

Dermot A. Lane: *Stepping Stones to Other Religions. A Christian Theology of Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011. 328 p. ISBN 978-1-57057-991-8 (pbk.)

The development of Christian “theologies of religions” is one of the most striking aspects of theological productivity since the end of the Second Vatican Council across denominational boundaries. This should not come as a surprise. Religious pluralism is a basic aspect of our postmodern environment. For many Christians this religious pluralism has become an experienced reality even in our Western environment. Inter-religious dialogue is no longer the inclusive affair of scholars and experts; there are symposia and intellectual conversations among Church leaders. These theologies of religions represent a wide variety of approaches to understand the relationship between Christianity and the other religions. Paul Knitter made an excellent attempt to classify them while himself deeply involved in the ongoing debate. He classifies the theologies of religions according to four models, presenting their main insights and the questions they generate: the replacement model (“Only One True Religion”); the fulfillment model (“The One Fulfills the Others”); the mutuality model (“Many True Religions Called to Dialogue”); the acceptance model (“Many True Religions: So Be It”); (cf. Paul Knitter: *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002). These different theological constructions indicate that religious pluralism is not simply perceived as a pluralism *de facto* (a cultural or anthropological phenomenon) but as a pluralism *de iure* (a theological reality, a fundamental dimension of the Christian salvation history).

The distinguished Irish theologian Dermot Lane enters this discussion with a remarkable book in which he reviews the current postmodern context of interreligious dialogue and the Catholic Church’s official position on the question while developing his own theology of religions. His “stepping stones” to the other religions are the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the universal mission of the Holy Spirit and the centrality of the Christ-event.

In his opening chapter, the author broadly lays out the radically new context in which a Christian theology of interreligious dialogue must begin to reconfigure itself with particular reference to the horrors of 9/11 and the turn to multiculturalism. This leads to an ambiguous return of religion to the public square. Other forces such as immigration, the shrinking of the world through globalization and the revolution in communications through the internet are also contributing to the new interest in reli-

gion. This produces a new or second modernity (cf. Charles Taylor; Robert Schreier) which makes the return to pre-modern forms of faith totally impossible but also calls for a new approach to the relationship between faith and reason, and theology and culture (Lieven Boeve; Jürgen Habermas; Jean-Luc Marion). There is no escaping the crucible of this new Modernity within any theology of interreligious dialogue. (46-47)

Chapter 2 offers an overview of the Catholic Church's outlook towards other religions. The purpose of the chapter is twofold : to examine the teachings offered by Vatican II and the challenges it poses for the self-understanding of Christianity today. It offers a detailed analysis of *Nostra Aetate* and of the history behind it. The author considers Vatican II as a truly "theological event" (89) that must continue to inspire us. Several important post-Vatican II documents are briefly considered such as the encyclicals of Pope John Paul II promoting dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) and *Dominus Iesus* (2000). But the author also notes that "while these documents are important benchmarks, there have also been a number of significant symbolic and prophetic actions by John Paul II that perhaps speak louder than any document" (76): for example, the first World Day of Prayer for Peace (Assisi, October 1986) and the Day of Pardon Mass in the Jubilee Year of 2000 on the first Sunday of Lent. All these documents and events continue to have a real impact on the Catholic imagination: "The language of mutuality in relationship to the world, other cultures, other religions and other churches [initially promoted by *Nostra Aetate* ] is new in the self-understanding of the Catholic Church and as such calls for an enlargement of the ecclesiological imagination." (90)

In Chapter 3 the author maps the debate about the relationship between Christianity and other religions as it developed after Vatican II. He presents a critique of the three-fold typology (exclusivism – inclusivism – pluralism) while offering some guidelines for dialogue. Special attention is given to the "inclusive pluralism" of Jacques Dupuis, S.J. and the difficulties he experienced with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then presided by Joseph Ratzinger, at the time it issued *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (2000). I have published my own analysis of this regretful controversy (cf. Achiel Peelman: «L’Affaire Jacques Dupuis” et l’avenir de la théologie chrétienne des religions», in Fabrice Blée et Achiel Peelman (éds): *Le dialogue interreligieux. Interpellations théologiques contemporaines*. Novalis 2013 : 201-217).

In Chapter 4 the author presents a critical but very sympathetic analysis of the contribution of Karl Rahner to inter-religious dialogue and, more specifically, of the christological dimension of the debate. He invites his readers to engage in this debate while "standing on the shoulders of Rahner" (155). It is obvious that Lane himself has adopted Rahner as the basis of his own theology of religions in the three following chapters.

While taking into consideration the contemporary "turn to the Spirit" (Chap 5), Lane adopts pneumatology as the very starting point of this theology of religions. He draws our attention to the contribution of Bernard Lonergan, S.J. and Frederick

Crowe, S.J. in this field. (157-183). If this Spirit-centered theology of religions is to succeed, however, there is a need to give to our Spirit-talk or Spirit-discourse a solid philosophical basis. It is important to realize “that the Spirit of God exists in this life primarily as embodied in creation, history, people and communities.” (199)

Chapter 6 deals with pneumatology and revelation. The author insists on the need to develop a Christian pneumatology of revelation, inspired by John Paul II and Vatican II (*Dei Verbum*). Revelation is a foundational category within Judaism and Christianity. It is also a key issue within the Christian reflection on inter-faith dialogue. This chapter provides perspectives to answer questions such as: Is there revelation in other religions and, if so, how does it relate to Christian revelation? Is Christian revelation separate and distinct from that of other religions or is it related to other religions? Can other religions enrich the Christian understanding of revelation?

Chapter 7 offers the pinnacle of Lane’s proposals by presenting the basic components of a Christian theology of the Holy Spirit. Based on the biblical data concerning the Spirit, this theology moves from a Spirit christology to a Spirit ecclesiology. The chapter concludes with reviewing its implications for inter-religious dialogue: How can we discern the *universal* presence and action of the Spirit? Lane writes: “The Catholic Church, in dialogue with other churches, with other religions and the world, must follow with equal seriousness this twofold advise: ‘Test the Spirits’ and ‘Do not stifle the Spirit’ ...” (261)

The final chapter concentrates on Jewish-Christian dialogue as a sign of hope and as the basis for all other forms of inter-religious dialogue. From the outset we are reminded again that *Nostra Aetate* was a milestone and a sea-change in Jewish-Catholic relations. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to review the progress that has been made in Jewish-Catholic relations since Vatican II with references to the achievements and the setbacks as well as to the unresolved questions. These questions are about the relationship between God and human suffering (theology after the Holocaust), the covenant (one or many) and mission. “What is the mission of the Church in the world today? Does it include a mission to the Jews or perhaps a mission *with* the Jews?” (295)

This book is written by someone who really loves the Church and who cares for the future of the Church. Lane offers us a Spirit-centered theology of religions that should be taken into consideration by anyone wondering how Catholics and other Christians can go forward in a multi-religious and multi-cultural world.

Achiel Peelman, OMI Saint Paul University Ottawa, Canada