

Multiple Religious Belonging

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Multiple Religious Belonging: Hermeneutical Challenges for Theology of Religions

DOI 10.1515/opth-2017-0004

Received May 1, 2016; accepted September 23, 2016

Abstract: The phenomenon of multiple religious belonging is studied from different perspectives, each of which reveals a different understanding of religion, religious diversity and religious belonging. This shows that the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging is challenging the applicability of these central notions in academic enquiry about religion. In this article, I present the different perspectives on multiple religious belonging in theology of religions and show how the understanding of some central scholarly notions is different. In Christian theology, the debate on multiple religious belonging is conducted between particularists, who focus on the uniqueness of religious traditions, and pluralists, who focus on the shared religious core of religious traditions. Both positions are criticized by feminist and post-colonial theologians. They believe that both particularists and pluralists focus too strongly on religious traditions and the boundaries between them. I argue that the hermeneutic study of multiple religious belonging could benefit from a more open understanding of religious traditions and religious boundaries, as proposed by these feminist and post-colonial scholars. In order to achieve this goal we could also benefit from a more intercultural approach to multiple religious belonging in order to understand religious belonging in a non-exclusive way.

Keywords: multiple religious belonging, theology of religions, religious diversity, religious traditions, religious boundaries, hybrid religiosity

In the contemporary globalized world, cultural and religious diversity leads to increasingly complex identities and social groups. In the sphere of religion, we are witnessing the emergence of hybrid forms of religiosity, multiple religious identities and multiple religious belonging. Either guided by their individual choice or as a result of a multicultural background, many people find themselves adopting new forms of religious belonging, combining elements from a variety of religious traditions or even belonging to different religious traditions at the same time. Cultural diversity on the level of society seems to mirror itself more and more on the individual level. To give meaning to their lives, many people rely on multiple religious sources.¹

This multiple religious belonging has been noticed and studied from different academic fields: Christian theology,² feminist³ and post-colonial studies,⁴ anthropology,⁵ sociology,⁶ and intercultural philosophy.⁷ In this article I argue that it has become apparent from these studies that multiple religious belonging

1 Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*; Chung, *Struggle*; Bochsinger, “Multiple Religiöse Identität”.

2 Cornille, *Many Mansions?*; Bernhardt and Schmidt-Leukel, *Multiple religiöse Identität*.

3 Kalsky, “Embracing Diversity”.

4 Donaldson and Kwok, *Postcolonialism*.

5 McGuire, *Lived Religion*.

6 Ammerman, *Everyday Religion*.

7 Braak, “Buddhist-Christian”.

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challenges commonly held scholarly notions such as the meaning of “religion”, “religious diversity” and “religious belonging”. Therefore, I propose we look for new ways to understand these notions, in order to gain more clarification about multiple religious belonging.

In Christian theology, the study and evaluation of religious diversity has been referred to as the theology of religions. In a classic threefold typology, a distinction has been made between exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.⁸ In this typology, exclusivism denotes the claim that salvation is only possible through the explicit acknowledgement of Christ as the savior; inclusivism denotes the claim that although salvation is only possible through Christ, this salvation might be attained through other religious traditions; pluralism denotes the claim that more than one (or all) of the religious traditions are equally valid, yet distinct ways to reach salvation.⁹ This threefold typology has, however, been criticized by a number of theologians¹⁰ who do not think of themselves as exclusivists or inclusivists, but instead argue that religious traditions are too different to compare. Therefore, they argue that individuals should evaluate their relationship to other traditions starting from their own tradition. Paul Hedges has referred to this alternative option as “particularism”, although the term has been disputed by some of its supposed representatives as well.¹¹

The context of the theology of religions is important for understanding the two main positions in Christian theology to approach the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging.¹² On the one hand, there are a large number of theologians who take the particularist position¹³ on multiple religious belonging. They start from their own (often Christian) tradition to evaluate the possibilities of belonging to certain other religious traditions. Opposed to particularistic theologians are pluralistic theologians.¹⁴ Pluralists attempt to compare different religious traditions on equal terms and evaluate their commonalities and distinctions to see whether or not multiple religious belonging is possible and theologically permissible. In some cases, the pluralistic theologians make a more positive evaluation of the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging.

Although the particularistic and the pluralistic positions on multiple religious belonging have been the most common in Christian theology, both positions have been contested by several liberal feminist and post-colonial theologians.¹⁵ These theologians argue that both particularism and pluralism maintain the idea of religious traditions as bounded wholes.¹⁶ They argue that we should employ feminist critiques to recognize that identities are always hybrid and never constitute ultimate closed communities of exclusive religious belonging. They show that the commonly held notions of religious identities have often been ways for religious elites and patriarchal culture to exert power over individuals.

The development and emergence of multiple religious belonging, hybrid religiosity, and new forms of spirituality has attracted significant attention outside of theology, as well. In anthropology, sociology and religious studies, this development has often been studied from the perspective of “lived religion”. “Lived religion” is a practice oriented perspective on religion, which focuses on the expression of religiosity in the daily lives of people. Social scientists have often noted that the “boundaries” between religious traditions, as they have been defined through theological reflection, have little meaning for people in the

⁸ Race, *Christians*.

⁹ Moyaert, *Fragile Identities*.

¹⁰ Hedges, “Particularities,” 112.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Daggers, *Postcolonial*, 161.

¹³ Hedges (“Particularities”, 112) names Gavin D’Costa, George Lindbeck, Rowan Williams, Kevin Vanhoozer, Lesslie Newbigin, Joseph DiNoia, John Milbank and Alister McGrath. I also include Catherine Cornille, Michaël von Brück, Rhiannon Grant and Jonathan Homrighausen.

¹⁴ For example Paul Knitter, Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Rose Drew.

¹⁵ For example Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Helene Egnell, Rita Gross, Manuela Kalsky, Laura Donaldson, Kwok Pui-Lan and Chung Hyun Kyung.

¹⁶ Fletcher, “Shifting Identity,” 13.

expression of religiosity in their daily lives.¹⁷ Also it has been noted by social scientists that we might need a multidimensional approach to the concept of religious belonging.¹⁸

It has sometimes been noted that multiple religious belonging is not really a new phenomenon, but has been the normal expression of religiosity in many Asian countries.¹⁹ Therefore, the comparison of multiple religious belonging with Asian interpretations of religious affiliation or belonging might also serve as a new perspective on the phenomenon in areas where exclusive religious belonging has formerly been the norm. The Asian and intercultural perspectives might offer us alternatives to think beyond exclusive religious belonging.

I argue that the variety of different perspectives from various disciplines on the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging shows that it has been increasingly difficult to interpret this phenomenon in a univocal way. In theology of religions we see that particularists and pluralists understand religious diversity in terms of bounded traditions, while feminist, post-colonial, and intercultural theologians draw a much more open and hybrid picture of religious diversity and belonging. By exploring the different positions in theology of religion on multiple religious belonging, I argue that scholars of multiple religious belonging could benefit from a more open approach towards religious belonging; I also argue that Asian approaches towards religious diversity might help us move beyond the presuppositions that have made it difficult to interpret the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging.

1 Particularism

In theology, the debate on multiple religious belonging has usually been conducted between pluralists and particularists. Regarding the distinction between pluralists and particularists, I follow Jenny Daggars, who argues that particularist approaches to the theology of religion serve to contest the hegemony of pluralists in theology of religions.²⁰ The debate between particularism and pluralism is centered around the question of whether to focus on the difference between religious traditions, or the similarities between them. While particularists focus on the former, pluralism is more interested in the latter. According to particularists, it is only possible to speak from a specific tradition.²¹ Particularism has been described as part of a postmodern worldview,²² in which religious traditions are understood as incommensurable. The term “religion” as something which denotes a variety of religious traditions is rejected by particularists.

Multiple religious belonging appears to be highly challenging from the perspective of particularism. Particularists do, however, want to take the phenomenon seriously. For particularists, an evaluation of the (theological) permissibility of multiple religious belonging has to start from within the religious tradition itself. The theological debate on multiple religious belonging has gained significant momentum with the publication of the book *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, edited by Catherine Cornille, which explicitly tries to investigate the possibility of multiple religious belonging from

¹⁷ Sociologist of religion Nancy T. Ammerman has called hybrid religiosity a fact of life, which demonstrates the presence of the spiritual in society and is as such independent from the judgment of religious traditions on it (Ammerman, *Everyday Religion*, 7). The phenomenon of people who combine elements from different traditions introduces a new distinction between traditional believers and hybrid believers. Ammerman refers to this as the distinction between “seekers and loyalists, dabblers and full-time devotees” (Ammerman, *Everyday Religion*, 8). Meredith McGuire, sociologist and anthropologist, writes: “When we focus on religion-as-lived, we discover that religion - rather than being a single entity - is made up of diverse, complex, and ever-changing mixtures of beliefs and practices, as well as relationships, experiences, and commitments.” (McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 185) Similar to the feminist critiques, she questions whether boundaries between religious traditions are the best way to describe religious phenomena. She states for example that “[w]e seem to have uncritically accepted definitional boundaries that distinguish religious practices from one religious group from another’s, viewing them as mutually exclusive” (McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 186). McGuire observes that “anthropologists no longer expect to find enduring traditions. Rather they see people as ‘wrestling with an adventitious present’” (McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 193).

¹⁸ Berghuijs, “Multiple religious belonging in the Netherlands: an empirical approach to hybrid religiosity”.

¹⁹ Cornille, *Many Mansions*, 1.

²⁰ Daggars, *Postcolonial*, 161.

²¹ Hedges, *Controversies*, 146.

²² Hedges, “Particularities,” 112.

a Christian perspective. The title of this book questions the possibility of inhabiting different “mansions”, or religious traditions.

Cornille notes that exclusive belonging to one religious tradition is no longer the rule and as a result of the availability of choice between a multiplicity of religious traditions, individuals have the possibility to combine these.²³ She argues, however, that this religious choice poses significant challenges for theology. Cornille tries to investigate if and how multiple religious belonging is possible from the perspective of the Christian religious tradition.²⁴ She notes that many religious traditions, including Christianity, require a unique commitment to and prioritization of their own tradition’s truth claims over those of other traditions. This poses problems for the possibility of multiple religious belonging.

According to Cornille, religious belonging always has two directions: objective and subjective. “It involves the recognition one’s religious identity by the tradition itself and the disposition to submit to the conditions for membership as delineated by that tradition.”²⁵ This also means that multiple religious belonging can only be possible if these “conditions of membership” in a particular tradition do not include an exclusive commitment to this tradition. Since many traditions do require exclusive commitment, Cornille considers full multiple religious belonging something that is hard to achieve.

Gavin D’Costa is a Catholic theologian who addresses religious diversity from a “tradition specific” perspective.²⁶ He distinguishes three types of dual religious belonging.²⁷ The first type is the “interior double believer”, someone who considers herself to be of two religious traditions, but does not need recognition from either tradition to belong to both. The second type is the “single community exterior dual belonging”, which is someone who belongs to one religious community, but is also influenced by another religious belonging, although he does not need to be recognized by that tradition. The third type D’Costa calls “double community exterior dual belonging” – which implies full religious recognition by both religious traditions. D’Costa’s approach focuses on this latter type and he investigates whether this type of double belonging would be permissible from the Roman Catholic perspective.

Not all particularists focus on the recognition of the religious tradition to permit multiple religious belonging. Several theologians have compared religious traditions to languages.²⁸ This metaphor shows several traits about the possibility of multiple religious commitments. According to Michael von Brück, religious belonging is the result of early processes of socialization, similar to acquiring a language. He believes that we first need to “become fluent” in one religious tradition to become able to acquire any more. Nevertheless, there will always be a primary religious tradition to which other religious traditions are added. Rhiannon Grant has used the concept of “fluency” to describe the different possible degrees of religious belonging. Jonathan Homrighausen refers to dual religious belonging as being “spiritually bilingual”. He argues that, as with the acquisition of any language, the more fluent you become in a new language, the more you are able to differentiate between the different religious traditions and combine them in your daily life.

Particularists address the question of religious belonging by looking at the norms as they are defined within religious traditions themselves. Since they argue that religious traditions are incomparable, multiple religious belonging can only be evaluated from within the religious tradition. Religious belonging is understood as a twofold engagement – both from the individual and from the religious tradition. Pluralists challenge these presuppositions.

²³ Cornille, *Many Mansions*, 1.

²⁴ Ibid., 2.

²⁵ Ibid., 4.

²⁶ Hedges, “Particularities”, 112.

²⁷ D’Costa and Thompson, *Buddhist-Christian*.

²⁸ Brück, “Identität Und Widerspruch”; Homrighausen, “Spiritually Bilingual”; Grant, “Being Fluent in Two Religions”.

2 Pluralism

In opposition to particularism, pluralists focus more on the similarities between religious traditions than on their differences. Pluralism argues that at least some religious traditions are possibly equal ways to salvation.²⁹ It must be noted that there are several types of pluralism, ranging from pluralists who consider all religious traditions to be equal expressions of one universal religious truth to pluralists who predominantly want to stress the need for interreligious dialogue to discover commonalities between the different traditions. One of the most influential forms of pluralism was formulated by John Hick, who developed the understanding of an ultimate reality, the Real, that exists beyond the different religious traditions.³⁰ Hick argues that religions can only make claims about God as it appears to them (the phenomenal God) and not the God as it is in itself (the noumenal God).

A pluralistic exploration of multiple religious belonging is found in the work of intercultural theologian Perry Schmidt-Leukel.³¹ He agrees with particularists such as Cornille that full belonging to two traditions is not really possible, and therefore prefers to focus on the individual's religious identity. Schmidt-Leukel argues that this identity might consist of multiple religious traditions.

Schmidt-Leukel believes that the question whether “multiple religious identities” are theologically possible or not comes down to the question whether it is possible to have different identities on the same categorical level. In this approach, multiple religious belonging is similar to, for example, having two nationalities.³² Therefore, multiple religious belonging could pose a problem to theology if someone admits to belong to multiple religious traditions in the same context.³³ Within theology, Schmidt-Leukel observes a tension between the obligation towards the primary tradition and openness towards a new tradition. Religious identity implies loyalty to a group, so that experiencing openness toward other groups could lead to tensions that have to be theologically understood and resolved.³⁴ Schmidt-Leukel believes that religious belonging should not be understood as a lifelong obligation toward a religion. Similar to Hick, he believes that religious belonging is ultimately belonging to a transcendent reality that underlies all religious traditions. To this, he adds that if religious belonging is understood only as a commitment to a specific tradition, the perspective of belonging to an ultimate reality might be lost.

Rita Gross, a Buddhist theologian, calls religious diversity the normal mode of religious expression.³⁵ She criticizes the focus of many theologians on religious traditions, because this leads them to see religious diversity as a problem. If theologians focus too strongly on religious traditions, this might cause unnecessary conflict between these traditions. Religious traditions often claim that their doctrinal beliefs have universal relevance. Gross thinks that in order to be able to accept religious diversity as the normal way of things, theologians should focus on religions as spiritual methods to salvation, instead of doctrinal beliefs.

Particularists have pointed out that since many religious traditions require a unique commitment, multiple religious belonging would be hard to achieve. Pluralists have taken this point seriously and have attempted to relieve this tension. Rose Drew, a scholar of interreligious studies, did a thorough investigation of the possibilities of multiple religious belonging from a pluralistic perspective. She interviewed people with a dual belonging to Christianity and Buddhism, and questioned them about their experiences of integrating different doctrinal positions into their religious belonging. She concludes that there are two challenges for people who want to integrate two religious traditions. In the first place, dual believers need to integrate their Christian and Buddhist beliefs in a coherent worldview. Second, it is a theological challenge to preserve the unique character, insight and integrity of each tradition separately within the dialogue.³⁶ Drew argues that this twofold challenge should lead

²⁹ Hedges, *Controversies*, 109.

³⁰ Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*.

³¹ Schmidt-Leukel, “Multireligiöse Identität”.

³² Ibid., 243.

³³ Ibid., 248.

³⁴ Ibid., 251.

³⁵ Gross, “Excuse me,” 77.

³⁶ Drew, *Buddhist and Christian*, 8.

to a sustainable integration of the differences between the two traditions but also to the preservation of the distinctiveness of each.

There are some essential differences in the ways that pluralists and particularists talk about religion, religious belonging and religious multiplicity. Particularists focus on belonging to a religious tradition. Also, different religious traditions are not really comparable and can only be judged from within specific traditions. Pluralists do not ignore the differences between religious traditions. However, they consider many religions to be valid and equal expressions of one ultimate religious truth. Some pluralists say that one cannot belong to two different religious traditions, because ultimately one cannot belong to any religious tradition. Religious belonging is in their view reserved for the belonging to the ultimate reality. In as far as there is religious multiplicity, pluralists locate this on the level of individual identity. Because of the perceived equality of religious traditions, multiple religious belonging is considered a positive phenomenon in which individuals experiment with the integration of different expressions of the ultimate truth.

Within Christian theology, both positions on multiple religious belonging – particularism and pluralism – have been criticized by feminist and by post-colonial theologians. They argue that we should move beyond the model of theology of religions to understand religious diversity.

3 Feminist and post-colonial critiques

Several feminist theologians have argued that feminist perspectives are the missing link to interpret religious diversity.³⁷ In the encounter between religious traditions, women's perspectives have often been ignored. Scholars in both gender studies and post-colonial studies have argued that religious pluralism and multiple religious belonging is not a theological problem, but has been part of the religious experience of many women and of the subaltern for a long time already. Furthermore, several scholars have argued that the emergence of new forms of spiritualities can be credited to women.³⁸ Linda Woodhead and Eeva Sointu, both sociologists of religion, argue for example that new spiritualities enable women to express their identities in ways that would be impossible in traditional religious contexts. These feminist perspectives encourage us to think religious belonging in a more open and hybrid way.

According to Jeannine Hill Fletcher, a feminist theologian, neither the pluralist nor the particularist perspective on religious diversity ultimately questions the existence of the religions as “bounded wholes”. She says that “each leaves the categories of religious traditions intact as an undisputed fact”³⁹ In the pluralist perspective, the diverse religions shape individuals towards the same ultimate end, while in the particularist perspective the diverse religious traditions shape the individual towards different ultimate ends. This “hypostatizing” of the religious traditions ignores, according to Fletcher, the inherent diversity within religious traditions.

The German-Dutch theologian Manuela Kalsky thinks that religious identities will become more and more flexible.⁴⁰ She observes people who adopt narrative identities, which are multi-vocal, fluid, flexible and focused on connection with other people.⁴¹ In her view, religious diversity is enriching for theology, religion and society as a whole. Although we need to acknowledge the differences between people with respect to religion, she believes it is necessary to find new ways of religious belonging and connection. She also argues that different religious traditions reveal the richness of the relationship between humanity and the divine more fully than any single religion can.

Some post-colonial feminists have identified and criticized a Western bias in Christian theology. Laura Donaldson and Kwok Pui-Lan⁴² have analyzed how people of both an underprivileged gender and ethnicity are particularly vulnerable to oppression by religious structures. They argue that women at these

³⁷ King, “Feminism”; Egnell, *Other Voices*; Gross, “Excuse Me”; Fletcher, “Shifting Identity”.

³⁸ Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*; Sointu and Woodhead, “Spirituality”.

³⁹ Fletcher, “Shifting Identity,” 11.

⁴⁰ Kalsky, *Maak het verschil*, 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴² Donaldson and Kwok, *Postcolonialism*, 15.

intersections are often denied the opportunity to express their religious experiences and feelings. Often these religious expressions show a certain kind of hybridity. The Korean feminist theologian Chung Hyun Kyung⁴³ observes hybrid religiosity from the perspective of economic, cultural and gender antagonisms; the inequality between rich and poor, the West and ‘the rest’ and men and women. From her personal experience she realized that the academic study of theology often favors rich, white and privileged males, while the religious experiences of the poor, female and under-privileged have remained unstudied and unacknowledged. Chung proposes a hybrid theology of solidarity, which she calls a “survival-liberation centered syncretism” which mixes a religious “gut-feeling” from the experience of poor underprivileged women with their understanding of the symbols of Jesus and Mary in a Christian context, and with the clear goal of the liberation and empowerment of the underprivileged.⁴⁴

Many of the critiques from gender and post-colonial studies focus on the problematic character of the issue of borders between religious traditions. Michele Saracino, a religious studies scholar, writes: “The more one probes the essence of borders, the more it becomes apparent that there is nothing at all certain about them; they are those places that are known only by what we feel in their proximity. Yet, it is the emotional impact of them - the very thing that signifies borders - that continues to be overlooked”⁴⁵ Multiple religious belonging challenges the borders between religious traditions and has therefore become the subject of heated debates.

The feminist and post-colonial critiques of the model of theology of religions challenge the concept of religious traditions as “bounded wholes” with fixed borders. This understanding does not always take into account the fact that religious traditions also have internal diversity and that it is therefore impossible to speak from the perspective of a religious tradition as a whole. Also, these critiques point to the fact that identities are always complex and that individuals always move on the intersection of different identities, for example by being a Christian woman born in an Asian country. Religious belonging might be better understood as a kind of “gut-feeling”, in the words of Chung, or in the connection with the religious other, in the interpretation of Kalsky.

4 Towards an intercultural approach of multiple religious belonging

What has become clear from my analysis of the various approaches to multiple religious belonging is that key terms of theology and religious studies have contested meanings. In traditional theological approaches, the understanding of “religions” is different from the critiques and observations in feminist and post-colonial theology. While the former approaches understand religions as bounded traditions, the latter approaches contest the boundaries of religious traditions and argue that we should attest for the internal diversity within religious traditions. The concept of religious belonging has also been debated and interpreted differently in the various approaches.

In intercultural philosophy it has been noted that religion is understood differently in many Asian countries. Jan Van Bragt, a Belgian intercultural theologian, says that in Japan, for example, there have never been any *a priori* theological objections against adherence to several “religious” traditions at the same time.⁴⁶ He says that it might be the case that the rise of interest in more hybrid forms of religiosity in the West is actually an evolution in the direction of the traditional Japanese understanding of religion, where religion is seen as something open-ended. According to Van Bragt, the rise of multiple religious belonging might prompt an “Easternization” of the concept of religion in the West.

Several known “multiple believers” have pointed to the necessity of integrating Asian understandings of religion into the common theological frameworks of the West, often from a perspective similar to the

⁴³ Chung, *Struggle*, 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁵ Saracino, *Being About Borders*, 13.

⁴⁶ Bragt, “Multiple Religious Belonging”.

pluralists. Aloysius Pieris, a Sri Lankan Jesuit theologian who immersed himself in Buddhist religion,⁴⁷ sees the different expressions of religious traditions as different and “mutually corrective instincts of the human spirit”.⁴⁸ Pieris observes a difference between his Western Christian tradition, which he understands as focusing on *agape* or redemptive love, and the Eastern Buddhist tradition, which focuses on *gnosis* or liberating knowledge.⁴⁹ The Vietnamese comparative philosopher Phan says an Asian hermeneutical method could help us to gain deeper and more intercultural insights into multiple religious belonging.⁵⁰ Within Asian theology, Phan argues, far less focus is put on the method of theology because “theology in Asia is regarded not primarily as *scientia* or *sapientia*”.⁵¹ Instead, Phan argues that theology in the East is understood as critical reflection on practices. According to Phan it seems that Western theology is concerned with the “practice of thought”, while Eastern theology focuses on the “thought on practice”.

In China, as well, where many of the cultural patterns characteristic of East Asia originated, religious diversity has historically been conceptualized differently from the Western concepts of religion, which have often stresses religious exclusivity. The historical discourses on religious diversity in China have often stressed the complementarity of religious traditions, without the necessity or possibility of belonging to any religious tradition in particular.⁵² In China, religious traditions have been considered as various schools of thought that serve different pragmatic functions in life. Therefore, each religious tradition has a specific place in the organization of Chinese society.

The hermeneutical frameworks for religious diversity in East Asia enable us to think about multiple religious belonging in a different way. I would like to point out three important features of these frameworks. First, religious multiplicity is understood differently in East Asia. Western frameworks of religious diversity focus on the fact that religious traditions are mutually exclusive. In East Asia, religious traditions are often understood as complementary teachings, each of which focuses on a different aspect of life. Therefore, anyone can combine various teachings as part of his or her religious commitment. Second, also religious belonging is not understood in the same way in East Asia. Although people might be committed to their religious duties, in East Asian hermeneutical frameworks of religion, this does not entail belonging to a religion in the way that it is understood in the West. The idea of belonging is connected to the family, the village or city, ethnicity or culture, but not to religious teachings. Religious teachings and practices that are native to these groups are therefore part of someone’s belonging. Religious and ethnic belonging are not separated, however. If the ethnic group to which someone belongs has multiple religious practices, this does not lead to tensions between religious commitments. Third, in East Asia religious teachings have less to do with doctrines and more with practices. In Western theology, doctrines from different religions are often mutually exclusive. In East Asia, religious teachings are characterized by the practices they promote. Therefore, the combination of practices from various religious traditions does not imply any irreconcilability.

As I have argued, the central debate on multiple religious belonging in theology of religions is conducted between particularists and pluralists. Neither perspective, however, accounts for the blurring of the boundaries between religious traditions and the hybrid character of religious belonging. In feminist and post-colonial theology the boundaries between religious traditions are contested. These contestations change the concepts of religion, religious diversity and religious belonging. They argue that religion should no longer be understood as religious traditions, but rather as “religiosity”; religious diversity refers therefore not only to the diversity of religions, but also to the diversity of expressions of religiosity; and religious belonging should not only be understood as belonging to a (or multiple) religious tradition(s), but as different modes of connecting with religious groups. My final observation is that these new understandings of religion, religious multiplicity and religious belonging have often been the norm in Asian religion. To fully understand the implications of these new conceptualizations and to acquire a clearer understanding

⁴⁷ Premawardhana, “Unremarkable Hybrid”.

⁴⁸ Harris, “Double Belonging,” 86.

⁴⁹ Dupuis, “Christianity and Religions,” 72.

⁵⁰ Phan, “Whose Experiences,” 5.

⁵¹ Ibid., 7.

⁵² Gentz, “Religious Diversity”.

of multiple religious belonging, we might benefit from studying the hermeneutical frameworks of religiosity in Asia more closely.

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