In this paper I want to raise, and attempt some provisional responses to, four questions. First, what is a theology of religions? Secondly, is a theology of religions needed for Pentecostal-Charismatic (PC) theology? Thirdly, are there within the PC tradition and community the necessary resources by which such a theology can be fashioned? And, finally, is a theology of religions to be desired by Pentecostals and Charismatics (PCs)?

1. What Is a Theology of Religions?

A theology of religions poses the question of whether or not the religions are related to the divine providence, and, if they are, then how so.1 This question has gradually emerged during the past century as a...
result of a much greater awareness among Christians than previously of the diversity of religions. This situation, known also as that of religious pluralism, has required that Christians once again confront the question of the religions.²

Christian theologians have argued three basic positions regarding the religions: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.³ Although the boundaries are by no means cut and dried, it is generally accurate to say that exclusivists hold salvation to be available only in Jesus Christ to the extent that those who have never heard the gospel are eternally lost whether or not they are religiously inclined or involved. In this scheme of things, the non-Christian religions play no role in the history of salvation, being either failed human efforts to secure salvation at best or demonically inspired to deceive humankind at worst.⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, the pluralists, who derive primarily, although not


2. For a discussion of what makes the present encounter with the religions qualitatively different from that which confronted the early Christians and previous eras of church history, see Kenneth Cracknell, Towards a New Relationship: Christians and People of Other Faith (London: Epworth Press, 1986).

3. This typology was popularized initially by Alan Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), and has been by far the most dominant—even if not the only—model utilized in Christian discourse regarding theology of religions.

4. This has been the traditional position of the church, and had been upheld by Roman Catholicism until as recently as Vatican II. Signaled by the extra ecclesiae nulla salus formula (‘no salvation outside the church’), its proponents include Augustine, Calvin and the Princeton theologians. For a history, see Francis A. Sullivan, Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), from the Catholic perspective; and Molly Truman Marshall, No Salvation outside the Church? A Critical Inquiry (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), from the Protestant. Among Evangelicals it is also known as restrictivism or particularism, and has been reinvigorated by the recent work of Harold Netland, Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Ronald H. Nash, Is Jesus the Only Savior? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, ‘A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach’, in Dennis L. Ockholm and Timothy R. Phillips (eds.), More Than One Way? Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 211-45; and Millard J. Erickson, How Shall They Be Saved? The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), among others.