

- 39—52) is thus illegitimate (p. 328). In the essay Hick explicitly states that he is ‘discussing the project of a specifically Christian theodicy’ (p. 39).
- 28 D’Costa, p. 329.
- 29 *Death and Eternal Life*, p. 464.
- 30 Maurice Wiles, *Explorations in Theology 4*, pp. 32—33.
- 31 *God and the Universe of Faiths*, p. 132. The point of this perception is not that a particular Ptolemaic theology or system is false or invalid, but that the truth or validity of such a system cannot be judged by external criteria. It can only be true or valid *for us*. Relativism calls the believer to faith. See Ernst Troeltsch, ‘The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions’ (1932), reprinted in *Christianity and Other Religions*, edited by John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (London, 1980), pp. 11—31 (p. 25).
- 32 Precisely the same considerations—historical relativity and phenomenological similarity—are adduced by Troeltsch. Sarah Coakley identifies Hick as ‘the major exponent of the Troeltschian position in Britain today’. ‘Theology and Cultural Relativism: What is the Problem?’, *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 21 (1979), 223—243 (p. 243).
- 33 *God and the Universe of Faiths*, p. 132.

An Answer to Mr Loughlin

Gavin D’Costa

I thank Mr. Loughlin for opening up further areas of debate in the important task of formulating a viable Christian theology of religions.

I believe his defence of Hick follows two lines of argument. The *first line* states that Hick’s Copernican revolution does not depend upon theological considerations but “rather a number of phenomenological considerations”. Briefly summarised, the initial consideration is that religions exhibit a similarity of “form and function” and have “common reference”. This apparently is empirically observable (cf. footnote 14 and the quotation to which this refers). The second consideration accounts for the similarly observable phenomenon that, generally, one’s religion is determined by one’s place of birth. Accordingly, to then judge other religions by one’s own is manifestly unsatisfactory. Due to the two previous points, the conclusion seems that the “failure of Ptolemaic theology, whether exclusivist or inclusivist, to do justice to the phenomenon of the world religions ... suggests the need for a new paradigm of the

universe of faiths". The Copernican must replace the Ptolemaic paradigm. Loughlin's *second line* of argument is that my criticism that Hick's Copernican eschatology requires a Ptolemaic Christian theology to sustain it is illegitimate, because two "distinct ... self-contained, eschatological theories" have not been viewed by me as "separate entities". The Copernican project in *Death and Eternal Life* must be kept separate from Hick's Ptolemaic theodicy—*Evil and the God of Love* and Hick's contribution in *Encountering Evil* (cf. footnotes 26 and 27).

Are these Copernican epicycles convincing? Let me begin with the second argument. In *Encountering Evil* Hick contravenes Loughlin's prohibition (and consequently opens himself to my criticism). In justifying his Irenaean theodicy Hick writes, "I would ... say that the belief in the reality of a limitlessly *loving and powerful deity* must incorporate some kind of *eschatology* according to which God ... brings (his creatures) into the *eternal fellowship* which he has intended for them". Referring to *Death and Eternal Life*, and breaking Loughlin's prohibition, he continues in the next sentence, "I have tried elsewhere to argue that such an eschatology is a necessary corollary of *ethical monotheism*; to argue for the realistic possibility of an after-life or lives ... (and) spell out some ... general features which human life after death may have".¹

Even if we allowed Loughlin's prohibition, Hick admits in *Death and Eternal Life* that his whole theory requires a "conception of God as personal Lord, distinct from his creation" and this eschatological view "implicitly rejects the *advaitist* view that Brahman *is* Atman, the collective human self being ultimately identical with God", for this state of unity in community requires what the "New Testament calls *agape*".² Loughlin is right in calling this final eschatological state of affairs "vague" and "hypothetical" (how could it be "precisely outlined" and "absolutely certain"?), but then we may legitimately ask two questions. Does not Hick's Copernican eschatology require a theistic, universalist, all-loving and powerful God? If it does, then Hick is left holding two contradictory positions. How can he assert that theistic and non-theistic religions are equally salvific and "authentically thought and experienced", while, at the same time, asserting that our *final relation* to the Real is one of eternal loving communion with a personal deity? This crucial problem leads us to Loughlin's first line of defence.

Loughlin states, with Hick, that all religions are "genuine responses to authentic experiences of ultimate reality". But, as I have shown in my first article and above, this is precisely what is implicitly questioned by Hick's own Copernican eschatology. Although there may be elements of truth in the experience, articulations and practices of the Advaitist, Theravādin Buddhist and adherent of Sāṃkhya

Yoga, will they not find in Hick's eschaton that their thought and experience of the Real was not equally as authentic or appropriate as the personalist religions? Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to point to so-called phenomenological similarities and conclude that a "common reference" is thereby implied. Elsewhere, I have pursued this criticism of Hick's phenomenological comparisons in some detail.³

Now the observation that one's place of birth tends to determine one's religion is an important fact. However, Loughlin and Hick are incorrect in implying that inclusivist Ptolemaic theologians fail to do justice to this, or to the previous consideration.⁴ Whether and how this phenomenological observation bears upon the question of religious truth is not clearly evident.⁵ Taken to its logical conclusion, this argument would suggest that truth is a function of birth and presumably the beliefs of an atheist, Christian, Buddhist and sorcerer would all be equally true. Loughlin follows Troeltsch and not Hick out of this situation. He asserts that these truths can only be "valid *for us*" (footnote 31). Hick, undermining his own phenomenological argument, insists that religious truth is not totally subjective but can be eschatologically verified.⁶ And, as was the main thrust of my first article and my present reply, it is precisely at the eschaton that Hick's Copernican revolution is seen for what it is—"just another, but rather confused, Ptolemaic epicycle".

1 *Encountering Evil*, p. 51 (my emphasis and bracket).

2 *Death and Eternal Life*, p. 464.

3 'Elephants, Ropes and a Christian Theology of Religions', forthcoming in *Theology*, 1985.

4 See my 'Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian—A Reappraisal', *Modern Theology*, 2, 1985.

5 R. Trigg pursues this question in 'Religion and the Threat of Relativism', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 19, no 3, 1983.

6 *God and the Universe of Faiths*, chs. 1 and 2, and recently *The Second Christianity*, pp. 109—116.