

BEING FLUENT IN TWO RELIGIONS

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Abstract

This article uses George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model of religion and the subsequent analogy between religion and language to explore issues arising from practices of dual or multiple religious belonging. Taking the concept of 'fluency' in religion as a way of thinking about degrees of belonging, it looks at the available sociological evidence about dual religious (mainly Buddhist-Christian) belonging and seeks to reinterpret the issues involved in light of the religion-as-language analogy. This analogy opens up new perspectives on sociological information about multiple religious belonging and reframes potential theological issues with it. The article weaves together sociological observations and theoretical ideas coming from a theological background to show how seeing 'belonging' in the light of 'fluency' can usefully reshape understandings of multiple religious belonging.

Keywords

Lindbeck, multiple religious belonging, hyphenated identities, cultural-linguistic

Introduction

Most literature produced so far on the subject of multiple religious belonging focuses either on describing it in a sociological way or on argument for it or against it from the perspective of a particular religion.^a In this article, I offer a way of describing and assessing it

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^a On the sociological side, see for example (Drew 2011) For religious – Buddhist – arguments in favour of multiple religious belonging, see (Nhat Hanh 1995) For religious – Christian – arguments against dual belonging, see (Cornille 2003) And for a Christian note of caution which nevertheless concludes positively and thus complicates this picture, see (Phan 2003)

which does not depend on the claims of a particular religion, although it arises from the reflections of a Christian theologian on the issue of doctrine. The concept of fluency, based on the analogy between religions and languages, will be useful in assessing the claims and status of people who are practicing dual or multiple religious belonging. It provides a language for describing levels of knowledge and involvement while also reflecting the complexities and flexibilities of real-world belonging.

I begin with a discussion of George Lindbeck's understanding of religion, describing his cultural-linguistic model and the concept of 'fluency' which arises from it, as well as some possible problems with it. Once the picture of what it means to be fluent in a religion is clear, I move on to describe some of the sociological findings relating to multiple religious belonging and the anxieties this can produce for (some of) the religions involved before commenting on the ways in which the concept of fluency helps us to reconceptualise and resolve some of these issues.

Lindbeck's model of religion

The core idea in Lindbeck's understanding of religion, and specifically of doctrine, is that it will help to think of religions as 'cultural-linguistic' entities: a religion is something like a culture (although Lindbeck does not develop this idea in detail and I will be leaving it aside in this paper) and something like a language. Lindbeck views language through a Wittgensteinian lens, focussing on its social nature and rule-guided or game-like aspects, (Lindbeck 1984, 33) and sees an analogy between natural languages, especially the way they can develop while remaining true to their grammar, and religious doctrine, which can also change and develop while seeming correct or 'grammatical' to those who are familiar with them.

Lindbeck's argument develops the analogical themes of 'religion as language' and 'doctrine as grammar' in detail. For example, he says that doctrines (whether official or operational, explicit or assumed) should be taken as second-order claims within the system rather than as ontological claims (Lindbeck 1984, 76, 80).^b This leads to the observation that doctrines may be mistaken in the same range of ways as grammar books: they may be unaware of important exceptions to a rule, they may seek to force arbitrary preferences or alien structures onto a language, and they may miss a deeper but relevant rule, among other possibilities (Lindbeck 1984, 202).

The religion-as-language analogy also offers the notion of the fluent speaker who, familiar with the grammar of a language, knows best:

The experts must on occasion bow to the superior wisdom of the competent speaker who simply knows that such and such is right or wrong even though it violates the rules they have formulated. (Lindbeck 1984, 82)^c

Developed in relation to doctrine, this leads Lindbeck to the idea that doctrinal formulations should be tested by "competent practitioners of that religion" (Lindbeck 1984, 99).

This idea creates the obvious challenge of identifying such people. Lindbeck poses the problem in relation to Christianity as follows:

Who are the competent practitioners? Who have the pious ears? Are they Arians or Athanasians, Catholics or Protestants, the masses of conventional churchgoers or an elite of saints and theologians? Competence in natural language is easy to identify. It is possessed by native speakers and a few non-native ones who can communicate effectively in a given tongue. The limits of the language are marked by the point at which variations in dialect become so great that communication is impossible apart

^b It is also worth noting in this connection that Lindbeck distinguishes doctrine from theology, theology being related to doctrine but not communally normative.

^c Lindbeck's note at this point indicates that he derives the idea of "appealing to the 'intuitions' of those who are linguistically 'competent'" from Noam Chomsky, although in broad rather than technical terms. (Lindbeck 1984, footnote, 90)

from learning the idiom as foreign speech. Among Christians, however, there are many groups who seem to speak mutually unintelligible dialects. This has been true not only of marginal sects such as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Christian Scientists but also for major groups such as Arians and Athanasians, Latins and Greeks, Catholics and Protestants. Which claimants to the authentic Christian tongue should be heeded? (Lindbeck 1984, 99)

Lindbeck overstates the simplicity of the natural language case here – there are pairs of languages which are called two tongues even though they are mutually comprehensible, and sociolects of English which require special training without leaving the language (such as academic ways of speaking and writing). I would also want to say that even within native languages, some speakers are more fluent, have wider vocabularies, or use more socially acceptable grammar than others (perhaps some are also more adept at code-switching, or using grammar and dialect which is appropriate to a particular social context). However, this does not take away from, but rather adds to, the difficulty of identifying the 'pious ears' who can test doctrinal formulations for orthodoxy.

Lindbeck's own answer, for a religion as a whole, is that we should seek those who are fully competent, for whom their religion has "become a native language, the primary medium in which they think, feel, act, and dream" (Lindbeck 1984, 100).^d He calls the demand for competence "the empirical equivalent of insisting on the Spirit as one of the tests of doctrine", and expects that if we seek these people in "the mainstream, rather than in isolated backwaters or ingrown sects", we will find that they have an "empirically recognizable" competence which tends to agree with others in the same position. This agreement, Lindbeck says, "may not improperly be called infallible", giving the example of a "virtually unanimous and enduring agreement among flexible and yet deeply pious Muslims

^d As I am not sure what it would be to dream in Christian or Hindu, I take this remark to be relatively poetic, stressing mainly the completeness of a religious way of life (that it impacts all areas of life) and the idea of immersion accompanying fluency.

throughout the world" which would be evidence that anything so agreed was "not in contradiction to the inner logic of Islam" – although he admits that "the practical difficulties of verifying the existence of such a consensus may be insuperable" (Lindbeck 1984, 100-101).

In considering the case of multiple religious belonging, the practical difficulty may not be so much of a concern, if it is reasonable to think that consensus is possible and that the fluent individuals can be identified in some circumstances. The difficulties may be reduced by reducing the scope of the exercise – to consult all fluent speakers of Islam may well be impossible, but to consult members of a denomination within a religion would be easier, especially if the pool of possible candidates is also limited by geographical or other scope. A thriving religious community at the local level – the worshippers at a particular church, for example – could reasonably be expected to contain at least some fluent speakers, and they as a group would be well placed to consult one another and reach a consensus. Working at this congregational or equivalent level it will be much easier to ask questions about whether an individual is accepted into the community as well as whether other fluent speakers in that community consider them to speak the religion correctly.

In considering this argument, D. Z. Phillips asks whether the metaphor of religion as language could have been applied at the beginning of Christianity, when the Christians were only "a sect" (Phillips 1995, 221). He concludes – almost before he has stated the problem – that Christians would have been ruled to be out of line with the accepted doctrine and therefore mistaken. However, I think that this is a premature conclusion; Lindbeck can readily argue that the fluent group needs to be within a single religious tradition. The new religion, Christianity, may be small but it has an internal group of competent speakers – just as the larger Jewish and Pagan groups around them have their competent speakers. This solution brings new problems, of course, such as how we draw those boundaries (Phillips is

correct if the new 'religion' is judged to be within the older religion), but those can be solved in turn. In any case, the line between a dialect and a different language is rarely sharp, so finding groups within groups does not automatically scupper the analogy between religion and language. Indeed, it might work in the opposite direction, suggesting that languages and religions do sometimes develop in parallel ways.

A bigger problem with Lindbeck's proposal is that it does, as indicated above, rely on our ability to identify a group who are all speaking, or trying to speak, the same religion. In the modern Western situation, where many religions may be on offer to an individual and an increasing number of people have been members of more than one religious group (either serially or concurrently), it will not be easy to establish this separation. It cannot, for one thing, be established by considering the language used, at least at a surface level, since the technical terms in a religious vocabulary may be drawn from ordinary language, or at least have a wide circulation in the natural language within which the religious is being expressed: not only the words used in metaphorical phrases ('bread' and 'life') but also specific words ('angel', 'altar', and even 'God') are widely used in secular contexts.

However, in practice a number of groups do persist through time, and the voluntary sharing of space and labels tells us much about them. Katherine Tanner has addressed this problem; her work project focuses on the cultural part of the cultural-linguistic model. She explores the idea of religions and cultures thoroughly in her book *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. There, she describes some of the problematic assumptions found in Lindbeck's work, for example that "Christians have their own language, their own ways of doing, understanding, and feeling; people who are not Christian have some other," and that "one does not work from what one already knows in the process of becoming a Christian – say, by translating a new Christian language into the language one already uses", and goes on to say that this "description ... of the postliberal account of Christian identity is nonetheless a

caricature in that followers of George Lindbeck gladly admit that a Christian way of life is influenced by outside cultures, mixed up with and modified by them" (Tanner 1997, 104-5). She argues, though, that this caricature "remains a good likeness... because postliberals interpret the mixed character of Christian discourse and the composite nature of a Christian outlook in ways that again strongly suggest the self-contained and self-originating character of Christian identity" (Tanner 1997, 105). Given the facts mentioned above, for example, about the sharing of vocabulary between Christian and secular speech, Tanner says that postliberals would argue that "vocabulary or conceptuality of doctrines may be so influenced [by outside forces] but not the basic rules by which they abide" (Tanner 1997, 105).

This explanation helps us to see that Lindbeck's postliberal position rests on the idea of rules – in the metaphor of religion as language, grammatical rules – which are internal to the religion in question and which produce and sustain it. Tanner's broader project looks to complicate this picture, considering the many ways in which Christian language is "essentially transferred or metaphorical language" and Christian practices are "always the practices of others made odd" (Tanner 1997, 113). However, for the purposes of this article it is enough to say that the borrowed or transferred language and practice must be made to conform to the internal grammar of Christianity – it is 'made odd' when removed from the previous setting and changed to fit the new one. (For a linguistic parallel, consider the process of anglicisation when a word is borrowed into English from another language. Not only do pronunciations and sometimes spelling change, but also grammar: in Japanese, the plural of 'ninja' is 'ninja', but in English it is often 'ninjas', despite the fact that English speakers can cope perfectly well with irregular plurals such as one sheep/two sheep.) In Lindbeck's model, it is the fluent speakers of the religion who make this kind of change as their grasp of the existing grammar of the religion allows them to judge whether a newly borrowing use is acceptable.

In this paper, the concept of fluency serves as an alternative way of framing the concept of belonging, and provides a depth and complexity to it. It is possible to belong to an organisation or a religion at many different levels, with more or less knowledge and commitment, as will be discussed in the next section. To be fluent in the religion and its ways of speaking and working is to have a deeper knowledge of it and usually involves a deeper commitment to it, as fluency takes time and practice to acquire. 'Fluency' offers the image of levels of fluency, familiar in language and visible in belonging, so that it becomes possible to say that some members of a religion are fully fluent (some will even be, in Lindbeck's terms, a 'fluent elite' who help to preserve the core of the religion in the midst of changes) while others are fluent at a basic working level or are just beginning to learn to 'speak the religion'.^e Fluency is also something which can be recognised by others – mainly those within the religion, who already speak the language, but it also has features such as comfort and confidence which are visible to those on the outside of the group. It is tied to practice (both to non-linguistic practices and to practise in the sense of repetition) and to familiarity with the contexts within which a language is used. Thus, it is also linked to the practices and forms of life which are constituent parts of a religion, but it is still possible to accept that some people will learn something of a religion or a language from textbooks, divorced from the original context of the material. In the next section, I consider the practice of multiple religious belonging quite broadly and examine some of the academic literature around it, before drawing in the idea of 'fluency' as an analytical tool which will help us to re-describe and hence better understand some of the theoretical problems created by multiple religious belonging.

^e Some authors have taken this metaphor and used it more or less directly for other discussions of religious language – Marcus Borg uses it in the title of a book which essentially sets out to teach new uses of old Christian terminology. See for example (Hauerwas 2011; Borg 2011)

Multiple religious belonging

That at least some people claim to belong in some sense to more than one religious tradition is not hard to establish. Gideon Goosen's 2007 paper found thirty-three in Sydney, Australia, in a short time by word-of-mouth, and many writers include in their considerations of the topic an anecdote about someone or a list of names of people who are in this position.^f It is difficult to provide any statistical idea of how many people in a given place find themselves in the position of practising some kind of multiple belonging, not least because most surveys and censuses do not recognise the possibility and are only able to record individuals under one religion. Furthermore, it is not always clear in what sense people belong to a religion – of Goosen's thirty-three participants, only four gave hyphenated identities, and the rest were influenced by more than one tradition but now clear about which provided their 'home' (so that he counts, for example, someone who grew up in a Roman Catholic family but is now a Zen Buddhist as being 'both Christian and Buddhist' in some sense, although they may never have identified as both at once) (Goosen 2007). Similarly, Rose Drew's 2011 book, *Buddhist and Christian? An exploration of dual belonging*, draws on in-depth interviews with and the published writings of six participants, all of whom she identifies as having dual Buddhist and Christian belongings, although it should be noted that not all of them would use this terminology, and by the end of the book, she has begun to argue that not all of these six people are equally fully members of both religious traditions (Drew 2011).

Other, less academic, texts on dual or multiple religious belonging suggest that it is, if not common, then at least recurrent: *The Jew in the Lotus* focusses on dialogue between

^f For example, Phan lists Henri Le Saux (also known as Swami Abhishiktananda), Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle, Thomas Merton, Bede Griffiths, Raimundo Panikkar, Michael Rodrigo, and Aloysius Pieris, giving a brief gloss of the Christian and Eastern positions which they combine, and the list given early on in Goosen's book gives Bhawani Charen Banerji, Henri le Saux, Jules Monchanin, Bede Griffiths, Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle, Aloysius Pieris, William Johnston, Father Oshida, Michael Rodrigo, Raimundo Panikkar, Roger Corless, and Robert Magliola. This amount of overlap is typical, and perhaps speaks to the relatively limited size of the available literature. (Phan 2003, 507-8) and (Goosen 2011, 22)

representatives of several Jewish communities and the Dalai Lama, but also discusses belonging to both Judaism and Buddhism (Kamenetz 1995). An essay in *Yentl's Revenge*, 'Challah for the Queen of Heaven', describes the author's spiritual journey and her attempts to belong to both Wicca and Judaism (which were, at the time when she was writing, partially successful but not without discomfort) (Kamenetz 1995). Online, discussion can be found of most possible combinations: plenty of people are discussing their experience of combining Buddhism with Judaism, Buddhism with Christianity, Christianity with Neo-Paganism, Christianity with Hinduism, and so forth. Some combinations – Christianity or Judaism combined with an Eastern religion or a New Religious Movement – seem most common in the English-speaking world, and are more likely to be spoken about in terms of dual belonging. Multiple religious belonging is one among several trends, such as the movement away from organised religion and towards individual spirituality, which may interact; for example, Meredith McGuire in her work on women's individual religious practices notes that "one of my colleague-friends considers herself a 'spiritual but not religious' Jew-Buddhist-Wiccan" (McGuire 2008, location 1410).

While we are establishing that multiple religious belonging exists in the West, it might also be worth saying a few things about its origins.[§] Jeffrey Carlson notes that at the 1993 and 1999 International Parliaments of the World's Religions, "many participants needed hyphens or dashes to list their religious affiliations when they registered" (Carlson 2003, 77). There is some evidence – Carlson's observation and other anecdotes, as well as Rose Drew's in-depth study of six participants who engaged in Buddhist-Christian dual belonging – to suggest that dual or multiple belonging often begins with or is associated with processes of interreligious dialogue. Some people might be children of interfaith couples, in which case their dual religious belonging – if they are raised in both their parents' traditions – would be

[§] In Asian countries, patterns are quite different. See papers on Japan and Sri Lanka, (Cornille 2010)

interlocked with their parents' navigation of any interreligious difficulties.^h Most, however, are raised in one tradition and then begin to engage in another, which they encounter through reading, personal contact, or travel (or a mixture of these). Seeking contact without conversion, a common feature of the explorations of those who end up belonging to multiple religious traditions,ⁱ interfaith dialogue settings have obvious attractions.

It is noticeable in the literature that those who think that true dual religious belonging is very rare or even impossible tend to have a very high standard for belonging, and of those, Catherine Cornille's is probably the hardest standard to achieve: she demands a "complete surrender" to a particular tradition and argues that one cannot surrender completely to more than one religion (Cornille 2003, 48).^j If you accept this as the standard of religious belonging, then Cornille may well be right; certainly, her picture of what one "might rightly" call "an experience of double religious belonging", in which one takes two different traditions as normative over different areas of life, so that Buddhism may "be believed to be true and normative in certain fundamental questions and Christianity in others" seems like a plausible form of syncretism (Cornille 2003, 46).^k However, I also suspect that her model of complete surrender to a religious tradition would be distasteful to many modern religious people – those who value and wish to retain the individual freedom they have, for example, who are likely to be a significant subset of the seekers who are attracted to the possibility of multiple religious belonging. Submitting "to the absolute authority of a Buddhist teacher on some issues and to a Christian teacher on others" hardly seems like a step forward if you do not wish to submit to the absolute authority of a human teacher at all, even if you get to choose

^h For examples mainly focussed on Jewish-Christian interfaith families, see (Miller 2013)

ⁱ It is presumably possible to convert from one tradition to another, and then add a third tradition as described here, or to convert and then return to a previous tradition and thereby end up with a dual belonging, but I have not found anyone describing this process in the literature. Exactly what constitutes 'conversion' will vary between religions, as they have different criteria for belonging.

^j I note that, in the context of this article, she is only considering the possibility of being both Christian and Buddhist – this is something we will see in much of the literature. Tilley and Albarran suggest that Eastern religions such as Buddhism "which can be embraced, in some of its forms, with minimal or no 'doctrinal' commitments that conflict with the expectations that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam place on their adherents" are correspondingly more attractive to Westerners from those Abrahamic backgrounds. (Tilley and Albarran 2007, 162)

^k Unlike Cornille, I do not think that syncretism is necessarily bad.

the issues! (Cornille 2003, 46) Nor is it a widely-recognised Christian standard of belonging; churches do not, and have never, generally requested this, and so it seems to be a strange choice for a criteria of belonging in the first place. For all these reasons, I find it unlikely that many practitioners of multiple religious belonging would be upset by their failure to reach Cornille's standard.

It is not entirely clear what would be involved in this surrender. Elsewhere Cornille mentions "unswerving and single-minded commitment to" one's own tradition and says that:

Religious belonging implies more than a subjective sense of sympathy or endorsement of a selective number of beliefs and practices. It involves the recognition of one's religious identity by the tradition itself and the disposition to submit to the conditions of membership as delineated by that tradition. (Cornille 2010, 3-4)

The issue of reciprocal recognition of religious identity is an important one. The other criterion given here, submission to the conditions of membership given by a religious tradition, is related but would come closer to Cornille's 'full surrender' model of religious belonging. It is difficult to see how this would be applied in some cases – for example, where there is disagreement within a religion about what the conditions of membership should be. In these cases, are some people members of one denomination but not the whole religion? To whose authority should they – and we as observers – submit on this question? In such cases, there seems to be an important and continuing space for individual self-definition, which is in turn likely to be based on a "sense of sympathy" and "endorsement of ... beliefs and practices"; that the endorsement will be more or less selective is de-emphasised when we note that most religious practitioners are selective to some degree, not managing to attend every event or agree in equal measure with all claims. I also want to argue, however, that fluency could be a useful way of discussing degrees of belonging.

Among the several approaches to multiple religious belonging which are to be found in the literature, some seem to have concerns in common with Lindbeck's worries about the continuation of fluent elites. For example, Peter Phan, although generally supportive of multiple religious belonging as a practice, has concerns about those who should undertake it (Phan 2003, 519).¹ Having described some people who have succeeded in practising what he considers to be an acceptable form of multiple religious belonging – he dwells on their depth and breadth of knowledge, long experience, academic achievements, and devotion to masters trained in the 'second tradition' – he goes on to say that:

While it has been made more acceptable by recent theologies of religions [pluralisms], its practice by people, especially the young, who do not possess the necessary qualifications that were present, to an eminent degree, in those pioneers, can easily lead to the 'nebulous esoteric mysticism' and 'Nietzschean neo-paganism' that we have been warned against [in *Dominus Iesus*]. (Phan 2003, 514)

This seems reminiscent of Lindbeck's concern about whether practitioners are truly fluent in their religious tradition, not least because to maintain Phan's model of good multiple religious belonging we would need also to preserve a core of 'masters', a 'fluent elite' who are trained very thoroughly in their tradition and able to teach it to others with confidence. (It could also be argued that if a tradition preserves a pure elite, it is 'safe' and need not worry about others being syncretistic; but Jeffery Carlson has argued that all traditions are already engaged in a form of syncretism (Carlson 2000). If this is correct, then the elite may not be so pure and is certainly not as far removed in form from the non-elite syncretists.) It is not clear from Phan's writing whether he thinks that members of this fluent elite could also be knowledgeable about other religious traditions, but it is clear that he thinks that without

¹ He says that it "it not unlike martyrdom... it is not something one looks for or demands at will. Rather it is a gift to be received in fear and trembling and in gratitude and joy." (Phan 2003, 519)

sufficient training in each religion, people can go astray – and so because of the time and effort required to achieve this level, multiple religious belonging should remain a rarity.

However, to return to the language metaphor, it is possible to accept that it is difficult to become fully fluent in multiple languages, and still encourage people to try. Terrance Tilley and Louis Albarran use this metaphor, saying that "Just as one may know two languages fluently, so one may come to know and accept two (or more) faith traditions" (Tilley and Albarran 2007, 166). I would agree with this, but note that in languages, ordinary people do not think that there is much if any harm in someone knowing a very small amount – I have never heard someone argue that it is dangerous to have a few words of Spanish and be able to order a drink in German as well as speaking English natively. And yet, in the religion as language metaphor, this would be analogous to the kind of situation which people are keen to avoid with regards to religion: there does seem to be the possibility of setting the bar on religious belonging too low, and causing other problems because of that.

In his book *Hyphenated Christians*, Goosen suggests that adopting a single word or practice from another religion might be enough for a kind of dual belonging, a kind which does not violate the precepts of the person's first religion. Compared with Cornille's idea of total surrender, this would be a very low bar indeed for religious belonging. Goosen focusses on the idea that if a practice works for an individual, if it makes them feel closer to God or the transcendent, they might as well use it. For example, he describes the gestures used in Islamic prayer and then says:

If Christians find this symbolic act more meaningful than what they normally do, why could they not use it in prayer? If it leads them to God in prayer, why not? To some extent they are 'belonging' to Islam but without adopting any incompatible act.
(Goosen 2011, 112)

The scare quotes suggest that Goosen agrees with me that this is not a full dual belonging,

and other scholars take the same line. Tilley and Albarran mention interreligious dialogue and the availability of information about other religions as important factors in the increase of multiple religious belonging – although they also note that there will be much borrowing which is not true belonging: "Reading *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* on a Sunday afternoon, having attended a Catholic mass that morning, or engaging in Zen meditation or yoga during a Christian retreat does not constitute multiple religious belonging" (Tilley and Albarran 2007, 161).

The way in which Goosen talks about using small parts of other religions in the context of one's main practice also points to a problem with this approach – not only that it advocates a kind of 'supermarket religious practice', although it does approach that model, but also that, even though Goosen says that this use will be "respectful" it does not follow a model of sharing or reciprocal borrowing (Goosen 2011, 111). His main concern – reasonably enough in a book about Christians – is whether other religious practices can be borrowed without contravening Christian teaching, but more widely there are possible concerns about whether such borrowing is fair. For example, Goosen suggests that Christians might use the holy syllable 'OM', "a most sacred [sound] used at the beginning of Hindu prayers" (Goosen 2011, 111). He does not mention whether Hindus approve of this or not; probably some wouldn't mind and some would have objections, but it would be interesting to know what forms their arguments took. Some might, for example, find it offensive, especially if the Christians concerned did not understand how and why the sound is regarded as sacred within Hinduism.^m If the practice became widespread, some might feel that their religious practice had been taken away from them and perhaps weakened or cheapened by the Christian use. This situation is especially politically laden in the post-colonial context.

Goosen might simply not know what would be said in this specific case, but an

^m This should not be taken to imply that Hindus agree about how or why 'OM' is sacred.

analogy with other cases of cultural or religious appropriation suggests some of the points which the discussion would be likely to include.ⁿ One of the most significant points which has occurred in other related conversations, both academic and less formal, involves a concern about maintaining the dignity and integrity of a tradition when words and practices from it are routinely used without much if any understanding by another members of culture – especially if that culture is, in the context, a dominant or hegemonic one.^o This has been an acute problem for and articulated by many Native Americans; for example, in 1993 the Lakota Summit V issued a declaration of war, saying that, "for too long we have suffered the unspeakable indignity of having our most precious Lakota ceremonies and spiritual practices desecrated, mocked and abused by non-Indian "wannabes," hucksters, cultists, commercial profiteers and self-styled "New Age shamans" and their followers" (Mesteth, Elk, and Hawk 1993). Hinduism has sometimes been treated in a similar way, as when images of Kali or Ganesh are used as decoration without respect for their origins or meaning to believers (being printed on tins of mints, t-shirts, or toilet seats, for example), although the largest debate about appropriation from Hinduism is about the use and teaching of yoga as non-religious. With these cases in mind, it is clear that Christians using 'OM' at the beginning of prayers are also appropriating something which is not theirs to use and thereby engaging in a practice which, especially because they are likely to misunderstand the importance of the syllable when it has been transported into this new context, is likely to be offensive Hindus and members of other religions – such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism – which use it regularly.

ⁿ For more about some specific cases of religious appropriation, see (2012)

^o Much work on cultural appropriation has happened within contexts of recent or post colonisation by white Europeans; it is in many ways a post-colonial issue although it can take place within other dynamics as well.

Being fluent in more than one religion

I now want to reframe the issue of multiple religious belonging in terms of fluency in religions and consider how this can help resolve some of the problems. Fluency is not an exact point in the process of learning a language, but it does suggest competency. It involves knowledge and accurate use of a range of grammatical rules. There is no direct equivalent to Cornille's 'complete surrender' standard for true belonging in the religion-as-language metaphor, and indeed the value judgement implied by that position (that anything less than complete surrender is insufficient commitment for true belonging) is undermined by the metaphor especially if the position taken in regard to language variants is to view a range of possible ways of speaking as equally acceptable. I would argue that this is the correct position to take, not least because it has the advantage that it accepts a range of valid possibilities while still regarding some things as unacceptable, depending on context. For example, a poet may be able to verb a noun in an unusual way, and the speaker of a dialect can continue to use the words specific to that dialect, but in both cases and in other settings there are specific and describable rules, and speakers familiar with the language and the context will be able to tell if and when those rules are broken. Thus, if religions are like languages in this way, then each religion or denomination will have their own rules, sometimes overlapping but often different.

This also addresses the issue raised by Goosen's very low standard for multiple religious belonging, the use of a single word or practice from another religious tradition. Here, the language equivalent is something like the borrowing of a new word from another language – often done, as we know, where the object or idea described is new to the speakers of the language doing the borrowing (for example, 'coffee', now used in English and ultimately from Arabic via Turkish and Dutch, following the spread of the beverage). In some cases this will be entirely benign, and in others it may have worrying implications (for

example, the absorption into English and subsequent reapplication of the word 'shaman' may disguise very real differences between indigenous traditions so described), but putting the question into the frame provided by the religion as language metaphor helps us to describe the possible risks and benefits of such borrowings.

Returning to the issue of objections to multiple religious belonging, some are focussed on a worry about people taking a consumerist attitude to religion – Drew's participants often "explicitly criticised 'supermarket' spirituality or New Age religiosity, and the superficiality they perceived in it" (Drew 2011, 218). Drew goes on to say that one element of this critique is "an objection to the exercise of personal choice", which is "clearly evident if one commits oneself to beliefs and practices beyond those prescribed by one's home tradition" (Drew 2011, 218). She does not find this convincing, however, since it is "erroneous to assume that those who are *only* Buddhist or *only* Christian do not also exercise personal choice"; King, one of Drew's participants, points out – rightly, in Drew's opinion – that "the fact of diversity both within religious traditions and among them makes choice inevitable, even if one does not choose consciously" (Drew 2011, 219).^P Issues of superficiality, lack of time, and coherence are not faced solely by dual believers, either, although they may need to work harder on balancing their commitments especially in relation to the latter problem. However, as more dual belonging pioneers, especially those like Drew's participants, whom she characterises as "highly reflective individuals with backgrounds in academic theology and religious studies", undertake the work of establishing coherence and the points of incompatibility between sets of beliefs, this burden is likely to be lessened.

Another issue in the 'pick and mix' or 'supermarket' objection might relate to these images of food, in which one is buying, consuming and being nourished by religious ideas or practices, but not belonging to a religious community. There might be discomfort with the

^P 'Choice' may not be the most useful framing for this debate, but it is the only one commonly used in the literature.

idea that one is paying for religion or spirituality, or assuming that one is entitled to it and taking without even paying, and also with the disconnect or alienation that it implies. This, again, is not an issue restricted to contexts of multiple religious belonging – treating religion as an object for consumption is problematic in single-tradition settings as well. However, it is so frequently associated with multiple belonging that it seems worth addressing here, and it is the case that multiple belonging can include a consumerist attitude to religion. It is also true that the supermarket seems a long way from a shared meal. Of course, actually at a community meal such as a 'bring and share', one exercises a considerable amount of personal choice – in what to bring, what to eat and what to leave (just like on the pick and mix counter), and even where to sit – but the metaphors suggest not just the choice but the lack of context. Supermarket food is wrapped and removed from its origins, where at a shared lunch Mary's casserole is accompanied by Mary's dish and usually Mary herself. John Hull also suggests that people talking about mixing of religions (in his case study, in the context of changes to the British national curriculum for religious education) are invoking disgust by making comparisons to disgusting food combinations – the pick and mix image may in part be linked to this, although it is not as direct as some of his examples, such as one where the proposal to teach six world religions equally is called "a mess of secular pottage" (Hull 1991, 9). These are themselves culturally shaped but very widespread within the culture and deeply affecting the emotions of those involved.

In relation to the concept of fluency, this problem might be considered as an issue of speaking six languages and none of them well. Usually people do have a native language or mother tongue (sometimes more than one) in which they are fluent, and acquire more over time. In the context of religious education, as given above, there may be a fear that if children are not receiving religious education at home and are educated about many religions at school, they will end up 'speaking' a few 'sentences' of each of them without having a firm

grasp of any of them. To those who regard all religion as one thing, this problem will not be visible, because the children would be expected to become familiar with 'religion' as a general concept; but to those who are members of a particular religion this is a serious issue.⁴ At the very least, this enables the asking of useful clarifying questions about the nature and purpose of religious education in schools. Teaching someone to speak French and teaching someone about the French language are two quite different activities, and in the same way we can ask: is this education *in* religion or education *about* religion? Which should be offered in the school context and which at home?

Sometimes, however, worries about dual belonging are based in concerns about the incompatibility of religions, and this is a place in which the metaphor of religions as language comes under strain. Being able to order a drink in German does not prevent me from being able to do so in English, but holding that it is "non-dual realisation of emptiness which liberates people" does seem to prevent me from simultaneously holding that it is God's grace which provides redemption (Drew 2011, 122). Obviously, there are many debates here – within Christianity and Buddhism as well as between them, and about the nature of reality as well as what people should do for the best – but many of them seem to involve the Christian-Buddhist dual-belonger in trying to hold two opposing positions at once. Throughout her book, Drew discusses examples of these contradictions, and finds that in every case at least some of her participants have managed to reconcile the two positions. It is not clear whether this is a testament to the compatibility of Buddhism and Christianity or to the ingenuity of people who find themselves trying to practice both, but the reader is left with the impression that all such difficulties can be surmounted eventually (Drew 2011, *passim*). Not being able to foresee what all the possible difficulties would be, it is difficult to know whether this is the case; it does seem to be the case that for all difficulties discovered so far in the practice of

⁴ The possibilities of providing education in a specific religion outside the school environment and/or withdrawing children from religious education with which you do not agree are also factors but not under consideration here.

dual Christian-Buddhist belonging, at least some practitioners are able to solve or dissolve any given one.

If this process of negotiation between positions is ongoing, we might think that dual religious belonging has an important place in today's world – for example, we might see it as a very deep form of interreligious dialogue, perhaps the more likely to succeed because those involved support or affirm both traditions involved in a very personal way. The two traditions might also benefit from learning from one another; in Drew's book, some of her participants talk about this, arguing that Buddhism might do well to learn from Protestant approaches to hierarchy and authority within the community, and that Christians can learn much from Buddhism about meditation techniques (King, Drew's Quaker-Buddhist participant, points out that many American Conservative Friends are already using Buddhist methods in Quaker contexts, such as focussing on the breath as part of the centring down process (Drew 2011, 174)). Turning back to the metaphor of religion as language, it is clear that some cases of linguistic borrowing can be enriching, providing new concepts and ways of viewing the world as well as simply labelling new objects, and that learning the grammar of another language tends to highlight interesting and previously unconsidered aspects of the grammar of one's native language.

Conclusion

Viewing the issue of religious belonging through the lens of fluency has provided a helpful reconceptualization of a number of problems related to multiple religious belonging. The concept of fluency makes it easier to see issues of varying levels of knowledge and experience in a realistic light which leaves room for the continuing processes of learning. Applying Lindbeck's linguistic model of religion in this way, as I have shown, makes a theologically sophisticated understanding of multiple religious belonging much easier than approaches which focus on just the sociological facts or on the theological risks present in

certain ways of practising multiple belonging. For best results, it should be held alongside other metaphors – like any metaphor it can be pushed too far, and even the strongest analogy includes dis-analogies – but as one tool among several it is extremely useful.

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