

## **Things violent in religion and politics: Some critical remarks on the theology of religious pluralism**

**KIM Seung-Chul**

**Professor, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture**

### **Abstract**

Among the theological paradigm for religious pluralism so far, the so-called “theology of unitive pluralism” is thought to be the most proper attitude toward other religions. It is grounded on the assumption that the ultimate truth is one, and many religions in the world are various ways to that one ultimate truth. Relying upon the critical analysis of Western monotheism by Jan Assmann, this article argues that the Western monotheistic paradigm is as exclusivist as the political discrimination between “friend and enemy.”

**Keywords:** violence, monotheistic paradigm, Jan Assmann, unitive pluralism, the One

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"Fear prophets, Adso, and those prepared to die for the truth, for as a rule they make many others die with them, often before them, at times instead of them."

Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*

## I. Violence in the theology of religious pluralism?

In this short presentation, I want to argue whether and to what extent the theology of religious pluralism can be free from the suspicion that it still commits violence to other religions. Under the term "theology of religious pluralism," I understand the theological tendencies that have been succeeded from the theological heritage of Ernst Troeltsch at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in general, and the "pluralist hypothesis" (John Hick) and "theology of unitive pluralism" (Paul Knitter) in particular, two representative theological standpoints represented by two leading theologians of religious pluralism in our age.

Before we get into the discussion, however, I admit that one might ask a critical question whether it is not absurd at all to understand the theology of religious pluralism relating to violence because religious pluralism just stemmed from the intention and effort to overcome the psychological and physical conflicts and violence between the religious traditions. Theology of religious pluralism is generally evaluated highly as a Christian effort to overcome the religious exclusivism toward other religions. Such an evaluation is not groundless. As said, the theology of religious pluralism emerged from the self-critical reconsideration of the traditional theological standpoints that had yielded an arrogant misunderstanding and violent behavior toward other religions in the world. As Jeffrey Haynes mentioned in his "Introduction" to *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, at the background of religious pluralism, we could find the religious diagnosis against the political conflicts that "many current international conflicts have religious aspects that can exacerbate both hatred and violence and make the conflicts themselves exceptionally difficult to resolve." (Haynes, 2009: 6) Haynes quotes here what Hans Küng said on religion and politics: "[T]he most fanatical, the cruelest political struggles are those that have been colored, inspired, and legitimized by

religion. To say this is not to reduce all political conflicts to religious ones, but to take seriously the fact that religions share in the responsibility for bringing peace to our torn and warring world." (Küng, 1993: 21-49) Seen from such a perspective, we may say that the theology of religious pluralism must be intrinsically immune to every possible critic that it has to do with the violence. In this sense, one may insist that the theology of religious pluralism is found at the exact opposite side of the violence.

Just as Haynes and Küng indicate, religious exclusivism entails violence, regardless of whether it is a psychological, mental, physical, and political one, and religious pluralism is a way to get over the religious exclusivism. The question is then whether and to what extent the theology of religious pluralism is far from religious exclusivism? This question in itself includes the following two questions;

1. What is the source of the exclusivist attitude of the Christian faith toward other religions?;
2. Whether or not the theology of religious pluralism, at least in its current form and content, is free from the doubt that it is a variant of religious exclusivism?

## II. Monotheism and religious violence

Roughly speaking, religious exclusivist attitudes of Christian theology could be summarized as follows: There is "one and only one" truth revealed exclusively in and through the Christian faith. Thus, interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism are expressed in how various religions are concerned with this "one and only one" truth. Such a Christian scheme for dealing with other religions reflects the genuine Christian understanding of the ultimate truth and its evaluation. It represents the typical Christian way of thought and behavior toward other religions that I wish to call "theological semantics toward other religions," which I borrowed from the concept of "cultural semantics" (*kulturelle Semantik*) of Jan Assmann, an eminent German Egyptologist and archaeologist. Assmann tries to explain the unique ways of behavior and thought under a particular worldview with the concept of "cultural

semantics," which is "a semantic paradigm expressed in grand stories and differentiation" (Assmann,2005: 19) and transmitted as "cultural memory." (Assmann,1992: 19-21) The "cultural semantics" of the monotheistic religions is, as per Assmann, represented by the belief that "there is no God, but one," and "an idol is nothing at all in the world." If there could be one and only one God, it is logical to conclude that the other things called "God" should be either exploited by the one true God or absorbed into one true God. As a result, a monotheistic religion logically changes the existential question on God into a logical question of "true or false," and a political decision on "friend or enemy." Therefore, monotheistic theological semantics intrinsically includes "the political," the function of which is to be found in discerning friends from enemies. (Kim,2013: 20-33)

Together with Assmann, we remember here that Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) defined his concept of "the political" (*das Politische*) as a way to distinguish friend from enemy or enemy from friend. (Schmit,1932: 14) Interestingly and tragic enough, his idea was molded by his youth's traumatic experience when he lived with his family as a Catholic minority member in Prussia as the Protestant state. (Althaus, 2007: 481)The fundamental character of monotheistic semantics is thus exclusive and "political." It demands that its followers choose between friends and enemies, between the two ways of life and death. Samuel Huntington, an American political scientist, summarized what "the political" means when he warns about the threat of large-scale immigration into America in his polemical work *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (2004):" You' and 'I' become 'we' when 'they' appears." (Huntington,2004: 24)

Such an exclusivist understanding of identity is found easily in the Old Testament, such as Exodus's stories, Ten Commandments, Covenant with God and formation of Israel, innumerable wars against pagans, and ruthless slaughter against those thought to be a traitor. The foundation of monotheism's "cultural semantics" is the dichotomy between "friend and enemy." It is decisively engraved as "a fundament and spiritual world for our [Western] traditions" in Deuteronomy, which is "absolutely central and fundamental texts for the Jewish culture and also in the Christian culture." (Assmann,2005: 25)

What is then the core of the "cultural semantics" of monotheism? Assmann agrees with Othmar Keel, who finds out the ground of real monotheism in God's "jealousness." That God is "jealous" means the oneness of God, and at the same time, the "dissociation and exclusion of other false gods." (Assmann, 2005: 25) The faith in the "jealous God" (e.g., Exodus 20, 5) is transmitted to the warning to the other gods by Paul in Cor. 1 8,4-6 when he mentions eating food sacrificed to idols. We are told that "an idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "there is no God but one." There is but one Lord, through whom all things came and through whom we live. The concept of jealous God is so central to the monotheistic idea of God that it is superficial to discern the Christian concept of loving God in the New Testament from the jealous God of the Old Testament, above all because the jealousy of God comes just from the love of God. (Assmann, 2005: 26) Such a distinction of true religion from false religion, so Assmann, went back to the memory of Moses, which Assmann calls the "Mosaic distinction";

"Let us call the distinction between true and false in religion the "Mosaic distinction" because tradition ascribes it to Moses. [...] Moses is a figure of memory but not of history, while Akhenaten is a figure of history but not of memory. Since memory is all that counts in the sphere of cultural distinctions and constructions, we are justified in speaking not of Akhenaten's distinction, but of the Mosaic distinction. The space severed or cloven by this distinction is the space of Western monotheism. It is this constructed mental or cultural space that has been inhabited by Europeans for nearly two millennia." (Assmann, 1997: 1-2)

According to Assmann, "a revolutionary counter-religion" occurred with the "Mosaic distinction" that accompanied "the construction of antagonistic conceptions such as 'paganism' or 'idolatry.'" (Assmann, 1997: 210) In the eye of radical monotheistic religious awareness emerged by the "Mosaic distinction," polytheism is deprived of its religiosity, or better, evaluated merely as "religious error." (Assmann, 1997: 4)

“The Mosaic distinction refers, as I have already mentioned, to the distinction between true and false religion. My thesis is that this distinction represents a revolutionary innovation in the history of religion. It was unknown to traditional, historically evolved religions and cultures. Here the key differences were those between the sacred and the profane or the pure and the impure. Neglecting an important deity amounted to a far more serious offense than worshipping false gods, the chief concern of secondary religions. In principle, all religions had the same truth-value and it was generally acknowledged that relations of translatability pertained between foreign gods and one’s own. The transition from primary to secondary religious experience therefore goes hand in hand with a new construction of identity and alterity that blocks such translatability. In place of what one could call a ‘hermeneutics of translation,’ there now appears a ‘hermeneutics of difference,’ which assures itself of what is its own by staking its distance from the Other, proceeding in accordance with the principle ‘*Omnis determinatio est negatio.*’” ( Assmann,2010: 23)

Interestingly and paradoxically enough, it is not monotheism but polytheism that distinguishes religions in a unique sense. While polytheism thinks that “[e]ach deity stands for a distinction” and that “[e]ach people, tribe, and city has its own tutelary deity and finds expression for its differentiated identity in a correspondingly differentiated divine world,” “monotheism is the religion not of distinctions but of unity and universalism.” However, monotheism can be a religion of “unity and universalism” depending on the violence. Just as the “jealousness” of God comes from His exclusive love for His people, the way that monotheism as a universal religion loves all religions is to destroy them. “Monotheism cancels and revokes all such distinctions. Before the One God, all people are equal. Far from erecting barriers between people, monotheism tears them down.” (Assmann,2010: 16)

It goes too far if we regard Assmann’s critic against monotheism’s violent nature as his willingness with a yearning to go back to the ancient polytheism. In this sense, we can agree with Ulrich Beck when he insists on the need for “subjective polytheism” relying on Assmann’s thesis mentioned above by us;

“The God of one’s own choosing – and this is my contention – has ceased to be the one-and-only God who holds the key to salvation by assuming control over history and empowering its agents to practise intolerance and the use of force. The principle of religious hybridity helps to bring into focus the humane principle of a subjective polytheism that must not be confused with the polytheism of antiquity, nor with the facility with which missionary Christianity, for example, has proved able to integrate local religious traditions and rituals. Such individualized forms of a hybrid religiosity that transcends the boundaries of particular religions benefit not least because they act as a kind of resistance to the institutional insistence upon absolute conformity by its members.”<sup>1</sup>

Beck’s opinion reminds us of Peter Berger’s sociological diagnosis on the religiosity of modern man. According to Berger, an American scholar of the sociology of religion, we nowadays believe religion in choosing one religion among many religions. Furthermore, interesting enough, the Greek word for heresy, *αἵρεσις*, literally means to choose one thing among many things. If so, then to be a Christian today means to be heresy because, in the literal meaning of the word, the one who chooses one among many is heresy. To have faith in one religion means, therefore, to be heretical. (Berger, 2005: 6ff) In this situation, there is no way to be “orthodox” except by being heresy. As the provocative work by Peter Berger indicates, we nowadays live under *Heretical Imperative* (1980). We live in an age where we accept the imperative to be heretical as a genuine religious imperative. We live in an age of religious pluralism where we are heretical to each other: *Homo homini haereticus!*

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<sup>1</sup> (Beck, 2010: 62). It also must be stressed that the awareness of religious pluralism is a genuine modern phenomenon, and that pluralism cannot be automatically traced back to this or that religious tradition from ancient times. We can approve of the way that Richard Hayes concludes his article on the Buddhist understanding of religious pluralism: “That all these religions are traditionally triumphalist and not pluralistic is simply something that must be acknowledged; it would be ideologically anachronistic and intellectually dishonest to try to find anticipations of a now fashionable way of thinking in traditions that evolved in a social and political setting entirely different from that of the present world.” (Hayes, 1991: 94-95; Kaplan, 2002, p.23 fn.3)

This is the religious situation of our age. That Heretical Imperative *stops* the traditional assertion that Christianity is the only one true universal way to salvation and deprives the validity of that assertion. To have faith in one religion means to be heretical. Suppose *homo homini haereticus* is the religious situation of our age. In that case, there is then no way to be “orthodoxy” but being heresy.

### III. Violence hidden in the shadow of “the oneness”

We have seen above that God's “jealousness” comes from His exclusive love for His people, and the self-understanding of the monotheistic religion as a true and universal religion leads it to conquer and prevail the other “false” religions that are in a genuine sense not to be worthy of being called as religions at all. In a more general sense, we can relate such a monotheism's narcissist nature to extinguish the other religions with the anthropological insight into the anxiety of death as the absolute other. There prevails the “psychology of mastery” that is equal to “the effort to deny death.” (Taylor, 1984: 14) In the context of deconstructive theology that aims at subverting the “logocentrism” of Western Christian theology, Mark C. Taylor reads the origin of the “logocentrism” out of the anxiety of death, the absolute other that annihilates oneself eternally. Just because death as the absolute invincible other could not be conquered, one tries to get surrogate satisfaction by destroying the visible other in the real world. In this sense, the “psychology of mastery” is the “different masks of Narcissus,” and “[f]or Narcissus, the entire world becomes a mirror in which he sees his own face reflected,” says Taylor. (Taylor, 1984: 29) As such, narcissism as an “effort to possess” is “an indirect attempt to possess one's own self,” which intrinsically comes from “the death instinct.” (Taylor, 1984: 29) If aggression as violence “entails identification and incorporation,” it is a desire to absorb the other in oneself and consume it, and even in the name of love.

To see whether or not such a “psychology of mastery” is working in the theology of religious pluralism, we will look back on how the other religions were dealt with in Christian theology. As Paul Knitter evaluated, “[m]uch of what we feel concerning religious pluralism is mirrored in Ernst Troeltsch.” (Knitter, 1985: 23) Such an evaluation on Troeltsch points out accurately the contribution of



Troeltsch to developing the theological discourses on the other religions. Simultaneously, it also exhibits the limitation of Troeltsch's theology and other theological endeavors after Troeltsch for interreligious dialogue that intrinsically stem from the same theological insight. Troeltsch was definitely a pioneer who was well aware that Christian theology should try to understand its essence and value as being located in the history of religion. The traditional Christian assertion of its decisive role in humankind's divine salvation comes up against serious problems due to the historicism that relativizes every event in history. Such a problem was related to reconstructing Christian theology concerning the various religious traditions outside Christianity. As Ernst Troeltsch aptly maintained, Christianity finds itself in the "clash between historical reflection and the determination of standards of truth and value." (Troeltsch,1980: 11)For theology, and again Troeltsch, it is imperative to ask for "*the Place of Christianity among the world religions.*" The history of religions deprives Christianity of the validity of its claim to absoluteness.

To show that the Christian theology of religious pluralism inherited the theological paradigm of Ernst Troeltsch regarding other religions, I will line up three quotations from Ernst Troeltsch, John Hick, and Paul Knitter in order.

(1) "And, as all religion has thus a common goal in the Unknown, the Future, perchance in the Beyond, so too it has a common ground in the Divine Spirit ever pressing the finite mind onward towards further light and fuller consciousness, a Spirit which indwells the finite spirit, and whose ultimate union with it is the purpose of the whole many-sided process. [...] In our earthly experience, the Divine Life is not one, but many. However, to apprehend the one in the many constitutes the special character of love." (Troeltsch,1980: 29-31)

(2) "The great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the major variant ways of being human. ... One then sees the great world religions as different human responses to the one divine Reality, embodying different perceptions which have been formed in different

historical and cultural circumstances. [...] Within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness is taking place. These traditions are accordingly to be regarded as alternative soteriological “spaces” within which, or “ways” along which, men and women can find salvation/liberation/ultimate fulfillment.” (Hick, 1989: 240)

(3) ”The many are called to be one. But it is a one that does not devour the many. The many become one precisely by remaining the many, and the one is brought about by each of the many making its distinct contribution to the others and thus to the whole. [...] So there is a movement not toward absolute or monistic oneness but toward what may be called ‘unitive pluralism’: plurality constituting unity.” (Knitter, 1985: 7)

The first quotation is from Troeltsch’s manuscript *The Place of Christianity among World Religions* that he prepared for the lecture at the University of Oxford, which unfortunately could not be realized by his sudden death. The second is what Hick calls the “pluralist hypothesis,” which is also called the “Reality-centered pluralism.” The third one is from what Knitter calls the “unitive pluralism.”

To bridge the gap between historical relativism and the ideological-dogmatical absoluteness of Christianity, Troeltsch finally had to resort to the mystical Christian tradition that throughout history has subsumed “manyness” into the ultimate “oneness” in the Divine union. Consequently, in Troeltsch, a precedent can be found for Hick and Knitter.

Knitter’s concept of “plurality constituting unity” implies that the plurality composed of other religions cannot be comprehended without supposing “the whole.” Knitter’s holistic perspective becomes apparent when he examines religious plurality problems through the traditional scheme of *one and many*. However, the question is whether it is possible to attain such a standpoint from which to observe “the whole”? In following the consequences of his thought, Knitter is sufficiently self-critical to acknowledge the possibility that his “unitive pluralism” could be considered religious “imperialism,” which claims “that there is one religion that has the power of purifying and then absorbing all the others.” (Knitter, 1985: 9) For Knitter,

Christianity and other religions are in "a movement toward" unity, in which "plurality constituting unity" is also guaranteed. Christianity and other religions together produce a "plurality constituting unity." (Knitter, 1985: 7) Knitter belongs to the mystical tradition that emphasizes the ultimate oneness "that has the power to purify and then absorb all the others."

In this regard, it is useful to consider the "pluralistic hypothesis" of John Hick, together with Heim's critique of it. According to Hick, religious pluralism rests upon the hypothesis that "infinite Reality, in itself beyond the scope of other than purely formal concepts, is differently conceived, experienced and responded to from within the different cultural ways of being human." (Hick, 1989: 14) That is, the world's various religions are embodiments of different responses to the same infinite Reality. In his critique of Hick's "pluralistic hypothesis," Heim argues that "Hick fails to specify a possible future state of affairs predicted by his hypothesis that is distinguishable from concrete religious fulfillments envisioned by the traditions." In short, Heim says, Hick's argument fails because "we cannot claim a 'God' s-eye view." (Heim, 1995: 212)

Such a suspicion is not entirely unfounded. As Hick acknowledges in the ventriloquistic imaginary dialogue with "Phil" (osopher), religious pluralism finds its historical roots in the thought of the "European Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with its universalizing rationalism," (Hick, 1995: 32) when "Westerners first began to think on a world scale and to consider religion generically, seeing the particular historical religions as its different forms." As "Phil's" critical questioning continues: "Kant, for example, held that there is only one (true) religion; but there can be faiths [i.e., creeds or 'ecclesiastical faiths'] of several kinds. That is the background. Now contemporary religious pluralism had arisen after the Second World War when the European colonial hegemony finally ended and when a general awareness came about, at least in the West, of the world as a single interdependent unity, with the image of 'one world' and 'the global village' becoming common." (Hick, 1995: 32)

The fact that religious pluralism seems to be a "child of the European Enlightenment," which sought for the universalistic unity of various religions, may

justify the critique “that religious pluralism ignores or dismisses the concrete differences between the traditions, homogenizing them into a false unity.” That is, religious pluralism is criticized, especially by postmodern thinkers, as an “all totalizing thinking,” which “writes a global meta-narrative that subordinates all individual and communal narratives, thus undermining ‘alterity’ and eliminating the otherness of the Other.” (John Hick, 1995: 40) If this is so, is it possible to ask whether, despite his negation, Knitter’s “unitive pluralism” might be a sort of religious “imperialism” that tries to fold all religions into one faith which, for Knitter, is none other than the Christian faith? In this sense, it is worth considering Stephen Kaplan’s critical view that Hick and Knitter still adhere to the “oneness” of religious truths. Kaplan raises suspicions that they are at best apologists for “crypto-exclusivism” and “crypto-inclusivism.”<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly enough, all these three theologians apply “the one and the many schemes” to relate Christian faith with other religions. Needless to say, the One represents something absolute, transcendental, and ultimate, while the Many something relatives, immanent, and temporal. Such a dualism of “one and many” mirrors the typical Western theology in the sense that in the Western tradition, as Mark Taylor indicates, “being is interpreted in terms of oneness and presence. To be is to be one, and to be one is, in some sense, to be uniquely and irreducibly present.” (Taylor, 1984: 130)

“From a monotheistic perspective, to be is to be one. In order to be one, the subject cannot err and must always remain proper. By following the straight and narrow course, the self hopes to gain its most precious possession-itself. [...] The interplay of oneness and ownness implies the inextricable relation between propriety and proximity.” (Taylor, 1984: 41-42)

Seduction to be one and toward the oneness is intrinsically violent in the sense that it always tends to exclude the real other. As *the one* could exist as one by

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<sup>2</sup> (Kaplan, 2002: 1-2). For the critical comment on the “theology of unitive pluralism” from the perspective of the theological thought of Raimon Panikkar, see (Kim, 2008: 197-208)

excluding the other from oneself, so *The One* extinguishes the differences among the real others by absorbing them into Oneself. *The one* mirrors *the One*, vice versa.

#### IV. From one center to many centers? How?

According to the concise analysis of Reinhold Bernhardt, theologians who support the theology of religious pluralism are thought to be either “a unitive (or monistic) pluralist,” or “a consequent pluralist.” (Reinhold Bernhardt, 2005: 176ff) The former, according to Bernhardt, tries to universalize and globalize Christian theology, while the latter wants to represent a “theology which is open to the other religious traditions and [is] always ready to make a dialogue with them, but does not attempt to go back behind the Christian confession of faith that is tied firmly with the Christian contexts.” In other words, the “unitive monistic pluralist” acknowledges the transcendental common ground of world religions, upon which she/he believes a “global theology” could be constructed. By contrast, the “consequent pluralist” adheres to the incommensurable particularity of a specific religious tradition, because such thinker denies the possibility of circumventing one’s religious tradition as it is transmitted to the present historically and culturally. The “consequent pluralist” concentrates on dialogue in the belief that it could broaden the scope of a specific religious tradition. Bernhardt maintains that the differences between these two theological opinions should be viewed not as mutually exclusive oppositions but as theological attitudes with different emphasis points. Michael Hüttenhoff rearranges Bernhardt’s classification by coining the term “monocentric pluralism” and “polycentric pluralism”;

“From the viewpoint of monocentric pluralism (*monozentrischer Pluralismus*), referring to the same is a prerequisite for allowing different religions’ claims to validity to be equal, despite their differences. By contrast, polycentric pluralism (*polyzentrischer Pluralismus*) holds that if one was to take the deep-seated differences between individual religions (for example, between Christianity and Buddhism) seriously, these religions’ validity claims could only be equal if they referred not to the

same thing but differences. Of course, this is not to say that some religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for example) refer to the same transcendent truth. If the triad model were to be a complete classification of conceptualizations in the theology of religions, then the concept of pluralism must include the monocentric as well as the polycentric variations.” (Hüttenhoff,2001: 45; Schmidt-Leukel,2005: 176)

In the arguments regarding religious pluralism up to the present, the oneness sometimes means the absoluteness of Christian faith that should be defended against other religions' plurality. At other times, the oneness means something inclusive that could absorb the variety of religious truths. In both cases, the oneness could work as something violent to other religions. Could there be any third-way to be liberated from the awareness of the oneness that makes even the theology of religious pluralism violent to other religions? What could afford the paradigm shift from the one-centeredness to the many-centeredness? When Paul Knitter insists that “our religious identity is not purebred, it is hybrid,” I believe that his insight could give us a clue to go over the awareness of oneness to that of the fundamental manyness of the Reality;

Our religious self, like our cultural or social self, is at its core and in its conduct a hybrid. That means that our religious identity is not purebred, it is hybrid. It is not singular, it is plural. It takes shape through an ongoing process of standing in one place and stepping into other places, of forming a sense of self and then expanding or correcting that sense as we meet other selves. There is no such thing as a neatly defined, once-and-for-all identity. Buddhists, indeed, are right: there is no isolated, permanent self. We are constantly changing and we are changing through the hybridizing process of interacting with others who often are very different from us. (Knitter,2009: 214)

To maintain that “the religious identity is hybrid,” however, we need to understand Reality itself as being constituted hybrid. What sort of thinking could make it possible for us to maintain that? I understand the meaning of this question

as follows. Multiple and “hybrid” religious identities are being assimilated into the self-understanding of our faith. In this sense, our faith is “hybrid,” as Knitter mentioned adequately. Nevertheless, we do not need to “apprehend” (Ernst Troeltsch) or to make a “hypothesis” (John Hick) the oneness of the Reality we try to approach through our faith's daily process. If not, we would betray the nature of the faith, and, as a result, betray our purpose to make dialogue with other faiths and commit the violence of arrogance and mastery to our neighbor religious people by casting them a shadow of the oneness of the Reality we imagine. We only admit that our faith's self-understanding is historically constituted by being assimilated with our neighbor religion's witnesses. But again, what sort of thinking could make it possible for us to do this? Instead of answering the question, please let me quote a Zen dialogue that, I think, could be cited as an indicator to cut the bondage to the one-centeredness and could open the door into the many-centeredness of the Reality:

“A monk asked Zhaozhou, ‘All the dharmas are reduced to oneness, but what is oneness reduced to?’

Zhaozhou said, ‘When I was in Qingzhou, I made a hempen shirt. It weighed seven pounds.’” (Grimstone, 1977: 271)

(僧問趙州，萬法歸一，一歸何處。州云，我在青州，作一領佈衫，重七斤。)

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輔仁  
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