

The Challenge of Religious Extremism: Understanding and Response

From Understanding to Response: *The Christian's Challenge*

A Personal Quest

Two sides of the Coin of Interreligious Relations



Positive Side of the Coin

- *The Church and Other Faiths (2010)*
- *Understanding Interreligious Relations (2013)*
- *Being Open, Being Faithful (2014)*
- *Christian Engagement with Islam (2017)*



This book investigates the coming-to-be, principal features and theological outcomes of interreligious dialogue as an activity of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Roman Catholic Church (Vatican). The embrace of dialogical engagement represents a dramatic departure from almost two millennia of hostile Christian regard toward other faiths. The development of this phenomenon is outlined and explored, with research focussed on the work of relevant offices of the WCC and the Vatican during the final four decades of the 20th century.

A principal task has been to construct a comparative narrative that provides the basis for a close analysis and assessment of policy and practice, together with theological reflection and critique. A hypothesis of three dimensions, or theological 'moments', that constitute a theology of dialogue has both informed and been tested by the undergirding research. The conclusion suggests that the more inclusive term 'interfaith engagement' today better encapsulates the ongoing field of concern, action, and theological reflection with respect to Christian relations to other religions, and that a model of transcendental dialogue is now requisite for the future of this engagement.

Douglas Pratt (Ph.D., DTheol) teaches Religious Studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. He is an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow of the School of Social and Political Inquiry at Monash University, Australia; and an Associate of the UNESCO Chair in Intercultural and Interreligious Relations – Asia Pacific. His research interests are in Christian theology, Islam and Christian-Muslim relations, interreligious dialogue, and contemporary religious issues. An Anglican priest, he is a member of the Faith and Order Plenary Commission of the World Council of Churches and a member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission in New Zealand.

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Douglas Pratt · The Church and other Faiths

Douglas Pratt

The Church and other Faiths

The World Council of Churches,
the Vatican, and Interreligious Dialogue



Peter Lang

OXFORD

UNDERSTANDING INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

Cheetham,
Pratt, &
Thomas

UNDERSTANDING
INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

The ways in which religious communities interact with one another is an increasing focus of scholarly research and teaching. Issues of interreligious engagement, inclusive of dialogue more specifically and relations more generally, attract widespread interest and concern. In a religiously pluralist world, how different communities get along with each other is not just an academic question; it is very much a focus of socio-political and wider community attention. The study of religions and religion in the twenty-first century world must necessarily take account of relations within and between religions, whether this is approached from a theological, historical, political, or any other disciplinary point of view.

Understanding Interreligious Relations is a reference work of relevance to students and scholars as well as of interest to a wider informed public. It comprises two main parts. The first provides expositions and critical discussions of the ways in which 'the other' has been construed and addressed from within the major religious traditions. The second presents analyses and discussions of key issues and topics in which interreligious relations are an integral constituent.

The editors have assembled an authoritative and scholarly work that discusses perspectives on the religious 'other' and interreligious relations that are typical of the major religious traditions; together with substantial original chapters from a cross-section of emerging and established scholars on main debates and issues in the wider field of interreligious relations.

Contributors

Nicholas Adams, Mario I. Aguilar, David Cheetham, Catherine Cornille, Anna Halafoff, Elizabeth J. Harris, Ed Kessler, Jeffery D. Long, Marianne Moyaert, Peter C. Phan, Douglas Pratt, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Jonathan Y. Tan, David Thomas, David R. Vishanoff, Paul Weller, Andrew Wingate

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EDITED BY David Cheetham | Douglas Pratt | David Thomas

What does Christian identity mean in the face of religious pluralism?

In some ways the frontier of global Christianity lies not in repairing its past divisions so much as bravely facing its future in a world of many other faiths and conflicting convictions. Douglas Pratt's new work is a brief history, astute analysis, and trustworthy guide for Christian encounter in this pluralistic environment.

A central argument of this perceptive work is that interreligious dialogue has moved so far as to fundamentally change the attitudes and openness of world religious traditions to each other, promising a future more open and less hostile than one might otherwise think. Pratt presents and reflects on the recent history of interreligious encounter and dialogue, and he traces the manifold difficulties involved, especially as they are experienced in Roman Catholic and WCC engagements with other faiths. But Pratt does much more: along with the history of such encounters, Pratt examines the issue of Christian discipleship in the context of interfaith engagement, the operative models, the thorny issue of core theological commitments, and what, in Pratt's view, might be the shape of Christian identity in light of such encounters.

Douglas Pratt is Professor of Religion at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. His research centres on Christianity, Islam, and Christian-Muslim relations. Author of many studies in the area, he has also been a visiting professor in Birmingham, Oxford, Heidelberg, Rome, Washington, D.C. (Georgetown), and the International Islamic University, Malaysia.

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WCC

PRATT

BEING OPEN, BEING FAITHFUL

BEING OPEN, BEING FAITHFUL

The Journey of Interreligious Dialogue

Douglas Pratt

Why did the Christian Church, in the twentieth century, engage in dialogue with Islam? What has been the ecumenical experience? What is happening now? Such questions underlie Douglas Pratt's *Christian Engagement with Islam: Ecumenical Journeys since 1910*. Pratt charts recent Christian (WCC and Vatican) engagement with Islam up to the early 21st century and examines the ecumenical initiatives of Africa's PROCURA, 'Building Bridges', and the German 'Christian-Muslim Theological Forum', together with responses to the 2007 'Common Word' letter.

Between them, Islam and Christianity represent over half the earth's population. Their history of interaction, positive and negative, impacts widely still today. Contentious issues remain real enough, yet the story and ongoing reality of contemporary Christian-Muslim engagement is both exciting and encouraging.

DOUGLAS PRATT, PhD (1984) St Andrews University, Scotland; DTheol (2009) Melbourne College of Divinity; is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Waikato and Adjunct Professor, Theology and Interreligious Studies, at the University of Bern. His publications include the subject areas of Christian-Muslim relations and contemporary issues in religion.

DOUGLAS PRATT
Christian Engagement with Islam

Christian Engagement with Islam

ECUMENICAL JOURNEYS SINCE 1910



Douglas Pratt



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Negative Side of the Coin

'Douglas Pratt's book *Religion and Extremism* cannot come at a more opportune time. Through a painstaking historical analysis Pratt demonstrates beyond doubt that all religions, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have had a violent past and path, whether one thinks that violence is inherent in religion, or religion has a violent core, or religion, though peaceful, can be instrumentalized as a violent means to achieve secular goals.'

PETER C. PHAM, IGNACIO ELLACURIA CHAIR OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, USA

'Alarmed by violent terror in the name of religion the public, media and politicians easily get lost in the terminological morass of "radicalization", "fundamentalism" and "extremism". Douglas Pratt's book provides a necessary, rigorous and accessible interrogation of these concepts and, by identifying a "religious absolutism" which leaves no space for theological or social diversity, he makes a distinctive contribution to debates at the crossroads of theology, sociology and political science.'

PAUL WELLER, PROFESSOR IN THE CENTRE FOR TRUST, PEACE AND SOCIAL RELATIONS, COVENTRY UNIVERSITY, UK

'Conceptually strong, and rich in examples, Pratt's book is an approachable, innovative, sophisticated analysis of contemporary religion, extremism and violence. It deserves to be widely read, cited and included on many syllabi.'

PETER LENTINI, FOUNDING DIRECTOR AT THE GLOBAL TERRORISM RESEARCH CENTRE, MONASH UNIVERSITY, AUSTRALIA

'This thorough, thoughtful study carefully distinguishes various forms of religious fundamentalism and extremism in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. Warning that fear of diversity can lead through reactive co-radicalization to extremist ideologies that legitimate violence, Pratt calls for a religious renewal that affirms each tradition's unique identity while affirming and accepting religious diversity in respectful dialogue. Highly recommended!'

LEO D. LEFEBURE, MATTEO RICCI PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, USA

Douglas Pratt argues that despite a popular focus on Islam, extremist Jews and Christians can also enact terror and destruction. *Religion and Extremism* stresses that the ideological rejection of diversity underlies religious extremism resulting in violent behaviours and, increasingly, in hardening social and religious attitudes and responses.

An analysis of religiously-driven terrorism reveals the presence of a distinctive and rigid form of exclusivity found in these religions. In this regard, the contemporary resurgence in totalising claims of fundamentalist ideologies is cause for particular concern. Pratt reasons that however expressed, the motif of the 'Absolute' is central to all, but how that absolute is and has been received, interpreted and responded to, is a matter of great diversity. The author asserts that theological 'Absolutism' displays an underlying dynamic whereby these three religions may be led into extremism. *Religion and Extremism* also explores contemporary issues of Islamophobia and mutual extremism, identified as "reactive co-radicalization", and concludes by reflecting on how extremism today might be countered.

DOUGLAS PRATT is Professor of Studies in Religion at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and Adjunct Professor of Theology and Interreligious Studies at the University of Bern, Switzerland. A former Fulbright scholar, he is an Associate of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, and the New Zealand Associate, UNESCO Chair in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations Asia - Pacific.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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RELIGION AND EXTREMISM REJECTING DIVERSITY

DOUGLAS PRATT



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RELIGION AND EXTREMISM REJECTING DIVERSITY

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Recapitulating Religious Extremism: *From text to ideology*

- **Scriptures contain image, model, example *BUT***
- **How are these received & understood?**
- ***Lens of interpretation:***
 - **Narrow overriding focus on negatives (Absolutism) *vs.***
 - **Applying a wider lens of theology & spirituality**
 - ***re* primary motifs (Absolute Values) of Divine-Human relationship**

Religious Extremism Matrix:

- **Absolutism in respect to:**
- **Referential texts that support**
- **Exclusivist Ideology and**
- **Impositional Action**
 - *rhetoical* – speech-act behaviours
 - *physical* – vandalism; violence; elimination
 - *manifesting*:
- **Rejection of Diversity (‘Others’ not like us...)**



What can be/ is being done about it?

- Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) –**
 - Security & Surveillance**
 - Education & Re-education**
 - Community engagement**

- Theological / Religious Analysis**
 - Religious Diversity & the Problem of Exclusivism**
 - Diversity Affirmation & Theologies of Pluralism**

Problem of Exclusivism:

Paradigms of Rejection

- Material identity of a particular religion (or form of that religion)
 - with the essence and substance of true universal religion as such
 - thereby excluding all other possibilities
 - Thus = ‘Only Right One’



Classic Christian

Salvific-eschatological Exclusivism

- ❑ **militant and triumphant**
- ❑ **only one way to God**
- ❑ *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*
- ❑ *eternal damnation without gospel salvation*

Variant Exclusivisms:

- *Open exclusivism*
 - relationship, but without change

- *Closed exclusivism*
 - sectarian isolation; withdrawal

- *Extreme exclusivism*
 - hard-line rejectionist; oppose & attack

Inclusivism:

Paradigms of Incorporation

- *Effective identity of a particular religion with the universal*
 - *with some allowance made for others*
 - *Thus = ‘Only Fully Right One’*



Two Christian Inclusivisms

- *Ubiquitous Incognito Inclusivism*
 - Doctrine of ‘Anonymous Christianity’

- *Implicit Fulfilment Inclusivism*
 - Christocentric doctrine
 - *Destiny of all fulfilled ultimately in Christ only*

Religious Pluralism:

Paradigms of Diversity Affirmation

Pluralism embraces plurality positively and self-reflexively, *thus* –

- *Religions as singular identities within plural ‘whole’*
- *Implying Relativities of ‘Rightness’*

Essential idea –

- *‘Multiplicity of Particular Expressions of that which is deemed to be Universal’ thus:*
 - *Co-equal validity of expression* (narrative & being)
 - *Suspend judgment on meaning* (metaphysics & belief)
 - *Compare and contrast like for like* (phenomenology)

Pluralism: *A Key Question*

- **If there is but one God, how is it there are so many religions?** (Kenneth Cracknell)
- **What does it mean for relations with religious ‘others’?**
 - **Rivalry?**
 - *Tolerance?*
 - **Cooperation?**
 - *Fellow-travelers?*
 - **Respect & acceptance?**

Common-point Pluralism (John Hick)

Common Ground Pluralism –

- **Contextualised Variable Expressions of/from a Universal Source**

Common Goal Pluralism –

- **Variety of Salvific Paths leading, or drawn to, a Universal Goal**

Ethical Pluralism (Hans Küng)

- **Future of humanity requires global ethic and universal action**

- *Meaning -*
 - **‘No world peace without peace between the religions’**

 - **‘No peace between the religions without dialogue between the religions’**

Commensurable Pluralism

Complementarity Holistic Pluralism –

- **Complementary Particular Expressions which together comprise the Universal Whole**

Dynamic Parallel Pluralism –

- **Parallelism of religious phenomena**
- **A ‘phenomenological theology’**

Responses to Religious Diversity

The religious exclusivist advocates a form of direct isolation:

- *Community of truth* versus
- *Communities of falsehood*

The religious inclusivist allows a measure of validity elsewhere, but

- *Only one religion fully contains/expresses the Universal Truth*

Responses to Religious Diversity

Prospects for religious pluralism

- **Religious plurality affirms diversity:**
 - **Resists isolationist exclusivism & imperial inclusivism**
 - **Affirms validity of expression**
 - **Engages in dialogue over meaning**
 - **Allows for addressing common concerns**
 - **Combats extremist tendencies**



Some Theological Considerations

- **A biblical basis for diversity affirmation:
Two key texts:**
- *“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour”*
- *“You shall love your neighbour as yourself”*



You shall not bear false witness...

- **9th commandment implies affirming the 'other'**
- ***Agape* (love) does not bear false witness**
- **Bearing true witness is itself an act of respectful love (*agape*) of neighbour**

Classic counter-text: John 14:6

- The ‘way to the Father’ is through ‘Jesus, the Son’
- *But* –
 - Multi-layered context of the text
 - *Farewell discourses; proto-trinitarian format*
 - Not as ‘excluding’ as often assumed
 - *Rather an affirmation of Christian uniqueness – proper sense of ‘exclusive’ relationship to God as Father*
 - Does not vitiate other ways to God, *not* as Father



Some key questions for today:

- 1. To what extent do the ideologies / theologies and behaviours of the followers of any religion collude with or counter contemporary withdrawals into communities of isolation; withdrawals that can lead to extremism and even terrorism?*



Key questions for today:

- 2. What model is employed, within and by any religion, to contend with inescapable plurality – the fact of religious diversity and difference both within and between religions?*



Key questions for today:

- 3. How may the religions enable the triumph of their own life-affirming values over the contemporary tendency from within their ranks to arrogant assertions of life-constraining or life-destroying values and ideologies?*

Absolute Values *Not* Absolutism:

- **Judaism – Co-Creatorship & Justice**
- **Islam – Compassion, Mercy & Justice**
- **Christianity – Love, Grace & Justice**
 - *Justice born of common affirmation:*
 - **Love God & Love Neighbour *found within***
 - **Torah, Gospel & Qur'an**

Finally ...

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has observed that

- *‘great responsibility now lies with the world’s religious communities. Against all expectations, they have emerged in the twenty-first century as key forces in a global age’.*

- **‘Religion can be a source of discord. It can also be a form of conflict resolution. We are familiar with the former; the second is far too little tried.**

- *Yet it is here, if anywhere, that hope must lie if we are to create a human solidarity strong enough to bear the strains that lie ahead..’*