



A COMPARISON OF JOHN HICK AND CARL BRAATEN ON THE FINALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

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I. Introduction

We are now living in the world of a religiously pluralistic context. According to P. Knitter, religious pluralism is “a newly experienced reality”¹⁾ for many today. Above all, this strong wave of religious pluralism has forced Christianity to withdraw the assertion of the absoluteness of Christianity. Therefore, theologies today are seeking the answers to these contextual questions in a variety of ways, for example, exclusivism, inclusivism, religious pluralism, and so on.²⁾

In this context, through his many books which have ignited the burning controversy of religious pluralism, John Hick claims the so-called “Copernican Revolution”³⁾ to the traditional Christianity. He rejects the premise of the “decisive, unique, normative, and final Christ.” At the same time, he stands in the vanguard of the movement of “theocentricism.”⁴⁾

In contrast, as a leading American Lutheran theologian, Carl Braaten follows at once the traditional position of Lutheran theol-

1) Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 2.

2) These terms appear in Alan Race's *Christians and Religious Pluralism* and they have been widely used since then. Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

3) John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 121ff. Also he says, “He [God] is the sun, the originative source of light and life, whom all the religions reflect in their different ways.” John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 52.

4) Theocentric pluralism is espoused in various nuanced forms by S. Samartha, R. Pannikar, Paul Knitter, Alan Race, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and so on.

ogy and acknowledges the reality and validity of theology of religions. However, through his book *No Other Gospel!* (1992), Braaten insists strongly the finality of Christ focused on the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ.

In considering this context, this paper will deal with both theologians' assertions of the finality of Jesus Christ. It also will discuss the analysis, the comparison, and the assessment of both views. Consequently, this paper will be a critical Christological response to religious pluralism of our day.

II. John Hick's View of The Finality of Jesus Christ

1. "Copernican Revolution"

In opposing the traditional claim that Jesus Christ is God's final revelation in the encounter with other religions, Hick calls for "Copernican Revolution" in Christian theology. As he insists,

The Copernican revolution in theology must involve an equally radical transformation of our conception of the universe of faiths and the place of our own religion within it. It must involve a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the center to the thought that it is God who is at the center and that all religions of mankind, including

our own, serve and revolve around him.⁵⁾

In this sense, Hick rejects not only the Roman Catholic dogma, “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*” (outside of Church there is no salvation) but also the traditional Protestant view, “outside of Christ there is no salvation.”⁶⁾ In other words, he proposes the paradigm shift from “ecclesio-centricism” or “christo-centricism” to “theo-centricism.”

Hick’s theocentric model for Christian approaches to other religions is based on his understanding of history of religion, philosophy of religion, and the current worldwide ecumenism. He starts with the analysis of the common religious phenomena. According to Hick, all the great world religions are characterized as different human responses to the One Divine Reality formed in different historical and cultural circumstances, either as divine *personae* (Yaweh, Allah) for theists or as divine *impersonae* (Brahman, Dharma) for non-theists.⁷⁾ Furthermore, Hick insists that all the major religions have concerns for the transformation of human existence from “self-centeredness” to “Reality-cen-

5) John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 36.

6) John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite, eds., *Christianity and Other Religions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 178.

7) John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 39f. also, John Hick and P. Knitter eds., *The Myth of God Incarnate: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 140-42. Here, Hick makes use of Kantian epistemological framework. Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis lies in a distinction between the divine noumenal reality (the Real an sich) and the common ultimate referent of phenomenal religious systems, which involve culturally shaped conceptualization and experiences of the Real.

teredness” within their soteriological structure(salvation/liberation).⁸⁾

From this perspective, Hick maintains that God has many names, that is, Adonai and God, Allah and Paran Atma, Rana and Krishna.⁹⁾ These are, in Hick’s view, different names of the same ultimate Being and aspects of the Divine¹⁰⁾ or like “maps” or colors of the rainbow.¹¹⁾ As Hick says,

... that there is but one God, who is maker and lord of all; that in his infinite fullness and richness of being he exceeds all our human attempts to grasp him in thought; and that the devout in the various great world religions are in fact worshipping that one God, but through different, overlapping concepts of mental images of him.¹²⁾

For Hick, God is the center of the universe of faiths; Jesus is the one way of the many ways that lead to God.¹³⁾ Thus, Jesus is not the one and the only Son of God, the Lord of the world, and the Savior of humankind.

8) Ibid., 86.

9) John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite, eds., *Christianity and Other Religions*, 177. Hick maintains that “all salvation - that is, all creating of human animals into children of God - is the work of God. The different religions have their different names for God acting savingly towards mankind.” John Hick and P. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 181.

10) John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 140-41.

11) John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 80; See also J. Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995), ix-x.

12) Ibid., 178.

13) Ibid., 186.

However, this does not mean for Hick that he denies the significance of Christ for Christians. Rather, he states, “We can say that there is salvation in Christ without having say that there is no salvation other than in Christ.”¹⁴⁾ In this way, Hick moves away from not only the exclusivistic understanding of Christ but also the inclusivistic view of universal finality of Christ to pluralistic Christological paradigm.¹⁵⁾

2. Pluralistic Understanding of Christ

In his many books, especially in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977) and *God the Universe of Faiths* (1973), Hick raises a serious question of the uniqueness of Christ. In other words, he re-interprets the reality and significance of the Incarnation. By using the results of the current New Testament criticism, he regards the Christian belief in the Incarnation as an unacceptable truth.

In Hick’s opinion, the idea of divine incarnation is better understood as metaphorical, mythological than as literal.¹⁶⁾ He states,

Fundamental heresy is precisely to treat the Incarnation as a factual hypothesis!... It[incarnation] is a mythological idea, a figure of

14) Ibid.

15) John Sanders argues that Hick began as classical universalist affirming the finality of Jesus but later moved into radical pluralist. John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 115-16.

16) John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 185.

speech, a piece of poetic imagery. It is a way of saying that Jesus is our living contact with the transcendent God. In his presence we find that we are brought into the presence of God.¹⁷⁾

However, in Hick's view, we no longer should say that Jesus is the one and the only effective point of contact with God.¹⁸⁾ Here, Hick opens the possibility of other ways of salvation outside of Christ without giving up the assertion of salvation in Christ.

In dealing with the myth of incarnation, rejecting the metaphysical concepts like 'substance', 'nature', and 'hypothesis' in Chalcedonian Christology, Hick explains the content of the myth of incarnation in terms of 'purpose', 'action', and 'operation'.¹⁹⁾ According to him, the Bible does not speak of the substance or of the essence of deity, but it does speak of a divine purpose of God's *Agape* for humanity and of God's mighty acts in human history.²⁰⁾ Furthermore, in Hick's opinion, the operation of *Agape* is revealed in the life and the death of Jesus. In this sense, for Hick, Jesus' *Agape* is not a representation of God's *Agape*; it is that *Agape* operating in finite mode; it is the eternal divine *Agape* made flesh, inhistorized.²¹⁾

However, here, Hick does not identify Jesus with God. He leaves room for other saviors alongside Jesus Christ as the agents of *God's*

17) Ibid., 186.

18) Ibid.

19) John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 149-52.

20) Ibid., 151.

21) Ibid., 159.

Agapeing. As Hick argues,

We want to say of Jesus that he was *totus Deus*, ‘wholly God,’ in the sense that his *agape* was genuinely the *agape* of God at work on earth, but not that he was *totum Dei*, ‘the whole God,’ in the sense that the divine *agape* was expressed without remainder in each or even in some of his actions.²²⁾

On the basis of this understanding, in his book *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (1993), Hick offers a revised and alternative view of Christ in a pluralistic age. Here, he defines at once divine incarnation as metaphor thoroughly and suggests plural incarnations clearly. As he says,

... But incarnated as Gautama Siddhartha, the Buddha, the Logos was humanly conscious of that aspect of the divine which could be conceived in quite different terms, as the eternal reality of *nirvana* or of the universal Buddha nature with which we can attain a blessed unitary consciousness as we transcend the false perspective of the self-enclosed ego. One could proceed to interpret along analogous lines each of the major options represented by the different world religions.²³⁾

According to Hick, we have to say that “all the great religious fig-

22) Ibid.

23) John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 98.

ures have in their different ways ‘incarnated’ the ideal of human life lived in response to the divine Reality.²⁴⁾

Furthermore, in order to establish his own pluralistic Christology, Hick criticizes the traditional doctrines of the atonement in terms of penalty, redemption, sacrifice, satisfaction, substitution, ransom and so on. In defining all these traditional views as too narrow and ineffective for today, he strongly proposes his understanding of salvation as human transformation which is characterized as a progressive change in human beings from self-centeredness to a new orientation centered in the ultimate divine Reality.²⁵⁾ In this context, Hick insists,

There would thus emerge a theology of religions which stresses the infinite nature of the Godhead, exceeding the scope of all our concepts, and the salvific efficacy of the variety of ways formed around the different incarnations that have occurred throughout human history.²⁶⁾

3. Interreligious Dialogue

On the basis of his pluralistic understanding of Christ and through

24) Ibid. It is quite correct to say that Hick attacks both the notion of God-Incarnate and the related doctrine of the Trinity.

25) Ibid., 112-13. In this context, Kaerkkäinen argues that Hick has moved beyond theocentrism to Realitycentrism. Veli-Matti Kaerkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical & Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 25, 350.

26) Ibid., 98.

his experience of religious pluralism and the wider ecumenism, Hick says,

Today the world religions are increasingly in contact with one another in conscious dialogue and in deliberate attempts to learn about and to learn from one another. These mutual influences can only increase in the future.²⁷⁾

In this way, Hick characterizes the traditional assertion of absoluteness Christianity as a kind of chauvinism.²⁸⁾ At the same time, he suggests interreligious dialogue as a mutual relationship among the world religions, regarding themselves not as enemies or rivals, but as friends.²⁹⁾ According to Hick, in the new age of growing interreligious dialogue the differences between the religious traditions will seem proportionally less significant.³⁰⁾ However, in his prospects, “A single world religion is never likely, and not a consummation to be desired.”³¹⁾ Here, Hick rejects religious syncretism explicitly. Rather, he suggests that we go forward into mutual dialogue and friendly interpenetration “with positive anticipations and with a sense of pleasurable excitement.”³²⁾

27) John Hick and B. Hebblethwaite, eds., *Christianity and Other Religions*, 187.

28) John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 90.

29) John Hick and B. Hebblethwaite, eds., *Christianity and Other Religions*, 189.

30) *Ibid.*, 188.

31) *Ibid.*, 189.

32) John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 59.

III. Carl Braaten's View of the Finality of Jesus Christ

1. The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ

As a prominent contemporary Lutheran theologian, C. Braaten insists on the finality of Christ focused on the uniqueness and universality of the gospel of Jesus Christ. On the basis of divine revelation attested by Holy Scripture, he holds the truth of the universal goal of salvation by means of God's particular revelation in Jesus of Nazareth.³³⁾ In this regard, he strongly refuses both the particularists and the universalists in relation to Christianity with other religions.³⁴⁾ Rather, he is willing to remain in the tension between the historical particularity of Christian faith and its eschatological universality.

According to Braaten, the basis and starting point of a Lutheran theology lies in "a consistent affirmation of a general revelation of God apart from the Bible and the history of salvation culminating in Christ."³⁵⁾ In this regard, as he says,

We find in the religions an echo of God's activity in all expressions of life because God has not left himself without a witness among the

33) Carl E. Braaten, *No Other Gospel! Christianity among the World's Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 3.

34) *Ibid.*, 3-4.

35) *Ibid.*, 67.

nations (Acts 14:16-17), which means that really of God and his revelation lie behind the religions of humanity as anonymous mystery and hidden power.³⁶⁾

Unlike K. Barth, standing the Lutheran tradition, Braaten affirms a twofold revelation of God, general revelation and special revelation within the biblical witness. However, in Braaten's view, the general revelation functions only "as a *praeparatio evangelica* showing that people are under the wrath and judgment of God, steeped in guilt and lies, and in need of the gospel and its redemption."³⁷⁾ Therefore, for Braaten, "the true and proper knowledge of God comes only through the revelation of Christ."³⁸⁾

According to Braaten, in Lutheran theology, the Gospel of Christ that God has accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for salvation of the world and humanity, functions as "the final medium of revelation and therefore the critical norm in a theology of the history of religions."³⁹⁾ Thus, for Braaten, "many ways of salvation are not needed, because the one way of God has revealed in Jesus Christ is sufficient for all."⁴⁰⁾ On the basis of salvation through Christ alone and justification by faith alone, Braaten strongly insists,

36) Ibid., 67-68.

37) Ibid., 69.

38) Ibid., 70.

39) Ibid., 74. C. Braaten primarily contributed to the report *Religious Pluralism and Lutheran Theology*, produced by the Lutheran World Federation. J. Paul Rajashakar, ed., *Religious Pluralism and Lutheran Theology* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1988).

40) Ibid., 91.

He[Christ] is the one and only Savior or he is no Savior at all. The exclusive claim is not a footnote to the gospel; it is the gospel itself.⁴¹⁾

From this perspective, Braaten says clearly, “Outside of Christ and apart from the preaching of the gospel there are no known historical alternatives that may be theologically accepted as divinely authorized means of salvation.”⁴²⁾

2. The Universality of Jesus Christ

In Braaten’s view, the uniqueness of Jesus belongs to the core of the Christian Gospel. However, Braaten argues that this particular and concrete man, Jesus of Nazareth, is unique because of his universal significance.⁴³⁾ According to Braaten, Christian belief in the universality of salvation in Jesus lies in the biblical witness; It is God’s will that all people shall be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:4).⁴⁴⁾ However, as Braaten states,

41) Carl E. Braaten, “The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ” in *Faith Meets Faith: Mission Trends* No. 5, eds. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist, 1981), 75.

42) *Ibid.*, 78. Also he says, “If traditionally, Roman Catholic theology has taught that ‘outside of church there is no salvation’, Lutheran theology has taught that ‘outside of Christ there is no salvation.’” C. Braaten, “Lutheran Theology and Religious Pluralism,” *Lutheran World Federation* 23-24 (Jan. 1988), 122.

43) *Ibid.*

44) *Ibid.*, 39.

New Testament universalism, however, is always a predicate of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, not a metaphysical attribute of the world in process (as in the Origenistic doctrine of *apokatastasis ton panton*), or of existential possibility universally available to every person in a moment of decision.⁴⁵⁾

Rather, in Braaten's view, "we have universal hope in Christ, not a universal gnosis; It is a hope that the Lord of the church will also finally rule as the Lord of the world, inclusive of all its religions."⁴⁶⁾ As Braaten says,

There are not two ways of salvation. There is one salvation, one way of salvation, one Savior of the world, and that is the eschatological salvation valid for all through the one who came that all might find life, who died that the world might be reconciled, who was raised that hope might live for the victory of God and the restitution of all things in him.⁴⁷⁾

Admitting that God is universally at work in the religions, Braaten argues that world history and salvation history are, in the end, eschatologically unified in the mystery of Christ.⁴⁸⁾ In this regard, Braaten strongly claims, "The Lord of the church is thus the Savior of the world,

45) Ibid., 80.

46) Ibid., 87.

47) Ibid.

48) Carl E. Braaten, *No Other Gospel!*, 72.

and the Savior of the church is the Lord of the world”.⁴⁹⁾

However, Braaten never absolutizes Christianity. In his view, “just as the religions are relativized from the perspective of the gospel, so also Christianity itself is relativized in the light of the absolute future of the kingdom it is called to serve.”⁵⁰⁾ For Braaten, Christianity has universal meaning only because of the connection of the eschatological revelation of God in Jesus Christ with the totality of history.⁵¹⁾

In Braaten’s view, we live in the interim between the particularity of the historical means of salvation and the universality of the vision which the gospel proclaims. In this context, he regards Jesus Christ as “the revelation of the eschatological fulfillment of the religions.”⁵²⁾ In other words, “the universality of Christ is something that is being worked out through the interaction of the religions and will be established for all eyes to see only at the end of history.”⁵³⁾

3. Interreligious Dialogue

Braaten already knew well the concrete reality of religious pluralism of our day. In this context, he raises a question seriously, “If Jesus is the unique and universal Savior, how can there be a dialogue with other

49) Ibid.

50) Ibid., 79.

51) Ibid.

52) Ibid., 80.

53) Ibid.

religions?”⁵⁴⁾ According to Braaten, Christians should not be afraid of dialogue with other religions. In his view, the religions are part of the universal context in which the true identity of Jesus must find new expression.⁵⁵⁾

Braaten does not recommend one kind of religious dialogue that abandons the heart of the Christian Gospel and keeps silent about the core of the biblical witness.⁵⁶⁾ Rather, he suggests both the evangelical outreach and the interreligious dialogue in our universal historical context. In other words, according to Braaten, in entering into dialogue with other religions, we should communicate to them what the Gospel of Jesus Christ means. At the same time, we should be open to exploring what the non-Christian religions can contribute to our understanding of the universal identity and significance of Jesus Christ.⁵⁷⁾ Thus, in Braaten’s proposal, our dialogue will be not one-sided. Rather, it will be “a two-way street, in which the condition of openness to the other religions will be motivated by a knowledge that they also somehow speak of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁸⁾

54) Carl E. Braaten, “The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ,” 78.

55) *Ibid.*

56) *Ibid.*, 79.

57) *Ibid.*, 85.

58) *Ibid.*, 86.

IV. Analysis, Comparison, and Assessment

From all consideration, we have come to know that the issue of the finality of Christ must be the most difficult of all issues for Christian theology in relation to other religions. Hick and Braaten, both have acknowledged the emerging concrete reality of religious pluralism and worldwide ecumenism of our day. Even though they address their own position in different ways, they seem to hold the validity and necessity of interreligious dialogue in common. Moreover, they all recognize the fact that God is at work universally in the world religions and humanity, in spite of their different approaches.

However, between them, the basis and starting point of their approaches are quite different. Hick makes the use of phenomenological and experiential analysis of philosophy of religion thoroughly. In contrast, in Braaten's position, is based on the biblical witnesses consistently. For Braaten, Hick's approach is a kind of natural theology.

In this context, Braaten criticizes that Hick's concept of God might be different from the God of the Gospel.⁵⁹⁾ In fact, it seems to me that Hick's view of God as the ultimate Being, Reality, and the One, is rather abstract, metaphysical, and philosophical. On the contrary, Braaten's concept of God is a biblical, trinitarian one. Braaten points out that Hick's universal God has many names among world religions and are all equally valid. In Braaten's view, "Hick is jumping directly from phe-

59) Carl E. Braaten, *No Other Gospel!*, 21.

nomenological facts to theological judgments without the benefit of the kind of christological critique that a trinitarian theology of the cross would require.”⁶⁰⁾

In addition, in relation to Hick’s definition of salvation as human transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness, it seems to me that it is characterized as a kind of reductionism. In other words, it is a very superficial and generalized understanding of salvation. This is primarily due to the fact that Hick depends on the phenomenology of religions approach.

From this basis, Hick relativizes inevitably the finality of Christ. According to him, in the age of religious pluralism, we should give up the exclusive claim of Christ and Christianity as the one and only way of salvation. In contrast, Braaten says, “He [Christ] is depicted... not as *a* savior, but as *the* savior, not as a lord, but as *the* lord.”⁶¹⁾ In this regard, Braaten insists,

[In Hick’s view] there is salvation without Christ in other religions, and therefore not only outside the church, not only apart from faith in Christ, but also apart from Christ altogether. The coming of Christ is not necessary for the salvation of humanity. They do not deny that there is salvation in Christ for Christians, but they abandon the hope of the world’s salvation in Christ alone as a chauvinistic doctrine, and along with it, of course, the Christological premise of the

60) Ibid., 78.

61) Carl E. Braaten, “The Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ,” 74.

uniqueness and universality of Jesus which supports the hope.⁶²⁾

In emphasizing both the historical particularity of Jesus Christ and the eschatological universality of Christ, Braaten goes beyond the extreme exclusive approach of the finality of Christ. At the same, he strongly reaffirms and reasserts the exclusive claim of the Gospel as a critical response to religious pluralism.

On the finality of Christ, Hick rejects the traditional premise of “the decisive, unique, normative, and final Christ.” Instead, he proposes the pluralistic understanding of Christ, such as multiple incarnations.⁶³⁾ To this, Braaten criticizes that “the underlying Christology of the new theocentric pluralist is a new edition of Arianism, in which Christ stands one rung below God on the ladder of being.”⁶⁴⁾

Furthermore, Hick feels that Christ is a liability in interreligious dialogue. For Braaten, theocentric religious pluralist’s assertions including Hick’s seem to be these mottos, “Christ divides, God unites!”, or “Christ must decrease so that God might increase!”⁶⁵⁾ To this, Braaten strongly opposes; “They are proclaiming another gospel.”⁶⁶⁾ On the contrary, Braaten insists that in Christian faith, trinitarian Christocentricism underscores the identity of God who is really God.⁶⁷⁾ Therefore,

62) Ibid., 81.

63) John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, 98.

64) Carl E. Braaten, *No Other Gospel!*, 21.

65) Ibid.

66) Ibid., 9.

67) Ibid.

for Braaten, “the Christocentric trinitarian paradigm offers a much more promising resource for thinking about the relation between the Gospel, Christianity, and other world religions.”⁶⁸⁾

In relation to interreligious dialogue, Hick suggests mutual dialogue and friendly interpenetration without any claims for the absoluteness one another among the world religions. Even though he rejects it explicitly, it appears to me that his position is leaning toward religious relativism. On the contrary, Braaten proposes both the evangelical outreach and interreligious dialogue. In his view, the church mission includes both the witness of eschatological finality in connection with the particular historical person and work of Christ, and dialogue with people of other faiths.

From the above analysis and comparison, in our religiously pluralistic context, I cannot help but respect these theological efforts of seeking the proper answers to the contextual questions. Between them, Hick’s view is very influential for religious pluralists. This is because he provides them with an intriguing theoretical framework. In spite of its definitive weaknesses and failures, his proposal of “Copernican Revolution” is of importance for Christocentric Christianity in that it makes traditional Christianity reflect on its own position among the world religions.

However, due to its relativistic character, Hick’s theocentric religious pluralism is hard to accept for the Church ministry and traditional missiology. As a critical response to this radical theocentric

68) *Ibid.*, 8.

religious pluralism, Braaten seems to present the alternative, “trinitarian Christocentric paradigm”.⁶⁹⁾ In differentiating his view from that of both particularists and the universalists, he calls his position “biblical universalist.” Even though he seems to show ambiguities and vagueness in some respects, I would agree with Braaten’s view rather than Hick’s. In my opinion, it is a strong point of Braaten’s view that it includes the finality of revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ on the basis of the biblical witnesses. In emphasizing the uniqueness and universality of Christ, he seems to remain in tension between the particularity and the universality of salvation in Christ. In my view, this is based on the Gospel of Christ properly.

Unlike Hick, Braaten does not present too hasty and hardened theological conclusions in relation to salvation in the history of the world religions. Rather, in underscoring the universal significance of the once and for all Chris-event, he suggests that we hope and pray for the universal salvation in Jesus Christ.⁷⁰⁾ Here, Braaten clearly has a theological reservation with an eschatological dimension. This position seems to me valid and effective for Christians who are living in the age of religious pluralism. Our task, in my opinion, should embrace both the faithful commitment to the evangelical outreach and the openness to interreligious dialogue.

69) Ibid., 8-9.

70) Ibid., 80. According to P. Fiddes, Braaten’s theological position can be defined as ‘hopeful’ universalism compared to ‘dogmatic’ universalism. See P. Fiddes, *The Promised Land: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 194-96.

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Abstract

A Comparison of John Hick and Carl Braaten on the Finality of Jesus Christ

This paper is a comparative study on the issue of the finality of Jesus Christ discussed by J. Hick and C. Braaten in our pluralistic age. It deals with the analysis, the comparison, and the assessment in the light of three major issues of both theologians, including the uniqueness of Jesus Christ or the universality of Jesus Christ, and the interreligious dialogue. Hick and Braaten, both have acknowledged the emerging concrete reality of religious pluralism and worldwide ecumenism of our day. Even though they address their own position in different ways, they seem to hold the validity and necessity of interreligious dialogue in common. Moreover, they all recognize the fact that God is at work universally in the world religions and humanity, in spite of their different approaches. While Hick relativizes inevitably the finality of Christ, he proposes the pluralistic understanding of Christ, such as multiple incarnations. In emphasizing both the historical particularity of Jesus Christ and the eschatological universality of Christ, Braaten goes be-

yond the extreme exclusive approach of the finality of Christ.

In relation to interreligious dialogue, Hick suggests mutual dialogue and friendly interpenetration without any claims for the absoluteness of one over another among the world religions. On the contrary, Braaten proposes both the evangelical outreach and interreligious dialogue. As a critical response to Hick's radical theocentric religious pluralism, Braaten seems to present the alternative, "trinitarian Christocentric paradigm." It is a strong point of Braaten's view that it includes the finality of revelation and the salvation in Jesus Christ on the basis of the biblical witnesses. In emphasizing the uniqueness and universality of Christ, he seems to remain in tension between the particularity and the universality of salvation in Christ. This position seems to me valid and effective for Christians who are living in the age of religious pluralism.

Keywords

C. Braaten, J. Hick, religious pluralism, the finality of Jesus Christ, interreligious dialogue

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Book of 1 John. The KJV New Testament was translated from the Textus Receptus. However, the majority of the book of Revelation seems to have been translated from the Latin Vulgate. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. 3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. Carl Edward Braaten (born 1929) is an American Lutheran theologian and minister. Carl Braaten has authored and edited numerous books and theological papers, including *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Fortress Press, 1983), *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (Fortress Press, 1998) and *In One Body Through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003). Along with Robert Jenson, he has been an influential figure in developing and restoring the catholic