PART FOUR

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
In most parts of the world, Christians live among people of other religions. In the Americas, or rather in North America, and Europe the situation has been different, and society has been less pluralistic. In some European countries, secularization has been very strong and the very visible presence of Muslims is an especially new factor that is at the center of public debate. Religious pluralism takes different forms, depending on the context of the other religious traditions that are present and on the constitutional arrangements made by the state.

The radicalization of pluralism and the conflictive relations between traditions profoundly affect the theology of religions. I will cite two developments.

The first is that, as Christians, we cannot only think about other traditions and not converse with their adherents. The only way to develop a theology of religions is to study other traditions first and only then evaluate them theologically. A theology of religions cannot be a priori. That is, we cannot sit down and say to ourselves, “there are other people with different beliefs from mine that I do not understand—what do I think about them?” On the contrary, if we respect our neighbors we will want to know what they think, how they view life, and learn from them. Moreover, if we take them seriously, we will discuss views that we consider strange or not true—and perhaps dangerous—and listen to them when they question our faith and practices. To speak about faith and to give account of one’s faith is always a dialogue and not a monologue. We do not have the truth: all we can do is testify to the truth. We do not have the whole truth, and therefore we can learn from other traditions. Even with respect to our own Christian beliefs, we are often mistaken and need others to question our understanding of our own tradition. The norm in every conversation in which we take