After moving to Managua (1985), he became a Nicaraguan citizen (1989), taught at the Central American University in Managua and, since 1999, has been living in Panama. Among twenty-six books, he wrote, with Pedro Casaldáliga, *Political Holiness: A Spirituality of Liberation* (published in six languages in sixteen countries); since 1992 he has helped to publish annually, also with Pedro Casaldáliga, the popular *Agenda Latinoamericana* (http://latinoamericana.org/); and he is a member of the Latin American Theological Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).

Lee Cormie
Faculty of Theology
University of St. Michael’s College
Toronto School of Theology

On October 12, 1965, at the very end of his life, Paul Tillich gave a programmatic conference on “The Significance of the History of Religions for Systematic Theology.” In that conference he affirmed that he would like to rewrite his whole theology from the new perspective of the dialogue between religions. Tillich could not have known that this would be his last conference and that he had just given his theological testament in which he indicated prophetically the vision of a new systematic theology as a new task to be realized within the horizon of the religions of the world.

I often remind people that the Theology of Pluralism (TP), like the Theology of Liberation (TL), is not a sectoral theology (with a genitive for which pluralism would be the material object). It is rather a fundamental theology (an ablative in which pluralism is the formal or pertinent object). Thus TP does not have a “specific content” that is proper to it and that is limited or sectoral. Its content is the whole content of theology except that it is focused, read, reread from a concrete perspective.

In this respect, it is worth indicating from the beginning that the field of TP is not limited but rather is unrestricted. The terms and aspects that we will attempt to approach here are, however, feasible. Obviously, we have to limit ourselves drastically.
The Fact of Religious Pluralism

Religions, many religions, have existed for a long time, though not forever—for at least the last 4,500 years. But the normal historical situation for humanity has been one of isolation. In spite of the fact that there have always been large migrations and exceptional adventurers, most of humanity has lived in its locally defined habitat with a radius of movement that did not exceed a few dozen kilometres. Faraway influences existed but arrived through ways and in forms that were not very visible to the majority of people in their ordinary lives. We can say that generally people lived within a homogeneous, stable cultural and religious universe without experiencing perceptible transformations that were pronouncedly distinctive and engulfing.

Until quite recently, societies were characterized by this homogeneity and local stability. Each person lived within his or her culture and religion and had no direct experience of other cultures or religions. The majority of the older generation today lived their childhood in this situation and can give witness to how preceding generations (our grandparents and ancestors) did not in general have contact with other cultures and religions.

In such a social context it was possible to live entirely in the framework of one’s own culture with one’s religion as its backbone, its profound existential meaning. Religion was the principal source of people’s existential knowledge and of their values. They looked at the world, thought about it and had feelings about it based on the religion which they held as “unique.”

The situation has changed profoundly in recent times. The drop in price and improvements in transportation and communications, the massive increase in migration, tourism, the interrelationship among the means of social communication—all this has produced a “globalization” of society today, with the integration of humanity into ever larger and ever more interrelated collectivities. Isolation, homogeneity and lack of knowledge of other peoples and cultures have passed into history. Cultural and religious plurality has become characteristic of societies today. More and more men and women are experiencing a coexistence in pluralism.

The Effects of the Religiously Plural Neighbourhood

“They who know one, know none.” Goethe was speaking of languages. Today this precept is applied above all to religions. We know our mother tongue much better when we have a little knowledge and study of others and the reason is that our mother tongue, even if we master it perfectly, is an automatic reflex learned at a very early age without our being explicitly conscious of its structures—above all of their arbitrary and contingent character. Only when we grasp the structure and characteristics of other languages are we able to render judgment on our own language and explain it with solid assurance.
The same thing happens with religion. When we are born and brought up in an environment where there is only one religion, without the presence of any other, that religion, taken up quite unconsciously and spontaneously from infancy, forms many of our opinions and gives rise to mirroring that can only be confronted through the experience of other religions.

Furthermore, in societies with only one religion, those religions tend to become established and to present themselves as the “one and absolute” religion, ignoring the existence of the others and disqualifying them or even condemning them. The experience of religious pluralism, for those who have always lived in the context of one religion, is an experience that deeply transforms their perceptions of religion and, for that very reason, their life. This can, logically, lead to a crisis that at times can be profound.

But this happens not just with individuals. It happens also with human groups, with religious collectivities, with societies and with religions. The current social situation of religious pluralism is a new historical event, new for the majority of religions. All their symbolic capital was built on the age-old foundation of homogeneity and uniqueness. For that reason, the implicit assumptions and the references that are revealed in their symbols and classical representations collide with the current situation and screech to a halt in the face of today’s perceptions.

I will try to address succinctly the challenges that this situation implies for Christianity, the transformations that the Christian religion has concretely suffered or is suffering as a result of this new historical situation of religious pluralism. The challenges and transformations are taken up in a reflective and thematic way by the theology of religious pluralism. In fact, then, we have to become aware of the principal “hot points” that in recent decades have emerged in “the theology of religions.”

• **We are moving beyond a pluralism that was denied and held as negative toward a pluralism that is accepted and appreciated as positive**

Generally, in classical monocultural and monoreligious conditions, religions—and Christianity concretely—have disregarded religious plurality: the other religions don’t exist or are too far away or we don’t know how to say anything about them nor do we need to take them into account. In practice, the life of the believer was never seen as needing to refer to other religions, and theology never included a branch, not even a section, that would take into account or study the meaning that other religions could have.

When a religion contemplated the existence of “other religions,” the most common attitude was to consider them negatively: the other religions are false, they are a mistake, they are not revealed, they are “simply human creations,” they are “natural religions” and for that reason without any salvific value. They don’t save. All these assumptions go directly toward guaranteeing the greatness of one’s own religion, “the” religion, that is to say, the true one, the only one loved by God,
the revealed religion, the really saving religion, the one that is meant to save all humanity.

The pluri-religious context so thoroughly characteristic of modern religions has produced and continues to promote a transformation in social attitudes on this point. This leads to a theological transformation which has given rise to the emergence and development of the new “theology of religions.” Religious plurality is becoming an obvious element of reality. It is no longer possible to continue ignoring it or leaving it off the table. It is no longer seen as something negative but rather as natural, logical (religion is a part of the identity of each people and of each culture), so that it becomes something tolerated, accepted, recognized and even considered positive as part of the richness and variety of the human patrimony. As a consequence of all these transformations, pluralism is beginning to be seen also as something desired by God. (It moves from being a “de facto pluralism” to a “pluralism in principle.”)

This change is a complete turnabout for religions, taken individually. During most of their existence, they insisted on their exclusivity and their uniqueness. Christianity, for example, has only partially overcome its exclusivity in the last fifty years with the acceptance of inclusivity. The idea of moving on to a paradigm of pluralism appears to be very radical, and reasonably so.

For a religion to accept religious pluralism as something good is akin to accepting a change of ontological status: accepting to set itself aside as “the” religion in order to become “one more” religion. It means letting go of its privileged status as unique and absolute in the eyes of its faithful. From the new pluralist point of view, all religions are beneficial, loved by God and, for that reason, true, salvific. Nevertheless, we need to recognize that all are also limited and need to be complemented.

Such a profound change has not been adopted by many religions as yet. I have no doubt that it could be considered a true “conversion” and that dealing with it entails a real crisis for the religion involved. The institutional Catholic Church, for example, is still encased in its rejection of this new vision. It cannot accept it. In societies where Catholicism is traditionally the religion of the majority and officially recognized, this transformation is creating a serious crisis for the official Church, a falling out of step with social development. It feels dethroned, dispossessed of its privileges, despised, attacked; Christians who live in profound contact with society and its constant flow of communications, on the other hand, have no difficulty in accepting a way of looking at things that slowly but surely makes itself felt by being so obvious. In the world of theology, only a few small circles are beginning to accept the new vision and only they are able to help the Christian people adapt to the new but real situation by assimilating the change and overcoming the crisis in a healthy way, without living on the defensive or with a schizophrenic outlook, or withdrawing into a mentality that looks only to the past.
force of divine and sacred origin. There is no God outside us up there who has
given us a “revealed” morality. Those who defend the postures of traditional reli-
gion interpret this situation as ethical chaos or as an attempt to destroy religion
and society morally. This crisis is generalized in many societies today.

Conclusion

We could list many other elements in the crisis that we want to reflect on. As we
said at the beginning, the whole of theology, the whole religious world view ends
up being affected by this change of paradigm. For that reason it would be impos-
sible to take on the whole theme or provide an exhaustive list of the principal ele-
ments. And so we conclude with a few brief final notes.

Although happening at the same time, the crisis provoked by the conscious
reception of religious pluralism is independent of the crisis initiated by the end
of the agricultural age and the coming of an “information society.” Each devel-
ops along its own path and with its own contents. Even if the agricultural era were
prolonged and the information society did not exist, the crisis that religious
pluralism is creating within religions would continue to occur. Even if the effects
merge and fuse, the original causes are distinct, although they come together and
affect one another and are frequently difficult to separate.

In provoking an unprecedented encounter between religions, the new world
state of “globalization” created a new epistemological horizon that offers pos-
sibilities for religions and invites a new way of looking at them—at each of
them—and makes possible a new way of conceiving also of religion itself on a
human and scientific level in general.

I believe that it is plausible to think that some religions are going to face this
challenge and are going to enter, little by little, into a rereading of themselves.
For institutions—for churches in the case of the Christian religion—this is going
to carry a heavy cost. For individual people, communities and the freer theolo-
gies, it is not going to be so difficult, but even there it is going to involve a con-
siderable effort. That effort is one of the important factors that will help move
forward the social transformation of religion in the twenty-first century.

The crisis of religion sparked by religious pluralism is as much theoretical or
theological as it is practical and experiential. This is felt more strongly in regions
that are strongly inter-religious, but also it is increasingly going to be felt every-
where in some measure as the modern means of communication bring religious
pluralism even to those areas where it has not physically penetrated.

In Latin America this crisis is just beginning to be felt, not yet explicitly but
quite really and quietly, gently. The complaints and the warning cries of many
ecclesiastical representatives regarding the retreat of Catholicism in the region,
for example, have not yet been connected to these signs and to a theological
description of the crisis. For their part, in the Latin American theological world,
the body of theologians is beginning to face this theme. Time is on the side of this evolution that undoubtedly will happen much more quickly than we can foresee.

Notes

2 J.M. Vigil, “¿Qué Ofrece la Religión a la Sociedad del Siglo XXI?,” Segundo Encuentro del Centro de estudio de las Tradiciones Religiosas (CETR) sobre el tema: ¿Qué Ofrecen las Grandes Tradiciones Religiosas a las Sociedades Europas? (Barcelona: Can Bordoi, 2005), pp. 235–264.
3 F.M. Müller, Introduction to the Science of Religions (London: Longmans, Green, 1873), p. 16.
4 If, in other times, diversity was held to be a deficiency, something negative because truth and unity were considered interchangeable (Unum and Bonum), today the dominant sense is, more and more, just the opposite: difference is tolerable and even to be desired, variety is preferable to uniformity, pluralism is better than exclusivity. And if it is positive and better than its opposite, it must be part of what we can call the “Plan of God.” The panorama of a world converted to one religion (“one flock with one shepherd”) appears to be discarded today as a possibility, outside anything history marches toward. But, what is more, it is no longer considered desirable, nor does it seem plausible to understand it as the supposed “will of God.”
6 An excellent presentation of this new vision can be found in A. Torres Queiruga, La revelación de Dios en la realización del hombre (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1987).
7 See the chapter on the “hermeneutic of suspicion” in J.M. Vigil, Teología del pluralismo religioso (Córdoba: El Almendro, 2005), pp. 41ff.
8 I am of the opinion that, given the transformation of viewpoint that we have experienced, the reality that traditionally we have called “revelation” should be addressed with another word that is more pertinent to its real nature. Only up to a certain point is it true that nominibus non est quæstio [words are not the issue]. The word “revelation” spontaneously and inevitably evokes a sense that today obscures more than it reveals the real meaning of what is classically called revelation. The same thing occurs with other words like “faith,” “heaven.”
10 It is curious that Christopher Columbus himself seemed to be aware of this on the very day of his landing at Abya Yala on October 12, 1492. “I believe these people will easily become Christians for they do not seem to me to have any sect,” he wrote in his diary. See Agenda Latinoamericana, 1992, p. 151; http://agenda.latinoamericana.org/archivo.
13 See the abundant literature on the Internet regarding the founding principles of the people of the United States and their “Manifest Destiny.”
14 “Dwelling in darkness and the deepest gloom,” says Psalm 106:10. Popes and the Catholic Church in general have applied this text to the “infidel peoples,” “pagans,” that is to all “oth-
ers,” those who are not Christian. For example, see *Maximum Illus*, 7 (Benedict XV, 1919); *Evangelii Praecones*, 228 (Pius XII, 1951), etc.

“Outside the Church there is no salvation.” This phrase was common in official pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic teaching.

See the *Roman Missal*, impregnated from beginning to end with the assumption of “the chosen.”

See A. Torres Queiruga, “El diálogo de las religiones en el mundo actual,” in *Vaticano II: Cómo lo imaginan 17 cristianos y cristianas* edited by Joaquín Gomis (Bilbao: Descée, 2001), pp. 70ff.

It is just forty years ago that in Catholicism we recovered in the brilliant second chapter of *Lumen Gentium* the forgotten and biblical expression “People of God,” and since then it has not occurred to us, not even for a moment, to think that we are not “the” People of God, “the unique,” but rather “a” people of God.

Remember that it was the same Council of Chalcedon that condemned any reformulation, reinterpretation or expression in any other form of the dogmatic conciliar formulas, even with the best of catechetical, theological or pastoral intentions.


See his letter to Baroness von Wizine: “At times God sends me moments of peace; on these occasions, I love and feel that I am loved; it was in one such moment that I composed for myself a credo in which all is clear and sacred. This credo is very simple. This is it: I believe that there is nothing on earth more beautiful, more profound, more appealing, more virile, or more perfect than Christ: and I say to myself, with jealous love, that greater than he does not and cannot exist. More than this: should anyone prove to me that Christ is beyond the range of truth, and that all this is not to be found in him, I would prefer to retain Christ than to retain the truth.”*Correspondence*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1961), p. 157. This quotation is taken from Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for our Times*, translated by Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999).


See what in my view constitutes the central paradigm of the theology and spirituality of liberation, in “¿Cambio de paradigma en la teología de la liberación?” http://servicioskoinonia.org/relat/193.htm.

*Lumen Gentium*, 5.

*Dominus Iesus* only managed to refer to a “supposed Church-centredness of the past” put in the mouth of others and with doubts cast on it (p. 19).


We would like to believe that in this field the law of history regarding delays in the Church that J.I. González Faus believed could be established as “two-and-a-half centuries” will not be followed. See *La autoridad de la verdad* (Barcelona: Herder, 1996), p. 109.


B. Häring, *Está todo en juego- giro en la teología moral y restauración* (Madrid: PPC Ediciones, 1995), p. 111: “Whoever knows well the history of dogma and of moral theology is aware that many things that were in the past considered to be permanently established and indisputable doctrine were later revised or simply fell into oblivion. And in the field of morality, the change is even more significant than in that of dogma.”
João Batista Libânio, *Igreja contemporânea. Encontro com a modernidade* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2000), p. 91: “At bottom, we are awakening to the fact that the absolute character of the Church is out of touch with the fact that many of its teachings, customs and practices previously considered incapable of reform were refashioned in the Council and these faults and errors need to be confessed. If those of the past were reformed, those of today could be managed. An attitude has been created of critical distance and a certain relativity in regard to practices in the Church today. In this situation, the faithful return to the refuge of their own conscience and freedom and no longer put their hope in external laws and norms as replies to their questions.”

I refer you to my work, *Teología del pluralismo religioso* (Quito: Abya-Yala, 2005), in which I cover this whole problematic in a systematic way.

The collection of books that EATWOT, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, has programmed, and that is already quite advanced in its program of publications, would be the most expressive sign. See the “Colección Tiempo axial,” Editorial Abya Yala, Quito: http://www.latinoamericana.org/tiempoaxial.
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Books Received


Research-Technology Management (RTM) is a journal published by the Industrial Research Institute (IRI). It publishes peer-reviewed, research-based articles and personal perspective pieces written by and for R&D practitioners. Published bimonthly, the journal is offered both in print and electronically to subscribers interested in the management of innovation. Oversight of RTM is handled by an appointed Board of Editors, led by the Editor-in-Chief; the Managing Editor handles day-to-day operations.