
ON SOME FOUNDATIONS OF PLURALISTIC RELIGIOUS SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY OF MULTIPLICITY

L e n a r t Š k o f

Introduction

The theology of comparative religion, accordingly, must be the product of thinkers who see, who feel, and indeed who know men and women of all religious groups and all centuries, as members of one community, one in which they themselves participate.¹

This paper aims to discuss some foundations of a pluralistic religious science as based on a revolutionary contribution to the *theology of religions* by Canadian theologian and religious scientist Wilfred Cantwell Smith. According to John Hick, more than any other single individual W.C. Smith has been responsible for a radical change towards a more positive and inclusive mode of thinking among the world's great religious traditions.² Contemporary religious pluralism therefore owes a great deal to Smith's important methodological and historical innovations. This paper will first focus on Smith's thoughts regarding religious pluralism. The question of "monotheism" and its ontological as well as historical understanding within the religious science will move to the forefront in the second part – by looking into less known but important contribution to religious science by Wilhelm Schmidt. Then we will follow Smith's methodological *credo* and explore the relation between the idea of religious pluralism and contemporary theology of multiplicity, as proposed by Lauren Schneider in her insightful study *Beyond*

¹ Kenneth Cracknell, ed., *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 216.

² Frank Whaling, ed., *The World's Religious Traditions* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 147.

monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity.³ The foundational principle of the theology of multiplicity is creativity: we should bear in mind that the Divine/God is present everywhere, in the birth of a child, in any gesture of affection and benevolence, in happiness on the one hand and crisis and suffering on the other, as well as in death. This is something that all world religions have in common, and we can put with these basic existential or ethical “markers” of different religions into a dialogue. The conclusion will argue that what is needed in our times is *ontological creativity* in the very core of the revelation of God that occurs within and around ourselves, but, even more importantly, in a truly hermeneutic way, it should occur in a dialogic manner *among us human beings*, as representatives of different religions and participants in the continuous religious dialogue of humankind.

Throughout this paper two fundamental questions related to the principles of the theology of multiplicity will be defended, namely the following:

- are we humble enough to be able to admit that we are fallible and open to amendments, corrections, revisions; which practical consequences could be inferred from this shift in our thought?
- we should be open to the presence of the Divine/God in the world, even where we perhaps did not expect it; the doctrines and their respective faiths as well as members of various religious communities should be in a dialogical partnership in achieving this goal.

1 On Humility and Tolerance in Interreligious Dialogue

Let us first look at the words of Smith, who presents us in the following passage with perhaps his most essential theological view on theological pluralism – which we can also take as a most sincere expression of his personal as well as theological (professional) *credo*:

If Christians take seriously the revelation of God in Christ – if we really mean what we say when we affirm that his life, and his death on the cross, and

³ See Lauren C. Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2008).

his final triumph out of the very midst of self-sacrifice, embody the ultimate truth and power and glory of the universe – then two kinds of consequences follow, two orders of inference. On the moral level, there follows an imperative towards reconciliation, unity, harmony, and fellowship. At this level, all humanity is included: we strive to break down barriers, to bridge gulfs; we recognize all people everywhere as neighbors, as friends, as loved of God as we are. (...) [T]here is another level, the intellectual, the order of ideas. (...) At this level the doctrines that most Christians have traditionally derived have tended to affirm a Christian exclusivism, a separation between those who believe and those who do not, a division of humanity into a “we” and a “they”, a gulf between Christendom and the rest of the world; a gulf profound, ultimate, cosmic.⁴

Two possible trends of theological and religious thinking could be implied from this simple, yet profound truth: theological exclusivism and theological inclusivism. Apart from both theological standpoints, however, the above paragraph articulates perhaps the most basic principle of all religious life: the principle of (epistemic) humility. This principle is what is common to all religious traditions if taken seriously. I elaborated upon this in one of my previous essays on humility as presented by Smith, namely with the following thoughts:

This testimony is what I think is the most important feature of interreligious dialogue today. Traditionally, theologians and believers (men and women of faith) have tended to distinguish both levels: we are ethical beings, we know that there are other individuals who possess and live their own faiths and live their ethical lives, but it is our faith that always makes us stronger and better, or more exclusivist in the search for truth. For Smith this is arrogant and it is in a direct contradiction with the Christian ethos: it is thus “*ipso facto* un-Christian”. It is in this sense that Smith polemicizes with the phrase, which was under discussion some years ago in the United Church of Canada: “Without the particular knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, men do not really know God at all.”⁵

But how is it possible to achieve such an epistemological standpoint, one that helps us become humble, more inclusive, and thus more

⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Patterns of Faith Around the World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 134.

⁵ Regarding this question cf. my essay “Faith and humility: on the future of theology of religions,” in V. Strahovnik and B. Žalec, eds., *Religion, violence, and ideology: reflections on the Challenges of postmodern world* (Wien / Zürich: Lit, 2016), 35–46 (for citation see p. 38).

tolerant in our religious lives? I want to answer to this question with a reflection on the tragic Charlie Hebdo Paris events from January 2015. Following a second attack by Islamic extremists on a Jewish store, the staff were rescued by a young Muslim worker who – upon asking about his courage and motives – said (paraphrased): “I helped my brothers. We are all brothers.” This expression of a young Muslim worker was at the same moment profound and simple. In these words two basic principles of religious life were encapsulated: the principle of compassion (or *agapistic* love), and the principle of religious tolerance (or multiplicity). If compassion was present in its most direct way and was literally incarnated in the form of the immediate help offered to his fellow-beings being under threat, religious tolerance, of course, represents what we, as observers of these horrific events, were able to understand from this courageous act. If the first principle is what is equally shared by all world religions, and directly relates to humility (and self-sacrifice in one of its forms), then the second principle is one of the key results of the process of Enlightenment. This expression from a young Muslim carries all truth, as presented in Smith’s works.

The intellectual level, as presented by Smith in his thought – that all humanity is included this endeavor, that we need to strive to break down barriers and recognize all people everywhere as neighbors or friends, as one humanity, loved by God – is what could be found in the most famous presentation of the principle of religious tolerance, namely Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise*.⁶ This dramatic poem was written in the years 1778–79. Its central motif, as is well-known, is the parable of the three rings, which Lessing adopted from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. The story probably originated in Spain, where it most likely emerged among the local Jews, appearing afterwards in the Dominican texts of the 13th century. The parable of the three rings is written in the spirit of the Enlightenment, but contains much more than the traditional Enlightenment criticism of religion and revelation, but contradicting it (positively) in many ways with its inherent eschatological and agapistic message. It is closer to contemporary (postmo-

⁶ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise: A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts*, tr. W. Taylor (London, Paris and Melbourne: Cassel & Company, 1893); see for citation Act Three, Scene 7.

dern) theological theses, for instance those by process theology, or, even closer, by the American theologian Jack Caputo, who in his *On Religion* proposes the form *What do I love when I love my God?* as the fundamental question of religion and theology.⁷ In an analysis of this text by Peter Sloterdijk the dramatic poem by Lessing is called *The Sermon on the Mount* of the Enlightenment.⁸ Sloterdijk sees this poem as a vehicle towards a future atmosphere of peace, based not on any kind of new polytheism or syncretism, but on one single truth: one of the principle of tolerance.⁹ The play most definitely advocates new Enlightenment principles, which should extend beyond dogmatism and fanaticism and be based not only on epistemic principles, as related to reason and tolerance, but also on more agapistic principles of our common ethos and humanity. The narrative of *Nathan the Wise* goes as follows:

SALADIN

The rings—don't trifle with me; I must think
That the religions which I named can be
Distinguished, e'en to raiment, drink and food,

NATHAN

And only not as to their grounds of proof.
Are not all built alike on history,
Traditional, or written. History
Must be received on trust—is it not so?
(...)

Let each feel honoured by this free affection.
Unwarped of prejudice; let each endeavour
To vie with both his brothers in displaying
The virtue of his ring; assist its might
With gentleness, benevolence, forbearance,
With inward resignation to the godhead,
And if the virtues of the ring continue
To show themselves among your children's children,

⁷ John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), 26.

⁸ Peter Sloterdijk, *God's Zeal: the battle of the three monotheisms*, tr. W. Hoban (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2009), 123.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

After a thousand thousand years, appear
 Before this judgment-seat—a greater one
 Than I shall sit upon it, and decide.
 So spake the modest judge.

We see from Nathan's words that there is an intrinsic layer in us, common to all three monotheisms (and, broadly, to all world religions): it is the layer of humility, which is a sign of our willingness to admit that we do not possess full knowledge, that we are ontologically contingent, and that we do not possess any full knowledge of our judgement. All these are values now considered to be the foundations of a modern world that would seek to resist any violence and any thought of the One as the exclusive and monarchic ruler of the world. In *God's Zeal*, Sloterdijk follows Derrida when he states that the three messianic eschatological realities at the level of world order (which includes politics and economy) are now fighting one another. Of course, neither Sloterdijk nor perhaps shall we accept the thesis about the war of the three monotheisms or their eschatologies, yet it may nonetheless serve us as a starting point for reflection on the role of religion in today's world. In order to offer some answers to this question, let us, by means of transition, look at a reading from a lesser known, but equally important figure in the theory of monotheisms within religious science, namely, Father Wilhelm Schmidt. This theory lets us approach an initial layer of the thinking on monotheisms within religious science and thus be able, as will be show, in the third part of this essay, rethink the question of multiplicity within contemporary theology.

2 Wilhelm Schmidt on "Urmonotheismus"

One of the most interesting personalities at the intersection of religious studies *and* theories of the monotheisms was without any doubt German theologian and one of the earliest religious scholars, Father Wilhelm Schmidt. He was born on 16 February 1868 in the town of Hörde near Dortmund (he died in 1954). Upon completing his studies, he joined the *Societas Verbi Divini* (SVD) congregation, also known as the Steyler Missionaries. As we shall see, Schmidt's affiliation to this

order was closely related to his doctrine on primeval monotheism or “Urmonotheismus”. Later Schmidt proceeded with his studies of Oriental languages and Islamic theology in Berlin. Soon followed Schmidt’s close encounter with the early social anthropologists and ethnologists, who were then just beginning to develop the new science, based on E. B. Tylor’s pioneering work. He became interested in the languages of African and Polynesian cultures as well as in undertaking studies that subsequently led to his principal and most extensive work, *The Origin of the Idea of God* (*Der Ursprung der Gottesidee*; published in volumes from 1926 to 1955). Throughout his career Schmidt remained in the ministry and his academic work was closely connected to the Church. That is also how he understood his theory of monotheism. He was mostly occupied by the problem of the origin of the idea of God, which was in different historical periods and in different cultures expressed in the most varying of ways. Schmidt wanted to unify that into a theory, and he approached the task by adopting a religious study and empirical method.¹⁰

One of the central topics in his work is related to the idea of God (*Gottesidee*): Schmidt wanted to study various cultures and religions (so-called ‘natural peoples’ or *Naturvolken*, as they appear in his theory) in order to discover how far back in history belief in the Supreme or Highest Being dates.¹¹ He examined peoples of all continents, presenting for each the idea of a supreme being as it was expressed in the culture in question: name, function, place, qualities. He thus attempted to illustrate the similarities between cultures and peoples in imagining and experiencing the idea of God. Without a doubt this methodological path was among the first serious attempts in religious science to discover the deeper religious truths of any of non-Semitic religions, and it could only be compared to Max Müller and his earlier project *The*

¹⁰ On Wilhelm Schmidt’s life and work see excellent survey by Hans Waldenfels, in: Axel Michaels, ed., *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft: Von Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade* (München: C.H. Beck, 1997), ch. “Wilhelm Schmidt”.

¹¹ See Wilhelm Schmidt, *Ursprung und Werden der Religion: Theorien und Tatsachen* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1930).

Sacred Books of the East.¹² The deficiency of such studies, as critics find, is in the very thing that Schmidt wanted to prove: he did not succeed in reaching as far back as the prehistoric era to show the continuity or origin of the idea of God before concrete historical beginnings. That was why he was not really able to touch on the fundamental issue of the origin of the idea of God. Schmidt therefore resorted to reduction: based on comparisons among the ancient cultures of Africa (the Pygmies) and Asia (e.g., the so called “pygmies” of the Andaman Islands), on the one hand, and the cultures of the Arctic-American belt of the Inuit and American Indians, on the other, he extrapolated the existence of an older or original culture (*Urkultur*), and eventually, through a number of reductions, arrived at Australian aborigines, who were at the time of early anthropology and religious studies presumably considered as the earliest culture of the world (with racist overtones included, as in Tylor). Through this reduction, he tried to reach *the* original, most ancient culture of the mankind. At that point, he crossed to the field of theology and made an assumption about the existence of proto-revelation (*Uroffenbarung*), as people in ancient times could understand it. Schmidt most extensively studied the religion of the Pygmies. As we have seen, he thought that the key to the solution of the puzzle was hidden in ancient or “primitive peoples” (or “savages”), as they were called at the time.

Now, despite many deficiencies, which could be attributed to the early stage of new and emerging religious and theological methodologies (also accompanied by a lack of empirical data and existing translations of religious books) we can still affirm that Schmidt paved the way for many more contemporary explorations into the very structure (epistemology and ontology, and ethics, of course) of religious pluralism. Another deficiency of his early work is that he still united his work with

¹² This book series comprises fifty volumes, and was first published by the Oxford University Press between 1879 and 1910. Since 2008 the complete series has been available online at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/sbe/index.htm>. This book series itself, and the new and emerging discipline of religious studies evolving in that time, are the testimony that there is only *one religious history* – that of humankind, which cannot be possessed or exclusively claimed by any person, culture, religion, or theology. Schmidt’s project therefore begins right after the completion of Müller’s series.

the thought that the world could be derived from *one* principle. This is no longer possible in the era of religious pluralism. To him, as a Catholic priest and theologian, (Christian) God was one, or the only one, and everything that ever emerged belonged to this One as a principle. We will see in the third part of this essay that this metaphysical or monarchic credo has largely been negated by the contemporary theology of multiplicity. Still, in his idiosyncratic and original thought Schmidt displayed something that could not yet be found in his contemporaries: he considered ancient and primitive peoples as “partners” in the process of the emergence of the god idea in the world, and consequently he would not treat them with haughtiness, as was the rule in the practice of early anthropologists, ethnologists, or missionaries – and, of course, colonialists all around the world. In this regard, Schmidt accomplished a great task in his use of the empirical method (data, languages), relying on the empirical data of many existing anthropologists and ethnologists and, perhaps most importantly, he showed in this endeavour a good deal of epistemic humility in his methodology.

In his monumental work and *The Origin and Existence of Religion* (*Ursprung und Werden der Religion*; 1912–1955), Schmidt thus focused on all previously mentioned fields to prove the existence of the so-called primitive or original monotheism in them (his *Urmonotheismus*). He held that the idea of a supreme being could be found in Pygmies, Bushmen, and in primeval Arctic cultures. All these and numerous other cultures are jointly mentioned under the label of “monotheism.”¹³ Where the latter (monotheism) was not that marked, Schmidt assumed it to be the result of subsequent degradations. He argued that no one before him had studied the ancient cultures in that light and that was why it had not been possible to confirm until then that (essentially) they were all (with a few exceptions) monotheistic. He therefore refuted the theory, still very important at the time, of animism (of Tylor and Marrett and others in anthropology, also Freud) and the evolutionary development of religion (such as in Comte, Spencer, and finally Frazer

¹³ Schmidt, *Ursprung und Werden der Religion*, see Chapter XVI (p. 254ff.). Schmidt discusses in this chapter “the monotheistic character” of the Highest Being (*Höchste Wesen*) of Pigmies.

and their followers).¹⁴ Relying on Andrew Lang, Schmidt claimed that “primitive peoples” would *not* at first believe in a being they associated with the Spirit, and only afterwards developed monotheism.

Finally, Schmidt built his theory of primitive monotheism on three elements: collective human needs, unity of time, and unity of space through that original idea of God. If these conditions are met, then it is possible to speak of primitive or original monotheism (*Urmonotheismus*). The element of collective human needs means that such a god gives meaning to the origin of family, parents, progeny, ethical need, love, etc. Unity of time is an attribute indicating that such a god fills up *all times*. The third element is the unity of space, which refers to God, the creator, controlling all space. These three elements as parts of Schmidt’s early theory of *Urmonotheismus* are precisely what in a modern theory of multiplicity could be translated into the idea of God, as being present in Her multiple revelations in various world religions.

3 Towards A Theology of Multiplicity

Let us now finally move on to questions referring to the role of monotheisms in the concrete lives of individuals and societies. This issue involves some of the fundamental dilemmas of modern societies: for example, the role of religion within, the current understanding of the term “belief”, and the way to consider modern society using the logic of monotheisms. This was contemplated in-depth by Laurel C. Schneider in her work *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity*. But why at all must we make mention of multiplicity? We must

¹⁴ See on this early and essentialist stage in the anthropology of religion an excellent study written by Brian Morris (*Anthropological Studies in Religion: An Introductory Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)). Especially see Chapter 3 on the intellectualists (Müller, Spencer, Tylor, and Frazer) and the early anthropological tradition within religious studies. Morris mentions Father Wilhelm Schmidt’s theory of degradation on p. 102 of this book as a complete reversal of Spencer’s and related evolutionary schemes of the development of religions from polytheism into monotheism. With this gesture Wilhelm Schmidt showed rare theoretical courage in an era of evolutionary science. One had to wait until E.E. Evans-Pritchard’s (1902–1973) seminal *Nuer Religion* from 1956 to witness an equivalent scientific *ethos* as well as *spirit of humility* in analyzing any (!) of the African religions within the tradition of the anthropology of religion as well as within religious studies as such.

realise that in the 19th century (already with Hegel's historicism, and especially with Nietzsche) it was philosophy that stopped looking for one truth that could explain the world. Science in the early 20th century saw Gödel's theorem posed, and Werner Heisenberg published the Uncertainty Principle, which itself could be a paradigm for a new era of epistemic humility. In the humanities, including theology, various thinkers discovered that one can only see the world through the perspective of empirical, hermeneutical, or historicistic methods (Dilthey, but especially Heidegger, Gadamer, and, of course, later Wittgenstein; in the United States philosophers of the tradition of American pragmatism – Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey). As we have seen, Caputo said in his *On Religion* that, as a theologian, he was not interested any more in drawing the lines between the orthodox and the heterodox, etc. but rather that the only thing that he was interested in is how passionately a person was willing *to love God*. This is not a matter of a singular truth, but rather of living and experiencing, as well as of creating peace and justice. This challenged the viewpoint advocated by those who preferred to speak of closeness, totality, the only One, instead of this inherent and pluralistic openness of the idea of God. It is here that the theology of multiplicity begins.

Schneider's basic question in her *Beyond Monotheism* is when, in the story about God, did we begin talking about something that is no longer dynamic, that has no connection to the body (or, flesh), that is dissociated from our hearts and unrelated to nurturing sexual differences and the elements of nature. The thesis offered by her book about monotheism(s) is that today we no longer want to talk anymore about the One that should rule the world (causing disputes and arguments: religious wars have always been waged under the flag of the One), but that we would like to return to theology as thinking (and feeling) about multiplicity, about a d/Deity (or God) that is no longer metaphysically *One*, but that possesses in itself/herself/himself the principle of humility, and reveals to us within the principle of multiplicity. But the theology of multiplicity is not a theology of polytheism or syncretism. Leonardo Boff (in his *Jesus Christ Liberator*) and especially Jürgen Moltmann (in his *Trinity and the Kingdom*) already criticised the so-called monarchical or political monotheism and suggested that we should think in-

stead about our inherent social and ethical aspects, also as related to the Trinitarian (or triadic) doctrine and principle, which in itself comprises the principle of multiplicity.¹⁵ Of course, another question associated with this is the one we posed ourselves when reading W. Schmidt, who talked about primitive monotheism as a paradigm of all the religions of the world. Here we necessarily raise the question of how to conceive of three monotheisms and, more broadly, of how to conceive a dialogue of faiths, both narrowly monotheistic (such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, theistic traditions within Hinduism, and Buddhist Adi-Buddha theology) as well as those that do not fall under the label of monotheism in its strict sense. We should not forget that the very same logic of the One also led the colonialist expansion of the Europeans, who did immeasurable evil in centuries past to peoples of other faiths and cultures. It also leads all those religions of the world, which in the present era aggressively or monarchically aspire to rule over other faiths, as was the case at any time or any place in the world's religious history.

Now we must bear in mind that the issue of Christian monotheism is, of course, extremely complex. Christianity emerged and developed in the context of the broader Semitic-Mediterranean cultural and religious framework, in an environment strongly influenced by Semitism/Judaism as well as ancient Greek philosophy, African traditions, and influences originating from Persia.¹⁶ In this environment something that we today know as Christian monotheism took several centuries to form. We know that the term "monotheism" was not used or defined until 1680 (polytheism in 1630).¹⁷ The first to use it was Henry More – not as a defence against New World religions and Judaism, but rather for inter-Christian purposes – to distinguish its position as opposed to that of the Unitarians, who supported the unity/oneness of God and world. The 19th-century theologians, early social anthropologists, and

¹⁵ Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes: Zur Gotteslehre* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1994). See chapter VI ("Das Reich der Freiheit") and his criticism of "political" and "clerical" monotheism. See more on the trinity and the triadic principle in my essay "Thinking towards peace: on triades and new cosmology of the mesocosm", *Religious inquiries*, 9:5 (2016), 81–93.

¹⁶ Cf. about the early African influences on Tertullian's trinitarian thinking an excellent study by A. O. Ogbonnaya, *An African Interpretation of the Trinity* (New York: Paragon House, 1994).

¹⁷ Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism*, 19.

religious scientists used the term monotheism together with the term polytheism (its evolution to, or degradation from Monotheism, as in W. Schmidt) to distinguish religions as more or less developed, more or less original, etc.

Now, how would a theology of multiplicity look at various monotheisms and their historic as well as contemporary encounters? First, I would like to propose that we talk about experience rather than theory. This is the view we encountered at the beginnings of hermeneutics (Hegel, Dilthey, Gadamer), as well as in the theology religions as posited by W.C. Smith. This experience can consist of something that someone personally met with or underwent, or it can also refer to literary, mythological, and, of course, religious characters and encounters, as proposed by Lessing in his *Nathan the Wise*. What is needed, thus, is ontological creativity in the very core of the revelation of God that occurs within and around ourselves, and *among ourselves*, all the time (in it thus horizontal transcendence), and replaces the earlier monarchic or vertical wish to rule over the other. In this wish all three methodological aspirations – those of W. Schmidt, W.C. Smith, and finally L. Schneider meet.

According to Schneider, “multiplicity is a dialect of porous openness, implicating a divinity that is streaming, reforming, responding, flowing, and receding, beginning ... again.”¹⁸ Thus, again with Moltmann, God “*begins* in the flesh and the pathos of incarnate connection.”¹⁹ In the introductory chapter to his *Towards a World Theology*, Smith elaborates on a variety of phenomena related to our religious lives – such as various religious practices, religious feasts, stories and prayers, all the way to the different greeting cards we send to each other. Smith beautifully observes with these illustrative examples in his thought how we, as members of various religious communities or Churches, but also as part of one world religious community, interact in them, how we take part in them, or how we communicate with others.²⁰ We do not say that all

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²⁰ W.C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1981), ch. 1.

religions are the same, but we can claim that in various practices, rituals, and religious acts one truth is revealed in multiple ways.

This acknowledgement is now a first sign that we are willing to accept the principle of epistemic humility. Our religious life is, as Smith would claim, participation in a broader process that transgresses boundaries, narrow doctrines, and exclusivist views. We are now able to see members of other religious communities as members of one, yet a pluriform community of believers. Spiritual life is not a privilege or possession of anyone: it is a sign of our common *humbleness* (before God, and before other human beings) to admit that there are many epistemologically valid and especially ethically worthy varieties of religious experience, and, finally, that it is *the spirit of love* that enables and guides such belief. It is only on this basis that a future culture of peace among the religions can be imagined and achieved.

B i b l i o g r a p h y

1. Caputo, John D. *On Religion*. London: Routledge, 2001.
2. Cracknell, Kenneth, ed. *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader*. Oxford: One-world, 2001.
3. Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. *Nathan the Wise: A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts*. Translated by W. Taylor. London, Paris and Melbourne: Cassel & Company, 1893. Available online at *Project Gutenberg*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3820/3820-h/3820-h.htm>.
4. Michaels, Axel, ed. *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft: Von Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade*. München: C.H. Beck, 1997.
5. Morris, Brian. *Anthropological Studies in Religion: An Introductory Text*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
6. Ogbonnaya, A. Okechukwu. *An African Interpretation of the Trinity*. New York: Paragon House, 1994.
7. Schneider, Lauren C. *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
8. Schmidt, Wilhelm. *Ursprung und Werden der Religion: Theorien und Tatsachen*. Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1930.
9. Sloterdijk, Peter. *God's zeal: the battle of the three monotheisms*. Tr. W. Hoban. Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2009.
10. Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *Towards a World Theology*. New York: Orbis Books, 1981.

11. Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *Patterns of Faith Around the World*. Oxford: One-world, 1998.
12. Škof, Lenart. "Faith and humility: on the future of theology of religions." In V. Strahovnik and B. Žalec, eds., *Religion, violence, and ideology: reflections on the challenges of postmodern world*, 35–46. Wien / Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2016.
13. Škof, Lenart. "Thinking towards peace: on triades and new cosmology of the mesocosm." *Religious inquiries*, 9:5 (2016), 81–93. Available online at: http://ri.urd.ac.ir/article_43971_89d435d01b61acd40a5792b223a6e80d.pdf.
14. Whaling, Frank, ed. *The World's Religious Traditions*. New York: Crossroad, 1984.