

Bearing (Perspectival) Witness: Absolutist Commitment Amid Religious Pluralism

The theistic thinking that undergirded conversion activities is dead. We Christians today know that we possess neither certainty nor eternal truth. We know that we do not possess the sole pathway to God, for there is no sole pathway.

If God is not a being but the Ground of All Being, the source of life and the source of love, then God surely cannot be contained in any religious system, nor can any people continue to live as if God were the tribal deity of their particular nation or group. Being, life, and love transcend all boundaries. No sacred scripture of any religious system can any longer claim that in its pages the fullness of God has been captured. Exclusive religious propaganda can no longer be sustained. The idea that Jesus is the only way to God or that only those who have been washed in the blood of Christ are ever to be listed among the saved, has become anathema and even dangerous in our shrinking world.¹

— Bishop John Shelby Spong

The subtitle of Bishop Spong's recent book is, *Why Traditional Faith is Dying and How a New Faith is Being Born*. The retired bishop's bold claim about traditional faith dying and theism as being dead begs an obvious question: what population group does he have in mind? Rather than dying, traditional forms of Christianity, especially in the two-thirds world, are gaining resurgence. Philip Jenkins' *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* documents in detail this resurgent trajectory for Christianity.² Now a more sensible reading would have us believe that Bishop Spong is

¹ John Shelby Spong, *A New Christianity for a New World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 179.

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). The growth of Christian communities in Latin America, Africa, and Asia is estimated to increase through 2025 to 2050, while the West (with the exception of the United States) is expected to hold numerically steady. See page 90 for the table for actual estimated numbers. The surprising thing, even for Western evangelicals, is that the flavor of Christianity in the two-thirds world is far more traditional and apocalyptic. Mystical experience, prophecy, faith-healing, exorcism, and experiences of dreams and visions, according to Jenkins, are basic to these newer churches. Jenkins also makes the provocative argument that we may see a return to religious wars in places where these newer churches come up against a resurgent Islam.

not making a sociological claim but a *prescriptive* claim, that we *ought to leave behind traditional, theistic Christianity*. And the reasons for this leaving behind are clear in the chapter from which the above passage is taken. In the chapter “Beyond Evangelism and World Mission to a Post-Theistic Universalism” Spong *links* traditional, theistic Christianity with the following: imperialism, Western expansionism, hostility, and the pain associated with these things.³ The linkage is *causal*: that the whole series of negative consequences followed in part from traditional, exclusivistic Christianity. While acknowledging other causes—political and economic—for Western expansionism, Spong nevertheless does not exonerate traditional Christianity from its causal role in these regrettable historical developments.

Whether Western colonial acts *were really* fueled by something inherent in traditional, theistic Christianity or whether Western desire for power and expansion were *rationalized* by religious language may be seen as making too fine of a distinction.⁴ But this distinction is important because, if Spong’s argument is sound—that there is something about traditional, theistic Christianity that causally entails these negative consequences—then Spong has some consequential reasons to reject traditional Christianity. If, however, there are some varieties within traditional, theistic Christianity

³ A sampling from Spong:

“These exclusive claims made for ‘my God and my tradition’ have marked every expansionist and missionary religious system throughout the world. All of them will have to go in the new reformation” (172). “The exclusive claims of Christianity have most often been attached to a text in the Fourth Gospel where Jesus is quoted as having said, ‘I am the way, and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me’ (John 14:6). This imperialism and the pain that has flowed from that single verse is so great it would be hard to measure” (172). “I submit that these expansionist efforts were flawed from the beginning, because they were nothing more than an ill-disguised quest for power born out of the self-centeredness that is our heritage from evolution. They were strategies adopted in the service of a tribal theistic deity and confused with the gospel imperative. Evangelistic efforts and missionary enterprises are thus compromised by a lack of integrity and filled, despite the veneer of virtuous religious jargon, with manifestations of hostility” (177-8).

⁴ Spong himself gestures towards this explanation but stops short of developing this line of thought: “Much of the justification for these colonial acts of conquest was explained by the rhetoric of religion” (175).

(and here we must reject the notion that there is “one” traditional Christianity), then Spong’s argument will be shown to be unsound or weak.

My argument in this paper seeks to qualify Spong’s generalized condemnation of traditional, theistic Christianity. I argue that Spong’s position lacks persuasion given the *compatibility* of traditional, theistic Christianity with nonviolence and peaceableness within a religiously pluralistic society. My interest in this paper lies not only in answering Spong’s position but others as well who share Spong’s outlook: that inherent in traditional forms of Christianity is something disruptive to peaceable, pluralistic living. My argumentative approach will be straightforward in that I will attempt to show how a traditional, theistic form of Christianity does not run afoul of the bad consequences noted above. One obvious move is to start with a recognized form of Christianity which holds traditional, theistic views while at the same time advocates for peaceable coexistence in a pluralistic society. Such a candidate could come, say, from the Anabaptist tradition. And such an appeal alone would be sufficient enough to overturn Spong’s generalized charge. However, I’ll argue the case by appealing to a tradition with a mixed historical record.

The Reformed tradition has had a checkered past, as historically evident in places where the Reformed faith was aligned with Western colonizing efforts. But even within this one tradition, there is variety. And so, I’ll appeal to a tradition-within-a-tradition with which I am familiar: the mainline Presbyterian body in the United States. I’ll argue that, in principle, there is nothing inherent in traditional Christianity that must entail the kinds of evils or abuses condemned by Spong and others. Adherence to “exclusivistic” claims about Jesus Christ does not entail disrespect, let alone violent rejection, of other religions, so I’ll argue. Furthermore, I’ll argue that the critical piece with regard to living

in a pluralistic society is an *ethics of religious engagement*. The theological *prescription* for engagement with other religious traditions is the conceptual and practical *determinant* for what that engagement should look like. Therefore it is possible for two groups with a set of common, core theological commitments in Christology and soteriology who may nevertheless differ in the manner of religious engagement with other traditions. But while acknowledging this possibility, I'll also show how a Christian ethics of religious engagement itself can be grounded in Christology and in the ethics of Jesus. To repeat, it is the articulation and application of an ethics of engaging others that will prove pivotal to how we think about the place of traditional, theistic Christianity within the larger pluralistic context.

In calling attention to this ethics-of-engagement strand I am also seeking some conceptual clarity about the nature of religious commitment within a religious pluralistic society. To this end, I will first lay out the philosophical warrant for my compatibility claim that absolutist religious commitment is not at odds with living peaceably in a religiously pluralistic society. Then, after the philosophical ground clearing, I will lay out the theological rationale for (1) why absolutist religious commitment still makes sense within a plurality of religions and (2) why such a strong commitment does not entail disrespect of other religious traditions.

Philosophical warrant and ground clearing

Religious pluralism vs. religious plurality.

The term 'religious pluralism' is ambiguous. It can be taken sociologically: as signifying the diversity of religions that one finds in many of our modern societies. It can be taken

ontologically: as signifying the metaphysical-religious doctrine that there is an Ultimate Reality⁵ whose description is given in various ways within the world religions. In such an approach, in this ontological use, there is, in standard ‘world religions’ approach the running assumption that these various religious descriptions are equally sound. Of course the discrepancies in the descriptions from different religions are obvious and striking. So how can these sacred traditions be equally sound when their description of Ultimate Reality are so different from each other?

One way is to affirm one Reality or Truth and say that different religious descriptions of this one Reality or Truth have their own strengths. An example comes from Father Bede Griffiths:

In each tradition the one divine Reality, the one eternal Truth, is present, but it is hidden under symbols. ... Always the divine Mystery is hidden under a veil, but each revelation (or “unveiling”) unveils some aspect of the one Truth, or, if you like, the veil becomes thinner at a certain point. The Semitic religions, Judaism and Islam, reveal the transcendent aspect of the divine Mystery with incomparable power. The oriental religions reveal the divine Immanence with immeasurable depth. Yet in each the opposite aspect is contained, though in a more hidden way.⁶

Griffiths’ approach is a species of a larger approach in religious studies which I call a ‘strategy of affirmation’. Griffiths, along with John Hick⁷ and others, is intent on affirming the good while downplaying the bad—the bad, that is, in terms of logical inconsistencies that invariably arise when religious claims are compared. The downplaying sometimes takes on the form of obfuscation, as in “yet in each the opposite aspect is contained, though in a more hidden way.” The language of *hiddenness*, *symbol*

⁵ Standard textbooks on world religions, like Mary Pat Fisher’s *Living Religions*, 5/e (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2002), opt for this vague term so that monotheistic, polytheistic, and atheistic descriptions of “ultimate reality” can be included.

⁶ Bede Griffiths, *Return to the Center* (Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1977) 71.

⁷ Cf. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Hick’s philosophical defense for religious pluralism as a metaphysical doctrine is indebted to Kant’s *noumena/phenomena* distinction. Hick sees the major world religions as culturally defined ways (the “phenomena”) of responding to the mystery of Being (the “noumena”).

and *veil* obscures the difficulty of truly reconciling claims that are incompatible. Even if we were to grant (for the sake of argument) the Kantian distinction between noumena and phenomena and say that what we have is only the phenomena of world religions, how are we to *make sense* of the noumena giving rise to logically contradictory aspects? How are we to reconcile, for example, the fundamental difference about the nature of Reality which some religions affirm as being theistic while others affirm as being the very opposite? Within theistic versions as well, how are we to reconcile the affirmation of theism-as-personal with the affirmation of theism-as-nonpersonal? These straightforward questions reveal the philosophical difficulty of maintaining the metaphysical thesis that one Reality or Something or Being or Non-Being gives *causal rise* to a diversity of aspects which are incompatible when laid side by side. Moreover, even if we were to reject the premise of a causal link between Whatever Is Behind the Phenomena and the phenomenal aspects described in various religions, we have then the more daunting task of showing how the various religious discourses are *really about* an Ultimate Reality. We now have a grave skeptical challenge of showing how the various religious descriptions are *linked in any way* with a Reality that is more than subjective. Failure on this front entails that religious descriptions are no more than descriptions inside our heads or descriptions within a community with no objective, outside-the-community, referent. Daunting indeed is the challenge when the philosophical underpinnings of the ‘strategy of affirmation’ are exposed. Therefore the persuasive case for religious pluralism as an *ontological thesis* remains to be made.

The other way of understanding religious pluralism is sociologically. This is simply the sociological reality that in many of our cities and nations there is a plurality of

religions. This reality is self-evident; no argument is needed. Yet given our past histories and contemporary events related to different religions, plurality is not a neutral sort of thing. Plurality within close proximity also means tension, sometimes spilling over into violent tension. Therefore religious plurality in the real world includes a challenge: of living peaceably and with justice. But sometimes the social challenge of mutual acceptance gets confused with the epistemic challenge of mutual agreement about what we believe. These are two different things. More importantly, mutual acceptance does not entail mutual agreement, nor, does mutual agreement, even on fundamental points, entail mutual acceptance.⁸

Therefore an ethics of living peaceably and justly within the plurality of religions is called for.

Relativistic perspectivalism vs. realist perspectivalism.

Sometimes the argument is made that since our views (theological or otherwise) is intrinsically *perspectival*—that is, it is always within a given perspective—then it must be the case that no one perspective can claim a God’s-eye-view on matters that interest us. And because there is no absolutely objective perspective from which to judge matters, the conclusion is sometimes drawn that no one perspective is better at getting epistemic access on some considered matter than another perspective. This is the line of thinking that leads to epistemic relativism.

⁸ The Sunni/Shi’a split and the Reformation/Radical Reformation are classic examples of mutual agreement on basic points of a religion yet not entailing mutual acceptance. Many peaceful contemporary cities with mutual acceptance of different religions yet not entailing mutual agreement on religious beliefs represents the other case.

Applying this relativistic conclusion to religious perspectives, we end up with a situation where, in principle, no one religious perspective can be said to be better or more in tune with reality as given by God. Take for example, religious perspectives on poverty. At most we can only affirm that these perspectives are *different*, and perhaps incommensurably different since the terms that define poverty and its problem, if so acknowledged, are themselves *relative to* a particular religious framework.

This relativistic conclusion and application must be rejected. The basis for this rejection lies in understanding the metaphysical status of *perspectives*. If the perspective in question does not get at an objective item of reality but only describes our subjective experience of that item, then the relativistic conclusion follows. But if the perspective is *about* an objective item of reality, then *it may be the case* that a particular perspective on that item is better at understanding that item than another perspective. Let us call this ‘realist perspectivalism’. (And when I say ‘it may be the case’ I am not trying to hedge my point.) Rather, the ‘it may be the case’ is an epistemic-ontological point that leaves open the possibility of some perspective getting a good (or better) grip on a particular item of reality.⁹ If this take on perspectives is essentially correct, then we ought to conclude that on certain matters a particular religious perspective may be more accurate or more complete than another. Deciding which perspective(s) is better of course requires dialogue and argumentation. But even in an outcome with no clear agreed upon “winner,” the lack of consensus does not mean that there is no perspective that gets it

⁹ A recent article from *Time* magazine (August 2, 2004 issue) illustrates my point. The article (p. 65) is about Stephen Hawking admitting that his long held thoughts about black holes were wrong; that another perspective on black holes (as propounded by John Preskill) seems more on the mark. The full scientific description of black hole is far from being complete. But different perspectives on this issue are argued for and against, and epistemic progress is being made.

right. In fact, reaching consensus is not a necessary condition for the pursuit of truth.¹⁰

Consensus does not entail truth since majority opinion can be wrong.

Therefore accepting perspectivalism as a description of our epistemic condition does not mean that we are also straddled with relativism. Briefly I've given the outline of an argument that perspectivalism can be understood in a metaphysical-realist manner. In such a scenario the possibility of some perspective getting it right metaphysically is an epistemic possibility.

Antecedent exclusivism vs. consequent exclusivism.

Exclusivism is sometimes presented as a dogmatic stance that seeks to exclude the ways of other religions as being salvifically legitimate. I call this 'antecedent exclusivism' to indicate the impression created by taking exclusivism as a starting point or initial premise. The contrast to this is what I call 'consequent exclusivism'. Instead of starting out dogmatically that other religious ways are questionable or objectionable, consequent exclusivism follows *only if* the nature of religious commitment has the *consequence* that other ways are deemed incomplete. But why quibble when both kinds of exclusivism amount to the same thing?

The quibbling has to do with misplaced emphasis or accent. When "exclusivism" is presented, along with "inclusivism" and "pluralism," as a categorical position in world religion discussions, it gives the false impression that exclusivism is somehow an important element within that particular religion. Certainly within many forms of traditional Christianity the doctrine of exclusivism has never been central. One may draw

¹⁰ See Nicholas Rescher, *Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Rescher offers a cogent presentation of why consensus is not required for the pursuit of truth.

exclusivistic inferences given the nature of Christian proclamation about Jesus Christ; but the central thing has always been Christological commitments. Many are indeed aware of this connection and recognize that exclusivism is only an inference from other religious commitments. Nevertheless, for the sake of proper emphasis and for the sake of rightly contextualizing this element within Christological commitments, this minor quibbling may be worthwhile.

Theological rationale

Theology as metadiscourse.

John Milbank writes in the opening page of his introduction to his *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*:¹¹

If my Christian perspective is persuasive, then this should be a persuasion intrinsic to the Christian *logos* itself, not the apologetic mediation of a universal human reason. However, to theologians, I offer my perspectival reading for positive appropriation. What follows is intended to overcome the pathos of modern theology, and to restore in postmodern terms, the possibility of theology as a metadiscourse.

The pathos of modern theology is its false humility. For theology, this must be a fatal disease, because once theology surrenders its claim to be a metadiscourse, it cannot any longer articulate the word of the creator God, but is bound to turn into the oracular voice of some finite idol, such as historical scholarship, humanist psychology, or transcendental philosophy. If theology no longer seeks to position, qualify or criticize other discourses, then it is inevitable that these discourses will position theology: for the necessity of an ultimate organizing logic (as I shall argue in Part Four) cannot be wished away. A theology ‘positioned’ by secular reason suffers from two characteristic forms of confinement. Either it idolatrously connects knowledge of God with some particular immanent field of knowledge—‘ultimate’ cosmological causes, or ‘ultimate’ psychological and subjective needs. Or else it is confined to intimations of a sublimity beyond representation, so functioning to confirm negatively the questionable idea of an autonomous secular realm, completely transparent to rational understanding.

The notion of “theology as a metadiscourse,” despite the postmodern jargon, is actually as ancient as the early church, for the church has always understood itself theologically as a central part of God’s unfolding, providential plan for all of humanity. Theology as a

¹¹ Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990.

metadiscourse provides the organizing logic for understanding who we are in this world, and by extension, for understanding other religions as well. Hence, what is rejected by Milbank and others who adhere to theology-as-a-metadiscourse is the supposition that there is an outside perspective (secular?) that correctly interprets the merits and demerits of world religions. No such neutral position governed by secular reason can correctly tell the theological community who they are and what they are about. In rejecting an externally neutral, reason governed perspective we are also affirming an internally defined perspective, as one's theology gives content to these questions. And if this is the case, the job of religious communities is to come up with a 'theology of world religions', a 'theology of salvific ways', a 'theology of' whatever. On this religiously thought-out basis will fruitful conversations take place.

How the various conversations will actually turn out will depend on a number of factors, including the variety within each world religion. For instance, differences in our understanding of Christology, soteriology, and eschatology *within* Christendom itself will render the outcome in conversations variously. But more fundamental still in our conversations—before the appeal to standard theological doctrines—is the speaking from who we are as *disciples* of Jesus, for at the very basic level of our religious identity is our *Christ following*.

The priority of discipleship in confession and witness.

Taking a page from Stanley Hauerwas, we ought to make following Jesus our starting point.¹² For Hauerwas this tenet is central to his work in Christian ethics. Likewise, his insights about discipleship as a starting point should be embraced for Christian engagement with other religions. The reason: it is who we are as Christians. Christianity at the personal and communal level is, in terms of commitment and actual lived life, a *discipled* life after Jesus as he is confessed to be ‘the way, the truth, and the life’. But what exactly does ‘following Jesus’ amount to? And how would the answer to this question help us in our engagement with people of other religions?

‘Following Jesus’ needs some unpacking because many things can come under this rubric. What I mean by ‘following Jesus’ includes some of what Hauerwas meant (and probably what the early church meant). At an elementary level, following Jesus means “we learn to locate our lives within God’s life, within the journey that comprises his kingdom.”¹³ Hauerwas calls us to “attend to the life of a particular individual: Jesus of Nazareth.”¹⁴ By such attending we learn “to be *like* Jesus.”¹⁵ We learn to imitate the life of Jesus in its ethical dimensions.

In terms of Christian ethics the language of imitation is appropriate. But the life of Jesus and the reality of the Risen Christ demands other things as well: to commit one’s life to him as Lord, to have faith in Christ by the power of God’s grace, to bear witness to

¹² Many of Stanley Hauerwas’ essays and chapters are collected in the *The Hauerwas Reader*, edited by John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). My reference above comes from a chapter from his most well-known book, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). The chapter is included in the *Reader* as “Jesus and the Social Embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom,” 116-41.

¹³ *The Hauerwas Reader*, 120.

¹⁴ *Reader*, 121.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

his saving power, to proclaim the good news of what God has wrought in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To be a disciple includes these basic elements. The activity of bearing witness and proclaiming the good news is different than the activity of consensus building and compromising possibly offensive elements of Christian proclamation. These activities are not necessarily contradictory. But they are in tension obviously. Now the critical question: how will the tension between these two sets of activities be resolved? The answer to this question will be determined by answering the prior question of what constitutes bearing witness and proclaiming the good news. If part of the constitution includes certain nonnegotiable items—such as, the confession that God is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ¹⁶—then compromising this belief for the sake of not giving offense or for whatever reason will itself determine how the tension is to be resolved.

A contemporary Reformed confession toward Christ following and peaceable living.

With some philosophical ground clearing and the theological rationale behind us, I will show how a commitment within traditional, theistic Christianity does not entail disrespect of other religions. Showing this from a Hauerwasian perspective is easy since central to his commitments are nonviolence and peacemaking, as modeled by the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

How about from a Reformed perspective, of which I am a part? I will seek to show how a Reformed perspective on Christ following does not entail violence or

¹⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg: “As Christians we know God only as he has been revealed in and through Jesus. All other talk about God can have, at most, provisional significance” (19). From *Jesus—God and Man*, 2/e, translated by Lewis Wilkins and Duane Priebe (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1977).

disrespect of other religious ways. An ethics of religious engagement will be outlined here, one rooted in absolutist commitment to the God-Man Christ Jesus.

The place to begin is with a document. It is the Study Catechism adopted in 1998 by the 210th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Catechisms and confessional statements are no replacements for the actual ethics and behavior of a religious community. Nevertheless, they are declarations of a religious community whose beliefs, intent, and ideals are publicly expressed. Especially for a confessional church, like the Presbyterian Church (USA), whose sense of identity is tied up with such documents, these declarations are also important for self-understanding.

The idea of using the Study Catechism as a springboard for reflection comes from my reading of George Hunsinger's chapter, "Social Witness in Generous Orthodoxy."¹⁷ My interest lies only with a small section of the Study Catechism, Questions 30 and 52. Respectively:

Question 30. *How do you understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ?*

No one else will ever be God incarnate. No one else will ever die for the sins of the world. Only Jesus Christ is such a person, only he could do such a work, and he in fact has done it.

Question 52. *How should I treat non-Christians and people of other religions?*

As much as I can, I should meet friendship with friendship, hostility with kindness, generosity with gratitude, persecution with forbearance, truth with agreement, and error with truth. I should express my faith with humility and devotion as the occasion requires, whether silently or openly, boldly or meekly, by word or by deed. I should avoid compromising the truth on the one hand and being narrow-minded on the other. In short, I should always welcome and accept these others in a way that honors and reflects the Lord's welcome and acceptance of me.

Hunsinger reflects:¹⁸ "Christians make large claims about Jesus Christ, but not about themselves. Humility, openness, and compassion are the only appropriate characteristics

¹⁷ In *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, edited by Wallace Alston, Jr. and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) 311-335.

¹⁸ Hunsinger, 316-17.

for those who know that through Jesus Christ they are forgiven sinners. Christians cannot disavow Christ's uniqueness without disavowing the gospel. ... Only because Jesus Christ is fully God as well as also fully human is he the object of Christian worship, obedience, and confession. Christ's uniqueness as confessed by faith is the foundation of generosity, not its ruin, for his uniqueness ensures that every wall of division has been removed. ... Christians cannot live for Jesus Christ without renouncing a life lived only for themselves. They cannot devote themselves to him without living also for the world that he loves, indeed, the world for whose sins he gave himself to die. Remembering that they, too, are sinners whose forgiveness took place at the cross, they stand not against those who do not yet know Christ, but always with them in a solidarity of sin and grace. This solidarity is the open secret of generous orthodoxy, which knows that there is always more grace in God than sin in us. 'Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God' (Rom. 15:7)."

Besides the eloquence with which Hunsinger reflects about the relationship between Christ's uniqueness and the Christian's response to others, there is the profound recognition that, from the Christian perspective, *Christ's very uniqueness is the grounds for Christian generosity and solidarity with others*. This recognition rejects the presumption that Christocentric commitments entail the opposites of generosity and solidarity. This recognition also rejects the supposition that one must develop a separate ethics of generosity and solidarity, detached from Christocentric commitments. Hunsinger's insight, in other words, reveals that our generosity to our neighbors of a different faith and our solidarity with all human beings lies not in watering down the uniqueness of Christ, but rather, understanding more clearly how Christ's uniqueness

binds human beings together and how his example models generosity. It is all of a piece. Therefore the ethics of religious engagement is informed and guided directly by Christ's uniqueness and by our confession of who he is and how we ought to live based on the imitation of Christ.

This conclusion is the exact converse of Bishop Spong's theological logic with which we introduced our topic. Rather than laying aside traditional, theistic Christianity for the sake of peaceable living, taking up traditional, theistic Christianity *leads us to* peaceable living. Rather than the uniqueness of Jesus being an obstacle to shalom in society, his uniqueness is the Christian's inspiration for shalom in our lived lives. And rather than absolutist commitment causing intolerance and hatred, such commitment is the source of strength to fight for a society where tolerance, respect, peace, and justice are enjoyed.