

***Praeparatio* or Prolepsis?  
Reframing the Relationship between Christianity and African Traditional  
Religions in Light of Pannenberg's Theology of the History of Religions**

Viewing pre-Christian religious traditions as *praeparatio Evangelica* (preparation for the gospel), African inculturated theology utilizes traditional faiths as a source for articulating Christian doctrine. While it remains one of the most promising developments in Christian thought over the last half-century, the flood of inculturated theology from Africa has slowed in recent years as the presupposed connection between the gospel and traditional religions has come under scrutiny. In the contemporary religious climate, it is no longer enough to assert that pre-Christian traditions are preparatory for the gospel; the claim must be tested and the relationship between the two submitted to critical examination. In that vein, this paper places the Kenyan theologian John Mbiti in dialogue with German dogmatician Wolfhart Pannenberg, arguing that the latter's theology of the history of religions provides an effective framework for re-envisioning the relationship between traditional faiths and Christianity. Grounded in the observable data of history, Pannenberg's work establishes connections between competing faith traditions that allow observers to compare and evaluate religious truth claims without relying on dogmatic assertions. Using his approach, traditional faiths can be seen as a proleptic (i.e. anticipatory) yearning for the eschatological unveiling of the all-determining reality Christians hold to be revealed in Christ. The relationship between African traditional religions and Christianity can thus be posited in a manner that significantly realigns their relationship, bringing important implications for future work in inculturated theology and missions studies.