keep her vows and live in an “empty valley with no people,” she asks for “women friends with a similar religion” (p. 178). Nevertheless, in that same prayer, she still writes that a woman’s body is a ground for samsara.

The final chapter narrates her death and cremation. Before her death, her meditation master told her that she did not need to do more meditation practices because she had fully protected her vows and commitments, thus contradicting the common belief that enlightenment in a female body was impossible. She died when a wooden beam broke and struck her in the head during a religious ritual. After her death, the kinds of signs of accomplishment familiar to readers of Tibetan Buddhist narratives occur. Her body remained in meditation posture for seven days and her cremation fire ignited spontaneously, producing rainbow colored flames. When the crematory was later opened, she had left relics behind. These are the same signs of accomplishment that often end the life narrative of a male saint.

Why the difference between these two narratives? The folk culture is the same in both cases; everyone agrees that female rebirth is unenviable and people like Orgyan Chokyi are quite rare in any case. In Orgyan Chokyi’s case, everything depends on her own persistence and the presence of a senior monk who will instruct her. How many other women may have had similar motivation but lacked a sympathetic teacher? We will never know. For a long time, Tibetans in particular and Buddhists in general have claimed both that female rebirth is unfortunate and that a few exceptional women have overcome the woes of female rebirth.

Reading these books side by side is an especially useful exercise for those interested in women and Tibetan Buddhism. We see very clearly both the usual cultural norm about women and the rare exception to that norm. These books are also enjoyable to those who know Tibetan Buddhist practices from the inside.

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This elegantly written book is not only a call to Christians to act in solidarity with persons of other faith traditions as well as persons professing no religious identity in matters of social, economic, and ecological injustice. It is also a challenge posed directly to Christians to create new forms of interreligious solidarity that can empower political and social solidarity with other religious communities. Of course, interreligious solidarity requires interreligious dialogue, but Fredericks seeks to
deepen the Christian theological underpinnings of interreligious dialogue by delineating a model of theology of religions that moves beyond the usual exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist models. He calls this model “comparative theology of religions.”

Given the fact of religious pluralism that necessitates living out one’s own particular faith tradition surrounded by faithful persons who religiously dwell in other faith traditions, and given the emerging realities of globalization, no religious tradition can remain in isolation from any other religious tradition nor from the growing secularization that challenges persons of faith wherever persons of faith are found on this planet. The issue is not the emergence of a new global religion that will supersede Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or Hinduism. Fredericks argues that the contrary is the case: as globalization and secularization erodes national, civic, and religious identity everywhere, interreligious solidarity that does not wash over the diversity of religious traditions becomes more important as a source of personal and communal identity, meaning, and purpose.

Since the meaning of “solidarity” depends on how one understands the practice of interreligious dialogue and the theological models through which interreligious dialogue is practiced, Fredericks expends much effort describing and critiquing the exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist models of theology of religions. Strictly speaking, as Fredericks notes, “theology of religions” is not an issue for other religious traditions. Appropriating the words of Martin Luther, “this is most certainly true.” Given the universal claims of Christian theology about the significance of the Incarnation and the notion that Christ is the only way to salvation, non-Christian traditions do not face the same exclusivist or inclusivist issues in their dialogues with other religious persons. This traditional Christian claim makes theology of religions a distinctively Christian problem.

Fredericks’s main criticism of exclusivist and inclusivist theologies are that both models are “replacement theologies” because (1) they either argue for the “replacement” of all non-Christian traditions with a form of Christian tradition, either Catholic or some form of Protestant tradition, or (2) they replace non-Christian traditions by assuming that what is good and true in these traditions is found most completely in Christian tradition. Much Protestant theology is exclusivist, and the current theological stance of Roman Catholicism is inclusivist. Both approaches are thoroughly nondialogical and thereby incapable of promoting Christian solidarity with non-Christians, and Fredericks’s arguments in this regard are exceptionally cogent.

But the trouble with pluralist theologies of religion, Fredericks argues, is that they “require Christians to recognize that Jesus is not the full revelation of God to the World. God is always more. Christians need to pay attention to other religious traditions in order to learn more of God” (p. 9). The idea of the incompleteness of God’s revelation in Jesus doesn’t make this revelation less true. But theological pluralism does make it difficult for Christians to be faithful to the depth and fullness of Christian faith and experience. In so doing, it fosters a debilitating theological relativism that often falsifies both Christian traditions and the non-Christian traditions with which one is engaged in dialogue. Given the relativist theology inherent in pluralist
theologies, it is difficult to see, Fredericks concludes, how theological pluralism can promote interreligious solidarity.

So how should Christians understand the nature of religious pluralism and thereby enter into dialogue with faithful non-Christians in order to create religious solidarity, a sort of unity in diversity that aids all religious persons in confronting issues of injustice that are not religion-specific and haunt all religious human beings? For Christians, Fredericks, argues, the need is for a comparative theology of religions that resists the temptation to resolve the tension between openness to the truth of non-Christian traditions and fidelity to the truth of Christian tradition. That is, a comparative theology is one open to the truth of non-Christian faith and practice while at the same time fully living at the depth of the central Christian affirmation that Christ is the full revelation of God to the world, sufficient for the salvation of all. Such openness requires being critical of Christian distortions of Christian tradition as well as being aware of the incommensurable difference between Christian and non-Christian traditions—even as one perceives what may be common between traditions.

I have few reservations about this book. Fredericks has offered a fresh and creative take on the practice comparative theology as a form of Christian interreligious dialogue. His discussion and critique of the various models of theology of religion are the clearest and most coherent I have read. As a Lutheran historian of religions who has wrestled long and hard to find his own religious identity, I found his call for a comparative theology of religions very helpful and think that Buddhist and Christians ought to be required reading for all Lutheran pastors and bishops. This being said, I think Fredericks is a bit too hard on pluralist theologies of religion. The trouble with Hick’s pluralist hypothesis, for example, is not that Hick wants to reduce all religions to a common core or that his model leads to a debilitating relativism that misinterprets both Christian and non-Christian traditions. Only a forced reading of Hick’s writings can support these conclusions. Hick’s problem is the Kantian epistemology that underlies his version of theological pluralism. Other versions of theological pluralism that assume a Whiteheadian process epistemology, including my “research paradigm model” of pluralism or the radical pluralism of John Cobb’s process theology are, in my opinion, not open to the standard criticisms of pluralism upon which Fredericks draws for his critique of this theological model.¹

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NOTES

This book explores the ideals of liberation theology from the perspectives of major religious traditions, including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and the neo-Vedanta and Advaita Hindu traditions. The goal of this volume is not to explain the Christian liberation theology tradition and then assess whether the non-Christian liberation theology...