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The Nature of Experience: Empirical Considerations and Theological Ramifications

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Recent theological writings indicate that theological conclusions are, to some extent, predicated on theologians' understandings of experience. Furthermore, recent and contemporary theologians are not unified in their understandings. George Lindbeck recognizes this scenario in his influential work The Nature of Doctrine *(2009/1984), in which he also describes two opposing ideologies as experiential-expressivism and cultural-linguistic theory. The former is ignorant of social construction and therefore claims that religious experiences are identical across cultures; the latter recognizes social construction and therefore claims that religious experiences are different across cultures. While many theologians tend toward one of these views, neither is sufficient from a perspective informed by cognitive science. In conjunction with studies of cognition, affect, and behavior, this article argues for a revised understanding of experience that recognizes the principles of mediation and degrees of cross-cultural sharing. Some implications of this revised understanding for interreligious dialogue and theology of religions will then be discussed.*

A wide-ranging survey of major theological thinkers and their works from the past half century indicates that human experience figures into theological method and reflection. Catholic theologian David Tracy speaks of theological method as marrying insights from "common human experience" with the "Christian fact" (primarily scripture).[1] Karl Rahner, perhaps the most prominent Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, was heavily reliant on existential analysis of the human condition for framing his theological reflections.[2] George Lindbeck, a Lutheran contemporary of Rahner, has argued that one's theological methodology must be able to "handle the anthropological, historical, and other nontheological [i.e., empirical or scientific] data better than do the alternatives" in order for it to be viable.[3] More recently, Gerald McDermott and Harold Netland, both evangelical Protestants, have argued that theology of religions should take into account phenomenological analyses of the religions themselves.[4]

While there is broad agreement among recent/contemporary theologians that experience is an important source for doing theology, there is significant disagreement over the way experience is handled and generally understood. These disagreements have led to some animated debates between proponents of various methodologies who, needless to say, often vary from one another in terms of their theological and practical conclusions. One of the most visible debates over the past forty years is between so-called liberals (experiential-expressivists) and postliberals (cultural-linguistic sympathizers). Lindbeck, one of the most

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influential advocates of the postliberal tradition, has characterized the debate as follows:

> The cultural-linguistic understanding of the relation between religion and experience is in direct opposition to that of experiential-expressivism. If one pictures experience as inner and religion as outer, then the outer rather than the inner is prior in the cultural-linguistic approach. Different religions are not outward manifestations of the same basic experience that underlies all of them, but, like cultures and languages, they shape the raw material of human potentialities into different, sometimes mutually exclusive, experiences of self, community, and world. What comes first is not a universal sense of ultimacy that is then diversely conceptualized and symbolized in particular religions, but rather particularity comes first and particularizes whatever it is that different religions take to be ultimate.[5]

While Lindbeck may be guilty of essentializing the views of complex thinkers to derive his twin categories,[6] there can be little doubt that his distinction possesses some legitimacy—not to mention heuristic value. Moreover, other scholars have advocated elements of Lindbeck's position (as opposed to rival conceptualizations) or described a similar bifurcation in theological methodology.[7]

This article begins with the contention that the postliberal position of Lindbeck and others captures something of importance that many scholars aligned with the liberal or experiential-expressivist position fail to appreciate sufficiently. At the same time, Lindbeck's construal of the postliberal position contains its own problems, which result in the erroneous impression that commonality between different religious systems—and the experiences they afford—is coincidental, trivial, or lacking. Common human experience—a given for liberal theologians but generally a source of scorn for Lindbeck and other postliberals—is something that must be reclaimed and rearticulated while acknowledging postliberal concerns.

To be sure, similar sentiments can be found in the works of theologians other than Lindbeck who likewise claim to reject theological liberalism. David Tracy (who Lindbeck actually considers to be a liberal theologian) accepts common human experience in tension with the fact that human selves are profoundly influenced by particular relationships and circumstances.[8] William Placher, an avowed postliberal who feels indebted to Lindbeck, wants to carve out space for a position between natural theology and fideism—which are associated with universal and relativistic experiencing, respectively.[9] Similarly, McDermott and Netland seek to defend "the particularity of Christian revelation and the uniqueness of Christian spirituality" while upholding natural theology.[10] Although each of these proposals may belong to the same genus (with regard to intent), the rationales and particular conclusions differ from one another. So it is that my proposal shares similar concerns with these authors but proceeds with a distinctive line of argument.[11]

In brief, I will make the case for a revised experientialist perspective (as opposed to the experiential-expressivist or cultural-linguistic paradigms), which draws its theoretical underpinnings from cognitive science and is supported by empirical analysis. This perspective claims that while culturally/religiously distinct people do not have identical experiences, they can have very similar experiences on account of shared humanity and environmental conditions, which ground cultural and religious systems.

The following section builds a case for the revised experientialist position contra experiential-expressivist and cultural-linguistic paradigms by examining studies of human cognition, affect, and behavior. In doing so, it likewise prepares the stage for a brief discussion of theological implications at the end. Although the empirical study of experience—and religious experience in particular—is ripe for theological reflection, a word of caution is in order. Many pertinent theological issues are matters of speculation that resist definitive adjudication through empirical analysis. Still, the revised experientialist position offers a better starting point for theological reflection than either the cultural-linguistic or experiential-expressivist paradigms.

"Experience" according to Liberalism and Postliberalism: Critique and Synthesis

There are four basic principles to keep in mind during the following discussion of experience. First, experiences are undergone. In other words, an experience is something that happens to a person.

Psychologically speaking, an experience consists of mental (e.g., cognitive, affective, sense perceptive) and/or behavioral activity.[12] Second, experiences are "roughly datable."[13] In other words, they typically have a beginning and end, although these might not be so clearly defined.[14] Third, experiences have a source. Source characteristics affect a person's cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral activity. Finally, experiences are affected by the aptitudes/characteristics of the persons who have them. Thus, two people can have experiences instigated by the same thing that differ in cognitive, affective, or behavioral terms. For instance, an individual with normal vision and one with red-green color blindness may have different experiences of seeing a "red" apple. According to this example, both experiences have the same source, but they differ in cognitive terms.[15] Similarly, American and Chinese individuals may have different experiences of a dragon after being asked to think about one, due to the fact that they have undergone different socialization processes that (generally) equip them with beliefs about dragons as being evil or lucky, respectively.[16]

By and large, the liberal position discussed above fails to acknowledge the fact that individuals possess different aptitudes/characteristics that can affect experiential processing. This recognition is a postliberal, that is, cultural-linguistic, achievement.[17] Liberals (experiential-expressivists) have argued that separate persons faced with same/similar stimuli will have the same experience but (perhaps) interpret it differently.[18] The problem with the conventional liberal view is that it is markedly ignorant about the ways that humans receive and process information. In perceiving physical stimuli or thinking about a particular subject, for example, the mind-brain is involved. Unless separate humans were to have identical minds/brains, their experiences could not be the same even though the same stimulus was present.[19] In short, all experiences are mediated.

Furthermore, experiences are interpreted. People react to discrete experiences with cognitive, affective, or behavioral activity. This reaction to a given experience constitutes an interpretation. Interpretations are like secondary experiences because they also involve cognitive, affective, or behavioral activity. Due to this similarity and the fact that interpretations naturally follow experiences, differentiating between interpretation and experience can be difficult or even idiosyncratic. Furthermore, some postliberal scholars will claim that all experiences "come interpreted," by which they mean "mediated" by the individual's prior psychological resources (see above).

Although postliberal scholars were correct in claiming that all experiences are mediated, this claim has been the subject of unfortunate and insufficient framing attempts that leave the impression that different people necessarily have different—rather than similar—experiences when they are faced with the same or similar stimuli. There are at least two problems with postliberal theory—à la Lindbeck, in particular—that lead to this impression.[20] First, postliberals like Lindbeck narrowly focus on culture, language, and religion as the main "ingredients" that shape people's minds.[21] Hence, Lindbeck and his sympathizers use the phrase "cultural-linguistic" to describe their methodology.[22] Furthermore, they have tended to view cultures, languages, and religions in their totality, which consequently highlights their distinctiveness.[23] Second, Lindbeck, in particular, has assumed that the mind is essentially "raw material" to begin with.[24] Given these presuppositions, it is not surprising to find postliberals, such as Lindbeck, ignoring experiential similarities or assuming them to be coincidental or trivial.

While postliberals are correct in an absolute sense—different people have different experiences—the amount of similarity between people's experiences can be striking. In fact, some accounts of experience across cultures/religions are so similar that it is nearly impossible to detect a meaningful difference (see below).[25] Thus, the liberal leaning toward experiential similarity must be recovered without losing the postliberal emphasis on mediated experience. The revised experientialist position does both by relying on basic assumptions of cognitive science.

In brief, cognitive scientists assume that the mind-brain (1) is shaped by environmental conditions and (2) possesses a generic structure as well as inherent (e.g., genetic) predilections and limitations.[26] The second assumption contradicts the postliberal notion of the mind as "raw material." Humans possess certain basic capacities and potentialities by virtue of being human. The first assumption posits a broader reality than culture (or "culture on the ground") as the basis of psychological conditioning.[27] Furthermore, cognitive scientists assume that the various environments

in which humans find themselves share many general properties without necessarily being identical.

If each of these assumptions is correct, we should expect to find quite similar cross-cultural experiences in the areas of cognition, affect, and behavior. Each of the following sections dealing with these areas will bear out our expectations. By relying so directly upon empirical findings from the social sciences, my methodology can be distinguished from those typically grounding experiential-expressivist or cultural-linguistic ideologies (of which, the former are more often indebted to metaphysics and existentialism, while the latter generally rely on philosophy of language and epistemology).[28] Furthermore, the following review of cognition, affect, and behavior studies will deepen our understanding of religious experience, in particular, and ground a brief discussion of theological issues associated with the nature of religious experience.

Cognition

Despite some variations among the environments where people live, there are a host of environmental aspects that remain constant for all human communities. For example, all of them contain living and nonliving things. These things behave according to generic laws or principles. Nonliving things such as rocks are inert and will not move unless some external force is applied to them, whereas animals (a special class of living things) are self-propelled. Understandings such as these are not limited to any one cultural group but appear to be recognized universally on account of environmental similarity in the places where people develop. Cognitive scientists have documented a compendium of common human beliefs/understandings that apply to natural and supernatural/spiritual things.[29] This strongly suggests that people from various cultural backgrounds have many of the same *types* of experiences—these experiences generate the beliefs in the first place.

With regard to cultural variation, cognitive scientists are not in doubt. Humans possess cultural knowledge (knowledge particular to one or a few cultural groups) in addition to more general knowledge about things. While it is important to acknowledge culturally diverse forms of knowledge and related experience, it is at least equally important to recognize that cultural diversity occurs within a broader context of environmental similarity. Hence, at the same time as persons from one culture are developing knowledge specific to their culture, they are also forming beliefs/ideas that people from other cultural backgrounds will develop as well.

Furthermore, many seemingly distinct cultural concepts or beliefs make use of more general ones. God concepts provide a good example to consider. There are a variety of God concepts, such as Jesus, Shiva, Allah, and Yahweh, and each of these has representations that differ between individuals and groups. Although each of these "concepts" is distinct—for example, Jesus is distinct from Shiva and one person's Jesus is distinct from another person's Jesus—they are predicated on many, but not all, of the same principles.[30] Thus, each of the aforementioned God concepts and their individualized representations refer to minimally counterintuitive intentional agents possessing strategic information.[31] These and other similarities between distinct God concepts are again supportive of common human experiencing. Whether an individual thinks of Jesus or Shiva, his or her experience would likely entail many of the same cognitive notes.

Additionally, it is evident that the same types of phenomena facilitate thinking about God concepts across cultures.[32] For example, both Christians and Hindus tend to think of divine agents if they encounter some type of anomalous event such as dream fulfillment.[33] The fact that the same type of event is implicated in the cognitive activities of both persons further suggests that the total experiences of both persons are similar in this case.

In short, cross-cultural studies of cognition show that some beliefs are widely dispersed and triggered by characteristic phenomena. Shared beliefs are not necessarily superficial commonalities; rather, they can provide the basic scaffolding for more complex/specific cultural ideas.[34] Thus, two individuals might have separate experiences—involving distinct cultural concepts—that nonetheless overlap in fundamental ways. At base, the presence of cross-cultural beliefs suggests that diverse persons sometimes have similar experiences.

Affect

Affect, or feeling, represents another crucial aspect of experience. Empirical (non-anthropological) investigations of affect generally suggest that affect is

more similar than different cross-culturally.[35] In one study, for example, Jeanne Tsai and her colleagues asked European and Hmong American participants to "relive past episodes of intense happiness, pride, love, anger, disgust, and sadness."[36] While the observed behavior in relation to a particular prompt sometimes differed between groups, the electrodermal responses were "strikingly similar."[37] The latter finding suggests that the two groups were essentially having the same affective experiences, whereas the former may suggest that they had developed different means of interpreting their experiences.[38]

Tsai has since developed the concepts of "actual" and "ideal" affect.[39] Actual affect refers to what persons *actually* feel in the moment of experience, whereas ideal affect refers to what persons *want to* experience and provides a way of *interpreting* what they do, in fact, experience.[40] Tsai and her colleagues claim that "culture shapes ideal affect more than actual affect."[41] It is important to note that in making this statement these researchers do not deny the possibility of some cultural shaping of actual affect. At the same time, they do not want to lessen the fact that feelings tend to have a great degree of overlap between cultures, such that it is possible to speak of generic affective traits such as love, anger, disgust, and others.

In some ways, the conclusions of Tsai and her colleagues fail to compute with either the experiential-expressivist or cultural-linguistic models of experience. On the one hand, a rigid experiential-expressivist model—which assumes cross-cultural invariance at the level of pre-reflective experience—is rebuffed by the likelihood of subtle qualitative differences in original affect.[42] On the other hand, a rigid cultural-linguistic model fails to appreciate the profound degree of similarity.[43] The revised experientialist model handles the actual state of affairs better than either of these models by forthrightly claiming that human emotional states are generalizable on account of common human conditioning while being susceptible to limited modification as a consequence of cultural, linguistic, or religious peculiarities. By and large, then, the basic notes of affective experience remain the same for diverse persons, but they probably differ in precise tone.

Mystical Experience

If the above model of affective development and differentiation is legitimate, then one would expect it to apply to mystical experience—or "mystical states of consciousness"—which, as William James has noted, are "more like states of feeling than like states of intellect."[44] Despite individual conceptualizations, there seems to be broad scholarly consensus that mystical experience is a kind of "peak" religious experience, with characteristics analogous to the experience of salvation as described by various religious traditions.[45] In line with our previous discussion, however, scholars and theologians are divided as to the degree of cross-religious similarity. On one end are those who support or otherwise imply that mystical experience is uniform across religious groups (religion may yield differences in interpretation but not experience), while the opposite end consists of those who argue that mystical experience differs for different individuals and groups.[46] For theologians and religious scholars, the payoff for each of these conclusions rests in the relative uniqueness of individual religious traditions as well as the implied reference/source of the experiences themselves (see below).

As noted above, all experiences are mediated by the mind-brain. Mystical experience is a good case in point: several studies have linked distinctive neurological activity to putative mystical experience.[47] While the neurological mediation of experience problematizes extreme conceptualizations of experiential uniformity, research on diverse religious adherents attaining mystical or peak consciousness suggests that many of the same brain regions and patterns of activity are operative across individuals and groups.[48] These studies provide one line of evidence that different religious persons can have similar religious experiences but refer to them by different names.

Other lines of evidence that support the same conclusion derive from phenomenological and psychological analyses of mystical experience. While there are various phenomenological analyses of mystical experience, one of the most influential has been that of Walter Terence Stace.[49] Based on analysis of "mystical" or "peak" experience reports from separate religious adherents, Stace systematically identified several characteristics common to these individuals and traditions. These include positive affect (e.g., joy, peace), religious affect (e.g., sacredness, awe), noesis, ineffability, timelessness/spacelessness, ego loss, inner subjectivity (the sense

of life in nonliving/non-agential things), and unity with something(s) beyond the self.[50] Furthermore, Stace claimed to discern two "species" within a single mystical "genus."[51] The genus is defined by oneness/unity whereas the species correspond to the ways in which that oneness/unity is realized. Introvertive mysticism refers especially to a unitary consciousness whereas extrovertive mysticism corresponds with a feeling of oneness/unity with things outside the self.[52] Each of these experiential "species," according to Stace, has precedence in each of the world's major religious traditions and communities, although it may be the case that some traditions stress one type over another.[53] Ultimately, Stace was compelled to conclude that the evidence for unanimity of mystical experience across religiocultural boundaries was quite strong indeed. According to him, any differences between individual/communal ways of describing the experience or attributing meaning to it were due to secondary interpretation upon what is a primary, unreflected (i.e., not a culturally mediated) experience.[54]

Empirically speaking, there is fairly strong support for Stace's phenomenological deductions. Ralph Hood and his colleagues have operationalized each of Stace's eight categories for survey research. To date, the resultant M Scale has been tested among Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Jews (hailing from various sects and geographical locations).[55] Responses to the scale in each of the test sites indicate that each of the eight characteristics resonates with the experiences of the local population as a whole. Furthermore, group response rates are similar, according to studies that sought to compare two or more religious populations. Additionally, participants in one non-Western study were interviewed with the survey items to see whether they were applicable to real experiences.[56] The results were affirmative, providing further construct validity for each of Stace's eight characteristics. All of the above suggests that Stace's basic characteristics of mystical experience are generally applicable.

Cross-cultural investigations of the M Scale have also been factor analyzed.[57] Typically, these analyses reveal three factors. Two of these factors generally contain traits that suggest introvertive or extrovertive classification, while a third factor contains additional traits, usually classified under the rubric of "interpretation." In other words, different religious communities tend to associate the components of their mystical experiences in same or similar ways.

So what can we conclude from this empirical investigation? At a minimum, we should conclude that a set of largely affective constructs/characteristics applies more or less equally to the extraordinary experiences of people from various backgrounds. In addition, these characteristics seem to possess logical interrelationships mostly independent of cultural/religious influence. At both trait and factor levels, mystical experience appears to be similar across religiocultural groups. Based on this analysis, I will, however, stop short of claiming that mystical experiences are entirely the same. After all, some differences in the results of factor analysis have been documented, and it remains possible that the same trait could refer to qualitatively different—albeit related—feelings. There might also be other unexplored or trivialized aspects of mystical experience that are present in the experiences of one group and entirely or largely absent from the experiences of others.

Ultimately, this brief foray into mystical experience is consistent with what I have argued in the prior section on "Affect." The basic notes of mystical experience—like other forms of affect—transcend individuals and groups. While this does not negate cultural/religious shaping of mystical experience, it does suggest that mystical experience can be "shared" to a broad degree—a finding of interest to psychologists and anthropologists as well as theologians.[58] Theologians are eminently concerned with the (metaphysical) source of mystical experience. As to whether mystical experiences of different religious persons point to the same source, I will offer a few related considerations in the section on "Theology of Religions." In anticipation of that discussion, it is prudent to note that the plausibility of separate religious persons reacting to the same source rises with the extent of similar or seemingly identical experiential characteristics. Valid assessment of the latter is made possible by the detail of comparative findings and analysis. The just-reviewed research on mystical experience across religions certainly does not negate the possibility of a single metaphysical ground for such, but it does not confirm the possibility beyond all reasonable questioning either.

Behavior

In conjunction with previous investigations of cognition and affect, the following brief examination of behavior supports the notion that experience can be shared across cultural and religious groups. As noted above, behavior can be seen as a kind of interpretation of affective experience stemming from the mind-brain.[59] However, behavior can also be viewed as a kind of embodied experience in itself. Regardless, evidence of similar behaviors across people groups is highly suggestive of the notion that their experiences share much in common.

With regard to putatively religious behaviors, anthropologists have noted cross-cultural/religious similarities especially with regard to glossolalia and possession.[60] Striking from my perspective as a charismatic-leaning Christian are several descriptions of ecstatic behavior from writers of Hindu sects. For example, Rupa Gosvami, a sixteenth-century Gaudiya Vaishnavite, describes the types of behavior often manifested by those enthralled with Krishna as "dancing, rolling around, singing, crying out, contorting the body, roaring like an animal, yawning, panting, disregarding worldly people, salivating, laughing loudly, shaking, and hiccupping."[61] Several centuries earlier, a Shaivite text, *The Kaula Ocean of Waves*, lists the following behaviors typical of the experience of spiritual power: "spontaneous laughter […] horripilation, 'paralysis,' convulsion, acting as if drunk."[62] In the mid-twentieth century, a treatise by Swami Visnu Tirtha echoes several of the aforementioned behavioral signs in its description of activated *kundalini*:

> Your body begins trembling, hair stand on roots, you laugh or begin to weep without your wishing, your tongue begins to utter deformed sounds […] your speech begins to utter sounds like those of animals, birds and frogs or of a lion … you feel intoxicated without taking any drug.[63]

Many of these signs endemic to Hindu religious experience would not be uncommon at a modern Pentecostal revival. For example, a 1990s revival at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (formerly Toronto Airport Vineyard) witnessed the following behaviors among its participants: spontaneous "holy laughter," "being drunk in the Spirit," "roaring like a lion," "weeping," "shaking," "dancing," and "speaking in tongues."[64] The similarity in terms/behavior between the Christian and Hindu accounts is impossible to miss. Hence, it is tempting to conclude that the overall experiences represented by these behaviors would be largely the same. In other words, cross-cultural accounts of behavior suggest that certain general forms of religious experience transcend demographic boundaries.

Summary

The foregoing review of cognition, affect, and behavior shows that individuals sometimes have quite similar (religious) experiences despite belonging to different cultural, religious, and linguistic groups. Nevertheless, cross-cultural analysis of experience can uncover salient features belonging to one or another group. Even highly similar cross-cultural experiences are probably not identical, due to differences between the minds of the people processing them. Altogether, this state of affairs challenges the prevailing experiential-expressivist and cultural-linguistic models of experience, while lending support to the revised experientialist paradigm.

Contra experiential-expressivism, the revised experientialist position claims that all experiences are mediated. Contra the cultural-linguistic model, the revised experientialist position asserts that the mind is influenced by common human and environmental conditions. Put another way, the mind is not raw material to begin with, and culture, language, and religion are insufficient variables to explain how minds are shaped. Lindbeck, a prominent supporter of the cultural-linguistic paradigm, has argued that one's theological methodology must be able to "handle the anthropological, historical, and other nontheological data better than do the alternatives" in order for it to be viable.[65] If that is the case, then a revised experientialist paradigm ought to be the basis for theological reflection instead of the cultural-linguistic or experiential-expressivist options.

Implications

As stated earlier, liberal (experiential-expressivist) and postliberal (cultural-linguistic) understandings of experience seem to be correlated with different positions on topics of theological interest. I will briefly address two of these topics—interreligious dialogue and the theology of religions—and the way(s) in which our revised understanding of religious experience may impact discussions concerning these. With regard to interreligious dialogue, our revised experientialist understanding clarifies the

basis of shared assumptions (which underwrite the possibility of mutual intelligibility) while being consistent with a basic understanding of natural revelation. With regard to theology of religions, I discuss how the revised experientialist understanding offers rationale for a more cautious theological approach such as that being demonstrated under the relatively new discipline of comparative theology. In addition, I suggest how the revised experientialist understanding offers a corrective to cultural-linguistic ways of thinking about the Trinity and salvation. In line with these discussions, I will also address the crucial issue of discerning a metaphysical ground for religious experiences.

Interreligious Dialogue

Critics of the postliberal school of thought—and to some degree Lindbeck himself—have noted that the cultural-linguistic perspective provides a weak rationale for interreligious dialogue. In essence, this perspective begets a concern that experience (and the knowledge thereby gained) is radically contextual and therefore cross-religious discussion is not likely to entail common understanding or agreement.[66] Thus, instead of bringing religions together in a way that would potentially enhance mutual respect, interreligious dialogue may fail in this regard and perhaps even lead to increased suspicion of the other.[67]

Although radical sectarianism may be more of a temptation for those who favor cultural-linguistic theory as opposed to experiential-expressivism, actual proponents of cultural-linguistic theory are somewhat less radical than their critics often make them out to be. Despite the fact that Lindbeck is committed to anti-foundationalism and the religions-as-language-games analogy, he briefly affirms "universal norms of reasonableness."[68] In a somewhat similar vein, Placher claims that different religions share assumptions.[69] Given this state of affairs, dialogue could lead to some degree of agreement and understanding between religious persons. Unfortunately, Lindbeck and Placher do not sufficiently articulate how distinct religious persons might come to possess the same norms of reasonableness. In fact, it is difficult to see how the cultural-linguistic paradigm could support this state of affairs given its rather closed understandings of culture, language, and religion.

The basic assumptions of the revised experientialist perspective help explain what Lindbeck and others want to affirm, namely, shared beliefs/norms of reasonableness.[70] To reiterate, common genetic and environmental conditions persist in spite of cultural, religious, or linguistic difference. Hence, persons develop many of the same beliefs/norms of reasonableness. Some of the beliefs that people share seem to undergird more particular religious beliefs and/or be joined together in systems with such beliefs.[71] Thus, even conversations regarding particular elements of a belief system may involve or imply more-generally accepted beliefs. As a consequence, different religious persons can describe their beliefs or reasons for a particular kind of stance or behavior and find that they share elements in common. Furthermore, after finding that they share elements in common, participants of interreligious dialogue may be challenged to reconsider the efficacy, necessity, or reasonability of their belief structures.[72] This could lead to epistemic change or conversion. After all, "if someone who shares my basic beliefs is able to believe that, why shouldn't I as well?"

In short, the problem with cultural-linguistic theory vis-à-vis interreligious dialogue is that it fails to specify how persons affiliated with distinct cultures and religions might be able to share assumptions. Simply stating the fact that people "happen" to share assumptions begs the question as to why they share assumptions in the first place.[73] The revised experientialist theory provides an answer. Again, common genetic and environmental conditions persist in spite of cultural, religious, or linguistic difference. With regard to the environment in particular, there are near-universal elements present in the various places where people live in addition to elements with a more limited or fixed distribution. Thus, even though people live in separate environments, there are elements from those environments that will overlap and provide grounding for shared beliefs. Religions—or religious belief systems—are not entirely closed off from one another because they are shaped by environmental conditions that they have in common.

Before transitioning, it seems pertinent to offer a brief theological commentary on some of the issues that have been raised in this section. From a perspective that claims Christians generally possess a plurality of divine truth, the presence of shared beliefs between

Christian and non-Christian religious traditions/communities suggests that the latter possess some of that truth or "ray[s] of that truth."[74] Additionally, the observation that shared beliefs are the product of common environmental features bridging Christian and non-Christian communities is consistent with a basic understanding of natural revelation provided that nature is not simply understood as "the great outdoors" but instead as everything that surrounds the individual. Furthermore, the fact that Christians and non-Christians do not share all of the same beliefs (when it comes to God or Reality or whatnot) accords with the idea that generally available revelation from nature fails to provide a complete or sufficient understanding of God. To acquire the latter, one must be exposed to special revelatory conditions, which, from a Christian perspective, would be unique characteristics of the Christian community as a sociological whole. Interreligious dialogue between Christians and non-Christians would expose the latter to some of that additional revelation, but momentary encounters with Christians would generally have less of an effect on one's belief system than prolonged participation within the Christian community.[75]

Theology of Religions

Earlier discussions noted stark differences between experiential-expressivist and cultural-linguistic theologians. The former generally assume that peak or fundamental religious experiences of different religious persons are essentially the same. The latter claim that religious experiences are always mediated by individuals who have been shaped by the particulars of their communities. Implicit within this cultural-linguistic perspective is an expectation for difference at the level of experience. While technically legitimate, the expectation can lead to simply writing off separate experiences as different without dutifully examining them for commonality (see below). As I have endeavored to show, there are good theoretical and empirical reasons for expecting some commonality between religious communities regarding the experiences of their members. This, I hope, would encourage theologians to spend more effort on initial comparison of religious experiences in anticipation of theological reflection. In fact, the relatively new discipline of comparative theology stresses this need for thick description and analysis of divergent religious practices and experiences.[76] This discipline represents an important development within theology of religions, although—in conjunction with some of its sympathetic critics—I hope it will come to include more ethnographic and psychological comparisons to balance out its major reliance on religious texts at present.[77]

With regard to cultural-linguistic theory and the theology of religions, Mark Heim has produced some of the most provocative and influential work.[78] In true cultural-linguistic fashion, Heim asserts that different religious persons have different religious experiences by virtue of distinctive sociocultural influences. More provocatively, Heim argues that communally distinct religious experiences have eschatological variants; in other words, differential religious socialization yields different experiences for Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, et cetera in the present life and in the life to come. The experiences of Christians, Buddhists, and others in the life to come represents a fulfillment of their religious values and aspirations, which have a similar—although less dramatic—effect on the experiences of such people at present. To account for experiential differences between the religions theologically, Heim relies on Trinitarian concepts. Thus, different religious experiences are the product of different relationships with the Trinity and its interrelationships. Different religions afford their adherents different relationships with the Trinity.

Although Heim's proposal has been widely regarded as ingenious (albeit speculative), I have a few concerns. First, detailed empirical comparisons of religious experience are simply lacking in Heim's work, although there are some fairly rudimentary comparisons of religious experience/"salvation" experience that appear to be based on scriptural sources. Like other cultural-linguistic theologians, Heim says that interreligious difference vis-à-vis religious experience is "plainly to be observed,"[79] thus eliminating the need for detailed comparison and evaluation of commonality. Had Heim engaged in extensive comparisons of religious experience, he may have altered his depiction of the Trinity. His insistence on interreligious difference results in a depiction that emphasizes uniqueness among the members of the Trinity and their relations to one another.[80] As we have seen, however, commonality between religious experiences can be broad and impressive. If Heim had taken this into consideration

when describing the Trinity, the final description ought to have placed greater emphasis on oneness/unity, which, coincidentally, would have made it more consistent with orthodox Trinitarianism.[81]

In spite of this first critique, I wonder why one should assume that religious experiences of non-Christians, in particular, are grounded in the Trinity? Although the probability of a single divine entity/reality grounding the religious experiences of diverse persons seems to rise with the extent of shared experiential features, there are biblical and analytical considerations that suggest caution before claiming a single source for cross-cultural experience. For example, the New Testament claims that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Although cryptic, the idea seems to suggest that separate spiritual entities can be mistaken as a single entity. Additionally, portions of the Old Testament seem to support a henotheistic kind of worldview.[82] According to this view, there are multiple divine entities, including one—Yahweh, the God of the Israelites—who far surpasses the rest. Even though Yahweh is exceptional, the fact remains that there are additional entities whose qualities are similar enough to Yahweh that they are likewise regarded/apprehended as gods. According to this view from scripture, it would seem that multiple entities are capable of eliciting comparable religious experiences. Thus, separate cases of "roaring like a lion," irrepressible laughter, feelings of drunkenness, and others could be the product of separate spiritual entities/sources, which is implied by the unique interpretations that Christians and Hindus give to these events. Again, however, these separate spiritual entities/sources would need to possess sufficiently similar characteristics in order for their effects on humans to be generally consistent.

In truth, this alternative view that I have been describing is not very common among contemporary theologians and stands in need of further elaboration.[83] Seemingly more common among theologians—whether they ascribe to cultural-linguistic or experiential-expressivist methodologies—is the idea that one God is responsible for the experiences of diverse people.[84] Neither of these ideas need be mutually exclusive, however. Some religious experiences attributed to separate entities may derive from the same entity, while others derive from separate entities. Furthermore, there is a possibility that both ideas are wrong—religious/mystical experiences are purely the product of human potential and natural stimuli.[85] Religious/mystical experiences purported to be about God(s) may have evidential force in arguments for the existence of such entities, but the existence of such cannot ultimately be proven.[86]

While a variety of issues are germane to theology of religions, much of the discussion historically has concerned the issue of salvation. In particular, the following question engenders debate among Christians: will non-Christians be saved? Working from the perspective that salvation is a kind of experience, prominent cultural-linguistic theologians have argued "no."[87] Consistent with their views about the cultural/religious shaping of experience, these authors argue that if salvation is something that Christians experience, one must be Christian to experience it. Still, non-Christians might have other eschatological experiences that are variously blessed, but these will differ in quality from the Christian experience; hence, non-Christians cannot be considered "saved" in the Christian sense.[88]

I will finish this discussion with a few comments in regard to the cultural-linguistic understanding of salvation. Assuming, as we have argued, that people are indeed shaped by culture, language, religion, and a host of other particularizing factors, it is certainly possible that eschatological experiences (e.g., "salvation") will be different for everyone. This possibility applies to Christians as well, since each individual Christian is unique. It may be that all Christians will experience something that, at the end of days, non-Christians do not; and yet, even among Christians, qualitative experiential differences could persist as long as their individual personhoods remain intact.

Still, one has to wonder whether differences between Christians and others with regard to their (possible) eschatological experiences of the Blessed are really significant. Our previous survey of religious experiences suggests that people of disparate backgrounds can have experiences that are overwhelmingly similar or basically the same. Logically speaking, this situation seems to occur when disparate peoples encounter the same object or separate objects that are similar. Experiencing God in his eschatological splendor could be basically the same for anyone who has the good grace to be placed in some sort of direct relationship with God at the end of days.[89] Ultimately, this statement points to grace as the essential entryway to salvation or to a salvation-

like experience. The major determiner of the quality of one's eschatological experience seems not to be personal background; rather, it is God's presence—and God can (arguably) choose those to whom he will make himself known. Perhaps God looks on Christians with special favor in meting out eschatological scenarios. And yet, perhaps God will choose to make himself known to non-Christians in the same way he makes himself known to Christians. Although God's selection process is shrouded in mystery, we can be fairly confident that those given the same degree of access to God will have very similar experiences, regardless of their past choices and religious conditioning. ✠

Notes

[1]David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[2]Karl Rahner, "The Experience of God Today," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 11 (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 149–65; ___, "Experience of the Spirit and Existential Commitment," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 16 (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 24–34; ___, "Experience of Transcendence from the Standpoint of Catholic Dogmatics," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 18 (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1983), 173–88; ___, "Experience of the Holy Spirit," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 18, 189–210.

[3]George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th anniversary ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009), 16.

[4]Gerald R. McDermott and Harold A. Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[5]Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 130.

[6]See William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).

[7]For example, see Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*; Richard Lints, "The Postpositivist Choice: Tracy or Lindbeck?," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 4 (1993): 655–77; Bruce D. Marshall, ed., *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

[8]Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, compare chaps. 4 and 8 especially.

[9]Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 61ff.

[10]McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 8, 90ff.

[11]This statement is not meant to be a strong indictment against the assumptions, methods, and conclusions of the authors mentioned, even though I harbor some criticism and/or questions concerning each of the authors' methodologies. I am generally supportive of multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research toward a specific end.

[12]The mind and behavior are the two principle subjects of psychology. See Jay Friedenberg and Gordon Silverman, *Cognitive Science: An Introduction to the Study of Mind*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2016), 58ff. If the individual person is the locus of (human) experience, then it would also be possible to define experience biologically as the things that take place in the brain and other material systems of the human body. I am certainly not against this definition; rather, I find it complementary to the psychological one presented above. It is widely accepted that psychological activities such as cognition and affect have biological correlates. Thus, for example, when someone feels "angry" or visualizes an object in the mind, these psychological activities/experiences are accompanied by particular neuronal activity. In what follows, I divide my study of experience into cognitive, affective, and behavior sections. Although one might argue that sense perception is given short shrift under this breakdown (in fact, Breckler [1984] categorizes sense perception as a cognitive activity), it seems to cover many of the things that scholars and laity refer to when they describe experience. Interestingly, cognition, affect, and behavior have received empirical validation as distinct but interrelated components of attitude. See Steven J. Breckler, "Empirical Validation of Affect, Behavior, and Cognition as Distinct Components of Attitude," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 47, no. 6 (1984): 1191–205. "Attitude" and "experience" are extensively overlapping concepts. Cf. Breckler, "Empirical Validation"; Friedenberg and Silverman, *Cognitive Science*, 341–43.

[13]These first two principles of experience are succinctly discussed by Caroline Franks Davis in her work *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 19–20. A study of her work indicates that she would agree with the last two principles as well.

[14]The experience of (ultimate/post-mortem) salvation may have a roughly datable beginning without an end (see final section on "Theology of Religions").

[15]See note 12 above.

[16]I owe this example to James Peterson.

[17]See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, especially p. 130.

[18]Ibid.

[19]For more on the mediation of experience, see Franks Davis, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*, 143–65.

[20]In what follows I am largely relying on Lindbeck's seminal work, *The Nature of Doctrine*. Lindbeck is often regarded as one of the founders and cardinal representatives of postliberalism. Although the problems with his theory—as expressed in *The Nature of Doctrine*—may be less apparent in the works of later scholars, there is no question that his theory casts a long shadow over the postliberal movement in theology. See Bruce D. Marshall, "Introduction: *The Nature of Doctrine* after 25 Years," in Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*; also see Lints, "The Postpositivist Choice."

[21]Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*; also see Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*.

[22]For a detailed description of the "cultural-linguistic" method, see Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, especially chaps. 1 and 2. Lindbeck's sympathizers include William Placher, Kenneth Surin, and Amos Yong, among others. See Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*; Kenneth Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith': An Examination of Lindbeck's Chapter Three," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 2 (1988): 187–209; Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 50–53.

[23]Consider the following statement by Lindbeck in *The Nature of Doctrine*:

> It is just as hard to think of religions as it is to think of cultures or languages as having a single generic

> or universal experiential essence of which particular religions—or cultures or languages—are varied manifestations or modifications. One can in this outlook no more be religious in general than one can speak language in general. Thus the focus is on particular religions rather than on religious universals and their combinations and permutations. (p. 9)

Additionally, Lindbeck and other postliberal scholars frequently employ the Wittgensteinian phrase "forms of life" to emphasize both the uniqueness and boundedness of cultures, languages, and religions. Cf. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 3, 118; Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 55–73; Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 52.

[24]Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 130.

[25]Perhaps cases such as these led liberals to assume that different people were having the same experiences to begin with (even though this deduction is incorrect).

[26]See Justin L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004); Steven Pinker, "Why Nature & Nurture Won't Go Away," *Daedalus* 133, no. 4 (2004): 5–17.

[27]The term "culture on the ground" refers to cultural manifestations that human persons can perceive/detect. The counterpart to this term is "culture in the mind," which refers to cultural or culturally influenced schemas. Culture in the mind and culture on the ground are influenced by each other. Both terms derive from the following: Bradd Shore, *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[28]Compare, e.g., the following: Tracy, *Blessed Rage*; Rahner, *Theological Investigations*; Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*; Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1997); John Allan Knight, *Liberalism versus Postliberalism: The Great Divide in Twentieth-Century Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). One of the novelties of Lindbeck's approach—contra the experiential-expressivists—is his stated commitment to "anthropological" and other forms of empirical inquiry. Nonetheless, his engagement with these forms of inquiry is both general and thin (see *The Nature of Doctrine*, chap. 2). Likewise, William Placher has a chapter on anthropology in his defense of postliberalism, but the actual discussion quickly turns to Wittgenstein and his concept of "language games" (see *Unapologetic Theology*, 55–73).

[29]Justin L. Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology: From Human Minds to Divine Minds* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2011); Robert E. Sears, "Spiritual Dreams and the Nepalese: Attribution Theory and the Dream-Related Cognition of Nepali Christians and Hindus," PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Intercultural Studies, 2016.

[30]In using the term "concepts" to describe Jesus, Shiva, and other God(s), I am not intentionally denying their actual/historical reality. Jesus, for example, was/is a person, while at the same time "Jesus" exists as a concept within individuals' minds.

[31]Additionally, Barrett claims that God concepts generally refer to agents that motivate religious behavior and act in the human world in detectable ways. See Justin L. Barrett, "Why Santa Claus Is Not a God," *Journal of Cognition & Culture* 8, no. 1/2 (2008): 149–61.

[32]For descriptions and examples of relevant phenomena, consult the following: Sears, "Spiritual Dreams and the Nepalese"; Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God*; Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[33]Sears, "Spiritual Dreams and the Nepalese," 187–99.

[34]Research on "God concepts" suggests this. Also see Barrett, *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology*.

[35]Jeanne L. Tsai, Birgit Koopmann-Holm, Masako Miyazaki, and Camaron Ochs, "The Religious Shaping of Feeling: Implications of Affect Valuation Theory," in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 2nd ed., ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park (New York: The Guilford Press, 2013), 276.

[36]Jeanne L. Tsai, Yulia Chentsova-Dutton, Liliana Freire-Bebeau, and Diane E. Przymus, "Emotional Expression and Physiology in European Americans and Hmong Americans," *Emotion* 2, no. 4 (2002): 380.

[37]Tsai et al., "Religious Shaping of Feeling," 276; cf. Tsai et al., "Emotional Expression," 380–97.

[38]Tsai et al., "Religious Shaping of Feeling," 276–77.

[39]Jeanne L. Tsai, "Ideal Affect: Cultural Causes and Behavioral Consequences," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 2, no. 3 (2007): 242–59; Tsai et al., "Religious Shaping of Feeling," 274–91.

[40]Ibid., 276–77.

[41]Ibid., 277ff.

[42]Compare with Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 22–23, 25–26. It is reasonable to expect some qualitative differences between people with regard to individual emotions on account of the fact that the mind-brain (not to mention other material systems) differs between persons.

[43]See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 26. Lindbeck, to his credit, seems to recognize that certain "raw" elements of affective experience are shared between persons of separate religiocultural backgrounds. While I agree with Lindbeck in this instance, I think he downplays the significance of this fact. Moreover, commonality cannot strictly be explained by appeal to culture, religion, or language.

[44]William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, ed. Matthew Bradley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 291. Originally published in 1902.

[45]For example, consider the following: James, *Varieties*, 290ff.; Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, especially 105ff.; Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th ed. (1930; repr., Santa Cruz, CA: Evinity Publishing, 2009), 413–44; John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), especially 37–41, 187, 292ff.; Robert Sears, "One or Many? How the Psychology of Religion and Emotion Can Help Us Understand Mystical Experience and Critique the Typological Debate within the Theology of Religions" (paper presented at the Center for Missiological Research, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 2015).

[46]See the following for discussions of these positions: Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16–32; Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 22–74.

[47]Andrew B. Newberg, Michael Pourdehnad, Abass Alavi, and Eugene d'Aquili, "Cerebral Blood Flow during Meditative Prayer: Preliminary Findings and Methodological Issues," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 97 (2003): 625–30; Mario Beauregard and Vincent Paquette, "Neural Correlates of Mystical Experience in Carmelite Nuns," *Neuroscience Letters* 405 (2006): 186–90; David B. Yaden and Andrew B. Newberg, "A New Means for Perennial

Ends: Self-Transcendent Experiences and Noninvasive Brain Stimulation," in *Seeking the Sacred with Psychoactive Substances: Chemical Paths to Spirituality and to God,* vol. 2, ed. J. Harold Ellens (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014), 303–24.

[48]Newberg et al., "Cerebral Blood Flow."

[49]W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Los Angeles, CA: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1960).

[50]Ibid., 131–32; cf. Ralph W. Hood Jr., "Construction and Preliminary Validation of a Measure of Reported Mystical Experience," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 14 (1975): 31–32.

[51]Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 131.

[52]Ibid., 44–133.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid., 31–38. Stace's work has been vehemently critiqued for relying on experience reports and failing to take into account the diverse meanings different cultures/religions tend to associate with particular words. In accordance with the cultural-linguistic paradigm, Stace's biggest critics assert that mystical experience cannot possibly be the same for people raised in different cultural/religious environs. Although proponents of the cultural-linguistic paradigm are basically correct in this regard, they (again) fail to appreciate the profound cross-cultural similarity between mystical experiences. See Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism."

[55]Ralph W. Hood Jr., Nima Ghorbani, P. J. Watson, Ahad Framarz Ghramaleki, Mark N. Bing, H. Kristl Davison, Ronald J. Morris, and W. Paul Williamson, "Dimensions of the Mystical Scale: Confirming the Three-Factor Structure in the United States and Iran," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 4 (2001): 691–705; Aryeh Lazar and Shlomo Kravetz, "Responses to the Mysticism Scale by Religious Jewish Persons: A Comparison of Structural Models of Mystical Experience," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 15, no. 1 (2005): 51–61; Francis-Vincent Anthony, Chris A. M. Hermans, and Carl Sterkens, "A Comparative Study of Mystical Experience among Christian, Muslim, and Hindu Students in Tamil Nadu, India," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 2 (2010): 264–77; Zhuo Chen, Ralph W. Hood Jr., Lijun Yang, and P. J. Watson, "Mystical Experience among Tibetan Buddhists: The Common Core Thesis Revisited," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 2 (2011): 328–38; Zhuo Chen, Wen Qi, Ralph W. Hood Jr., and P. J. Watson, "Common Core Thesis and Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Mysticism in Chinese Buddhist Monks and Nuns," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 4 (2011): 654–70; Zhuo Chen, Yang Zhang, Ralph W. Hood Jr., and P. J. Watson, "Mysticism in Chinese Christians and Non-Christians: Measurement Invariance of the Mysticism Scale and Implications for the Mean Differences," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 22, no. 2 (2012): 155–68.

[56]Chen et al., "Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis."

[57]Factor analysis is a statistical procedure that groups survey items/questions into discrete arrangements based on what they seem to share in common. A "factor" is a latent variable that includes each of the items from a single arrangement. For specific factor analyses of the M Scale, consult the works mentioned in endnote 55.

[58]Cf. Jerald D. Gort, Hendrik M. Vroom, Rein Fernhout, and Anton Wessels, eds., *On Sharing Religious Experience: Possibilities of Interfaith Mutuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).

[59]See Tsai et al., "Religious Shaping of Feeling," 276–77. Also see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), especially 311ff. Gadamer speaks of the behavioral application of textual understanding/experience as a work of interpretation. Although understanding (a text/event) cannot be separated from its application according to Gadamer, Tsai and her colleagues suggest that behavior is secondary to affective experience.

[60]Felicitas D. Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues: A Cross-Cultural Study of Glossolalia* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008); Pamela A. Moro and James E. Myers, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, 8th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

[61]Quoted in Michelle Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 66.

[62]Quoted in Christopher Wallis, "The Descent of Power: Possession, Mysticism, and Initiation in the Śaiva Theology of Abhinavagupta," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (2008): 265.

[63]Swami Vishnu Tīrtha, *Devatma Shakti: (Kundalini) Divine Power* (Rishikesh: Swami Shivom Tīrth, 1948), 103–105, quoted in Wallis, "The Descent of Power," 292.

[64]Wallis, "The Descent of Power," 293; Margaret M. Poloma, "The 'Toronto Blessing': Charisma, Institutionalization, and Revival," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 2 (1997): 257–71; Margaret M. Poloma and Lynette F. Hoelter, "The 'Toronto Blessing': A Holistic Model of Healing," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 2 (1998): 257–72.

[65]Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16.

[66]Compare the following: Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 9, 40–41, 115; Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 224–32.

[67]Note the fact that experiential-expressivism does not foresee this problem because according to this perspective different religions have the same experience(s) at their core, which, in turn, generate the beliefs/values at issue in dialogue. Since the generative experiences are common between religions, it is assumed that the beliefs/values will be largely common as well. Thus, experiential-expressivists expect different religious persons to find much they can agree about over the course of dialogue.

[68]See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 114–16.

[69]Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 105ff. For Placher, both the extent and types of shared assumptions differ between persons and religious groups. Hence, Christians may have more shared assumptions with Muslims than Hindus, for example, but the types of assumptions shared between Christians and Hindus on the one hand, and Christians and Muslims on the other, are not wholly consistent either. Placher doubts that there is a set of assumptions that *all* persons share equally. While it seems legitimate to claim that both the extent and types of shared assumptions/beliefs vary between persons and religions (perhaps on account of the environments that have historically given shape to various traditions and individuals), there still seem to be some beliefs that, if not held universally, are held by very many and diverse peoples (see the section on "Cognition").

[70]See previous endnote.
[71]I allude to this point in the section on "Cognition" (see my discussion of "God concepts" in particular). For more discussion of this point, see my dissertation "Spiritual Dreams and the Nepalese."
[72]Placher calls this "immanent critique of my own previous assumptions." Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 67.
[73]Ibid., 110.
[74]The latter phrase comes from *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican II document dealing with "the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions."
[75]Cf. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 38ff.
[76]Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Michelle Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).
[77]Kristin Bloomer, "Comparative Theology, Comparative Religion, and Hindu-Christian Studies: Ethnography as Method," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 21, Article 10 (2008): 33–42.
[78]S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); ___, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001); also see Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 173ff. While references to Lindbeck and "cultural-linguistic" theory are not very common in Heim's work, there can be no question that he is quite supportive of both. See, for example, *The Depth of the Riches*, Kindle locations 379–81.
[79]Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, Kindle locations 496–98.
[80]Although Heim clearly denies the notion of separate essences for each member of the Trinity, his depiction "tends to isolate the persons of the Trinity one from another." Compare the following: McDermott and Netland, *Trinitarian Theology*, p. 82; Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, chaps. 4 and 5.
[81]For a description of "orthodox" Trinitarianism, see McDermott and Netland, *Trinitarian Theology*, 46–85.
[82]Michael Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible," *Liberty University Faculty Publications and Presentations*, no. 277 (2008), http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/277; Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).
[83]The lack of representation for this view may be due to the relative lack of Pentecostals/charismatics in the theological academy. Pentecostals, in general, seem to be especially receptive to a "diversity of spirits" worldview; hence, one would expect an analogous kind of proposal from a Pentecostal scholar. See Amos Yong, *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2011).
[84]For example, see the following: Hick, *Interpretation of Religion*; Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*; Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, ed, Scott T. Eastham (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Rahner, *Theological Investigations*; Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*.
[85]Under the divinely inspired scenario, natural/psychological phenomena would continue to have a direct role as instigators of religious experiences. The divine force/entity would be ultimately responsible for the state of affairs that brought the experience to pass, however. See Franks Davis, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*, 223–35.
[86]Franks Davis, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*.
[87]I am thinking of Lindbeck and Heim in particular. See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*; Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*.
[88]See Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*.
[89]In using masculine pronouns for God, I am not attempting to claim that God is male and thus not female or neutral gender. I merely use the male pronoun because of its biblical and historical precedent.

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