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# Pluralism and Truth

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*A review article on DISSONANT VOICES, a discussion of Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth, by Harold A Netland, 323 pages, published by Apollos at £14.95*

On January 27th 1992 Bernard Levin, that brilliant but cynical commentator on current events, turned his interest to evangelism. He was incensed by an advertisement of the Californian-based Jews for Jesus. Although he raised the usual liberal smoke-screen by criticising their tactics (entitling his piece, *Clodhoppers on Crusade*), he nevertheless showed a canny idea of what the real issues are. He alleged, "the vulgarity and religious ambiguity of Jews for Jesus are a liability to two faiths".

What exactly did he mean? Simply this, that by engaging in evangelism, in seeking to bring Jewish people to believe the gospel and commit themselves to Jesus as Messiah both Christianity and Judaism were being threatened; the Jews once more falling victim to Christian hostility, and the Church isolating itself by its untenable claim to have the only true way to God. Most evangelicals, I suspect, have not for one moment thought of themselves as engaged in acts of hostility each time they witness or hand out a tract. But that is exactly how they are perceived by the followers, not only of Judaism, but many of the other world religions too.

Levin's perplexity, shared by many today, finds expression in the following words, "In these ecumenical days it is surely reasonable to ask Christianity what its founder meant when he said, 'None shall come to the Father but by me' (sic)." Adding, "I do not offer those words to give offence, but many a devout Christian is worried by them, and many a bishop, opening his heart to other faiths, must be hard put to it to provide an answer." He sums up his thoughts, "The Jews simply deny the thesis (that they should believe in Jesus as Messiah); the Christians will have to search their hearts to see whether evangelism, after all, may be right."<sup>1</sup>

George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has caved in to pressure to reinterpret evangelism. He sees its purpose not as the conversion of members of other faith communities but rather as a means of strengthening the convictions of Christians. He had been put under severe pressure by the Jewish lobby and inter-faith groups such as the Council of Christians and Jews. In mid-February the JEWISH CHRONICLE carried a story reporting that the sought-for assurances had been given. Dr Carey, it seems, had taken the initiative to reassure representatives of the Board of Deputies that he was not in favour of direct evangelism. Anna Maxted's article proclaimed - "Archbishop distances Church of England from Jews for Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

DISSONANT VOICES is, therefore, a very welcome contribution helping to clear the fog surrounding the current ecumenical, inter-faith, missions debate. This book exudes a breath of clean, cool air into a highly charged area of contemporary thinking. For Christians valiantly witnessing to the growing<sup>3</sup> and increasingly vocal members of Britain's ethnic and religious groups, **Netland's clearly presented arguments are encouraging and confidence building.** They help beleaguered evangelicals to hold,

without embarrassment or arrogance, to an exclusivist position, firmly denying that any other faith but Biblical Christianity provides a way back to God.

There can be no doubt that Netland knows the issues thoroughly, having been a pupil of that most outspoken champion of pluralism, John Hick. Hick's views came prominently to our attention in 1977 with the publication of the highly controversial symposium, *THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE*.<sup>4</sup> In the context of his graduate studies in philosophy, Netland has grappled with the issues of religious pluralism and the conflicting truth claims among religions. The book is Netland's response to those who, like Hick, deny the validity of the traditional Christian position.

Put simply, the question Netland addresses is, "**how we are to live as disciples of the one Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the midst of a highly relativistic and pluralistic society**"<sup>5</sup>. To find an answer Netland engages a logical and clear mind to show, to use his own words, "not only is philosophical rigour compatible with commitment to world evangelization, but the two can have a mutually enriching relationship."<sup>6</sup> Renowned missiologist David J Hesselgrave enthuses over Netland's contribution: "With scintillating perspicuity and impeccable reasoning he demonstrates that it is Christian exclusivism that is biblically required, logically valid, and ontologically hopeful".

After an initial discussion of the salient features of the problem now facing the Church, Netland moves on in chapters 2 and 3 to survey the essential claims of several of the world religions. Selecting Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Shinto, he shows how, on the face of it, they are mutually incompatible; an incompatibility which is much more than a conflict of individual doctrines, for at their heart they have irreconcilable conceptions of, and approaches to, Ultimate Reality. Netland argues cogently that it is implausible to hold that all religions teach fundamentally the same thing and that the seeming differences are superficial, merely the product of different historical and cultural vantage points.

## **Christian exclusivism**

In chapter 4 Netland deals with the problem of Religion and Truth. It is here that the reader needs to bear in mind what he is setting out to do. His aim is not to produce a rigorous theological study, based on a close and careful exegesis of the biblical data, but rather to deal with matters of basic epistemology. He sees his contribution as "a kind of defense of Christian exclusivism - a prolegomena to an evangelical theology of religions."<sup>7</sup> We hope that other scholars will take the lead and complete the work. This chapter then tackles very helpfully four areas of common confusion. Firstly, he answers the old dialectic that says you can have personal truth or propositional truth but not both. He is worth quoting at length:

But surely, construing the matter in these terms is mistaken. An account of divine revelation that is faithful to Scripture and epistemologically sound will include both propositional and non-propositional revelation. ... However insofar as revelation is informative about God - and surely this is the whole point in divine revelation in the first place - it must be capable of being expressed propositionally. It is simply nonsensical to think in terms of knowledge of God that is non-propositional. If the propositional element is eliminated from divine revelation, whatever else one is left with, it cannot be informative about God.

Netland argues that though it is undeniable that religious discourse differs from the discussion of matters scientific or political, and though it is furthermore true that religious faith involves some subjective interaction on the part of the believer with the object of faith, yet this should not be allowed to cloud the fact that, even in religion, the idea of objective, propositional truth is necessary.

The second argument refuted is that which says religious truth is ineffable and beyond articulation, an outlook which, incidentally, may be found in an unsophisticated form in certain branches of evangelicalism, expressed in the dictum - 'it's better felt than telt'. Tracing the line of development through the influence of Rudolph Otto's work *THE IDEA OF THE HOLY* and doing full justice to the orthodox idea of the incomprehensibility of God, Netland brings us back to the fact that to hold to the idea of God as knowable we cannot rule out the use of language being used to describe this knowledge. If what he calls, "ineffability with a vengeance", be true and "no meaningful and informative statements can be made", then such a statement itself is self-refuting, being itself a statement about God. We are brought back to the orthodox contention that though God cannot be known comprehensively he can be known really and that this knowledge can be communicated through language.

Thirdly, Netland introduces us to the idea that asserts that religious truth is a higher form of truth and cannot be discussed through the use of the normal conventions of language and logic. Traditional reasoning is based on the principle of non-contradiction, that is to say that where there are contradictory claims advanced, not all of them can be true. At least one must be false. But writers such as Paul Knitter, John A T Robinson and Wilfred Cantwell Smith set out to show how, in their opinion, it is false to apply traditional conventions to the study of religions. However, the cost of such a rejection is too high. Netland demonstrates, through a carefully stated argument - worth equally careful reading - that "by rejecting the principle (of non-contradiction) one does not attain more profound 'truth'; one is reduced to incoherence or utter silence."<sup>9</sup>

### **Assessing truth claims**

Chapter 5 is entitled, *Evaluating Religious Traditions* and here demands are made on the average reader to read carefully and think clearly. A great many people today hold to the idea that there is something indelicate about responding to the claims of other religions with a critical spirit: "don't make value judgments of any kind, positive or negative; simply allow the other religions to carry on in their own way"<sup>10</sup>. Yet evaluating religious claims, far from being a show of arrogance, is in fact required of us as human beings created in the image of God, with rational abilities and critical faculties. Indeed, Netland informs us that even John Hick has reminded us that the great religious leaders of the past assessed and re-evaluated the religious beliefs and practices around them. Hick sees in this questioning spirit an evidence of "deep religious seriousness and openness to the divine."<sup>11</sup>

The crucial difficulty is how do we evaluate and with what criteria do we judge conflicting beliefs, ideas and practices?

Hick uses two general criteria, those of moral and rational adequacy. The moral criterion is, he confesses, altogether unsatisfactory due to our limited knowledge and the complexity of religious traditions. But, he believes, neither is rational analysis capable of establishing the superiority of one tradition over against another. Both

criteria are, according to Hick, legitimate in principle but in practice they are of little value. Are there then no criteria that may be used? Hick suggests a pragmatic test, which assesses religions on their ability to achieve for their followers, what he calls the *soteriological function*. Hick assumes, and Netland shows the falsity of this assumption, that all religions have a similar aim of providing salvation, liberation or enlightenment for their followers. Netland demonstrates that a religion can only be regarded as soteriologically effective if its remedy is appropriate to an accurate diagnosis of the human condition. To apply the pragmatic criterion to determine whether, say, Buddhism's way of salvation is more effective than Christianity's, we must first be convinced that Buddhism's analysis of the human predicament is correct.

Roman Catholic theologian, Paul Knitter, also propounds a view that the correct criteria for evaluation is performance based. Using the cliché, "the kingdom", Knitter judges the effectiveness of religions by the way they advance "the kingdom". But as Netland points out, he never defines just what "the kingdom" is:

But, it must be asked, whose kingdom? The Kingdom of God as articulated by Jesus? The theocratic society envisioned by Islam? Does Buddhism, Hinduism, or Shinto even have a concept of the kingdom - with the accompanying principles of justice, righteousness, and individual as well as social well-being - which warrants use of the term in this manner?<sup>12</sup>

But this also depends on an accurate diagnosis of the human predicament. If man's problems are almost entirely *this worldly*, then Knitter's criteria may be helpful but if his fundamental problem is alienation from God as a result of sinful rebellion, and the ramifications of this rebellion extend beyond this life, then such criteria are clearly inadequate.

How then shall we evaluate religions? Netland's answer delights the heart of any evangelical (as well as satisfying his mind!):

The most important question is not what a given religion does for society at large or for any of its members, but rather what it affirms, explicitly and implicitly, about reality is in fact true. The most significant question we can ask of any religion is whether its fundamental claims are true.<sup>13</sup>

However, to make the claim that non-arbitrary criteria exist to evaluate world views brings us, sooner or later, into conflict with the advocates of relativism. A point of view which has made an enormous impact on contemporary society, as Francis Schaeffer never tired of telling us. Typical of those advocating relativism is Don Cuppitt of Cambridge. His view is what he calls *perspectivism* - seeing things from our own historically coloured and culturally conditioned viewpoint. There is, says Cuppitt, no objective, neutral or pure knowledge of reality. All we can say is how things appear to us from our point of view; we cannot say how they are absolutely. Not only so, but our vantage point on reality is constantly changing, new discoveries challenge the way we looked at things before and lead us on to radically new views. We may choose our ground and fight our opinions but we cannot do so with the kind of old fashioned certainty of "permanent anchorage in an unchanging order".

Netland's answer is to argue that the major difficulty with relativism is that it is incoherent. Though it claims to be a response to cultural diversity it fails to determine the question of truth. Relativism fails to take seriously the inconsistency of ideas about rationality in particular social contexts, truth cannot simply be defined in terms of what

society accepts. The price is too high; an acceptance of relativism means the forfeiture of the right to make any judgments about world views. All we are left with is the ability to state our subjectively determined preferences.

Netland's own rational criteria for appraising religious claims are put forward modestly, recognizing the difficulties in this area. (This is perhaps the most technical discussion in the book and is quite demanding on the powers of concentration of non-experts in the field of logic.) Netland introduces us to the concept of a *defining belief*, that is to say a key concept central to the religion of which it is a part. Some beliefs can be accepted or rejected without challenging the very nature of a religious world view. For example, to reject the doctrine of baptism does not threaten the position of Christianity itself. However, belief in a creator God is a cardinal Christian doctrine - a defining belief. Each religion seems to have a set of such defining beliefs (though it may be difficult for adherents, let alone outsiders, to agree as to what these in fact are). We may then, according to Netland, use this concept to move forward to a definition of a true religion. "A religion (say, Hinduism) is true if and only if all of its defining beliefs are true; if any of its defining beliefs are false, then (Hinduism) is false."<sup>14</sup>

It is not Netland's aim in this book to apply this principle but rather to demonstrate that it exists, that it is legitimate and that it can be used in challenging religious claims. In questioning a religion's defining beliefs Netland argues for the use of the basic principles of logic, the avoidance of self-defeating statements and the need for inner coherence. Moreover, a religious world view ought to be able to provide answers to questions that lie at the heart of mankind's religious concerns: "Any religious world view which is unable to account for fundamental phenomena associated with a religious orientation or which cannot provide adequate answers to central questions in religion should not be accepted as true."<sup>15</sup> Also, for a religion to be true its claims must be compatible with established knowledge in other fields. True religion and true science or history will be in fundamental harmony with each other. Another criterion requires that for a religion to be true it must not set up an irreconcilable tension between the religious ultimate and basic moral values. Netland concludes this section with a very helpful, though non-exhaustive, list of the kinds of criteria that may be applied to determine the truth or falsity of defining beliefs.

## **Confronting syncretism**

Chapter 6 challenges the prevalent theory that all religions ultimately lead to the same destination. Could millions of sincere Indians, over so many centuries, be utterly wrong in their acceptance of the principles of Hinduism? Is it conceivably that all in the world except the Christians are wrong? Can we really accept that Christianity alone has the key that unlocks the door to salvation? There are those who refuse to accept the exclusivity of any single religion's claims and suggest that despite the many external differences between religions, at heart they are united. It is difficult to see that such a view does justice to the remarkable diversity of opinion that does exist, and it is sometimes pointed out that those who accept this view may distort the data to fit their theory. Others, such as Hick, draw our attention to this diversity but prefer to believe that it is accounted for in terms of cultural and historical conditioning. Each religion, with its dogmas, practices and beliefs, is not a statement of actuality as it is in itself but rather a description of ultimate reality as seen through the tinted and, perhaps somewhat

distorted, spectacles of the viewer. As Hick puts it in his own words, “the great religions are all, at their experiential roots, in contact with the same ultimate divine reality.”<sup>16</sup> Netland demonstrates that this theory is implausible, not least because Hick is not simply trying to be faithful to the various data from the array of religions, but that he seems to be pointing toward to a reinterpretation of difficult doctrines thrown up by these different world views, in order to forge together a more synthetic perspective. Netland points out that the irony of Hick’s reductionism is that his understanding of the beliefs of the world religions as *myths* bears little resemblance to that of the followers of these traditions and, in many cases, would be rigorously opposed by them. Hick’s tortuous notions result simply from his reluctance to accept that at least some of the central claims of the different religions must be false. Netland courageously backs Hick into a corner and confronts him with the logical weakness of his position.

### **No other name**

Chapter 7 brings us to the question of the uniqueness of Jesus and Christianity’s central claim that in his name alone is salvation to be obtained. Netland quotes Harvey Cox’s comment that in the process of dialogue between Christians and others, sooner or later - usually sooner - question of the claims of Jesus will have to be faced. Indeed Cox points out that whilst Christian partners in inter-faith dialogue often show a marked reluctance to introduce the subject of Jesus, non-Christian participants in such conversations seem eager to discuss the central issue. To which the reviewer would merely add that discussions with the Jewish people rarely seem to centre on the person of Jesus and the claim that he is Messiah and God!

Netland faces the challenge of the conflicting Christologies which the inter-faith process has produced, by setting out in the first place a clear statement of traditional Christology in terms of the classic two-nature Chalcedonian theology accepted by Roman Catholicism, the theologies of the Reformation, and the confessional statement of the World Council of Churches.<sup>17</sup> It is this conception of Christology that Netland urges must undergird any biblical response to pluralism.

He rightly points out that one of the most distressing developments in modern theology is the capitulation by those on the inside of the Christian religion to higher critical theories which regard two nature Christology as outmoded, superseded by a more enlightened view of the New Testament data in the light of other religious traditions. As is so often the case, the most deviant views of the Christian faith are often propounded by those who having once embraced an evangelical position have turned their backs upon it. Hick is in this category and most notably aired his views on Christology in the symposium he edited, *THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE*. Hick argues that the Christology of the Biblical record evolved from a simple view of Jesus as Master and Messiah to a more complex metaphysical understanding of him as the incarnate Son of God. Many scholars have challenged his understanding, not least C F D Moule who has shown that Hick’s theories cannot be fitted into the New Testament data with any degree of plausibility. Howard Marshall has also pointed out that, “The view that it (the doctrine of the Incarnation) is found merely on the fringe of the New Testament is a complete travesty of the facts”.<sup>18</sup>

From here, Netland proceeds to take on Paul Knitter’s less sceptical but equally

unhelpful understanding of the New Testament data. According to Knitter, Jesus came to point people to God, his presence in this world was a manifestation of divine revelation and salvation. However, after his death and whatever is meant by his resurrection, a change overtook the early church so that the “proclaimer became the proclaimed”. Thus the portrayal of Jesus in the books of the New Testament should be seen for what it is, an impressionistic portrait rather than a photograph; its “Christological language is mythical or figurative, not literal”. Exclusivist language should be understood as the hyperbole of devotion; to be sure for the Christian there is no-one to compare with Christ - but that may be true only for the Christian. What the New Testament does is speak the “love language” of the disciple’s personal experience, it does not make ontological claims in the language of dogmatics or science. Netland deals with Knitter’s proposals by raising a series of objections both from his (Knitter’s) understanding of the New Testament and his approach to the exclusivist claims of the early Church. Why should we regard these statements merely as expressions of feelings of commitment? The answer simply put - but more complexly argued - is that Knitter is simply unprepared to accept the natural meaning of these statements because of the undesirable ramifications this will have for his whole understanding of religion. He is unwilling to accept the uniqueness of Jesus and his superiority over every other religious leader.

### **The Unevangelised**

The final section of chapter 7 deals with the question of those who have never heard. It commences with a quotation from the Lausanne Covenant of 1974, a clear and unambiguous statement that Jesus Christ the Saviour is only offered to men through the preaching of the gospel. He is not to be found hidden in the folds of non-Christian religions, nor is he faithfully offered to men through any system based on syncretism. Put simply, the Lausanne Covenant states that all men are perishing in their sin and salvation is available only through Christ. But men die without hearing of Christ; must we believe that somehow God has allowed them to die beyond hope of salvation? Some evangelicals try to soften the sharp edges by refusing to give an unqualified “yes” to this question. They prefer to struggle with this difficulty in terms of God’s grace rather than man’s response of faith. Such was the view of J Oswald Sanders; men who have not explicitly responded to Christ in faith, but who sincerely have sought after God will be accepted on the grounds of their sincerity and provided with further light to lead them to salvation.<sup>19</sup> Donald McGavran also has suggested that some who have never heard of Christ might be saved. God, it is suggested is sovereign, if he chooses he can bring people to salvation through hidden means not revealed in Scripture.<sup>20</sup> J Herbert Kane, writing from a dispensationalist viewpoint, likewise hints that some who have not heard of Christ may be saved because, as dispensationalism teaches, God saves in different ways during different dispensations. Is it implausible to believe that his sovereign discretion could not be exercised within a dispensation?<sup>21</sup> The British Islamicist, Sir Norman Anderson, also leaves the door of heaven ajar for those without Christ. The way that people within Old Testament times, *chronologically* before Christ, experienced salvation provides hints as to how God may choose to deal with those who have not yet had opportunity to hear of Christ and who now live *informationally* before Christ.<sup>22</sup> Netland, as he surveys other approaches to the same problem by other writers

gradually works us toward the somewhat less inclusivist position of people like Stott. However all authors quoted by Netland hold at least to some theoretical possibility of the salvation of the unevangelised, yet affirm their belief in evangelism.

To be sure, the problem is thorny, yet this is, in my opinion, the weakest point in this book so far. Have we any justification to believe that, apart from the mentally deficient and children dying in infancy, there is any Scriptural justification for leaving the door of heaven ajar by even a hair's breadth for those without faith in Christ? The problem must be set in the light of human sinfulness and an objectively perspicuous general revelation that leaves all men without excuse. Despite the fact that he helpfully stresses that we must confine ourselves to revealed teaching and not wishful thinking, Netland is somewhat disappointing in failing to take seriously the true depth of the human predicament he is so concerned to correctly evaluate. It would have been more helpful to discuss the crucial teaching of, say, the first three chapters of Romans in his approach to this question. However, we must be grateful to him that he reminds us of the staggering consequences of the implications of the uniqueness of Christ.

### **The missionary task**

In the final chapter we come to questions relating to evangelism, dialogue and tolerance. Increasingly Christians will have to get used to the idea that in a pluralist climate evangelism will be seen as an intolerable act of spiritual aggression. We in Jewish evangelism are frequently portrayed as perpetuating traditional Christian anti-semitism through our activities.

Christian mission has been reinterpreted to marginalise the idea that encourages a change of religious affiliation; it is now set in the framework of inter-religious co-operation and dialogue. Netland encourages us to continue the traditional understanding of evangelism as the proclamation of the gospel intended to bring people to faith in Christ. Evangelism is to be conducted with a sense of urgency emanating from an underlying obligation which results from a knowledge of the plight of sinful man in relation to God. Netland puts it with startling clarity:

If in fact, as the Bible claims, the fundamental cause of our predicament is human rebellion against a holy and righteous God, and if the only remedy for this ailment is to be found in the salvation available through Jesus Christ, then clearly evangelism - the communication of the good news of salvation through Jesus - is not only a legitimate option but an inescapable imperative.<sup>23</sup> As the apostle Paul put it. 'Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!' (I Cor 9:16).

On the subject of dialogue, Netland has some helpful and carefully drawn distinctions to make, which evangelicals should take care to note. Avoiding the temptation of *open ended* dialogue and sounding a clear warning that the evangelical believes certain truths to be non-negotiable, he reminds us that it is possible to sit down with representatives of other faiths in conversation. Particularly, he draws attention to a number of evangelicals in the USA who have, without compromise, over the last number of years, held a series of discussions with representatives of the Jewish community. He also notices that as yet evangelicals do not seem to have approached members of other religions in quite the same way. Despite the fact that, arguably, contemporary Judaism is the most anti-Christian religion, having no place whatsoever for Jesus, yet due to its common acceptance of the Hebrew Scriptures there seems to be a legitimate basis for some kind

of dialogue. Yet one hesitates to use the term 'dialogue', so coloured as it is by the participants of the inter-faith process. What Netland means by dialogue is, I fancy, what J H Bavinck would call *approach*. It is that part of the evangelistic encounter that is preliminary to the presentation of the claims of Christ. It is the process of taking people seriously. Bavinck put it so:

God ... takes us very ... seriously, and as his ministers we ought to do the same. Abstract, disembodied and history-less sinners do not exist; only very concrete sinners exist, whose sinful life is determined by all sorts of cultural and historical factors; by poverty, hunger, superstition, traditions, chronic illnesses, tribal morality, and by thousands of other things. I must bring the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ to the whole man, in his concrete existence, in his everyday environment. It is obviously then a great error on my part if I do not take a person's culture and history seriously.<sup>24</sup>

Netland believes, and this reviewer is inclined to concur in his view, that dialogue *properly understood* is not incompatible with evangelism, but is a legitimate part of the evangelistic process.

Finally, what of tolerance? It is a strange phenomenon of modern western thinking that a major characteristic of religion is a spirit of tolerance. Historically nothing could be further from the truth. History is replete with examples of those so dominated by their religious convictions that they would both kill and die for them. Islam has been one of the least tolerant religions, Christians, Jews and Baha'is have been persecuted by Muslims. Hindus have killed Muslims. Jews and Muslims have been hounded and murdered under the sign of the cross. Protestant Christians have fought Roman Catholics and vice versa. Even within the 'ivory towers' of academia the *odium theologicum* has fostered division and dissension.

What Netland does so helpfully is to enable us to think through what it is we can be tolerant of and what we cannot tolerate. He disagrees strongly with the viewpoint of Jewish writer Blu Greenburg who alleges that evangelism conducted on the presuppositions of the exclusivity of the Christian faith is an act of violence; she represents it as proselytism, and that seen through Jewish eyes is 'forced conversion'. Netland correctly reminds Greenburg of the underlying motivation that drives the evangelical Christian. He evangelises out of obedience and love to Christ and compassion towards non-Christians.<sup>25</sup> Of course we will be misunderstood and misrepresented:

To those who take it for granted that one cannot have certainty about basic religious questions the evangelical proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, cannot help but sound arrogant, naive, and intolerant... In such a climate, then, it is incumbent upon evangelicals not only to proclaim the message of the gospel with humility and sensitivity, but also to demonstrate to a sceptical and relativistic culture why it is that it can claim to have certainty concerning ultimate religious questions.<sup>26</sup>

This is a book which deserves to be carefully read and pondered not only by missionaries - it is essential reading for them - but also by ministers in pluralistic Britain. Netland's book is a strong affirmation of Christianity's claim to know the truth and to know God himself. The difference between Netland and the pluralists like Hick is brought out sharply in a comment of John Duncan's on a saying by Lessing<sup>27</sup> - "Did the Almighty, holding in his right hand 'truth' and in his left hand, 'search for the truth',

design to proffer me the one I might prefer, in all humility, but without hesitation, I should request, 'search after truth'." Duncan replied - it "contains the essence of all devilry. It is delight in the mere activity of faculties that is chosen, the search that is fearless and free, unimpeded and unrestricted. To be left alone for ever to pursue the endless chase, cut off from the Eternal Being, would be for me the horror of all horrors."

## References

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- 3 The British problem is particularly acute. "London is today one of the world's most pluralistic cities; more than 170 languages are spoken by pupils of London schools." Cf Ralph C Wood, *British Churches Encounter the Challenge of Pluralism*, CHRISTIAN CENTURY, 19 October 1988, pp 923f
- 4 THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE, ed John Hick
- 5 Netland, p ix
- 6 *ibid*, p xii
- 7 *ibid*, p xii
- 8 *ibid*, p 126
- 9 *ibid*, p 147
- 10 *ibid*, p 152
- 11 John Hicks, *PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM*, St Martins Press, 1985, p 67, cited by Netland, p 153
- 12 *ibid*, p 163
- 13 *ibid*, p 165
- 14 *ibid*, p 182
- 15 *ibid*, p 186
- 16 *ibid*, p 201
- 17 The WCC confesses itself to be, "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures." THE NEW DELHI REPORT ed, W A Visser 't Hooft, 1962, p 152
- 18 I Howard Marshall, cited by Netland, p 247
- 19 Netland p 286
- 20 *ibid*, p 286
- 21 *ibid*, p 269
- 22 *ibid*, p 270
- 23 *ibid*, p 283
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- 25 Netland, p 312
- 26 *ibid*, p 314
- 27 John Duncan in *COLLOQUIA PERIPATETICA*, ed William Knight, Edmonston and Douglas, 1871, p 36

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