

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

---

Volume 5 | Issue 4

Article 4

---

10-1-1988

## An Apology for Apologetics

Paul J. Griffiths

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

---

### Recommended Citation

Griffiths, Paul J. (1988) "An Apology for Apologetics," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 4 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol5/iss4/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

# AN APOLOGY FOR APOLOGETICS

Paul J. Griffiths

## *Prolegomena*

It has become a truism (though none the less true for that) to say that the world has grown smaller; that the community within which each of us lives is no longer the church or the nation, but the world; and that Christian theology as an intellectual discipline cannot legitimately be done without making the realization of these things central to its practice.<sup>1</sup> Those who say this the loudest are, however, often the last to offer a serious treatment of the pressing intellectual problems that such a realization brings. How is systematic theology to be practiced if the tradition-based norms that have shaped it are placed in (and relativized by) a context of radical religious pluralism? What is the status and validity of Christian ethical and meta-ethical theory in such a context? What, in such a context, can the adjective 'Christian' mean? Is it genuinely possible to engage in constructive theological thought comparatively?<sup>2</sup> These are large questions, to none of which I know the answers. I certainly don't intend to enter into a systematic treatment of any of them here. Instead, I'd like to explore, in a fair amount of detail and with as much precision as I can muster, one small preliminary question: what is the nature and status of the discipline of inter-religious apologetics?

This may seem an odd question to choose as a prolegomenon to the broader and more difficult questions mentioned. Apologetics is a term laden with many negative connotations; to be an apologist for the truth of one religious claim or set of religious claims over against another is, in certain circles, seen as not far short of being a racist.<sup>3</sup> In almost all mainstream institutions in which theology is taught in the USA, apologetics as an intellectual discipline does not figure prominently in the curriculum. You'll look for it in vain in the catalogues of the Divinity Schools at Harvard or Chicago. Liberal Protestants have never been wedded to the virtues of apologetics, and, as a broad generalization, the Roman Catholic tradition of systematic apologetics appears to have been killed by the Second Vatican Council and especially by *Nostra Aetate*. Why then choose it? A detailed justification of the choice is in the paper that follows. As a preliminary defence: it appears to me that a proper understanding of the status and importance of inter-religious apologetics will be of enormous help in clarifying the significance of theological claims to truth made in a pluralistic context. And this, in turn, will have significant implications for the broader systematic questions mentioned.



*The Necessity of Inter-Religious Apologetics (NOIA)*

I wish to defend the thesis that inter-religious apologetics is a necessary component of theology done in a multi-cultural, religiously plural context. And since this is now the only context within which theology can properly be done, I shall also be defending the thesis that theology *simpliciter* needs apologetics. More formally, the thesis for which I wish to argue is:

For any two religious communities,  $R_1$  and  $R_2$ , any two ordered sets of sentences,  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ , and any time,  $T$ : If  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are doctrines of  $R_1$  and  $R_2$ , and if, at  $T$ , representative intellectuals of  $R_1$  come to judge that some members of  $S_2$  are incompatible with some members of  $S_1$  (or that  $S_2$  and  $S_1$  *in toto* are incompatible), then the representative intellectuals in question should feel obliged to engage in both positive and negative apologetics *vis-à-vis*  $S_2$ .

Let's call this the *principle of the necessity of inter-religious apologetics* (the NOIA principle). Its constituent terms need a little explanation. First, by 'ordered set of sentences' I mean any collection of sentences ordered in such a way that what they express constitutes a conceptual system in some sphere of discourse, and is recognized as such by its users. The American oath of allegiance would be one such ordered set; the sphere of discourse in this case would be the individual citizen's proper relations to the state. The *sūtras* comprising *Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī* would be another; the sphere of discourse here is that of the rules governing the formation of semantic items from (notional) roots in the Sanskrit language.

By 'religious community' I mean any group of persons who would, severally and collectively, acknowledge themselves to be members of some community which is recognizably religious. Most individuals who would so describe themselves recognize that their membership in any given religious community operates on a number of levels and that the requirements for entry and continuation are likely to differ at each level. For example, a Gelukpa Tibetan Buddhist monk resident in some specific monastery in 1949 would have been likely to identify himself first as a member of some specific monastic community, then as affiliated to a particular scholastic lineage, and finally as (most broadly of all) a Buddhist. It would be possible to specify fairly precisely what it took to become a member of a specific monastic community in Tibet in 1949, as well as what it took to remain one; it would be much more difficult to specify the constraints upon becoming and remaining a Buddhist, in 1949 in Tibet or in any other time and place. Similar considerations would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the requirements for entering any specific Christian community and for maintaining oneself as a member thereof. There will always be difficult marginal instances, and, especially in the case of multi-cultural, polyglot, semi-fictional entities like 'Buddhism' or

'Christianity,' some systematic theoretical difficulties in determining who is a member of which religious community and why. But for the purposes of this study such nice issues of delineation and demarcation need not be of concern.

The NOIA principle suggests that religious communities (and, by implication, their members) typically have religious doctrines, and that such doctrines may be (and are) expressed in ordered sets of sentences. Some traditions have made a virtue of constructing confessional formulae out of such sets, and have used these formulae in various ritual settings. Such, for example, is the Nicene creed, recited (or chanted or sung) in many Christian communities. Such also is the classical twelve-fold *pratīyasamutpāda* formula, learned, chanted, and represented iconographically in many Buddhist traditions. The NOIA principle also suggests that it is possible for a sentence that expresses a doctrine of one religious community to be incompatible with a sentence that expresses a doctrine of another. Such incompatibility may have many forms.<sup>4</sup> In the case of sentences that express claims about the nature of the universe or of specific existents within it, it may be strictly logical: if what is expressed by one sentence is true, what is expressed by the other cannot be. An example might be the *prima facie* incompatibility between the Buddhist assertion *everything that exists does so momentarily*<sup>5</sup> and the Christian assertion *Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever*.<sup>6</sup> In the case of sentences that recommend courses of action, incompatibility may be practical: that it is not possible for a single individual to consistently follow both courses of action. For example, there may be an incompatibility of this kind between the (Buddhist) recommendation of the ceaseless practice of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna*), and the (Christian) recommendation that all actions should be done for the greater glory of God.<sup>7</sup>

It should be noted that the NOIA principle requires, in order to come into operation, only that some representative intellectuals of a given religious community should come to judge that there is an incompatibility of one of the kinds mentioned, not that there actually is. The phrase 'representative intellectuals' is inserted in order not to place too great a burden upon the doxastic practices of ordinary (non-intellectual, non-professional) members of religious communities. I do not intend to claim that every member of a religious community who finds herself in the situation described by the NOIA principle is thereby required to engage in apologetics; only that every religious community should have some individuals among its members who respond in this way. The NOIA principle is thus clearly normative in intent, but its normativeness bears upon communities rather than individuals.

The meaning of 'positive apologetics' and 'negative apologetics' now needs to be clarified. I understand apologetics in general as an occasional and polemical intellectual discourse which operates in two quite distinctive modalities. The first is negative: in this mode, apologetical discourse is designed to show that a

given critique of (any one of) the central truth-claims expressed by an ordered set of doctrine-expressing sentences fails, or that a critique of the set as a whole (as to, say, its consistence or coherence) does the same. Suppose that someone from outside the Buddhist tradition presents an argument purporting to show that two key doctrine-expressing sentences from within the tradition—say, the claim *there are no spiritual substances* and the claim *each person is reborn many times*—issue in a contradiction if taken together. A Buddhist defender of the faith will usually try to mend fences by showing that no such contradiction issues, or that some important misunderstanding of the sentences in question has occurred.<sup>8</sup> This is negative apologetics in action. Standard-issue Christian responses to the problem of evil<sup>9</sup> tend to be of the same logical kind.

Positive apologetics is both more complex and more interesting: it is a discourse designed to show that the ordered set of doctrine-expressing sentences constituting a particular religious community's doctrines is cognitively superior, in some important respect(s), to that constituting another religious community's doctrines. Where negative apologetics is defensive, positive apologetics is offensive; where negative apologetics mans the barricades, positive apologetics takes the battle to the enemy's camp.<sup>10</sup> Positive apologetics is, by its very nature, part of an evidentialist program; it often tries to show, by cumulative-case arguments, that the conceptual system it is attempting to establish is more likely than not (or more likely than some specific competitor) to be true, both in its parts and as a whole.<sup>11</sup> It may also (though more rarely) try to provide a knock-down drag-out argument for the truth of one particular doctrine-expressing sentence, the kind of argument whose force one cannot preserve sanity and deny. Of this genre are some versions of the ontological argument.

I have suggested that both kinds of apologetic are (or should be) occasional and polemical. I mean by this that they are typically occasioned by a specific challenge of some kind, or by awareness that the ordered set of sentences for which the apologia is being undertaken is not the only one in the field. This, I think, is largely the case. But it's also worth noting that, at particular points in the history of various traditions, there has been a tendency for apologetics to lose its occasional and polemical thrust and to harden into a formalistic intellectual discourse, an exercise aimed at showing that a particular set of doctrine-expressing sentences is cognitively superior to any other, even when the only competitors actually canvassed are the dry relics of long-dead intellectual systems. This was certainly often the case in Tibet, where the production of *Grub mtha'* texts was an activity of just this kind,<sup>12</sup> and the same is true of many of the Roman Catholic manuals of apologetics. But this is a degenerate form of apologetics, sufficiently different in both genre and goals from the kinds of discourse I have in mind to warrant no further comment.

Apologetics also usually uses only methods of argumentation and criteria of

knowledge acceptable to the adversary. This to rule out, among other things, appeals to authority-sources not recognized by one side in the debate. A Buddhist attempt at positive apologetics *vis-à-vis* Christianity that does nothing other than appeal to the word of the Buddha is unlikely to be successful. This restriction on methods of argumentation and allowable authority-sources is fully consistent with the character of apologetics as an occasional and polemical intellectual discipline.

It remains to explain the thrust of the normative 'should' in the NOIA principle. I take this 'should' to be, first and most interestingly, an epistemic 'should.' That is, since religious communities characteristically assert the ordered sets of sentences that express their doctrines because they take them to be true, it is part of their epistemic duty to consider whether a challenging sentence or set of such makes it improper to continue asserting what the community asserts. This will usually initially involve engagement in some form of negative apologetics—an attempt to see whether the competing assertion fails in its claims—but it may often (and should) pass from there into positive apologetics—the attempt to show not only that the attack fails, but that the doctrines of the community being attacked are cognitively superior.

Secondly, the 'should' in the NOIA principle is ethical in a somewhat broader sense. That is, religious communities often (though not always and not necessarily) hold that assent to sentences expressing the doctrines of the community is of some considerable soteriological significance. Perhaps the strongest imaginable soteriological significance that assent to some set of sentences could have is that of necessary and sufficient conditionality. Here, the relevant assent would both be necessary for the attainment of salvation (if you don't make it you don't get it), and sufficient for that attainment (if you do make it you'll certainly get it). Very few religious communities (perhaps none) suggest that this relationship holds, and for very good reasons. Among them is the obvious fact that, if assent to any set of sentences could by itself guarantee salvation, then non-cognitive attitudes, including praxis of all kinds, would become religiously irrelevant. This is not a position that any religious community happily takes, and it scarcely warrants further consideration for the purposes of this study.

A less strong position, though still one that gives much weight to assent to sets of sentences, is that which judges the relevant relation to be one of necessary conditionality. This, I think (*pace* some of the counter-positions to be discussed), has been and remains very common in virtually all religious communities. The (pseudo)-Athanasian Creed will serve as an excellent example: both in its surface logical structure (*quicumque vult . . .*) and (probably) in the intent of its framers, it strongly presents the position that assent to a lengthy and comparatively well-defined set of sentences is a necessary condition for the attainment of salvation.

A weaker position still is that which suggests simply that there is some kind

of strong positive link between assenting to some set of doctrine-expressing sentences and attaining salvation. Perhaps that the former is helpful for the latter, or that it is more helpful than any of its known competitors. This position, too, is widely instanced in all religious traditions. For theistic traditions it preserves both the importance of assent to the correct sentences and the possibility of salvation being attained through such things as unmerited grace in default of access to the correct set of doctrine-expressing sentences.

However exactly the relation between assent to some set of doctrine-expressing sentences and the attainment of salvation is conceived, it is beyond doubt that virtually all religious communities assert that there is some such relation. Many of them also (including virtually all Christian and Buddhist ones) tend to hold that the salvation of non-members (those who, *inter alia*, do not assent to the sentences in question) is important. The conclusion that there is thus an ethical imperative placed upon such communities to engage in positive apologetics is therefore at least suggested.

The key terms used in the NOIA principle should now be clearer. It is not, I take it, an uncontroversial principle, nor without pressing intellectual difficulties of its own. Many of its assumptions would be rejected out of hand, for a wide variety of reasons, by influential voices in today's academic theological universe, not least by those concerned with inter-religious questions. And so I shall now explore what I take to be some of the more important theoretical objections to the NOIA principle.

### *Challenges to the NOIA Principle*

There are a number of ways in which the NOIA principle can be challenged. They fall into three main groups. The first is unwilling to concede any of the significant theoretical assumptions of the principle, the second concedes some of these assumptions but argues that the situation envisaged by the principle rarely or never obtains; the third concedes both the assumptions and the situation, but rejects the conclusion. I shall take an example of each group in the comments that follow, but first it is necessary to say more about the assumptions at issue.

Underlying the NOIA principle is the assumption that religious communities characteristically do require assent to doctrine-expressing sentences in the sense outlined, and that such communities often do consider such assent to be of soteriological significance. Underlying it also is the assumption that there are such entities as incompatible doctrine-expressing sentences. Both these assumptions can be challenged on a variety of grounds. It might be argued, for example, that as a matter of fact religious belief and practice has very little to do with assent to sets of doctrine-expressing sentences, and that the view that such assent has any soteriological significance is a characteristic of the (religiously degener-

ate) post-enlightenment West.<sup>13</sup> With this view often goes a location of the essence of religiosity in feeling-states, attitudes, or even ethical praxis. If a position of this kind could be shown, *per impossibile*, to be convincing, it would not entail the falsity of the NOIA principle: it would merely show it to be irrelevant. Some brief comments on this view will be offered below, but I shall not treat it extensively for reasons that will become clear.

A more thoroughgoing objection to the assumptions mentioned is that not only is it not the case that (empirically) religious communities engage in the activities envisaged by the NOIA principle, but that there can (theoretically) be no such entities as sets of doctrine-expressing sentences capable of standing in opposition one to another, and that, *propter hoc*, the NOIA principle has no purchase because the situation which it envisages can never arise. Theological deconstructionists would presumably fall into this camp. Even on this view, though, the NOIA principle is not false: it is simply a conditional whose antecedent never obtains because some of its key terms have no referent. I shall not explore this extreme position further here, though I shall pay a good deal of attention to a somewhat similar (though much more interesting and sophisticated) model of what religious doctrines are and what believing in them means: I refer to that developed by George A. Lindbeck in *The Nature of Doctrine*.<sup>14</sup> Lindbeck's model also rejects the key empirical assumptions upon which the NOIA principle is based, and does so for theoretical reasons; it attacks the principle at the same level of theoretical significance by apparently rejecting the idea that there can be incompatible doctrine-expressing sentences through a denial that such sentences can directly make claims to truth.

A second group of objections to the NOIA principle concedes the theoretical assumption as to the nature of doctrine-expressing sentences and the possibility of their conflict, concedes also the empirical assumption that religious communities characteristically do require assent to such things, but denies that as a matter of fact such conceptual systems ever come into significant conflict, or that, if they do, we have the cognitive equipment to know that they do. There is a broad range of positions here. Among them is that of souls sensitive to the difficult hermeneutical questions involved in understanding even one set of doctrine-expressing sentences, and thus skeptical of the possibility of understanding more than one well enough to be sure that significant contradictions among them (or any of their members) do in fact obtain. Cautions of this kind, whether from philosophers or historians, are important and should be carefully considered; but they do not (or do not usually) call the NOIA principle as a whole into question. They merely stress the great difficulty of knowing when it obtains and thus when it would be appropriate to apply it.

A more thoroughgoing set of objections to the NOIA principle (one that still falls into this second group), is what I shall call *a priori* pluralism. This is a



doctrine that denies the possibility of significant contradiction among doctrine-expressing sentences because of the application to all of them of some equivalence principle.<sup>15</sup> This may be a principle asserting that all sets of doctrine-expressing sentences (or at least all those belonging to the world's major religious communities) are (equally) descriptive of the same religious reality; or that they are all equally effective in transforming human beings; or some such. Below I shall consider one currently influential variant on this position: that of John Hick. While lacking either the theoretical interest or the intellectual sophistication of Lindbeck's model, *a priori* pluralism is a very widely held (usually viscerally held) theological position; if true, it makes the NOIA principle inapplicable, and thus deserves some consideration.

A third and final cluster of objections to the NOIA principle allows almost all of its claims and assumptions, and centers attention instead upon the normative 'should' in the principle. Typical is the Calvinist objection to natural theology in all its forms, an objection especially prominent, for example, in the works of Alvin Plantinga and his followers. The point here is that, while it is agreed that religious communities characteristically do require assent to sets of doctrine-expressing sentences and that such sets may and do conflict significantly, it is nevertheless inappropriate to suggest that positive apologetics is ever the proper response to this situation (although negative apologetics may be recommended). This for three reasons: that the standards for successful positive apologetics are impossibly high; that the believer is not violating any duties, epistemic or ethical, by refusing to engage in it; and that engaging in it suggests an idolatrous attitude towards human reason and its capacities. This (set of) objections to the NOIA principle is also currently very influential; I shall have no space to explore it further here, though I hope to do so in another study in the near future.

I shall now try to show that two of the most pressing critiques of the NOIA principle in fact provide no decisive reasons for rejecting it. And in conclusion I shall say more about the importance of the NOIA principle for the Christian theological enterprise as it should be practiced in the current situation of radical religious pluralism.

#### *George Lindbeck's Rule-Theory of Religious Doctrine*

Lindbeck's agenda in *The Nature of Doctrine* is, positively, the development of a cultural-linguistic model of what religious doctrines are, a model which stresses their regulative functions. Negatively, he is concerned to reject two other important models: the cognitive-propositional model and the experiential-expressivist model. The former sees doctrines as propositions, bearers of truth-value and conveyors of information about extra-mental and extra-linguistic realities,<sup>16</sup> while the latter sees them as ". . . noninformative and nondiscursive symbols

of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations . . .”<sup>17</sup> In rejecting the cognitive-propositional model of religious doctrines Lindbeck seems to call the NOIA principle into question: for if doctrine-expressing sentences cannot make direct claims to truth but can function only regulatively within the bounds of specific communities, then they cannot be directly incompatible. Since this is the main significance of Lindbeck’s position for the purposes of this paper, I shall focus most of my attention in the remarks that follow upon what he has to say about the cognitive-propositional view. But some brief remarks upon why he takes experiential-expressivism to be an inadequate interpretation of the nature of doctrine are also in order.

Lindbeck suggests that experiential expressivists typically take doctrine-expressing sentences<sup>18</sup> to express core religious experiences. The relation between religious experience and religious doctrine on this view is one-way: the former produces the latter. As Lindbeck correctly points out, this view flies in the face of all that we know from historical and anthropological studies of the complex phenomenon of becoming and remaining a member of a religious community. These studies show, I think decisively, that there is an exceedingly complex symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between experience and doctrine; each conditions the other, but if there is a dominant direction of influence it is from doctrine to experience, not *vice-versa*. Assent to a given set of doctrine-expressing sentences (together, of course, with the legends, myths, rituals, practices, and so forth that accompany it) makes possible the occurrence of certain kinds of experience, and may at times act as both necessary and sufficient condition for the occurrence of that experience.<sup>19</sup> Religion, on the cultural-linguistic view, is thus like a language, an idiom,<sup>20</sup> and becoming religious is “to interiorize a set of skills by practice and training.”<sup>21</sup> Lindbeck is entirely correct that the weight of contemporary developmental psychology (Piaget and after), much of contemporary philosophy (especially since Wittgenstein’s critique of the possibility of a private language), almost all current anthropological theory (Clifford Geertz *et al.*), and much of linguistics and cognitive science,<sup>22</sup> is in support of a cultural-linguistic model and against an experiential-expressivist one. Theologians and historians of religion (especially those of the Chicago school) are perhaps among the last important intellectual groups for whom the insights of these disciplines have still to be absorbed. They have not yet been able to exorcise Schleiermacher’s ghost.

Lindbeck’s rejection of experiential-expressivism is, then, to be applauded. But, as he realizes, the rejection of experiential-expressivism and its replacement by some form of cultural-linguistic theory does not by itself entail (or even suggest) the rejection of a propositional theory of what (at least some) doctrine-expressing sentences are.<sup>23</sup> It may still be the case that some doctrine-expressing sentences represent propositions and bear truth-value. And at this point we come

to the question of truth, a question that Lindbeck raises explicitly in his third chapter. Here he distinguishes two kinds of truth<sup>24</sup> corresponding to the two views of religious doctrine that he considers to be serious options: the cognitive-propositional and the cultural-linguistic. On the first view, to say of a religious doctrine that it is true is to say that the natural-language sentence which expresses it corresponds to reality. So, for example, when a Buddhist says *everything that exists is momentary*, the proposition thus expressed is true if and only if everything that exists is momentary. On the second (cultural-linguistic) view of religious doctrines truth is a property not of propositions but of the categories of systems: a religious conceptual system is true if and only if the categories that constitute it make reference to "whatever is in fact more important than anything else in the universe"<sup>25</sup> a possibility. That is, if by using these categories one can talk about whatever the object of religious discourse is taken to be, then the system by which they are constituted is categorially true. On this view, it would seem, one would have to interpret the Buddhist assertion just mentioned as a categorial assertion, an assertion that a given category (and only that category) should be employed in order to make meaningful reference to religious reality. It should be understood, that is, as a rule whose content can be paraphrased, roughly, as *it is incumbent upon the Buddhist religious community to use the category of momentariness in talking about reality*.

Now, if this is Lindbeck's view, his stress on the importance of seeing religious doctrines as idioms, as cultural-linguistic systems that generate categories and provide rules for which category is to be used when, does not make it impossible that some doctrine-expressing sentences may also make claims to the kind of truth possessed by (what Lindbeck calls) first-order propositions, and may thus oppose one another as the NOIA principle suggests. More broadly, Lindbeck's position is both defensible and illuminating if all he wants to claim is that some (perhaps even many) doctrine-expressing sentences function for religious communities primarily as rules. But further arguments are needed if the stronger thesis that *all* doctrine-expressing sentences function *only* regulatively for all religious communities is to hold.

At times, Lindbeck does seem to want to go just this far. He says, for example, that the regulative, the marking-out of proper categories for the use of the community, is the only job that church doctrines do.<sup>26</sup> In order to see exactly what is at issue here something needs to be said about Lindbeck's technical 'Excursus on Religion and Truth.'<sup>27</sup> He begins here by making a distinction between intrasystematic truth and ontological truth. The former is the truth that given utterances have in virtue of their coherence "with the total relevant context."<sup>28</sup> A religious utterance is thus intrasystematically true if and only if it coheres with all other utterances, attitudes and practices in the religious form of life within which it occurs. By contrast, an utterance is ontologically true if and

only if it corresponds to extra-categorical reality. Lindbeck then claims that, for any given religious utterance, intrasystematic truth is a necessary condition for ontological truth. He uses the striking example of a crusader uttering the sentence *christus est dominus* while lopping off the head of an infidel, and claims that the intrasystematic incoherence of the utterance with the action makes the former false.<sup>29</sup> Conversely, the utterance may be true if spoken in a situation wherein it coheres with the total context. This elevation of intrasystematic truth to the status of a necessary condition for ontological truth is, on the face of it, odd. Certainly, if applied to other forms of discourse it leads to manifest absurdities;<sup>30</sup> it would seem preferable to say not that the crusader's utterance is false, but that it fails as a religious utterance.<sup>31</sup> I suspect, however, that Lindbeck's reasons for making this apparently implausible claim about the logical relations between intrasystematic and ontological truth have to do with his view that a religious utterance can have ontological truth (that is, a correspondence between what is expressed in the utterance and reality) "only insofar as it is a performance, an act or deed which helps create that correspondence."<sup>32</sup> It's significant that Lindbeck uses the term 'utterance' throughout the 'Excursus': he does so because he wishes to assert that sentences forming part of religious conceptual systems can possess ontological truth *only* when uttered in an appropriately faith-centred confessional setting.<sup>33</sup> This, he says, is because only in such settings can "religious utterances" gain sufficient referential specificity to be capable of expressing propositions and thus of possessing ontological truth. A corollary of this view is the position (worked out at length in chapters 4-5) that confessional language is first-order discourse while the language of technical theology is second-order discourse. The former (and only the former) is capable of expressing propositions, while the latter provides and organizes the categories (the grammar and syntax) that govern which assertions may be made. Church doctrine (technical theology) thus becomes entirely regulative in function, while truth-claims are made only in and through confessional utterance.

It seems worth pursuing some of the implications of this view. To restate the position formally: a religious utterance becomes a true first-order proposition for Lindbeck if and only if all of the following four conditions are met: (i) That the utterance in question is spoken in a context wherein it is intrasystematically true; (ii) That the utterance in question is part of a conceptual system which is categorially true; (iii) That the utterance in question is given voice to in an appropriate confessional context; and (iv) That reality is as the utterance in question says it is. All of these conditions except the third can be met by the doctrine-expressing sentences found in technical theological texts.

Why then, in Lindbeck's view, is this third condition so necessary? He offers two reasons, one (in the 'Excursus') explicit but confused; the other, somewhat more compelling, implicit throughout the book and coming to the surface in the

final chapter.<sup>34</sup> To take the first reason first: Lindbeck argues (as already mentioned) that a necessary condition for the possession of ontological truth by any given religious utterance is that the utterance in question be performative. By this, following J. L. Austin,<sup>35</sup> he means that a religious utterance must, in order to be ontologically truthful, create a new reality. Suppose the Nicene Creed is recited by a believer in an appropriate liturgical setting: this act may certainly be regarded in Austinian terms as an instance of uttering performatively. It may be understood as constituting a new relationship between two previously-existing relata: the worshiper and God. In this it fits the structure of Austin's more homely examples (apologies, marriage vows, etc.). But it cannot be understood as constituting or bringing into existence either of the two relata to whom its utterance relates. God exists (if God does) before the utterance, with all of God's essential properties (if God has any), just as God does after the utterance. So does the worshiper. What is changed (newly constituted) is the relation between them. But if this is all that is meant by categorizing religious utterance as performative, not enough has been said to support Lindbeck's third requirement for the possession of ontological truth by a religious utterance—that such an utterance be given voice to in an appropriate confessional context. This is so because among the conditions for the efficacy of every performative religious utterance is the truth of some more-or-less specifiable non-performative doctrine-expressing sentences. In the case under consideration these would include *there is a God who made heaven and earth* and *there is an utterer of religious utterances who is other than God*—and so forth.

To generalize: in order for any performative utterance (religious or otherwise) to function as such, what is expressed by some set of non-performative utterances must be ontologically true. To suggest, as Lindbeck does, that only sentences uttered confessionally and with performative function can possess ontological truth is thus confused.

Lindbeck's use of Austin's category is therefore quite insufficient for the task he wishes it to perform. It suggests, in fact, not that confessional utterance possesses ontological truth because of its performativity, but rather that (following Austin) ontological truth is *never* a property of performative utterance,<sup>36</sup> and, *propter hoc*, never a property of performative confessional utterance. None of this, of course, is to say that performative utterance is uninteresting or religiously insignificant; only that it can't, by its very nature, possess ontological truth in Lindbeck's sense.

Lindbeck does offer (or at least suggest) another set of reasons for the necessity of his third condition on a given religious utterance possessing ontological truth. This, if I correctly understand his remarks on intratextuality and skill<sup>37</sup> and his references to the work of Hans Frei on the importance of narrative,<sup>38</sup> is that only by fully entering into the *lebensform* that constitutes a particular religious com-

munity can one understand the doctrine-expressing sentences of that community with sufficient richness and precision to be able to utter them with enough referential specificity to give them the possibility of possessing ontological truth. Further, the key terms of the doctrine-expressing sentences in question are given their content largely in and through the use of narratives (hence the significance of Hans Frei's work).<sup>39</sup> How can one know Buddha without knowing the *Jātaka* stories? How can one know God without knowing that "vast, loosely-structured, non-fictional novel"<sup>40</sup> that Christians call the Bible? Theologizing, claims Lindbeck, must thus be done "intratextually," in the sense that what normatively constrains it is an agreed text. Briefly, and perhaps more crudely than Lindbeck would like, members of religious communities need their stories in order to tell them to whom (or to what) their religious utterances refer.

It's hard to disagree with this. But it's equally hard to see that it's terribly significant. That exposure to and faith in certain stories is a necessary condition for understanding (and even for properly making) religious utterances is surely an important psychological truth for most members of most religious communities; but it is equally obviously not a logical truth. If it were the latter, then I, as a member of a Christian community, could neither fully understand nor properly assert (or deny) any Buddhist doctrine-expressing sentences. And the result would be both relativism and fideism: religious communities as closed, impermeable, incommensurable forms of life.

Lindbeck recognizes this, and recognizes it as a problem.<sup>41</sup> He wishes to preserve his cultural-linguistic view of doctrine-expressing sentences as purely regulative in function (when used non-confessionally), and as not fully comprehensible to the outsider, and yet still allow both the possibility of and (at times) the necessity for an "ad hoc apologetic"<sup>42</sup> directed towards outsiders. His model for how such an ad hoc apologetic might function is catechetical: the non-member can only be made a member by a full process of acculturation—catechesis in a rich sense, including exposure to the relevant narratives, practices and so forth. Ad hoc apologetics, for Lindbeck, offers a form of life; it is successful if and only if the recipient of the offer enters the form of life. Lindbeck further thinks that the significance of rational argumentation in all of this (of apologetics as envisaged by the NOIA principle) is vanishingly small.<sup>43</sup>

Two points need to be made. First, even if Lindbeck is correct in all of his contentions about the practical importance of narrative, intratextuality, and catechesis for *both* the enterprise of fully understanding religious utterances *and* the enterprise of creating new members of religious communities, he offers no new arguments here for their logical necessity. Nothing in his final chapter suggests that a given doctrine-expressing sentence *cannot* possess ontological truth (or be fully comprehended) outside the (almost) closed, intratextually constituted, circle of a particular religious *lebensform*. Much of it suggests that such

sentences are very often not fully understood outside the circle, but that is a very different matter from claiming that they cannot be. Secondly, it's very revealing that the person at whom Lindbeck's intratextual, catechetical apologetic is aimed is never the intellectually sophisticated passionately committed member of another religious community.<sup>44</sup> Rather, it's the dechristianized postliberal secular individual. The catechetical model of apologetics is most intuitively appropriate in such cases because it can be seen as filling a void, a need. It loses almost all of its force when placed into the inter-religious context under consideration here. Lindbeck's discussion-partner is still the non-believer, not the other-believer.

In conclusion: Lindbeck's rejection of experiential-expressivism is entirely justified. His use of cultural-linguistic models of religion is also very fruitful, both for our understanding of how religious doctrine (often) functions in communities and in the life of the believer, and for our understanding of how one becomes and remains a member of a religious community. But Lindbeck's espousal of cultural-linguistic models does not require (or even suggest) that only confessional religious utterances can be ontologically true, or that all doctrinal formulations are regulative. The doctrine-expressing sentences of an averagely sophisticated religious community can still (and should still) be seen as capable of bearing truth. This in no way hinders their ability to function as rules. Taking this view also leaves open the possibility of interesting empirical enquiries into the question of how specific doctrine-expressing sentences do in fact function for specific religious communities. I suspect, *contra* Lindbeck, that there is no useful *a priori* answer to this question; it is likely that some doctrine-expressing sentences function both regulatively and propositionally for some religious communities, some only regulatively, and some only propositionally. Those parts, then, of Lindbeck's rule-theory that can be defended do not require the rejection of inter-religious apologetics, positive or negative; the NOIA principle thus stands.

#### *A Priori Pluralism*

Perhaps the most vocal and visible proponent of this view in recent years has been the British theologian John Hick.<sup>45</sup> While not notable for the rigor with which it is stated and argued for, and thus rather difficult to give a precise delineation of, the view may be characterized roughly as follows: (i) That the central doctrine-expressing sentences of all major religious communities have as their ultimate referent the same ultimately significant religious reality; (ii) That these doctrine-expressing sentences operate within the context of a religious life-world (a "religious totality" as Hick often puts it) as aids in the transformation of the believer: they, together with their associated practices, myths, stories,

institutions, and so forth, mediate religious reality to human beings and thus transform their lives; (iii) That all the major world religions—and thus also all the sets of doctrine-expressing sentences espoused by those religions—are equally effective in mediating religious reality and in transforming for the better the lives of those who adhere to them.

These views apply an equivalence-principle to all doctrine-expressing sentences.<sup>46</sup> They require that there actually is a single religiously ultimate reality, and that it is of a kind capable of effective mediation through a wide variety of incompatible sentences. It means, to take an example from Buddhism and Christianity, that ultimate reality must be such that it can be characterized both as a set of evanescent instantaneous events connected to one another by specifiable causes but without any substantial independent existence, and as an eternal changeless divine personal substance. While it may not be impossible to construct some picture of ultimate reality which meets these demands, it is far from easy to see how it might be done. The *a priori* nature of the position is evident from the fact that no empirical evidence as to the extent of incompatibilities among doctrine-expressing sentences is allowed to count against its truth.

What one usually finds in the writings of pluralistic thinkers on the question of how it is that the same ultimate reality can be characterized in apparently contradictory ways is a bow in the direction of ineffability—since the ultimate reality transcends all our characterizations of it, we have to make a fundamental distinction between it as it is *an sich* and it as it is apprehended by us.<sup>47</sup> While it may indeed be the case that ultimate reality is, in and of itself, just the kind of thing that can be characterized and mediated in the ways suggested above, the prior probability of this being true seems distressingly low; some powerful collateral reasons to support it are needed.

Hick does offer some collateral reasons. First, he gives an *ex post facto* justification of (i)'s possibility which assumes its truth. This usually has the following form: if there really is a single transcendent reality one would expect human characterizations and descriptions of it to differ, perhaps even, allowing for the radical effects of contingent social and cultural factors upon such conceptualization and description, to differ drastically. So the fact that we do find such drastically differing descriptions of the putative ultimate reality is not troubling.

Then there are a couple of reasons given for (i)'s desirability. The first of these has to do with world harmony: if everyone becomes convinced of the truth of (i) then missionaries will pack their bags, Jews, Muslims, and Christians will stop fighting one another in the Middle East, Buddhists and Hindus will stop fighting one another in Sri Lanka, and the world will become a much happier and more habitable place. There is also the suggestion that the sincere and committed believer of any particular religious community often meets sincere and convinced believers of other communities in whom, as Hick puts it, "the



fruits of openness to the divine Reality are gloriously apparent."<sup>48</sup>

None of these collateral reasons is able to do the work it needs to do. While it is probably true that much of the violence and bloodshed in the world has something to do with religious hatred, broadly understood, this is not by itself a sufficient reason to deny that instances of such disagreement are cognitively significant. And the recognition that there are good, sincere and apparently grace-filled individuals in all religious communities does not in any way require that there be no substantive cognitive conflicts among the truth-claims of those traditions.

There are other, and perhaps more severe, problems with *a priori* pluralism as I have defined it. I shall note only two. First, there is the problem of criteria for exclusion. The thrust of the position is to remove the need for excluding as false or inadequate any doctrine-expressing sentence of significance to any community. And yet this leads rather rapidly to very undesirable conclusions. Consider, for example, the case of the Jonestown massacre: the reverend Jim Jones built up a devoted following in California in the 1970s, and then led the faithful off to await the coming of the kingdom in Guiana. While there the community appears to have degenerated into paranoia and fear, and ended with the founder instructing his followers to drink cyanide. Some complied willingly; others were forced. The end result was the agonizing death of hundreds. What does the *a priori* pluralist say about such a case? She would presumably want to exclude a sentence of the form *God is such that God wants God's followers to drink cyanide now* as being properly descriptive of the ultimate reality; presumably, also, this sentence is not to be regarded as on a par with *God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself* as a means of mediating the ultimate reality to human beings and transforming the quality of their lives. And yet in order to make such nice distinctions the *a priori* pluralist must construct criteria for separating appropriate affirmations about the ultimate reality from inappropriate ones. He must, in other words, enter into apologetical discourse whether he likes it or not.

There are some signs in Hick's recent work that he is prepared to countenance the suggestion that some doctrine-expressing sentences must be rejected, as must some religious forms of life. But his suggestions as to criteria by which this may be done are thin. Some religious communities, apparently, constitute an effective context of transformation, while others do not. But we are never told how to distinguish the former from the latter, nor what arguments may be brought to bear in support of the distinctions we must make. Hick's lack of interest in this matter comes directly from the inner logic of his position: his *a priori* pluralism was constructed in an attempt to get away from the need to make such invidious distinctions. To attempt a rational justification of the distinctions that even a pluralist like Hick must make would be to re-enter the apologetical arena, and

since doing this is abhorrent to him, the distinctions are made but not argued for.

To take one example: Hick's position would seem to entail, if taken seriously, that any religious community which claims cognitive superiority for its set of doctrine-expressing sentences over that of another religious tradition must be making a false claim. Yet to assert this is precisely to claim that some of the doctrine-expressing sentences of some religious communities are false; and such an interesting and potentially religiously divisive assertion cries out for justification through argument, justification which Hick seems not to want to provide.

It is, perhaps, worth offering a comment on the likely reasons for the current popularity of theological perspectives that fit under the pluralist umbrella.<sup>49</sup> It is a characteristically Western postwar perspective. It is almost impossible to find hardline *a priori* pluralists in either the Buddhist or Christian tradition in any other place or time. It is probably that the major historical reason for the emergence of this current of thought in our time is a profound (and justified) postcolonialist guilt on the part of sensitive Western Christian intellectuals. Some atrocities have been committed in the name of the Christian faith; others with the silent connivance of Christians. We know it and want to distance ourselves from it, to ensure that it doesn't happen again. Adoption of the pluralist perspective seems a way of ensuring at least that Western colonialist aggression doesn't get out of hand and become too intimately linked (as it often has been in the past) with Christian theology. These goals are admirable, but there are other and better ways to atone for our reprehensible past than the adoption of incoherent philosophical positions in the present.

*A priori* pluralism would, if true, seriously threaten the NOIA principle. It would make significant clash among the doctrine-expressing sentences of different religious communities effectively impossible, and would thus make the apologetical response (positive or negative) completely inappropriate. But, as I have tried to show, *a priori* pluralism is, *prima facie*, a massively implausible position, and the collateral arguments offered for its truth do not go far enough towards remedying this implausibility. The NOIA principle thus stands.

### *Conclusions*

My conclusions will be brief. I have tried to show that the NOIA principle can stand against some of the major criticisms which are usually brought against it. Even if I have been successful in this, I have not, of course, shown that the principle is true. It remains to say something about the principle's significance for contemporary Christian theological thinking about non-Christian traditions.<sup>50</sup> I take it to have important, though limited, applications. It comes into operation only when the situation described by the principle obtains, and there is, as I've suggested, much careful historical work to be done before one can be sure, in

a given case, that the situation does obtain. But when the necessary careful historical and hermeneutical work has been done, when representative intellectuals of a particular religious community arrive at the conclusion that there is indeed a *prima facie* case of incompatibility, the NOIA principle should be applied.

Recognition of the principle, together with its application where appropriate, is, however, not exhaustively descriptive of the Christian theological task in a religiously pluralistic world. It is, rather, a relatively minor part of this task, and it in no sense precludes or excludes the constructive enterprise of comparative theology. The NOIA principle simply represents one modality under which theological thinking in a religiously plural context must operate if it is to stay honest. It is also a modality which brings with it some great practical benefits: it is one of the most useful ways available to a theologian of learning about the internal intellectual dynamics of a tradition other than her own. Intellectual challenge and the response it brings is almost always more productive of understanding and knowledge than the pallid, platitudinous, degouted discourse in which so much contemporary inter-religious 'dialogue' consists. So there are pragmatic as well as purely theoretical reasons for a proper recognition and application of the NOIA principle.

There is also, given the regnant intellectual orthodoxies among academic theologians on the question of how theology should be done in a religiously plural context (some of them discussed in this paper), a real need for an apologetica for apologetics. It is this need that this paper has tried to fill. But the task of developing a responsible apologetic, both positive and negative, is one that has scarcely yet been begun in any religious community. The primary desiderata for its future development are: first, the acquisition of more, and more accurate, knowledge by the intellectual representatives of all religious communities concerning the doctrine-expressing sentences of other communities. In meeting this need historians of religion, area-studies specialists, philologists, religious studies experts, and so forth, all have a very important part to play. Second, there is a need for the development of appropriately sophisticated theoretical frameworks for the comparative analysis of complex conceptual systems, such as those set forth in the sets of doctrine-expressing sentences belonging to the world's major religious traditions. There is much to be learned here from theoretical developments in the philosophy of science,<sup>51</sup> and there are some suggestive contributions by a few philosophers of religion.<sup>52</sup> But there are very few attempts to apply these theoretical contributions to instances of the kind envisaged by the NOIA principle.

## NOTES

An early version of this paper was presented at a Theology Department colloquium at the University of Notre Dame on 9 November 1987. I am grateful for the vigorous discussion it received then, and am especially indebted to David Burrell, Joseph Wawrykow, Laura Garcia, Robert Krieg, and James T. Burtchaell for their comments, criticisms, and encouragement. Since that time the paper has benefited from comments by William Alston, Alvin Plantinga, and John Hick. None of these individuals, of course, should be held accountable in any way for the opinions expressed herein.

1. For a trenchant expression of this point from a Roman Catholic perspective see Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979), pp. 716-27.

2. Substantive attempts are being made at this latter task. See, for example, David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). I have written on this myself. See F. X. Clooney, P. J. Griffiths, C. Hallisey, J. Laine, "Catholic Theology and the Study of Religion in South Asia," *Theological Studies* 48 (1987), pp. 677-710, esp. pp. 687-96.

3. For a discussion revealing much of the *odium theologicum* sometimes attached to apologetics in action see the exchange between Professor Gunapala Dharmasiri (of the Department of Philosophy, Peradeniya University, Sri Lanka) and myself (forthcoming in *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* in 1988) on the nature and validity of Theravāda Buddhist meta-ethical theory.

4. For the best available discussions of whether and in what sense one religious doctrine may be said to oppose or be incompatible with another, see William A. Christian's works: *Oppositions of Religious Doctrines* (London & New York: Macmillan, 1972), and *Doctrines of Religious Communities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). The latter was given a review symposium in *The Thomist* in April 1988 (see especially pp. 319-327), in which its importance for the theme of this paper was drawn out.

5. Taken from Ratnakīrti's *Kṣaṇabhāṅgasiddhi*, edited and translated by A. C. Senape McDermott, *An Eleventh Century Buddhist Logic of 'Exists'* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1970), p. 14.

6. *The Epistle to the Hebrews* 13:8.

7. For some discussion of this second example see William Christian, *Oppositions of Religious Doctrines*, pp. 43-59; *Doctrines of Religious Communities*, pp. 126-44. I am not claiming either of the examples used as a clear case of incompatibility; I use them only for illustrative purposes.

8. For a discussion of this kind see my "Notes Towards a Critique of Buddhist Karmic Theory," *Religious Studies* 18 (1982), pp. 277-91; J. C. White "Is Karmic Theory False?" *Religious Studies* 19 (1983), pp. 223-28; Paul J. Griffiths, "Karma and Personal Identity" "A Response to Professor White," *Religious Studies* 20 (1984), pp. 481-85.

9. For example, Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979); "The Probabilistic Argument from Evil" *Philosophical Studies* (1979), pp. 6-10. Buddhists tend to respond similarly to attacks from theists. See, classically, Ratnakīrti's *Īśvarasādhanaḍūṣana*, in Anantalal Thakur, ed., *Ratnakīrtinibandhāvalih* (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975), pp. 32-56.

10. For a splendid dialogical exploration of the differences between positive and negative apologetics

see Gary Gutting, "The Catholic and the Calvinist: A Dialogue on Faith and Reason," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), pp. 236-56.

11. Recent examples of this in the Christian sphere are Basil Mitchell's *The Justification of Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1973), and Richard Swinburne's trilogy: *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); *Faith and Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). An older, but still in many ways unsurpassed attempt is J. H. Newman's *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979; first published London, 1870). The Indo-Tibetan Buddhist traditions are especially rich in systematic apologetical texts of this kind. The most famous example is probably Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṅgraha*, translated (together with Kamalaśīla's *pañjika*) by Gangañātha Jha, *The Tattva Saṅgraha with the Commentary of Kamalaśīla* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985; first published Baroda, 1937-39).

12. A good example is 'Jigs med dbang po's *Grub pa'i mtha'i rnam bzhag rin po che'i phreng ba*, easily available in English translation. See H. V. Guenther, *Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: Shambhala Press, 1971), and Geshe Lhundup Sopa & Jeffrey Hopkins, *Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Rider, 1976). The intellectual systems discussed in such texts are abstract straw men, not real debating-partners.

13. See, for example, the works of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, notably *Faith and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), and *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981). On Smith, from very different perspectives, see David Burrell, "Faith and Religious Convictions: Studies in Comparative Epistemology," *The Journal of Religion* 63 (1983), pp. 64-73; William J. Wainwright, "Wilfred Cantwell Smith on Belief," *Religious Studies* 20 (1984), pp. 353-66.

14. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

15. The notion of an equivalence principle has been worked out with the greatest degree of sophistication by those adherents of the so-called Edinburgh School in which the strong program in sociology of knowledge has been carried through with all the rigor that the position makes possible. See, *inter alia*, Barry Barnes and David Bloor, "Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge," in Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes, eds., *Rationality and Relativism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), pp. 21-47.

16. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 16.

17. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 16.

18. This is my terminology, not Lindbeck's. He usually speaks simply of "religious doctrines."

19. *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 33ff. Compare Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), and *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), for some supportive theoretical observations and some very illuminating case-studies.

20. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 33.

21. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 35.

22. George Lakoff's *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) is an important work that spans linguistics and cognitive theory, and, in its study of concept-formation, provides direct support (if any is still thought to be needed) for Lindbeck's views on what it is to become and remain a member of a religious community.

23. Lindbeck does claim that the acceptance of a cultural-linguistic model brings with it the realization that a particular religion's truth-claims are secondary to its "vocabulary of symbols and its syntax" (*The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 35). But the kind of primacy at issue here is temporal rather than logical:

the fact that one needs certain concepts before one can use them to make truth-claims says nothing about whether the claims thus made are in fact true.

24. He actually distinguishes three, but since the third has to do with experiential-expressivism (which, following Lindbeck, is to be rejected) I shall comment upon only two.

25. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 50.

26. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 19.

27. *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 63-69.

28. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 64.

29. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 64.

30. Suppose that I have a simple conceptual system: it contains the two propositions *all four-year-olds turn green on Thursdays* and *my four-year-old daughter does not turn green on Thursdays*. The second proposition is intrasystematically false; by Lindbeck's criteria it must therefore also be ontologically false. If one could alter the ontological truth of any given proposition simply by altering the conceptual system within which it is made, the world would be an even odder place than it actually is.

31. I am indebted for this point to David Burrell. See also the comments below on performative utterance.

32. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 65.

33. "For Christian theological purposes, that sentence [sc., "Christ is Lord"] becomes a first-order proposition capable (so non-idealists would say) of making ontological truth claims *only* [my emphasis] as it is used in the activities of adoration, proclamation, obedience, promise-hearing, and promise keeping which shape individuals and communities into conformity to the mind of Christ." *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 68.

34. *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 112-38.

35. J. L. Austin, "Performative Utterances," in idem, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 220-39.

36. This is very clear in Austin's work: ". . . although these [performative] utterances do not themselves report facts and are not themselves true or false, saying these things does very often *imply* that certain things are true and not false . . . still, it is very important to realize that to imply that something or other is true, is not at all the same as saying something which is true itself." "Performative Utterances," p. 224.

37. *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 113ff.

38. *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 12-13, 137 n.7, 138 n.35. See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

39. I would not have sufficiently appreciated the importance of Lindbeck's use of Frei without the help of discussions with Joseph Wawrykow.

40. *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 120-21, citing David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 48.

41. *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 128ff.

42. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 131.

43. *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 132.

44. Nowhere in his discussion of the possible modes in which dialogue among different religions may occur (*The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 52-55) does Lindbeck use the term "apologetics," not even

in the limited sense he gives to it in his final chapter.

45. Hick is prolific. Representative publications are: *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship Between World Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1974); "Whatever Path Men Choose is Mine," in John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite, eds., *Christianity and Other Religions* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1980), pp. 171-90; "On Grading Religions," *Religious Studies* 17 (1981), pp. 451-67. I have myself responded to this last piece ("On Grading Religions, Seeking Truth, and Being Nice to People," *Religious Studies* 19 (1983), pp. 75-80—in collaboration with Delmas Lewis); Hick's response is "On Conflicting Religious Truth-Claims," *Religious Studies* 19 (1983), pp. 485-91. See also "Religious Pluralism and Absolute Claims," in Leroy Rouner, ed., *Religious Pluralism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 193-213.

46. Hick puts it thus: ". . . the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the real or ultimate from within the major variant cultural ways of being human . . . within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness is manifestly taking place . . . the great religions are to be regarded as alternative soteriological paths within which, or ways along which, men and women can find salvation/liberation/fulfillment." "Religious Pluralism and Absolute Claims," p. 194.

47. See Hick, "On Conflicting Religious Truth-Claims," p. 488.

48. "On Conflicting Religious Truth-Claims," p. 488.

49. The phenomenon is not limited to Protestants. See, for example, Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984).

50. The NOIA principle also has significance, of course, for, *inter alia*, Buddhist thinking about non-Buddhist traditions. Buddhists, however, unlike Christians, generally do not need any convincing that both positive and negative apologetics are valid and necessary modes of discourse. The proper use and application of these modes of discourse by Buddhists is, naturally, a matter for Buddhist thinkers to work out.

51. One example among many: the distinction between creative and degenerative research programs in science, developed by Imre Lakatos and his followers—see Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes* (2 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978)—is suggestive.

52. See the works by William A. Christian, already discussed, and Keith E. Yandell's "Religious Experience and Rational Appraisal," *Religious Studies* 10 (1974), pp. 173-87.