RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE WORLD RELIGIONS

HAROLD G. COWARD



The Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy

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by

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PREFACE

I wish to thank Professor R. Balasubramanian and the members of the Dr S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy for extending to me the invitation to deliver this Special Lecture Series. The topic I have chosen "Religious Pluralism and the World Religions" is, I feel, very close to the life and spirit of Dr S. Radhakrishnan. He was a brilliant and tireless ambassador from Hinduism to the other world religions. It would not be too much to say that the driving spirit behind Dr Radhakrishnan's scholarship was to make Indian Philosophy and Religion understandable and relevant in the pluralism of this modern world. Thus, it is with respect, admiration and humility that I attempt to share in his mission through the offering of this Special Lecture Series.

I must acknowledge the assistance of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada in providing for my travel expenses so that I could deliver these lectures in Madras.

Finally, I express my thanks to Dr V. K. S. N. Raghavan and Dr R. Gopalakrishnan for reading the proofs. I am thankful to Mr John Allen Grimes who not only helped in proof reading, but also in the preparation of Index.

Harold G. Coward

INTRODUCTION

Religious experience has been defined as the quest for ultimate reality. In pursuing this quest, religions often seem to have an inherent drive to claims of uniqueness and universality. Many religions exhibit an inner tendency to claim to be *the* true religion, to offer *the* true revelation as *the* true way of salvation or release. It appears to be self-contradictory for such a religion to accept any other expression of ultimate reality than its own. Yet what characterizes today's world is religious pluralism. It is certainly true that the world has always been religiously plural. But the breaking of cultural, racial, linguistic and geographic boundaries today is on a scale that the world has not previously seen. For the first time in recorded history we seem to be rapidly becoming a truly world community. Today the West is no longer shut up in itself. It can no longer regard itself simply as the centre of the history of this world and as the centre of culture with a religion that is the obvious and indeed the sole way of worship. I am sure that the same thing is true for the East. Today everyone is the next-door neighbour and spiritual neighbour of everyone else.

In Canada it is the case in almost all our cities that sometime during the year a special day is set aside for a kind of cultural fair. Music, dance, handicrafts and food from all the cultures are offered by the members of the ethnic communities, now Canadian citizens. In addition to these 'at home' experiences, we are all travelling more and having the existential experience of each other's cultures. The same thing is happening with religions. I don't have to come to India to encounter Hindus. In Calgary there is a large Hindu community, two Jodo Shinsu Buddhist congregations, Zen and Tibetan Buddhist groups, three Islamic mosques and five Jewish synagogues — to say nothing of the many so-called New Religions, T. M., Hare Krishna, etc. Today every religion, like every culture, is an existential possibility offered to every person. Alien religions have become part of everyday life and we experience them as a challenge to the truth claims of our own faith.

While this existential pluralism may not be as much of a new thing for India as it is for the West, I suggest that the coming of secularism, technology and foreign ideologies of various kinds will rapidly face India's traditional culture and religion with similar challenges.

The aim of these lectures is to examine the way each religion has reacted and is reacting to the challenge of pluralism. The hope is that in undertaking such a study we will better understand each other's religion, and learn from one another of the true dimensions of spiritual life in a pluralistic world.

Harold G. Coward

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1

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND JUDAISM

Judaism' is a most appropriate place to begin our study of "Religious Pluralism and the World Religions." From the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (C. 70 A.D.) Judaism has lived as a *diaspora* — as widely scattered communities of believers living as minority groups within other societies. In fact the dispersion and scattering of the Jewish people actually began as early as 586 B.C. with the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile. Thus for 2,500 years the Jews have constituted subcultures in the midst of other, larger cultures, often struggling to maintain Jewish identity and existence. The experience of being a minority group in other cultures, which is now facing all the world religions as religious pluralism becomes common place, has been the norm for Judaism for countless generations. From the Biblical period to the present Judaism has had to formulate its beliefs and practises in the face of challenges from other cultures and religions. The events of the twentieth century, and the *Holocaust* in particular, have given fresh intensity and sharpness to the old question: "How does one sing the Lord's song in an alien land?"

Another reason for starting with Judaism is that of the three Western monotheistic religions of Biblical origin (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), Judaism was the first historically to achieve its distinctive forms and beliefs. These forms and beliefs provided the context out of which first Christianity and later Islam arose. This integral relationship (somewhat like that of Hinduism and Buddhism in the East) has caused Jewish philosophers and theologians to examine their Jewish stance in relation to the viewpoints of the other traditions with which they were so closely connected.

I. The Biblical Response to Religious Pluralism

The Jewish Bible or Torah recounts how Israel came to be separated out from the vast array of different religions that characterized the ancient near East. The Jews trace their origin to Abraham who left Mesopotamia and migrated to Canaan. The religious significance of Abraham's journey is that in leaving Mesopotamia he also left the gods of this world, idols and nature deities to serve the Lord, creator of heaven and earth. According to Jewish thinking the Abraham event marked the appearance not only of a new people but also of a new religious idea — one God, the creator, separate from and transcendent over all creation.[2]

The early experience of the Jewish people with the God of Abraham took the form of a covenant relationship. Scholars suggest that this covenant relationship may well have been set in the form of the vassal treaties which were common at that time. For example, in reporting the liberation of the Jews from bondage in Egypt, the book of Deuteronomy understands the Jews to be in bondage to God through the covenant entered into by Moses. Instead of being held in a worldly vassaldom as they were in Egypt, the Jews are now committed to a relationship of service and obedience to God. "Like the other small nations that surrounded her, Isreal was to be a vassal state, but not to Egypt or to the Hittites; she owed her allegiance to God alone."[3] It is this notion of being committed to God that is fundamental to Jewish theology, and to the way the relationship of other peoples to God is understood. Just as God has entered into a special covenant relationship with the Jews, so also there is no reason why God could not enter into other relationships with other peoples. Thus, from the Jewish Biblical perspective, the various religions may be seen as the expression of the relationships obtained between other peoples and God. While for the Jews it is the Mosaic Covenant which is true and authoritative, for other peoples (e.g. the Christians or Muslims) it will be their particular relationship with God that will be true and authoritative for them.

The personal nature of the covenant relationship between God and his people is emphasized in Judaism. The old Israelites experienced the Divine as a very personal God who presided over their destiny.

"God was not just there and acting; he was turned towards man, asking for him and calling for his co-operative response."[4] God's calling to man was experienced as God's word spoken through Moses and the prophets. In the Jewish understanding God calls man, and all man has to do is to listen and obey. This conception of the one Lord to whom they owed loyalty and obedience was the unifying power within Judaism. Instead of seeing a variety of gods performing particular functions (e.g. special gods for the different natural powers) or controlling specific geographical locations, or representing the metaphysical forces of good and evil, the Jews experienced the one God as the transcendent source and unity of all being.[5] Thus when the Babylonians defeated Israel, it was theologically interpreted not as a failure on the part of their God, Yahweh, but rather that their God, the Lord of all, was using the Babylonians as his instrument to punish the Jews for their failure to keep their covenant with God. When the defeated Israelites were carried off into Babylonian exile (587-538 B.C.), this was understood as God's punishment of Israel for its conscious neglect of the covenant.[6]

II. Classical and Medieval Responses

With the Persian victory over Babylonia in 539 B.C. the Babylonian exile ended. Some Jews returned home to Judea, others however remained in Babylonia forming a Jewish community within Babylonian society. Two centuries later, the process of dispersion was greatly increased by Alexander's conquests. Before long there was a large and important Jewish community in Alexandria; and there were similar communities in Antioch, Rome and most of the larger cities of the Greco-Roman world. The first great thinker of the Jewish dispersion was the philosopher-statesman, Philo Judaeus (20 B.C. - 50 A. D.) of Alexandria.[7] Philo was both a loyal Jew who believed that God had spoken decisively to his people in the Torah and through the prophets, and a lover of Plato. Philo argued that the same God spoke through Greek philosophy and Jewish religion. Philo asserted that God as absolute spirit completely transcends all human limitations. God relates to matter through a series of intermediaries (like Plato's ideas) which derive from the *Logos* or divine reason. The *Logos*, for Philo, was God's instrument for creative activity as well as the rational structure of the universe. The different religions (including Greek philosophy)

could be understood as various manifestations of the one divine *Logos*. Because of his blending of Greek and Hebrew thought, Philo had little influence on the conservative rabbis of his day. However, he had a strong immediate influence upon Christianity as is evidenced by the appropriation of his *Logos* notion into the *Gospel of John*. Right up to the present, the idea of a single divine *Logos* manifesting itself in the various religious traditions has continued to be a favorite of theologians and philosophers of religion.[8]

The most important thinker of medieval Judaism was Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides (1135-1204). Maimonides, a physician by profession, was, like Philo, educated in Greek thought as well as Jewish studies. He was at once a devout Jew and a thoroughly rational thinker. As a result of persecution in Spain, he and his family wandered through Isreal and North Africa finally settling in Egypt where he served the Muslim ruler Saladin. There is no doubt that he was fully experienced in the challenge of the dispersion — the challenge of living and thinking Judaism in the midst of a foreign religion and culture. Maimonides believed that of all religions Judaism was the only faith revealed by God, and it alone was in every respect true. He states:

> The difference between our religion and the other religions, to which it is sought to liken them, is none other than like the difference between the living, sentient man and the image carved by the workman from wood...[9]

The basis of the discrimination against other religions is clearly the Mosaic prescription against idolatry. Contrary to Philo, for Maimonides there is to be no intermediary between God and man. To interpose any such object is to open the way to it becoming an object of worship, and so to sow the seeds of idolatry. Other religions are seen by Maimonides as human attempts to emulate the Jewish religion, by constructing belief structures which, like the carved image, were false and idolatrous.

In spite of this strongly negative view, Maimonides also shows himself to be surprisingly tolerant. Although both Jesus and Muhammad were false prophets, their activities were under God's wisdom and paved the way for the spread of Judaism and the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom. The positive point about Christians is that

they regard the Torah as scripture. The positive point about Islam is that like Judaism it takes a strong stance against idol worship. Maimonides even finds positive features among the gentiles and admits that the pious among them have a place in the world to come if they have attained knowledge of the creator and corrected their soul with the virtues.[10] For Maimonides the criterion for spiritual acceptability seems to be:

> Anyone who corrects his soul with purity of morals and purity of knowledge in the faith of the creator assuredly will be of the children of the world to come.[11]

Not all of the medieval Jewish community agreed with Maimonides' rationalistic and somewhat exclusive view of God and religion. About the same time the mystical tradition of the *Kabbala* was gaining strength in Jewish circles. The most famous book of the *Kabbala*, the *Zohar*, which may have been written in Spain (C. 1285) by Moses de Leon, has many gnostic and neoplatonic ideas. God is seen to be the absolute beyond all human predications. Between God and the world are a series of emanations, with human beings as the worldly receivers. The logic of the *Kabbala* is the same as that of Philo's *Logos* — one Absolute of which there are many manifestations, or One God phenomenolizing through the forms of the various religions.

III. Modern Responses

Even though Judaism existed in dispersion throughout the medieval period, within its scattered communities it was in effect a closed society. The impact of modernity has meant that now, more than ever before, Jews are freely associating with non-Jews. This fact has given higher profile to the question of the relation between Judaism and other religions. Modernity has also brought a changed consciousness with regard to the dangers of idolatry. As a modern Jewish philosopher puts it, "Surely in this modern, technological, demythologized world ancient idol-worship is dead and buried..."[12] Although Rabbinic law regards the worship of graven images so dangerous that ownership is prohibited even when no worship is intended, the modern Jew, far from being tempted himself, cannot understand how there ever could have been such an attraction. "In fact," says Fackenheim, "this apparantly once desperately serious business has become a mere joke, as in the

the story of the parishioner who informs his minister that whereas he has broken 9 of the 10 commandments, he has, he is proud to say, never worshipped graven images."[13] For the modern Jew, idol worship no longer seems to be a real possibility. In many instances images have been brought into the modern house of worship itself. But, says Fackenheim, it occurs to nobody that a stained-glass window depicting Abraham or Moses might become an idol. The very idea seems preposterous to a modern mind.[14]

As was noted above, it was the ancient notion of idolatry that formed the basis of Maimonides' rejection of other religions. It seems as if the Jewish attitude toward other religions was rooted not in exclusivism, but rather, in the fear of idolatry. Now that this fear of idolatry no longer has a place in modern Jewish consciousness, the basis for the rejection of other religions has also been removed. Evidence for this is the modern Jewish willingness to participate in interreligious dialogue, and the widespread interest in interfaith cooperation. Fackenheim concludes, no modern Jew would regard another religion as idolatrous simply because images or statues are part of it — so long as the one imageless God is the intended object of worship.[15] If the modern Jew thinks of idolatry at all, it is in the form of the worship of sex, money or nationalism (especially Nazi idolatry[16]) instead of the God of the Bible.

While the viewpoint of the modern Jew opens the way for relation with Christianity, Islam and perhaps Hinduism, Buddhism — especially Mahāyāna Buddhism — may prove to be in a separate category. The Buddhist consciousness in which no "over and above" God is recognized, and the Mahāyāna awareness of the Divine in the secular, may be judged by the Jewish philosopher as a modern idolatry. In Fackenheim's view, idolatry is still possible if the notion of the one transcendent God is desecrated.[17] Jewish thinkers do not seem to have thought this through in relation to Buddhism.

In addition to the changed response to other religions resulting from the modern understanding of idolatry, contemporary Judaism has been strongly influenced by Franz Rosenzweig in Europe, and thinkers such as Abraham Heschel, Robert Gordis and Jacob Agus in America. Let us first look at the life and thought of Franz Rosenzweig[18] as it

relates to other religions. Rosenzweig develops his position in reaction to Hegelian idealism. In opposition to Hegel's focus on universal ideals, Rosenzweig centers on the individual in the complete experience of man-world-God. None of the parts of this whole, can be understood in separation from the others. Any such separation brings with it a state of heathen imagery. "There we find the tragic hero, dumb, alien to men and to God; the plastic cosmos — without a beginning and without an end, unrelated to man and God; the gods of myth in their hiddenness, far removed from the doings of men."[19] This heathen view of the world is transcended by a revelation of the real relations which obtain between man-world-God. Judaism is one such revelation. Christianity is another.

> Both are representations of the real world (and as such equal before God) and spell the end of the heathen view of the world. Judaism, which stays with God, stands in contrast with Christianity, which is sent out to conquer the unredeemed world and is forever marching toward God.[20]

Glatzer concludes that Rosenzweig's work is the first attempt in Jewish thought to understand Judaism and Christianity as equally true and valid religions. However this does not lead to any suggestion of compromise or harmonization. It is Rosenzweig's view that the two religions will exist parallel to the end of historical time: the Christian being eternally on the way; the Jew having the privilege of realizing eternity in time. In answer to the question as to whether Judaism is the truth, or whether Judaism and Christianity together constitute the truth, Rosenzweig gives this response. Truth is beyond man. "Only God is Truth, Man (Jew, Christian) is given a part in truth (*Wahrheit*) insofar as he realizes in active life his share in truth (*bewahren*)."[21] Rosenzweig concludes his book, *The Star of Redemption*, by saying that the distant vision of truth does not lead into the beyond but "into life."[22]

Although there seems no philosophical reason Rosenzweig's analysis should not apply to other religions as well as Christianity (at least to Islam and Hinduism); Rosenzweig clearly restricted true religion to Judaism and Christianity. Islam he called a parody of Christianity and Judaism.[23] In one of his letters Rosenzweig comments on the inadequacy of Islam in relation to Judaism and Christianity.

> [The Muslim] has more in common with Goethe than with either Jew or Christian... He doesn't know, and cannot know, the quite otherworldly attitude of the soul that yet breathes the world with every breath... *How* that breathing of the world happens is the great contrast between Jew and Christian, but *that* it happens is their common ground. In Islam you will always find that God and the world remain perfectly apart, and so either the divine disappears in the world or the world disappears in God...[24]

Although he does not spell it out, he implies that Hinduism and Buddhism suffer the same failing when he concludes the letter by saying that the bringing together of God and the world is something "only Jew and Christian can do, and no one else."[25]

Turning to American thinkers such as Abraham Heschel, Daniel Breslauer has recently produced a helpful analysis in which he finds "the ecumenical perspective" to be their distinctive mark.[26] The characteristic feature of the ecumenical perspective in modern America is that of "the Jew embracing the non-Jewish religions as partisans in a spiritual battle."[27] The Jew and religious non-Jew are seen as standing together against a demonic secularity. For example, the Jewish philosopher, Abraham Heschel argues that it seems to be the will of God that there should be more than one religion. However, analysis indicates that this view is founded not so much on traditional texts or teachings as on Heschel's sense of the desperate state of the human spiritual condition. In Heschel's view, "The Jew's task was to be deeply religious *Jewishly* and thus deepen the spiritual content of America communally."[28] The role of modern American Judaism is to reawaken the religious life of all America. This new ecumenical role for American Judaism has a certain resonance with God's call to Abraham in *Genesis* 12:3, "... by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."

In this new ecumenical perspective, says Breslauer, the modern Jew sees diversity as a positive element. Diversity is creative in that it experiences pluralism as "a situation in which various religious traditions interact with mutual self-respect and a sense of spiritual unity despite diversity."[29] But the modern Jewish ecumenical perspective does not look to any "common denominator" religiousness, rather there is a strong need to retain one's unique identity. Another modern American Jewish thinker Jacob Agus describes pluralism as, "the

apprehension of unity and polarity, it is the awareness of a bond in unity in some sense along with the realization of categorical separateness and disunity."[30] The uniqueness of each religious tradition witnesses to the variety of possible responses to the divine. The richness of the variety is seen to strengthen the whole pluralistic spiritual community. As Abraham Heschel puts it:

> God's voice speaks in many languages, communicating itself in a diversity of intuitions. The word of God never comes to an end. No word is God's last word.[31]

Thus God is speaking to each of the traditions uniquely, and it is through the ecumenical efforts of each tradition that the others will come to hear the unique word that God has spoken to it. Only if one listens to all the languages of all the religions will one hear all of God's word that has so far been spoken. Hearing God's word in other religions stimulates one to creative development within one's own religion. In this way religious differences provide the challenge to keep religions alive and fresh. But such a stimulating variety is possible only when religions share a common universe of discourse, and thus the necessity of the ecumenical perspective.[32] Religious pluralism, seen in this light, is judged to be inherently good for all religions.

In addition to stressing the importance of diversity, the Jewish ecumenical perspective also emphasizes unity. Several modern American writers identify the ground of this unity in diversity as "the depth-dimension of faith."[33] The depth-dimension refers to the internal personal experience of religion which puts one in touch with the essence of religiousness. This essence of depth of religion is identified as a personal meeting with God — a meeting which occurs in eternity and transcends the historically and culturally conditioned external religious forms. However, it is through these forms of ritual and creed that one may step out of historical time and into moments shared with God. It is this inner sharing of God's eternity that is the common ground in which the diversity of the various religions are thought to inhere. In Heschel's view, while outer rituals and dogmas separate people, it is this deep inner spiritual intuition that unites them into one pluralistic community of spiritual persons.[34] At the level of outward experience, this depth-dimension is identified as a protest against any historical or conditioned form that is judged to be absolute. This is the push of

the essence of religiousness from within each of the religions which leads to self-transcendence and renewal. Religious pluralism is seen to be helpful in this regard because it forcefully points to the insufficiency of any one answer.

This last point sounds amazingly akin to Paul Tillich's formulation of which he called "the Protestant principle" — the rejecting of any absolutizing tendency as a manifestation of institutional demonism.[35] That modern Jewish thinkers and Tillich should be so similar is not really surprising when it is remembered that the sources for both are the Biblical prophets. Tillich also shares in the idea that the inner religious essence (the Holy Spirit for Tillich) is dynamic and creative breaking out through secularism and demonism to new forms of religious self-transcendence.[36]

While the idea of a purifying and uniting depth-dimension resonates strongly with Christianity (especially Protestantism) and probably also with Islam and Hinduism, serious problems are encountered in Buddhism. A depth-dimension defined as a personal meeting with God will not likely find any common ground with a Buddhist. Although the notion of creative renewal will be very acceptable, the Buddhist will not likely agree that the inner sharing of God's eternity is a ground in which the Buddhist experience can inhere and be united with the other religions. The modern American Jewish thinkers do not seem to be aware of this problem; however, American Judaism has clearly gone much further than European thinkers like Rosenzweig, in attempting to embrace all other religions as spiritual brothers in the ecumenical perspective. It is also interesting to note that something very much like Philo's *Logos* model has returned in modern American Jewish dress.

Since the mid-twentieth century Judaism has been caught up in two major historical events. On the one hand there was the Holocaust, Hitler's cold-blooded extermination of about six million Jews under the eyes of a passive Christianity. On the other hand there is the emergence of the state of Israel. As Zwi Werblowsky puts it, "No Jew could fail to be touched to the quick by the existential significance which the age-old symbols of his faith had suddenly assumed — sanctification of the Name in martyrdom and the promise of a return to Zion..."[37] In terms of interaction with other religions the dangers of these two events

were that "suffering may lead to self-righteousness and injustice, faith in providence to arrogance, and Messianism to Chauvinism. Even religious Zionism is tempted to mistake for fulfilment what is really a trial and for accomplishment what is essentially another stage on the long road of Isreal's Messianic destiny."[88] In Zionism there is a tendency toward a narrow and arrogant response to other religions.

In recent times the situation has become very complex. A narrow political Zionism has been opposed by one of the earliest Zionist leaders, Martin Buber. Arguing against the German philosopher Hermann Cohen, Buber stressed a spiritual Zionism in which Jews would serve God faithfully in their acts as well as their words. This would require the establishment of a human community according to God's will.[89] How to do this is not at all easy or clear. There is a Jewish state which must include Muslims, Christians and others as Israeli citizens — an empirical test of Israel as God's community on earth. And at the same time Judaism must exist as a minority religion of Israelites who are loyal citizens of France, Germany, Great Britain or the United States. The challenge of religious pluralism for modern Judaism is still being worked out.

IV. Conclusion

Judaism arose out of the pluralistic content of the Ancient Near East. The Jewish response to the challenge of religious pluralism has a long history dating back to the Babylonian Exile in 586 B.C. During classical and medieval period two important Jewish thinkers directly addressed the question of the relationship between Judaism and the other religions. Philo viewed the various religions (including Greek philosophy) as different manifestations of the one divine *Logos*. Maimonides taught that of all religions Judaism was the only faith revealed by God and therefore true in every respect. His rejection of other religions was based on an interpretation of them as idolatrous forms — and thus subject to the Mosaic prescription against idolatry. In the late medieval period the *Kabbala* became influential. The logic of the *Kabbala* was the same as that of Philo's *Logos* — namely, that there is one Absolute or God of which there are many manifestations in the forms of the various religions.

In the modern period Jews have begun to associate with non-Jews more freely than ever before. In addition the modern technological

and demythologized world seems to have largely removed the threat and temptation of idolatry from Jewish consciousness. Two modern Jewish responses were examined: the European thinking of Franz Rosenzweig and the American ecumenical perspective of thinkers such as Abraham Heschel. Rosenzweig emphasizes the wholeness of the relationship between man-world-God. This wholeness, he feels, is revealed within Judaism and Christianity, but not within the other religions. The modern American Jewish thinkers, by contrast, seem open to considering all religions as various manifestations of God's word. Diversity among religions is seen as a positive element creatively strengthening the total religious community in its opposition to surrounding forces of secular society. Unity between the religions is grounded in the individual believer's experience of the depth-dimension, the direct meeting with God. This is open to the experience of the believer in each of the traditions and thus provides the common ground for all of the religions. With the American Jewish response we seem to have come full circle back to a logic not unlike that of Philo's *Logos* model. Apparant affinities with Tillich's Protestant Principle were noted. But perhaps the serious challenge for Judaism comes in its response to Buddhism. As long as a religion is founded on the experience of a transcendent God, Judaism seems to be able to enter into spiritual partnership. But if that experience does not hold true for the Buddhist — if it is not a transcendent God that is being experienced — can the Jew still embrace him as a spiritual brother? This question has yet to be squarely faced by Judaism.

Some aspects of Zionism and the emergence of Israel have produced a resurgence of narrow Judaism. This may be the familiar experience of a narrowing taking place once a religion is pressed into the service of political or national ends. In any case it has refocused the challenge of religious pluralism for Judaism in new and complex ways.

NOTES

1. Scholars differ in the way the term Judaism is used. Some, notably Jewish scholars, see a continuity from ancient Israelite beginnings to the fully developed forms of Judaism, using this word to cover the entire history. (See e.g. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*. New York: Columbia, 1952). Other

scholars differentiate between "Classical Hebraism," ancient Israel from Abraham to the Babylonian exile, and "Judaism" as emerging after the Babylonian exile. (See e.g. W.F. Albright *From the Stone Age to Christianity*. New York: Anchor, 1957). For purposes of this paper, the former interpretation is adopted.

2. Jacob Neusner, *The Way of the Torah: An Introduction to Judaism.* Belmont: Dickenson, 1974, pp. 3-4.

3. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1976, p. 28.

4. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Judaism, or the Religion of Israel" in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths* edited by R.C. Zaehner. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959, p. 31.

5. *Ibid.*

6. J. Kenneth Kuntz, *The People of Ancient Israel*. New work: Harper & Row, 1974, p. 356. See also Lamentations 2:4, Psalm 137 and Ezekiel 1-24.

7. E.R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1962.

8. See e.g. Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964; and more recently John B. Cobb Jr., *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975.

9. A. Cohen, *The Teachings of Maimonides*. New York: Ktav, 1968, pp. 116-117.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

12. Emil L. Fackenheim, *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*. New York: Basic Books, 1973, p. 173.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

18. See Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. by W.W. Hallo. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971; and *Judaism Despite Christianity: The "Letters on Christianity and Judaism" between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1969.

19. Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*. New York: Schocken, 1953, p. xxiii.

20. *Ibid.*, p. xxv.

21. *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

22. *The Star of Redemption, op. cit.*, p. 416.

23. *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought, op. cit.*, p. 203.

24. *Judaism Despite Christianity, op. cit.*, p. 68.

25. *Ibid.*

26. S. Daniel Breslauer, *The Ecumenical Perspective and the Modernization of Jewish Religion.* Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

30. Jacob B. Agus, *Dialogue and Tradition: The Challenges of Contemporary Judeo-Christian Thought.* New York: Abelard Schuman, 1971, p. 429.

31. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays in Applied Religion.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966, p. 182.

32. *The Ecumenical Perspective and the Modernization of Jewish Religion, op. cit.*, p. 20.

33. Breslauer here identifies Agus, Gordis and Heschel. *The Ecumenical Perspective..., op. cit.*, p. 21.

34. Abraham J. Heschel, *Man is not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion.* New York: Harper and Row, 1951, p. 171.

35. Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era.* Chicago: Phoenix, 1963, p. viii.

36. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology,* Vol. III: "Life and the Spirit." Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, see especially pp. 162-244.

37. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Judaism, or the Religion of Israel" in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths,* ed. by R.C. Zaehner. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959, p. 49.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Martin Buber and Hermann Cohen, "A Debate on Zionism and Messianism" in *The Jew in the Modern World,* edited by P. R. Mendes-Flour & J. Reinharz. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 448-453.

2

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND CHRISTIANITY

The relationship between Christianity and other religions is today one of the key issues in Christian self-understanding. Perhaps pluralism is so pressingly felt to be a challenge because of the exclusivistic missionary approaches adopted by Christianity over the past several hundred years. In the not too distant past Christians have taught that the presence of a sufficient number of missionaries scattered over the world would result in the conversion of all men and women to Jesus Christ. Today Christians are recognizing that far from disappearing, the religions of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are alive and well — in spite of all the Christian missionary efforts. This fact is causing Christians to seriously reassess their understanding of God's will, scriptural teachings regarding Jesus, and theological doctrines of Christology and Evangelism. In the rapidly expanding body of literature resulting from the encounter with other religions, Christian theologians are concluding that theology cannot continue to be formulated in isolation from the other religions, and that in fact future developments in Christian theology will be the direct result of serious dialogue with other religions.[1] A most important enabling factor is the good data about other religions now available to theologians, largely due to the efforts of scholars of history of religions and comparative religions. With this knowledge of other religions, and with spiritual persons of other religions becoming part of the theologian's existential situation, no matter where he lives, both theoretical and concrete realities are forcing the theologian to put the exclusivistic claims of his Christian faith in question.

Certain theologians have described the task of theology in terms of the encounter with world religions. R. Whitson suggests that the task of theology is to open one's religious tradition to another.[2] John Dune proposes crossing over to experience the other religion and then coming back to reflect upon one's own religion with enrichment.[3] Thus a kind of cross-fertilization can take place with the spiritual wisdom of the other religion enriching the experience of one's own religion. But such open approaches to the tasks of theology meet serious objection from Christanity's claim to uniqueness and normativeness. The claim is based upon the Christian doctrines of salvation, revelation and, most fundamentally, Christology. Lucien Richard puts the problem precisely:

> Can Christianity accept other religious traditions as valid ways to salvation without giving up its fundamental conviction about the absoluteness and uniqueness of Jesus Christ? Is it possible to believe simultaneously that God has acted decisively and for the salvation of all in the person of Jesus Christ and that Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists are warranted in remaining who they are and in following their own different ways to salvation?[4]

The theological problem is rooted in the Christological doctrines formulated at Nicea and Chalcedon which made Christianity an exclusivistic world religion. Over the centuries the Christian claim of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus has been grounded in the doctrine of "hypostatic unity" defined at Chalcedon as follows: "...that Jesus of Nazareth is unique in the precise sense that while being fully man, it is true of him and him alone, that he is also fully God, the second person of the co-equal Trinity."[5] It is this fundamental doctrine that the fact and experience of today's religious pluralism has put seriously in question.

The Chalcedon formulation of the unique incarnation of God in Jesus has also resulted in the Christian Church conceiving itself as the one "perfect society," frequently identified with the Kingdom of God.[6] Being in full possession of all truth, the Church has not felt any need to listen to voices from the wider world, e.g., other religions. Instead, the medieval Christian Church retreated "into a splendid isolation, concentrating on her inner life through a strong centralization and reacting defensively to the outside currents of thought and life."[7] It is this attitude which has obstructed any real contact between Christianity

and other religions, except of course, for missionary endeavours designed to convert all others and so bring them into the Church. Recently, however, following the second Vatican Council, there has been a shift in the image of the Roman Catholic Church. In the attempt to remedy broken contacts with the surrounding world, the Church has accepted dialogue with the world community of peoples and religions as a fundamental attitute. In part this shift in attitude has been caused by the growing pluralistic nature of the world which causes Christians everywhere to live next door to people of other faiths. Christians have found that their foreign neighbours are religious persons living from within their own traditions, convinced that they have a truth or a message for the world.[8] In a sense, today, all religions have become missionary-minded in the desire to share their own truth with others. It is this new situation which is forcing the Christian Church to change from its all-knowing "let us teach you" attitude, to one of listening to the wisdom and questions that come from other religions. This new dialogical attitute is causing significant changes in the traditional Christian doctrine of the Church: the narrow interpretation of the adage "outside the Church there is no salvation" is abandoned; the spiritual nature of other religions is recognized as is the presence of God's saving will within their teachings and practices.[9]

Although the Churches are altering their ecclesiology so as to open the way for serious dialogue with other religions, the fundamental Christology, underlying traditional ecclesiology, has not yet changed. Until the doctrine of the uniqueness of Jesus is examined and reinterpreted in relation to the truth claims of other religions, the changed ecclesiology will lack a firm foundation — and thus will have no power. Consequently, the following discussion will focus on Christology, or the Christian understanding of Jesus, in relation to other religions. The Christology of the New Testament will be examined, the views of the early Church Fathers will be considered, and finally the views of modern theologians will be studied — all this focusing on their Christology in relation to other religions.

I. The New Testament and Other Religions

Christianity took shape within the context of Judaism. Jesus was born into a Jewish family and raised by devout Jewish parents.[10] His scriptures were Jewish scriptures and his approach was not unlike that

of the rabbis of his day. Yet at the same time Jesus saw himself as inaugurating something new. Although in the line of the prophets, he seems to have experienced himself to be "something more" — at least, according to the reports of the Gospels. Whereas the prophets regarded themselves as but the mouthpieces of God announcing their proclamations by "*thus saith the God*," Jesus repeatedly used the words "I say unto you" with the quiet assumption that he had the inherent authority to speak in such a fashion. This was one reason for the anger he aroused in the Jewish religious leaders, for to them such statements indicated Jesus was engaging in blasphemy by making himself equal with God.[11] Jesus' statements about his relationship to God certainly would seem to assert a unique status. In *The Gospel According to John*, Jesus is described as the *Logos*, the "Word" become flesh, and he is reported to have said, "the Father is in me and I in him" (*John* 10:38), and "I and the Father are one" (*John* 17:22). Also in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is said to claim that all things have been delivered to him by the Father, and that no one knows the Father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him. Such statements certainly laid the foundation for later claims regarding the uniqueness of Jesus. They also helped produce the split between Judaism and Christianity.

One aspect of Jewish self-consciousness, namely, its sense of being the specially chosen "People of God" (*Deut.* 7:6), provided fertile soil for the development of Christian exclusiveness and missionary activity. The Jews were a people with a mission: "Every knee shall bend before Yahweh, every tongue shall swear by him" (*Isaiah* 45:23) and the time of Jesus was a time of unparalleled missionary activity for Judaism.[12] In *Romans* 2:17-23 Paul described the Jewish people as having absolute certainty that they possessed the truth of God and had the duty to make this revelation known to all others. Although Jesus apparently forbade his disciples to preach to non-Jews (*Matthew* 10:15, "Go not to the Gentiles and enter not the province of Samariai, but rather go to the lost sheep of Israel"), we find the disciples involved in missionary works very soon after the resurrection. In the light of the resurrection the early Christian community saw Jesus as the fulfilment of all the promises of the Hebrew scriptures and as the embodiment of God's saving action for all people (*Luke* 1:55, 73). The covenant established by Abraham and Moses with God now becomes focused on the one

person of Jesus Christ. "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Acts* 4:12). Thus the Christian appropriation of the Jewish missionary motivation seems complete.

It is in Paul's writings that the foundations for later incarnational doctrines are laid. In *Romans* 5-8, Paul describes Jesus as the second Adam, God coming as a New Creation embodying in himself the final eschatological destiny of all people. Jesus Christ is Lord of all and the Father of the new humanity. "He is the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things" (*Colossians* 1:15). According to Paul, then, Jesus Christ is a universal active presence throughout the world and in the whole of human history, the *Logos* notion. But, God's sending of his son in the world is a decisive act of salvation and the unique manifestation of that divine *Logos*. Jesus Christ is a new incarnation but in continuity with God's past relationship with Israel, and embodies its fulfilment. Lucien Richard summarizes the New Testament teachings as follows:

> What emerges out of the New Testament are two different strands of thought that serve as groundings for claims about uniqueness and finality. The universalism of the New Testament has its source and foundation in the one person of Jesus Christ as God's very special agent and ultimate fulfilment of God's promises. The doctrine of the incarnation is an attempt to express Jesus Christ's special agency... The other affirmation of the New Testament about Jesus Christ is that in him sacred history has already come to its end. Realized eschatology is one of the roots for the Church's claims about Christ's uniqueness and finality.[13]

Thus Christian claims of the uniqueness and finality of Christ are grounded in the two New Testament concepts of incarnation and realized eschatology. Both of these concepts are seen by contemporary Christian theologians as obstacles to Christian openness to other religions. Both lead to "the absolutization and the freezing of attention on one human being and one moment of history."[14]

But the New Testament also contains elements which can provide a more open approach. Jesus in his own life did not evidence a narrow exclusive approach. He treated with full seriousness the spiritual views of a Samaritan woman, concerned himself with a Roman officer, and told parables in which a man of another religion — a Samaritan —

was the embodiment of true spirituality. His opposition to the pharisees and sadducees was directed against their legalistic and doctrinaire approach to religion — which was insensitive to true spiritual life. He gave dignity and respect to sincere believers whose views differed from his own. By focusing on Jesus' behaviour and teachings in his interaction with those of other religions, a basis does exist for a Christian openness.

The other apparently positive approach found in the New Testament comes from the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence and the title of *Logos*. The idea that Jesus has been actively present throughout creation has provided the basis for a Christian universalism that would see Christ as being at work in all religions. This, however, has not been the basic theme of Christology in the Western Church, and even when taken seriously it runs the danger of reducing other religions to something less than they themselves claim. The *Logos* doctrine must be taken in conjunction with the conceptions of "incarnation" and "realized eschatology" if a balanced understanding of New Testament thought is to be achieved.

II. Early Christianity and Other Religions

The first major conflict within the early Christian Church was over whether Christianity should remain within Judaism as one of the many sects of that faith. If Christianity were simply a variant on Judaism, Gentile converts would have to submit to circumcision, food pollution requirements and other aspects of Jewish law. While the Jerusalem Christians were in favour of such requirements, Paul argued that to insist on Jewish law was to fail to understand the essence of the gospel. Paul's view carried the day and cut Christianity free from the Jewish requirements of circumcision, food laws and Sabbath observance. It also marked out Christianity as a religion separate from Judaism.[15]

As Christianity freed itself from Judaism and moved out into non-Jewish world, it encountered Greek philosophy and religion. This led to attempts to think through and present the Gospel in the categories of Greek philosophy. A new element imported into Christianity here was the sharp distinction between spirit and matter which had come into Greek philosophy through the Orphic movement centuries before Christ. It was perpetuated through Platonism and Neoplatonism and

moulded the worship and thinking of Christian converts from a Hellenistic background.[16] In sharp divergence from the Jewish tradition, shared by Jesus and Paul, the Greek approach regarded matter, including flesh, as evil, and pure spirit as good. Hebrew thought, by contrast, regarded body, mind and spirit as one psychosomatic unity, and did not identify evil with the flesh. Rather, from the Hebrew perspective evil occurred when the whole body/spirit unity of a person operated under a negative motivation, and good when the body/spirit unity of the personality operated under positive motivation.[17] The Greek splitting of human nature into two, and identifying evil with the matter side of existence has had a lasting and most unfortunate influence upon Christianity. Matters of natural instinct came to be experienced as evil and sinful, even when conducted within the required bounds of marriage. This has caused much unnecessary guilt and suffering, which continues even today. Salvation from the Greek perspective required the emancipation of the spirit from the contamination of the flesh. Although this provided an attractive solution to the problem of evil, it made nonsense of the New Testament insistence on the resurrection of the body — a requirement thoroughly consistent with Hebrew thought. This Greek influence is frequently found as a recurring theme in Christian asceticism and mysticism.

In its first centuries Christianity was also challenged by Greek dualism through Gnosticism. Gnosticism was highly syncretistic and drew on a variety of sources including Orphic and Platonic dualism, Syrian conceptions, Persian dualism, the mystery cults, Mesopotamian astrology and Egyptian religion. "When combined with certain elements from Christianity, Gnosticism proved so attractive that, while no accurate figures are obtainable, the suggestion has been made that for a time the majority of those who regarded themselves as Christians adhered to one or another of its many forms."[18] Gnostics believed in a *Gnosis* or knowledge that had been revealed and was transmitted to those who were specially initiated. It professed to be universal, accommodating the truths of the various religions. Salvation, the freeing of pure spirit from corrupt matter, was to be attained by the understanding of revealed truth presented in the form of mysteries.[19] Gnostic beliefs were integrated with Christian thought by allegorically interpreting Christian and Jewish scriptures, and by

appealing to some teachings of Jesus which, so it was claimed, had not been written out, but handed down secretly through oral tradition. Gnosticism gave many different interpretations of Jesus. For example, some held that he was really pure spirit and only appeared to be associated with the flesh.[20] Gnosticism minimized the historical element in Christianity and attempted to divorce the wisdom of Jesus from his life, acts, death and resurrection.

The claims of the Gnostics and others (the Marcionites and the Montanists) compelled those Christians who did not agree with them to attempt to clarify and systematize the Gospel. This response took three forms: (1) identifying authoritative lines of succession among bishops; (2) determining which writings were by the apostles or clearly contained their teachings, thus forming the canon of Christian scripture; and (3) formulating clear, brief statements of Christian doctrine (e.g. Apostles' Creed), so that even a common person would know the essentials of the faith and be protected against deviations such as Gnosticism.

III. Christ, the Logos and the Early Church Fathers

In the second and third centuries various views were put forward by the Church Fathers as to the relation of Jesus to God. A common view in this regard — and one which is enjoying renewed attention in the modern encounter of Christianity with other religions — centered on the identification of Christ with the *Logos*.[21] Justin Martyr, with influence from Philo, held that the *Logos* was a kind of "second God" incarnated in an historical person, Jesus, for the salvation of men. Although this incarnated *Logos* was not different in kind from God the Father, it was a second God. Irenaeus, on the other hand, held that the *Logos*, which became incarnate in Jesus Christ, was the divine agent of revelation. Against the Gnostic's view of Jesus as only an apparent man, Irenaeus stressed that "Jesus Christ was both man and God, fully man and from the beginning the incarnation of the *Logos*, that in Jesus, God Himself suffered for men (who deserved nothing from Him), and that at the same time Jesus as man at every stage of his life ... perfectly fulfilled what God had intended man and his entire creation to be, and so, as representative of man, won for man the right to be recognized by God as having met his standards."[22] Tertullian

declared that although in his substance God is one, he has three activities or *persona* — a unity of substance but a trinity of manifestation. Also in God is *Logos* or reason which expresses itself in word. In Jesus, said Tertullian quoting the *Gospel of John*, the word became incarnate.

At the great Catechetical school of Alexandria, Clement held that God is knowable only through the *Logos*, His mind. The eternal *Logos* is the perfect mirror of God, and the means by which He is made known. The *Logos* inspired the Greek philosophers, and Jesus is the *Logos*, the guide to all humanity. Clement's successor at the Catechetical school in Alexandria was Origen. Basing himself on scripture Origen taught: (1) that there is one God, the Father, just and good, the creator of all things; (2) that Jesus Christ, the God-man, was the incarnation of the *Logos* and co-eternal with the Father although subordinate to him; and (3) that the uncreated Holy Spirit is associated with the Father and the Son. He held that persons derive their existence from the Father, their rational nature from the *Logos*, the Son, and their sanctification from the Holy Spirit. Following Origen came the protracted Arius-Athanasius dispute over the nature of the identity relationship between God and Son; Arius argued for a distinction giving the Son a beginning but seeing God as beginningless. This interpretation which would make Christ second and subordinate to God, was unacceptable to Athanasius who stressed the uniqueness of Christ and the Christian revelation and its eternal identity with God. The debate between the two camps is too long and convoluted to be rehearsed here. Suffice it to say that the followers of Athanasius, with their stress on Christ's uniqueness and identity with God carried the day. Although controversies continued over the relation of the divine and human in Jesus, these do not seem as crucial to the relationship of Christianity to other religions, and so will be omitted. The importance of the Arius-Athanasius dispute is that Arius' position (making Jesus a subordinate incarnation) would have given Christianity openness to other incarnations, whereas the Athanasian view produced a closed exclusive Christianity with Jesus as the only true incarnation.

Subsequent early thinkers in the Western Christian Church, e.g. Augustine, turned their attention to analysis of human nature, God's grace and the Church as a saving instrument. Although important to the internal development of Christian thought, no change in the basic

Christological assumptions of the Athanasian theory was introduced. Thus this period can also be bypassed as having little significance for Christian relations with other religions. In the Eastern (Orthodox) Church, also, there were no further developments worthy of note. The single-pointed focusing of Christian doctrine had to a large extent taken place as reactions to the teachings of the Gnostics and numerous other Greek and Roman religions. The strength of the exclusiveness of Christianity is indicated in that by 500 A.D. Christianity had profoundly changed the religious life of the Roman Empire. The Greek and Roman religions had virtually ceased to exist. Their easygoing syncretism had given way to tough-minded claim of Christianity that through itself alone was salvation to be attained.[23] Further, the Catholic Church tended to identify itself with the Kingdom of God on earth. Influence had come into Christian thought in the use of the term *Logos* to describe the relationship between Jesus and God. In a more negative way, Greek identification of evil with the flesh and its desires led to a rejection of certain aspects of human nature by Christianity, especially Christian monasticism.

IV. Christianity, Islam and the Medieval Period

From 622 A.D. Christianity was challenged by the younger and more vigorous religion, Islam. Within a century Islamic rulers had become masters of over half of the Christian world. Muhammad knew of Christianity and honoured Jesus as a prophet, but denied the incarnation. The fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity still remains; in the Islamic view the gulf between God and man is too great to be bridged by Jesus or anyone else. Some Christians in the early Moslem centuries regarded Islam as a Christian heresy, but this Islam denies, holding itself to be a fresh revelation from God, the final religion.[24] The impact of Islam on the Byzantine Christian Church did not produce any fresh theology, rather it signalled a slowing down in Christian creative activity.

During the medieval period Christianity once again resumed outward expansion. Missionaries were sent to Europe and Asia. Missions were established in India and China bringing Christianity into direct contact with Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. But, true to its exclusive tendency Christianity seems to have

shut itself off from any meaningful contact with these other religions. The Jews were spiritually ghettoized. An anti-Semitic theology said that they could not even interpret their own scriptures properly. Islam was seen by Western Christians as a political and religious enemy to be put to the sword. In spite of a few brilliant exceptions such as Nicholas of Cusa and the early Dominican and Franciscan missionaries, the dominant consensus was that the full extent of Christian Universality and of God's Kingdom on earth had been reached.

V. The Modern Christian Encounter with Other Religions

As mentioned earlier, several factors in contemporary experience are causing Christian theologians to seriously re-examine the closed, exclusivistic attitude that has prevailed since the time of the early Church Fathers. For the first time Christian scholars have available to them full factual information on the other world religions. In addition, there is the existential experience of cultural and religious pluralism — all over the world, religious believers of different traditions are living side by side as citizens of the same country. No longer can Christians view Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims as heathens living in far off lands to be converted by Christian missionaries. Today believers of these religions live as neighbours to Christians in the formerly Christian dominated cultures of Europe and North America. Eastern religions especially are evidencing considerable appeal for occidentals through sectarian movements such as Transcendental Meditation, Zen Buddhism and others.[25] In Western universities, Religious Studies Departments are drawing large numbers of students and providing them the opportunity to study each of the World Religions in their original language and in a free academic atmosphere. Taken together all of these factors are putting pressure on Christian theologians, for the first time since Chalcedon, to seriously re-examine the traditional exclusiveness of Christian doctrine. Within the Roman Catholic Church, some of the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council have opened the way for a more positive attitude toward other religions.[26] In Protestant circles the World Council of Churches has, throughout the nineteen-seventies, given increasing importance to dialogue with people of other religions.[27] Recently, the World Council of Churches released its *Guidelines on Dialogue* which is now spawning commentaries and study books within each of its member Churches.[28]

Outside the formal activities of Church Institutions, the scholarship of the past decade shows an increasing focus on the issue by theologians and Religious Studies scholars.[29]

The debate among early modern Christian thinkers grouped around two opposing interpretations of Jesus Christ: on the one hand is Kant's focus on the idea or principle of Christ as an eternally present incarnation; on the other side is Schleiermacher's rejection of the metaphysical and ontological aspects of Chalcedon and his desire to ground himself in human experience. Immanuel Kant, in his analysis of Christ as a manifestation of reason universally inherent in human experience, represents an idealizing Christology. For Kant, the historical Jesus was not a necessity.[30] Schleiermacher reacted against Kant's abstracting and universalizing tendancies and inaugurated a new humanistic or "bottom up" approach by interpreting the meaning of Christ from the side of his manhood. Schleiermacher assumed a universal religious consciousness which he described as a feeling of absolute dependence.[31] He grounded Christian faith in the universal human phenomena of religious experience rather than abstract reason or authoritative sources. This turning inward to subjective insights and away from outward authority was a radical change from previous approaches. Since Schleiermacher, Christology has tended to either further develop or refute his position. While neither Kant nor Schleiermacher had a depth knowledge of other religions, they did deal with the problem of Christianity's exclusivism. Kant, through reason, and Scheiermacher, through the subjective feeling of absolute dependence, grounded Christianity in human universals which opened the doors to religious relativism.

The founding of Christian claims on history was given a severe blow by David Friedrich Strauss' book, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined.*[32] Because of his scepticism about the historical reliability of the Gospels — a scepticism which modern scientific Biblical scholarship has in some ways continued to augment — Strauss rejected historical facts as a basis for Christian knowledge.

In this century yet another theme was added to the notion of religious relativism — that of evolutionary progress. *Ernest Troeltsch* understood religious history in an evolutionary perspective — as a

universal human movement toward perfection.[33] Since the whole of human history comprises the total evolutionary movement, other religions and movements cannot be excluded. Absolutism is rejected and revelation is seen as a progressive movement toward the Absolute, which can never be completely attained. God's revelations in the Hebrew Scriptures and in Jesus are only stages in the general history of revelation. For Troeltsch, Jesus Christ cannot be identified with God, but must take his place alongside the founders of other great religions. Jesus provided the needed requirements for the evolution of the Christian religion. Jesus Christ is the means by which Christians grasp the essence of religiosity. Absolute validity cannot be claimed for Christianity or any other religion. Truth can only be truth for me, for my culture, for my religion. Yet in spite of this relativism there is, for Troeltsch, the sense of a potential absolute as the common goal of the evolutionary process in all religions.

> (Religions) are products of the impulse towards absolute objective truth, and take effect in the practical sphere under constant critical self-purification and effort at self-improvement ... all seem impelled by an inner force to strive upward towards some unknown final height, where alone ultimate unity and the final objective validity can lie. And, as all religion has thus a common goal in the Unknown, the Future, perchance in the Beyond, so too it has a common ground in the Divine Spirit ever pressing the finite mind onward toward further light and fuller consciousness, a Spirit which indwells the finite spirit, and whose ultimate union with it is the purpose of the whole many-sided process.[34]

For Troeltsch, each religion is a different cultural manifestation of the struggle of the human spirit from the divine source to the divine goal.

At the opposite end of the spectrum stands Karl Barth. Barth reacted against Troeltsch by presenting an uncompromising and exclusivistic view of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Barth describes his basis for the theological evaluation of man as the subject of all religions as follows:

> It will be man for whom (whether he knows it or not) Jesus Christ was born, died, and rose again. It will be man who (whether he has already heard it or not) is intended in the Word of God. It will be man who (whether he is aware of it or not) has in Christ his Lord.[35]

Although Barth is stridently exclusivistic in his Christology, he does not accept a simple one to one identity of true religion with the Christian religion or the Christian Church. Both of these are under the same judgement for failings as any other religion. But to the extent that the Christian religion or Christian Church through grace lives by grace, to that extent it is the locus of true religion.[36]

At first glance Barth would seem to open true religion to any religion which "through grace lives by grace," but it is quickly evident that Barth restricts grace to Jesus Christ. Barth carefully distinguishes grace from fanatic piety, Hegelian and Kantian rationalism, and relativism or historical scepticism. All these Barth dismisses as the worst forms of intolerance and argues that true tolerance toward other religions can only be found in the forbearance of God's grace as manifested in Jesus Christ. Barth's theology in this regard is based on two points which he finds in Christian Scripture: (1) that religions are futile human attempts to know God, and that only through revelation can God be known; and (2) in the revelation of Jesus Christ we experience the grace by which God reconciles us to himself.[37] For Barth revelation (and grace) dialectically oppose religion (and religions). Christian religion and the Christian Church are sinful and therefore not true religion. But by abandoning its own claims to superiority or absolute truth, and, by God's grace manifesting the revelation of Jesus Christ, Christianity may be judged by God as the right and true religion.[38]

Barth offers an analogy of the sun illuminating the earth as a way of understanding Christianity in relation to other religions.

> Like the sun, Christ's light falls on one part of the earth and not on the other, enlightening one part and leaving the other part in darkness, and this without ever changing the religion itself. All depends on the light of Christ shining here and not there on the "act of divine election." The only difference between Christianity and other religions is that Christianity stands in the sunlight, the others in the shadow.[39]

Barth's theology takes with utmost seriousness the sinfulness of human nature which corrupts all religions including Christianity. Thus he is very critical of any notions of superiority or pride within Christians or the Church in encounters with other religions. Only God's grace in

Christ can help, and as it happens, its locus is in Christianity and not in any other religion.

VI. Recent Developments

In the past few decades Christian theologians have taken up various positions along the spectrum between the religious pluralism of Troeltsch at the one end, and the Christian exclusivism of Barth at the other end. Troeltsch's absolutizing of relativism and Barth's absolutizing of faith have produced a dialectical morass from which contemporary Christian theologians are desperately attempting to escape. The outcome has been a "theological smorgasbord" without, as yet, any clear solution. In analyzing this "theological smorgasbord" we will use the terms "Theocentricism" and "Christocentricism" as helpful headings with which to survey many of the contemporary positions. Finally the model of "dialogue" will be examined as the approach seeming to hold the most hope for further development.

Theocentric Approaches

Theocentric approaches to other religions are evidenced by theologians who place God rather than Christ at the centre. Typically they point to passages in the Hebrew scriptures where God's covenant with Abraham and Noah are understood as applying to the whole of humanity, and where God elects several peoples not just Israel.[40] Attention is also drawn to the Theocentric statements of Jesus. He habitually spoke of God as the father, and placed himself below God, e.g. "My Father is greater than I" (*John* 14:28). Centre stage is given to Jesus as the one who points to and reveals God, and attention is drawn away from Jesus' statements equating himself with God, e.g. "I and my Father are one" (*John* 10:30). The emphasis is placed on Jesus pointing to God rather than to himself. In passages from the epistles, the priority of God as the one who has exalted Jesus is repeatedly highlighted, e.g. eternal life is "to know thee as the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent" (*John* 17:3). God is not only *previous* to Jesus Christ but also after him at the eschatological end: "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him that God may be everything to everyone" (1 *Corinthians* 15:28). The proponents of this approach see it not as ignoring the divinity of Christ but as recognizing

the greatness and freedom of God — of avoiding such exclusive focusing on Christ that it becomes impossible to have any positive relationship with other religions.

It is certainly true that shifting the centre of focus from Christ to God opens the way for dialogue with Judaism, Islam and many forms of Hinduism. But one point, not yet recognized by the theologians taking this approach, is that centering on God is a serious obstacle to Buddhists. Let us now sample some of the Theocentric theologies.

Orthodox Theology[41]

A viewpoint that is frequently forgotten in contemporary debate is that of Eastern Churches, the Orthodox Christians of Greece, Russia, the Ukraine, etc. Orthodox theologians seem more comfortable with religious pluralism than many of their Western counterparts. This is not surprising in that Orthodox Christians have for many centuries lived as pluralists within Christianity — a self-awareness which Western Christianity has to a large extent repressed.

Orthodox theology, with its emphasis on the Holy Spirit, sees the continuity of God's revealing truth in all nations before as well as after the incarnation of the *Logos* in Jesus Christ. The contribution of Greek philosophy to inclusive Christian theology via Justin, Clement and Origen is favoured over the narrower formulations of Tertullian. Paul's analysis of Athenians' worship of the unknown God as being Christian without knowing it,[42] and the invocation of the *Logos* at the beginning of John's Gospel, prepared the way for a positive attitude toward non-biblical truth. Thus recognition could be given that Socrates' teaching, "It is evil to return evil for evil,"[43] is more humane and godly than the Torah "your eye shall not pity; it shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth..." (*Deut.* 19:21). Rejecting the more exclusive and militant formulations of the Christian West, Orthodox theologians attempted to absorb and consecrate the good as part of truth wherever it was found.[44] No one can limit God's presence. It is not given to Christians or anyone else to judge where God is not. As Peter confessed, "I now see how true it is that God has no favorites, but that in every nation the person who is God-fearing and does what is right is acceptable to him" (*Acts* 10:34-35). For the Orthodox, this in no way denies Christ's claim that he is "the way, the truth, and the life"

(*John* 14:6). Christ is not limited by space or time, his Spirit lives, speaks and acts in human history everywhere. The Holy Spirit manifested in the early Christian Church (*Acts* 2:1-4) is God's Spirit which is everywhere inspiring and uplifting all people. It is this doctrine of the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit that is the basis for the positive approach of Orthodox Christians to other religions.

Orthodox Christians point to the fact that for many centuries millions of them have lived as peaceful suffering servants in the midst of Islam. In the West, by contrast, the fruits of exclusivism — the Christian Crusades against Islam — are pointed to as empirical evidence of the error of that theology. Orthodox Christianity sees its past as one of living in the midst of pluralism, and its future within the context of Marxian and other creeds as being no different. The theological objective of Orthodox Christianity is the absorption of the human being into God through worship. Their Christology and its relationship to other religions is summarized as follows:

> Christ is never mere man or God but always the *theanthropos* (God-man), seeking to elevate human beings to *theosis*. As long as other religions have the same goal, the elevation of humanity to divine life, they are perceived by the Orthodox as instruments of God in God's world.[46]

Paul Tillich[46]

Paul Tillich, a Protestant theologian, develops a position which, like the Orthodox view, argues for openness based on the omnipresent action of the Holy Spirit. Tillich sees in Christianity an ongoing tension between the particular and the universal. The particularity is of course centred on the appearence and reception of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. This is the criteria for all Christian encounters with other religions and for all self-judging of Christians. Tillich explains this as follows:

> What is particular in him is that he crucified the particular in himself for the sake of the universal. This liberates his image from bondage both to a particular religion — the religion to which he belonged has thrown him out — and to the religious sphere as such: the principle of love in him embraces the cosmos, including both the religious and the secular spheres. With this image, particular yet free from particularity, religious yet free from religion, the criteria are given under which Christianity must judge itself and, by judging itself, judge also the other religions.[47]

Thus Tillich sees an openness in Christianity in the tension between judging the encountered religions and accepting judgement from them. This was the vital power of Christianity in its early centuries — its ability to be a centre of crystallization for all positive religious elements after they had been subjected to the criteria of Jesus as the Christ. Such openness and receptivity was gradually lost with the strengthening of hierarchial anthority until "The tradition ceased to be a living stream; it became an ever-augmented sum of immovably valid statements and institutions."[48] This stagnation and inturning of Christianity, which resulted in a rejection of pluralism, lasted through the medieval period and the reformation until modern secularism opened Christians again to a creative encounter with other religions. Tillich gives examples of the way in which Christianity both judged other religions and accepted judgement from them. This attitude, says Tillich, puts an end to Christian attempts to convert Jews, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists and instead invokes self-criticism and dialogue. The goal is neither the mixing of religions nor the victory of one religion, but, through self-critical dialogue to penetrate ever further into the depths of one's own religion. In the depth of every religion, says Tillich, "there is a point where particularity breaks through to spiritual freedom — and to a vision of the spiritual presence in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence."[49]

Because Tillich conceives of God in very abstract philosophical terms,[50] his theology may prove more acceptable as a basis for dialogue with Buddhists than the approaches of other contemporary Theocentric theologians.

John Hick

John Hick is a British philosopher of religion-cum-theologian. Of late his viewpoint is much discussed in English speaking circles. Hick takes for his title a phrase from the *Bhagavad Gītā*, "Whatever Path Men Choose Is Mine."[51] Hick formulates his position in reaction to the Christocentric approach dominant in contemporary Western theology today. Theologians like Karl Rahner, who regard the devout Muslim, Hindu or Jew as an "anonymous Christian," are criticised by Hick as still working within the old dogma which holds Christ rather than God at the centre. From that perspective only Christians can be saved and "so we have to say that devout and godly non-Christians

are really, in some metaphysical sense, Christians or Christians-to-be without knowing it."[52] The intention, says Hick, is not double talk but the charitable extension of grace to religious persons who had formerly been regarded as beyond the pale. In his view, such a move has the psychological function of being a bridge between the no longer acceptable exclusivism of the past, and a new open view which is emerging. But, says Hick, sooner or later Christians shall have to get off this bridge on the other side. His own position is offered as one in the new realm — completely on the other side of the "anonymous Christian" bridge.

Hick develops his position by analogy to Ptolemaic and Copernican astronomy. Just as in Ptolemaic astronomy the earth was seen as the centre of the solar system with all the other planets revolving around it, so in Ptolemaic theology Christ is seen as the centre of the universe of religions. Other religions are seen as revolving around Christinity and being graded according to their distance from it. Hick notes that such a Ptolemaic approach could just as well be used by any other religion. A Hindu, for example, could say that sincere Christians are implicit Hindus, that other faiths provide various grades of ordinary paths to truth, while Hinduism is the extraordinary path, that Hinduism is not a religion but the eternal truth judging and superseding all religions (*a la* Barth), etc. This stance can be taken by a theologian of any religion, but in reality it is only an interim position while we prepare our minds for Copernican theology. Just as Copernicus realized that it is the sun, and not the earth, that is at the centre, so also "we have to realize that the universe of faiths centres upon *God*, and not upon Christianity or any other religion. He is the sun, the originative source of light and life, whom all the religions reflect in their own different ways."[53] If this is so, then it is to be expected that God, as reflected in the different civilizations, manifests in different revelations or religions. But even though the various revelations differ, we may believe that everywhere the one God has been at work "pressing in upon the human spirit."[54]

Hick attempts to defend his position by re-interpreting traditional Christology. The Biblical claims regarding the uniqueness of Christ (e.g. "I and the Father are one," "No one comes to God but by me") he dismisses, on the authority of New Testament criticism, as being

additions by the early Christian community rather than the words of Jesus. It is worth noting in passing that recent Biblical studies do not uniformly support Hick's interpretation. For example, whereas Hick claims that according to Biblical scholars the "Son of Man" sayings cannot be ascribed to Jesus, a 1980 study comes to a quite different conclusion. Although it is allowed that many Son of Man sayings are inauthentic, the author concludes that some twelve key instances are attributable to Jesus, himself.[55] Attention is called to this problem because it is on the basis of his understanding of Biblical scholarship that Hick concludes that *Jesus did not think of himself as God.*[56] Hick then builds on this a theory that statements about the incarnation of Jesus must be understood as mythological statements.[57] Incarnational statements, says Hick, are simply figural ways of saying that Jesus is the living contact with God for Christians. When this is seen it frees us from having "to draw the negative conclusion that he (Jesus) is man's one and only effective point of contact with God."[58]

The Kantian background of Hick's theology is readily apparent. God is an *a priori* idea which is structured by human experience. A problem, however, that Hick refuses to recognize is that "God" as an *a priori* is simply unacceptable to the Buddhist, and to Advaita Vedantins. This calls into question Hick's Copernican revolution as acceptable to all religions. While Hick may have stepped off the bridge of "anonymous Christianity," he is, from the viewpoint of much Eastern religion, still stuck on the "bridge of theism."

The above scholars provide a fair sampling of the Theocentric approach to other religions. But, before moving to some of the Christocentric theologians a footnote on a recent Biblical contribution may be in order. Krister Stendahl, Professor of New Testament at the Harvard Divinity School, recently gave three Bible Studies which presented a Theocentric position. Adducing both Old and New Testament sources, Stendahl interprets them as a "witnessing particularism within a universal perspective."[59] The Bible, says Stendahl, speaks of God's attempts to "mend creation." He sent Noah, the prophets and then Jesus who preached God's kingdom as a mended creation. But when the kingdom did not come, Christians turned their attention from the kingdom to Jesus as Lord (King). The Christian failure of exclusiveness, says Stendahl, is rooted in the fact that while Jesus preached the

kingdom, the Church preached Jesus. Stendahl's exegesis of Peter's statement "There is no other name under heaven given among man by which we must be saved" (*Acts* 4:12) is that it is a confession, and religious confession should be understood as love language. If a husband says that his wife is the only one for him, and is telling the truth, then that is good and true. But if he were witnessing in court under oath and was asked by the judge whether he could be sure that nowhere in the world could there be another woman about whom he could have come to say the same thing, then he could not take such an oath. In that setting, says Stendahl, the same words take on a different meaning, just as would Peter's confession if treated as an axiom of dogmatic theology. In our particular religious experience, we are at the level of witness, confession, love language, and such primary religious experience is not a good basis for an absolute conceptual claim in an absolute sense. In a pluralistic world it is important for Christians to find their right and particular place as faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ leaving the result of the witness in the hands of God. Stendahl finds guidance in this regard in Paul's letter to the Church in Rome. In it Paul reflects on how his mission to the Gentiles fits into God's wider plan (*Romans* 9-11). Although he would like the Jews to accept Jesus as the Christ, he criticizes the Gentile Christians for their attempts at converting Jews (*Romans* 11:13). Paul seems to have noted two things: an attitude of conceit and superiority in the Gentile movement, apart from the Jews — salvation of the Jews is to be left in God's hands. Throughout this passage, notes Stendahl, the stress is on God, not Christ. The problem that Paul discerned was that Christians were witnessing to Jesus in conceit, in a manner which suggested that God's only way was that everyone must become like themselves. They did not understand their mission as a particular witness of their particular community in a world of communities, and in that, said Paul, they were wrong. They became proud, they did not "stand in awe" (*Romans* 11:20).

Christocentric Approaches

Christocentric approaches to other religions ground themselves in Christologies which hold Jesus Christ to be the unique incarnation of God, either absolutely or in degree. As such he is the universal revelation for all humanity. Older Christocentric views in the Christian West

often consigned other religions to spiritual darkness and their followers to damnation. This older view has become increasingly unacceptable in the light of growing contact with other faiths. Consequently contemporary Christocentric Theologians have been labouring mightily to avoid the unacceptable implication of the older view without having to implicitly renounce it. This is in accordance with the traditional theological method of reinterpreting a dogma rather than saying it was wrong. In attempting to reinterpret Christocentric theology in ways more acceptable to religious pluralism various tactics have been adopted: ideas of implicit as distinguished from explicit faith; baptism by desire as distinguished from literal baptism; the latent Church as distinguished from the manifest Church; salvation through Christ in the life to come if not in this life.[60] Theologians such as Raymond Panikkar[61] and John Cobb[62] employ the old Christological notion of Christ as the incarnation of the *Logos*. Both see Christ as the normative *Logos* incarnation for all religions. Wolfhart Pannenberg adopts an inductive approach which lays great emphasis upon the objective historicity of Jesus as the ground of faith. Pannenberg moves from the historical Jesus to a recognition of his divinity, with the incarnation emerging as a conclusion.[63] However such a "bottom up" Christology still leads Pannenberg to hold to the finality and universality of Christ. Although God is experienced in other religions he is not really known, since saving knowledge only comes with Christ, the experience of God in other religions cannot save.[64] The Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner has presented perhaps the most sophisticated and influential attempt to work out acceptable Christocentric approach to other religions.

Karl Rahner[65]

Karl Rahner's theology is a systematic effort to affirm the exclusiveness and universalism of Christ, while at the same time respecting God's universal salvific will. "If, on the one hand, we conceive salvation as something specifically *Christian* ... and if, on the other hand, God has really, truly and seriously intended this salvation for all men — then these two aspects cannot be reconciled in any other way than by stating that every human being is really and truly exposed to the influence of divine supernatural grace."[66] It is the universal grace of God for all mankind that moves Rahner deeply and drives his desire

to somehow reconcile Christocentric theology with non-Christian religious experience.

Rahner establishes his position in terms of four theses: (1) Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion intended for all persons and cannot therefore recognize any other religion as equal with itself; (2) until the moment when the Gospel enters into the historical situation of an individual, a non-Christian religion not only contains natural knowledge of God but also supernatural elements of grace (a free gift from God on account of Christ); (3) thus (based on 2), Christianity does not simply confront the member of another religion as a mere non-Christian, but as someone who must be regarded as an anonymous Christian; (4) the Church will not so much regard herself as the exclusive community of those who have a claim to salvation, but rather as the historical vanguard and explicit expression of what the Christian hope is that is present as a hidden reality in other religions Through these four theses Rahner accommodates both the universal saving grace of God for all, and the exclusiveness of Christ as the explicit and full criterion. If due to the historical circumstances of living before Jesus or of not yet being exposed to Christ through the missionary witness of Christians, then God's grace — understood as the *a priori* spiritual horizon of all religious acts — in the other religions is revelation leading to salvation. But since salvation can only be Christ's salvation (Thesis 1), then if salvation is reached via another religion, it must be an experience of anonymous Christianity. Rahner is careful to safeguard the superiority of Christianity: the individual who is exposed to God's grace through Christianity has, other things being equal, a greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian,[67] i.e. of another religion.

Rahner realizes that a Jew or Hindu will think it presumptuous of the Christian to regard him (the Jew or Hindu) as a Christian who has not yet come to himself reflectively. Yet, says Rahner, "the Christian cannot renounce this presumption ... it is a profound admission that God is greater than man and the Church."[68] In Rahner's view, allowing for the reality of God's grace in other religions gives the Christian a basis to be tolerant, humble and yet firm towards all non-Christians.

From within Christianity, Rahner's doctrine of anonymous Christianity has been accused of both elitism and relativism. But in Rahner's mind, "the anonymous Christian is not condemned to a defective form of Christianity; it exists at the same supernatural, radical and human level as that of the explicit Christian. The universal possibility of salvation is ontologically grounded in the creative act of God and made historically present in the Christ event."[69] A possible misunderstanding of Rahner would be to think that for him Christ is simply the manifestation of salvation (the *Logos* notion) and not the *cause*. This danger could perhaps be avoided by giving more stress to the historical dimension in Rahner's transcendental Christology.[70]

As is evident in Rahner's theology, the Christocentric approaches, like the theocentric, are shifting focus from the exclusivity of Christ to the universality of God.

The Approach of Dialogue

While the above theologians have been attempting to reinterpret Christian theology so as to systematically make room for other religions, another group of Christian thinkers have stressed the approach of dialogue. Dialogue starts from the assumption that each religion has its absolute claims which cannot be relativised.[71] No amount of reformulation will do away with difference. But, by letting our theologizing be overheard by others we will be forced to greater honesty and deeper spirituality. The prerequisite for dialogue is not the harmonizing of all beliefs, but the recognition that each spiritual person has a committed and absolute conviction — and that these convictions are different. The Christian is committed to God through Christ, the Muslim to the Qur'ān as God's final word, the Hindu to the idea of many paths to the One Brahman (the absolutizing of a relativism), and so on. In the Dialogical approach, each religion is seen as having an absolute which cannot be surrendered without destroying the essential identity of that faith. Such dialogue urges the ego maturity required "to let the opposites co-exist without pretending that they can be made compatible."[72] Indeed, the very capacity and need for categorical assertion is understood as held in common by all religious persons, and as such is a ground for dialogue.[73]

Stanley Samartha[74]

Among Christian proponents of dialogue, Stanley Samartha has made perhaps the most serious effort at systematization. He begins by arguing that a Christian must approach dialogue from a theocentric rather than a Christocentric basis. This frees the Christian from the exclusiveness of *possession* which petrifies revelation and monopolizes truth. True Christian commitment, he says, clings to the centre of faith without closing the gates at the circumference. Some doors must be left "unlatched in order that the gentle breeze of the Holy Spirit may enter the Christian home, sometimes from unexpected corners."[75] The problem, in Samartha's view, is that Christians constantly misunderstand openness to mean mere relativism or neutrality.

> To acknowledge the fact of religious pluralism means that one cannot take shelter in neutral or objective ground. There is no theological helicopter that can help us to rise above all religions and look down upon the terrain below in lofty condescension. *Our* standpoint, therefore, has to be Christian; but by the same token our neighbours are also free to have their particular standpoints.[76]

In Samartha's view the obligation of Christians today is not to Christianity as a religion, nor to the cultural forms of Christianity we have inherited, "but to God who, at the very point where he reveals himself in Jesus Christ, liberates us from our particular bondages in order to have new relations with our neighbours in the larger community."[77] Just as God took upon himself the risk to become human, so Christians must not be afraid to live in the midst of religious pluralism. What is needed is not a theology of dialogue, but courage for dialogue.

Samartha defines dialogue as "an attempt to understand and express our particularity not just in terms of our own heritage but also in relation to the spiritual heritage of our neighbours."[78] He details three theological reasons as to why dialogue ought to be a continuing Christian concern: (1) God in Jesus has himself entered into relationship with men of all faiths and all ages, offering the good news of salvation; (2) the offer of true community inherent in the Gospel, through forgiveness, reconciliation and a new creation, inevitably leads to dialogue; and (3) since Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit

will lead us into all truth, and since truth in the Biblical understanding is not propositional but relational, therefore dialogue becomes one of the means of quest for truth.[79] Although the word. "dialogue" is not found in the Bible, warm relationships and intense personal encounter are in evidence throughout the scriptures. The approach of dialogue is exemplified in the way in which Jesus deals with people, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the Roman centurion, and his own disciples. It is the way of dialogue, and not "theological bulldozing," that is required of Christians in today's pluralistic world.

As to the ultimate outcome of dialogue, Samartha reports that "where people meet in freedom and expectation, there are moments when the particular labels that partners wear lose their importance and that which is behind and beyond them breaks through in spiritual freedom, offering a vision of the ultimate that holds them together."[80] Though few, says Samartha, such moments are significant and it is his hope that they will contribute to the transformation of particular religions without denying their distinctiveness.

Many other advocates of the Christian approach to dialogue could be cited,[81] but Samartha's position is generally representative. A Theocentric theology is assumed with Christ being both the exemplar of how to dialogue, and the universally present Holy Spirit which makes dialogue possible. The expected outcome is not the homogenization of particular religions, but the mutual deepening of spiritual experience within the particular, perhaps leading to glimpses of a common transcendent reality.

The approach of dialogue would seem to open the way for the meeting of Christians with Jews, Muslims, and many Hindus. Once again, however, the Theocentric premise could become an obstacle to encounters with Buddhists and Advaita Vedantins. None of the Christian thinkers examined exhibited sensitivity to this problem.

VII. Summary and Conclusion

Due to the challenge of religious pluralism, the relationship between Christianity and other religions has become a key issue for theologians. The major problem is Christianity's claim to uniqueness and normativeness arising from the doctrine of Christology. In the

New Testament some statements support the concept of a unique incarnation of God in Christ, while other statements (such as Jesus' attitude toward those of other religions) provide a basis for Christian openness. Paul's debate with the Jerusalem Christians over circumcision requirements marked out Christianity as a religion separate from Judaism. As Christianity freed itself from Judaism it encountered Greek philosophy which led to attempts to interpret the Gospel in the categories of Greek philosophy. The challenge of Gnosticism led to the formation of the canon of Christian Scripture and statements of Christian creed. Thus the process of rendering Christian self-understanding in exclusive terms was begun. This process continued with contributions from the early Christian fathers, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement and Origen with the Greek *Logos* notion playing a major role. These theological developments culminated in the long and important Arius-Athanasius dispute over the nature of the identity relationship between God and Son. The importance of this dispute is that Arius' position (making Jesus subordinate to God) would give Christianity an openness to other religions, whereas the Athanasian view, which carried the day, produced a closed exclusive Christianity with Jesus as the only true incarnation. By 500 A.D. this exclusive and tough-minded Christianity had destroyed the previously dominant Greek and Roman religions, and the Catholic Church was tending to identify itself with the Kingdom of God on earth. In the medieval period, in spite of continuous contact with Islam and the beginning of missionary activity to the East, the dominant attitude, in western Christianity at least, was of a narrow exclusivism.

In the early modern period exclusivistic theology was challenged by Kant and Schleiermacher. Kant, through reason, and Schleiermacher, through the subjective feeling of absolute dependence, grounded Christianity in human universals and opened the way to religious relativism. The anchoring of exclusivism with the historicity of scripture was put in serious question by Strauss and subsequent Biblical criticism. Troeltsch added further support to relativistic understanding of Christianity by introducing the notion of an unending evolutionary progress. Barth countered this gathering relativism and scepticism by dialectically separating all religions (including Christianity) from the grace experience of revelation — which he saw as coming from God exclusively through Jesus Christ. Although he

attacks the pride and sinfulness of Christianity, Barth continued to see it as the exclusive locus of God's grace and revelation in Christ.

Recent developments in Christian Theology include a variety of attempts to escape from both Troeltsch's relativism and Barth's exclusivism. Theocentric approaches, such as those of Paul Tillich and John Hick are seen to shift from an identity Christology (with emphasis on Christ) to a subordinate Christology (with emphasis on God), thus opening the way to other Theocentric religions such as Judaism, Islam and parts of Hinduism, the often forgotten Orthodox or Eastern Christians were found to agree with this theology. By contrast, Christocentric approaches, such as Karl Rahner's anonymous Christianity, attempt to retain Christ as criterion while allowing for God's grace and even saving action in other religions. Finally the Dialogical approach, perhaps the most promising of all, emphasizes the universality of God while at the same time the human need for complete committment to the particular truth of the worshipper's religion. In the experience of dialogue the overhearing by other religions of one's own theologizing and the communal appreciation of the truths of each religion, is said to result in a spiritual deepening for all.

As was the case for both Judaism and Islam, an unresolved problem for all of the above approaches is the Buddhist and Advaita Vedanta rejection of God as ultimate reality. Christian theologians, even those with considerable exposure to Buddhism and Hinduism, seem to almost wilfully turn a blind eye to this problem. One possible exception might be found in Tillich's formulation of the "god above gods" as the "ground of being." While this may be quite acceptable to Advaita Vedantins, it must surely pose problems for Mādhyamika and Yogācāra Buddhists.

NOTES

1. See among others: Paul Tillich, *The Future of Religions.* N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1966; J. M. Carmody, "A Next Step for Catholic Theology" in *Theology Today* 32, 1976, 371-383; Klaus Klostermaier, "A Hindu Christian Dialogue on Truth," *Jr. of Ecumenical Studies* 12, 1975, 157-173; R. H. Drummond, "Christian Theology and the History of Religions," *Jr. of Ecumenical Studies* 12, 1975, 389-405; John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths.* London:

Macmillan, 1973; Hans Kung, *On Being A Christian.* N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976; Karl Rahner, "Anonymous and Explicit Faith" in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 16, N. Y.: Seabury Press, 1979; Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973; J. A. T. Robinson, *Truth is Two-Eyed.* London: S. C. M. Press, 1979 and W. C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981.

2. Robley E. Whitson, *The Coming Convergence of World Religions.* N. Y.: Newman, 1971.

3. John S. Dune, *The Way of All the Earth.* N.Y.: Macmillan, 1972.

4. Lucien Richard, *What Are They Saying About Christ And World Religions.* N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1981, p. 3.

5. M. Wiles, "Christianity Without Incarnation?" in *The Myth of God Incarnated,* ed. by John Hick. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977, p. 1.

6. E. D. Piryns, "The Church and Interreligious Dialogue: Present and Future," *The Japan Missionary Bulletin,* 4, 1978.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

8. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men.* N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1972, pp. 9-23.

9. Piryns, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

10. K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity.* London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955, p. 36.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

12. J. Jeremais, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations.* London: S. C. M. Press, 1967.

13. Richard, *op.cit.*, pp. 6-7.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

15. Latourette, *op.cit.*, pp. 120-1.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

17. H.W. Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation In The Old Testament.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950.

18. Latourette, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

20. *Ibid.*

21. The following summary is taken from Latourette, *op. cit.*, pp. 142 ff.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

25. See, for example Jacob Needleman, *The New Religions*. Richmond: Simon & Schuster, 1971, and Harvey Cox, *Turning East*. N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1977.

26. "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by W. M. Abbott. N.Y.: Guild Press, 1966.

27. At the World Council of Churches Central Committee meeting in Addis Ababa in January 1971 a sub-unit on dialogue (DIF) was established in Geneva for the purpose of encouraging dialogue with other religions. In the face of considerable opposition and charges of syncretism and the blunting of evangelism, the DIF was able to organize a world-wide consultation on the theme "Dialogue in Community" in Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1977.

28. See, for example, *Why Dialogue?: A First British Comment on the WCC Guidelines*, by Kenneth Cracknell. London: British Council of Churches, 1980.

29. At the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion "Religious Pluralism" has been the focus of an increasing number of panels and papers each year.

30. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. N.Y.: Harper Torchbooks, 1960.

31. Frederick Schleiermacher, *On Religion*. N. Y.: Harper & Row, 1958.

32. D. F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, tr. M. Evans. N. Y.: Calvin Blanchard, 1860.

33. Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions" in *Christianity and Other Religions*, ed. by John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite. Glascow: Fount, 1980, pp. 11-31.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

35. Karl Barth, "The Revelation of God as the Absolution of Religion" *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I. pt. 2 reprinted in *Christianity and Other Religions, op. cit.*, p. 32.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

37. *Ibid*, pp. 34-39.

38. *Ibid*, pp. 50-51.

39. Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

40. *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, II, p. 234, trans. J. Lauterbach. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976.

41. The following summary is based on Demetrios J. Constantelos "An Orthodox Perspective" in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, ed. by G. H. Anderson and T. F. Stransky. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981, pp. 181-190.

42. *Acts* 17:23.

43. Plato, *Crito*, 47D-49B.

44. Constantelos, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

46. The following summary is based on Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1963.

47. *Ibid.*, as reprinted in *Christianity and Other Religions*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

50. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I.

51. John Hick, "Whatever Path Men Choose Is Mine, "reprinted in *Christianity and Other Religions*, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-190.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

55. Barnabas Lindars, "A New Look on the Son of Man," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 63, 1981, 437-462.

56. Hick, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

59. Krister Stendahl, "Notes for Three Bible Studies" in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism* ed. by G.H. Anderson and T. F. Stransky. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981, pp. 7-18.

60. I am indebted to John Hick for this concise summary. See "Whatever Path Men Choose Is Mine," *op.cit.*, p. 179.

61. R. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*. N.Y: Orbis Books, 1973.

62. John Cobb, *Christ In a Pluralistic Age*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975.

63. W. Pannenberg, *Jesus — God and Man.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968, p. 37.

64. W. Pannenberg, "The Revelation of God In Jesus of Nazareth" in *Theology as History,* ed. by J.M. Robinson. N. Y.: Macmillan, 1967, p. 133.

65. Karl Rahner, "Chistianity and the Non-Christian Religions" reprinted in *Christianity and Other Religions, op.cit.,* pp. 52-79.

66. *Ibid.,* p. 63.

67. *Ibid.,* pp. 76-77.

68. *Ibid.,* p. 78.

69. *What Are They Saying About Christ and World Religions, op. cit.,* p. 35.

70. *Ibid.*

71. John V. Taylor, "The Theological Basis of Interfaith Dialogue" in *Christianity and Other Religions, op.cit.,* pp. 226-7.

72. *Ibid.,* p. 213.

73. *Ibid.,* p. 226.

74. S. J. Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981.

75. *Ibid.,* p. 96.

76. *Ibid.,* p. 97.

77. *Ibid.,* p. 98.

78. *Ibid.,* p. 99.

79. *Ibid.,* p. 12.

80. *Ibid.,* p. 98.

81. See also John Dune, John Taylor, Klaus Klostermaier, Raimundo Panikkar, Jurgen Moultmann, John Carman, and others.

3

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND ISLAM

Islam was born within the context of Judaism and Christianity. Some in the Arabian region were at least nominally Christian, and there were a good number of scattered Jewish communities. Indeed Muhammad understood his revelation to be a continuation and fulfillment of the Jewish and Christian biblical tradition. Muhammad's respect for the biblical tradition is exemplified in one stage of his teaching that during prayer one should face in the direction of Jerusalem. But when the Jewish community of Medina scorned him, the Prophet then ordered that the direction of prayer be toward Mecca.[1] This initial openness toward other religions hardened in line with the basic requirement for absolute allegiance to the one God, Allah, and the rejection of all other gods as false idols. *Shirk* was defined as the unforgivable sin of idolatry. Islam develops the notion of idolatry in its most consistent and extreme form.

Jihad (the holy war) develops in part, at least, as a response to idolatry. Allah is understood as the creator of all, and thus the God to be accepted and worshipped by all. After having had time to learn of Allah (a fourth month grace period) an idolator would be subject to attack as a threat to Islam, and a performer of *shirk*. In the early years, only in the case of Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians was the principle of *jihad* relaxed. Since they were also people of the biblical tradition they were allowed to retain their faith if they submitted to Muslim government and paid a special tax. Muhammad continued to think of Jews and Christians, not as idolators, but as members of the tradition which was being completed through his own revelations.[2] One effect of *jihad* was to rapidly expand Islam especially during the period 634-732 A.D. Within 100 years Islam had spread through the

Middle East to include Spain, Southern France, North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and East to the borders of India. In later years the expansion continued South into Africa, East to India, China, Java, Indonesia and the Phillipines.

During the modern period Islam has come West where it resides as a minority religious group in the American melting pot. Since the creation of Pakistan, the percentage of Muslims in India has decreased so that there too Islam faces the situation of being a religious minority. Up to the modern minority developments, Islam has usually had majority control of its territories, which allowed the traditional notions of *shirk* and *jihad* to guide reactions to other religions. However, with cultural and religious pluralism increasingly becoming the norm, rather than the exception, Islam may have to look to its experiences in India, Europe and America for leads into the future.

To begin our consideration, it may be useful to briefly outline the historical meetings of Islam with other faiths, as a backdrop against which to analyze Islamic reactions to other religions.

I. Historical Meetings of Islam with other Faiths

Jacques Waardenburg has recently provided a helpful outline of the encounter of Islam with a number of other religions.[3] He identifies six phases in the historical meetings of Islam with other faiths.

(1) Muhammad grew up in Mecca where he met Christians, Jews, Mazdaeans, and probably also Manichaeans and Sabians.

(2) During their first conquests outside Arabia in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., Muslims encountered the following religious communities:

(a) Mazdaeans in Mesopotamia and Iran

(b) Christians of different varieties:
Nestorians in Mesapotamia and Iran
Monophysites in Syria, Egypt and Armenia
Orthodox Melkites in Syria
Orthodox Latins in North Africa
Arians in Spain

(c) Jews in Mesapotamia, Iran, Syria and Egypt

(d) Samaritans in Palestine
(e) Mandaeans in South Mesapotamia
(f) Harrānians in North Mesapotamia
(g) Manichaeans in Mesapotamia and Egypt
(h) Buddhists and Hindus in Sind
(i) Followers of tribal religions in East Africa.

(3) Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries A. D. military activities brought Muslims in contact with:

(a) Orthodox Melkite Byzantine Christians across the North-West border
(b) Orthodox Latin Christians in Northern Spain, Southern France, Sicily, and Southern Italy
(c) Crusaders in greater Syria
(d) Monophysite Armenians living between the Muslim and Byzantine empires
(e) Slavs in Southern Russia
(f) Turkish tribes, at first non-Muslims in central Asia before their conversion and penetration into Muslim territory
(g) Buddhists in Sind and Punjab
(h) Hindus in Punjab
(i) Followers of tribal religions in East and West Africa

During this period peaceful relations were maintained with Christian, Jewish, Mazdaean and Harrānian minorities within Muslim territories, and in trading contacts with Hindus in India, Buddhists in Burma, and in China with adherents of Chinese religions.

(4) Between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D., peaceful encounters increased between Muslims (traders and especially Sufis) and religions in India, Burma, Malaysia, Sumatra and Java, resulting in an expansion of Islam in these regions.

(5) From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century there was confrontation between Islam and Christianity in the West. Western sea trade expansion placed outposts in the most important regions of the Muslim world. The Islamic Moghul empire dominated India with its majority Hindu population, and the expansion of Islam into Africa,

Indonesia, Malaysia and Central Asia proceeded apace with many encounters with the religions of those areas.

(6) From the nineteenth century to the present, there is another period of confrontation, mostly political in nature, between Islamic states and the expanding West, heir to the Christian tradition. During this period there are increasing movements within Islam against Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and against non-religious ideologies such as Marxism. Since World War II there have been two major military clashes: Pakistan versus India, and the Arab countries versus Israel.

Historically Muslim attitudes toward people of other religions have been guided by the images of those religions appearing in the Qur'ān, and in the attitudes taken by religious leaders and political rulers. Rarely have Muslims had good information about other religions independent of the Qur'ān or approved commentaries, although Muslims probably had a far greater knowledge of all other religions than any other group during the Middle Ages and were certainly more "objective" than, say, Medieval Christians in their representation of other faiths. With the spread of modern educational opportunities and the increasing minority group experience in today's pluralistic society, Muslims now have better opportunities to formulate a knowledgeable response to other religions, than did many of their forebearers.

II. Unity and "the People of the Book"

The theme of "unity" within Islam can be approached from two ends, as it were — from the biblical end, where Islam sees itself as the unifying culmination of Judaism and Christianity; and from the other end of the mystical unity, experienced by the Sufi poets, especially in their encounters with Hinduism and Buddhism in India.

Islam maintains the idea of a prophetic succession from Adam through the Hebrew Bible and the Christian scriptures to Muhammad and the Qur'ān. The sense of unity for Islam is found in the succession of teachnings in the pronouncements of the prophets, and not in the historical covenant relationship which is central for Jews and Christians. From the Islamic point of view the incarnation notion of Christianity is simply mistaken. There can be nothing "more than" or "higher than" being a prophet — a mouthpiece for God. For the Muslim,

> The call of Abraham is to repudiate idolatry rather than inaugurate a dispensation. The task of Jesus is to preach righteousness, not to bring all things into subjection that God may be all in all. Islam is the inveterate natural religion: time consists in the interventions and interludes of messengers and the vicissitudes of the communities that hearken or refuse.[4]

Islam sees a sense of unity in that all religions are composed of prophets of God. The teachings of these prophets has simply to be either accepted or refused. The difficulty experienced by Christians and Jews in recognizing Muhammad as the culminating prophet is simply due to their partial spiritual blindness, but from the Islamic perspective that does not destroy the basis for a unity underlying all three religions. Although it is true that a significant amount of Jewish and Christian doctrine is being disallowed by Islam, it is nevertheless also true that the central impulse of Islam is one that can be accepted by Christianity and Judaism. Indeed, the prophetic revelation "that one must fear and acknowledge God in the constant submission, rightness and worship of his world" is a core belief found in all three religious traditions.[5] To worship God and not idolize some aspect of man's nature is the root of Islam. It is also a central theme for both Judaism and Christianity, and therefore the foundation for the Islamic sense of biblical unity.

This central theme of a foundational unity underlying all religions is clearly presented in the Qur'ān. As Rahman recently noted, in the earlier part of the Qur'ān different prophets coming to different people are recognized, "but their messages are universal and identical."[6] The messages spoken by the different prophets, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and others, all emanate from a single source called variously by the Qur'ān "the Mother of the Book" (43, 4; 13, 39) and "the Hidden Book" (56:78). Because all prophetic messages come from a single source Muhammad felt it was incumbent on all people to believe in all divine messages. Thus Muhammad is made to declare in the Qur'ān that not only does he believe in the Torah and the Gospel but "I believe in whatever Book God may have revealed"[7] (42:15). In the Qur'ān's view God's truth and guidance is not restricted but is universally available to all people — "There is no nation wherein a warner has not come" (35:24) and "For every people a guide has been provided" (13:7). Rahman observes that the word "Book" is often used in the Qur'ān not to refer to any specific revealed book, "but as a generic

term denoting the totality of divine revelations (e.g. 2:213)."[8] This idea of one *a priori* revelation is linked in the Qur'ān with the notion of an originally unified humanity.

> Mankind were one single community. The God raised up prophets who gave good tidings and warnings and God also sent down with them The Book in truth, that it may decide among people in regard to what they differed. But people did not differ in it (i.e., with regard to the Truth) except those to whom it had been given (and that only) after clear signs had come to them; (and this they did) out of (sheer) rebelliousness among themselves. (2:213).[9]

Consequently, according to the Qur'ān, there was originally a unified humanity which became divided due to its own rebelliousness. Some Muslims see this divisive state as fostered by the various versions of the "one Book" brought by the different prophets. Why prophetic revelations should act as a force for disunity does not seem to be answered, except to say that it is a mystery which God could overcome if he so willed. The fact that God does not so will is explained as providing an opportunity for the various religions to compete with each other in goodness.

> If God had so willed, He would have made all of you one community, but (He has not done so) that He may test you in what He has given you; *so compete in goodness*. To God shall you all return and He will tell you (the Truth) about what you have been disputing. (5:48).[10]

To all other religions then, the Qur'ān invites "competition in goodness" and the invitation "O People of the Book! Let us come together upon a formula which is common between us — that we shall not serve anyone but God, that we shall associate none with Him." (3:64) This challenge and invitation applies to Jews and Christians who are obviously "people of the book." But, as we shall later note, there have been recent attempts within Islam to understand Hindus and Buddhists as also "people of the book." The logic of the Qur'ān seems strongly reminiscent of the *logos* idea — one divine Book of which the prophetic utterances of the various religions are simply different deviations. The Qur'ān is, of course, the complete and full revelation of the one divine Book, all other books being only partial and incomplete presentations. However, in addition to understanding this basic Qur'ānic logic, it is useful to look at the variations in the

way Islam has related itself to each of the other religions, and especially the favoured judgement that Christianity has often received.

III. Islam and Western Religions

The Islamic view of Judaism has been marked by the sharing of a common spiritual ancestry and at the same time a sharp divergence in the understanding of prophecy. When he arrived in Medina, Muhammad guaranteed the religious freedom of the Jewish community and called on Jews and Muslims to co-operate for peace. This positive attitude toward Judaism began to change when certain Jewish tribes in Medina sided with the opposers of Muhammad. As a result two Jewish tribes, the Qaynuqā and the Nadīr, were exiled from Medina. This created a dilemma for Muhammad. On the one hand the Qur'ān contains a great deal of Judaic content which would lead one to accept them as spiritual brothers. On the other hand, the bitter opposition to Muhammad by the Jews of Medina led to the conclusion that among Jews there were two strands, the upright and the untrustworthy. The Jews that Muhammad encountered were obviously of the second strand and therefore suitable subjects for repression. After the Jews of Khaybar, a prosperous oasis, helped to raise an unsuccessful army of ten thousand men against Medina, Muhammad introduced a poll-tax (the *jizya*) which he imposed on the Jews. Subsequently this practice was extended and became the standard treatment of Christians and other religions.[12]

The early political and military strife between Muslims and Jews was also reflected in intellectual polemics,[13] although these did not begin as early as the Muslim-Christian polemics. Waardenburg notes that "although critical statements and polemical utterances occur after the Qur'ān already in the *ḥadīth* literature, proper information about Judaism as a religion and way of life was only later supplied by converts."[14] During the medieval period a number of polemical treatises were written by Muslim authors against Judaism.[15] The principal argument used against Judaism concerned the doctrine of abrogation or *naskh*. According to this view a prophetic revelation occurring later in time abrogated or superseded an earlier one. God could reveal his will successively in different ways and therefore a series of revelations was possible.[16] The Jews, however, believed that God

does not change his mind or his Torah, and therefore they rejected the Muslim doctrine of *naskh*. Muslim writers devoted considerable effort in attempting to convince the Jews of the necessity of *naskh*, and tried to show that abrogation was already present in the Torah itself (e.g. the law of Jacob is superseded by the law of Moses). Even the Qur'ān itself is understood (generally) to have specific instances of *naskh* in it.

In addition to the argument regarding abrogation, the Qur'ān suggests that Jews had corrupted their scriptures. The theory presented by Muslim scholars is that Moses had presented a perfect copy of "the Divine Book" which later followers corrupted.[17] As evidence of corruption such things as scandalous stories, failure to recognize prophets outside of Israel and the mentioning of prophets not included in the Qur'ān were cited. Another indication of corruption was the failure of the Hebrew scriptures to mention the mission of Muhammad and the coming of Islam, when the Qur'ān clearly states that such an announcement had been made in earlier scriptures.[18] Muslim scholars also studied the transmission of the Torah within Judaism and found, for example, that Ezra had made unacceptable innovations. This scepticism by Muslim scholars regarding the status of Jewish scriptures was indirectly reinforced by the refusal of Judaism to recognize Muhammad as a prophet, the Qur'ān as revelation, or the principle of abrogation (*naskh*). Although the Jews could be identified as "a people of the Book", Judaism had become corrupted and therefore required the purification embodied in the revelation of the Qur'ān.

The polemical literature in Islam against Christianity is abundant with many texts not yet edited. Favourable judgements given early in the Qur'ān turn polemic by the end of the Medinan period and Muhammad's encounter with Christian Arab tribes opposing his expansion in Northern Arabia. According to Montgomery Watt, the main Qur'ānic accusations against the Christians are that they attribute a son to God and that they venerate priests and other people besides God, so that they commit *shirk* (idolatry) and are considered as *kuffar* (unbelievers).[20] The early initiative in the Muslim-Christian debate was taken by the Damascus Christians who questioned the Muslim scholars on the nature of revelation and prophecy, the unity of God and the salvation of man.[21] In the ninth century, however, the situation changed with the Muslim theologians taking the initiative.

By then the Muslim scholars had assimilated Greek thought and were knowledgeable of the Old and New Testaments. Thus the Muslim-Christian polemic from the ninth century on takes the forms of both philosophical-dialectical and biblical arguments. The Christians found that they had to agree with the principle of *naskh* (abrogation), since they themselves held that the Old Testament was abrogated by the New Testament. The Muslim scholars quoted texts from the New Testament and other Christian sources in support of the Qur'ān. New Testament texts are also cited to disprove the divine nature of Jesus. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Muslim scholars shift their attack and seek to show that the historical parts of the Christian scriptures are forgeries but that the legislative parts of the Bible are true (although the Christian exegesis is often at fault).[22]

Waardenburg has provided a concise summary of the accusations made in Muslim polemical writings against Christianity:[23]

1. *There has been a change and forgery of textual divine revelation.* This forgery is seen not only in the corrupting of Christianity when measured against the teachings of Jesus, but also in the Christians' refusal to accept Muhammad as a prophet, due to their neglecting the announcements contained in their own scriptures and the rational and scriptural proofs of his prophethood given by his miracles and his revelation of the Qur'ān.

2. *There have been doctrinal mistakes, in particular about things divine.* Three main doctrinal issues are involved:

   (a) The Christian belief in the *incarnation* of Jesus. The Qur'ān denied that Jesus was anything more than a prophet, and the Muslim scholars tried to prove this using reason and arguing against the Christian distinction of a human nature in Jesus able to suffer, and a divine nature free from suffering.

   (b) The *trinitarian* doctrine that God consists of one substance and three persons is rejected outright on the basis of the Qur'ān's teaching that nothing can infringe upon the oneness of God. The Muslim scholars point out that

the trinity is not found in the New Testament, and also claim that it cannot be supported by reason. In particular the idea of a father-son relationship within God was revolting to Muslim thought, as was the notion that God would become contingent through the action of procreation.

(c) The *soteriological* doctrines of the Christians were also rejected. The doctrine of original sin goes against the Qur'ān and is seen as logically contrary to divine justice. Also the idea that peoples' sins (for which they were responsible) could be remitted by Jesus through atonement goes against the Qur'ānic ideas of law, justice, and man, and it conflicts with reason.

The basis for all of the above doctrinal errors is found by Muslim scholars in the Christian attempt to locate three eternal principles within one. From the Muslim perspective there can be only one eternal principle, God, and thus there can be no mingling of God and man.

3. *There have been mistakes in religious practice* as a result of not adhering to a true account of the revelation, and through the use of faulty reason:

(a) Christians indulge in *idol worship* by adoring Jesus or venerating Mary and the saints.

(b) Christians are *lax* in their spiritual practice: they ignore circumcision and ritual purity as prescribed by Mosaic law.

(c) Inadmissible *novelties* have been introduced by Christians since the lifetime of Jesus, e.g. sacraments, celibacy, excommunication, etc.

According to the Muslim scholars it is because of these errors that Christians not only have fallen away from the true teachings of Jesus, but also have refused to hear the completion of the biblical revelation given through Muhammad.

In recent times the polemic literature against Christianity has largely focused on Christian missionary endeavours.[24] The tack taken in these writings is to argue that Christians do not live up to their own teachings (as stated in the Sermon on the Mount), that missionaries are often agents of Western imperialism, that the Christian Bible does not stand up to the scrutiny of modern critical scholarship, and finally that Islam, when freed from the misconceptions relating to the seclusion of women, polygamy, *jihād*, etc., shows itself to be the religion of the golden mean and of reasonableness as opposed to the difficult mysteries of faith required by Christianity. Islam, it is argued, is much more in tune with today's rational and scientific thought. The idea that the Qur'ān contains scientific data that is verified by science today is often cited as something which places Islam above all other religions.

In a recent article, William Shepard directs our attention to Aḥmad Amīn, an Egyptian Muslim scholar living in the first half of this century.[25] In Aḥmad Amīn's writing Shepard sees a shift to a more open attitude towards other religions, especially Christianity. Christianity is seen as the particular form that the spiritual dimension has assumed in Western culture. While efforts of Christian missionaries to convert Muslims must be resisted, this resistance is directed more toward Western political and economic domination than toward Christianity. There is also no plea for the conversion of Christians to Islam.[26] Both Christianity and Islam should learn from each other, although for Aḥmad Amīn, Islam is seen as the superior religion. Shepard sums up Aḥmad Amīn's position as follows:

> We may conclude that he tends to assume, particularly in relation to Christianity, a communal image of two distinct communities whose religious views are essentially compatible and which therefore stand on a par with each other.[27]

Shepard finds in all of this a "communal model" for relationships between religions. Islam has already essentially reached the truth toward which all other religions are evolving. Christianity, it seems, has also virtually reached this goal. The possibility that various nations or cultures may find this religion in their own way is definitely left open. "All of this implies the communal image, that of several separate peoples, each with essentially the same teachings in corrupted form, who may return to the truth either by accepting Islam, or by doing on

their own, as it were, what Islam has already done, i. e. distilling the truth out of the preceding religions to find the universal one."[28] The Qur'ān itself teaches that *every* community in *every* age has had its prophet.[29]

III. Islam and Eastern Religions

Although Islam has been in contact with Buddhists and Hindus in India from the seventh and eighth centuries A. D., it is with the major influence of Ṣufism, throughout the Moghul empire (sixteenth to nineteenth centuries), that Muslim scholars seriously begin to engage Eastern religions. As the approach of Ṣufism rendered Islam more amenable to the worldview of Eastern thought, it was fortuitous that the Ṣufis led the way East. As Rahman puts it, "the spread of Islam in India, in Central Asia and Anatolia and in Africa, was carried on through Ṣufī brotherhoods, and Ṣufism in all these zones made compromises with the spiritual *milieu* already existing."[30] The Ṣufī response to the encounter with other, especially Eastern religions, not only helped significantly in the massive spread of Islam to the East, but also infused a fresh vitality in the Muslim community and Muslim orthodoxy.[31]

In medieval Islam only a few Muslim scholars were acquainted with Buddhism. There is scattered and limited knowledge of Buddha and teachings relating to such things as rebirth, Bodhisattvas and Buddhist Monks. The Buddhists are described by Muslim authors as having lived before the coming of revealed religions to the East, and to have been the ancient idolators on the East. The main Buddhist doctrines reported in medieval Islam included: the worship of idols, belief in the eternity and non-createdness of the world, and the idea of rebirth. It was also held, probably as a misunderstanding of the Mādhyamika position, that Buddhists were sceptics who denied reason and logical inference.[32] None of these concepts seems to have had much impact upon Islam but were simply noted in passing.

The first real interchange is evident in the influence of some Buddhist ascetic practices and teaching techniques on the early development of institutional Ṣufism. Anything that would make Ṣufī sermons more persuasive and effective was borrowed from Buddhism, as well as the other religions.[33] At a later date the impact of Buddhist ideas on

Ṣufism was considerable. Aziz Ahmad summarizes them as follows.[34] Certain Ṣufī exercises like *habs-i dam* (holding back of breath) seem to have been derived through Buddhist channels from yogic *prāṇāyāma*. The Ṣufī concept of "peace with all" (*sulh-i kul*), which becomes a dominant feature of Indian Ṣūfism of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seems to have been borrowed much earlier from Mahāyāna Buddhism. Also, the concentration of the Ṣufī student on the teacher's image in the early stages of an initiate's education seems to have been adopted from Buddhism. And the Ṣufī use of a rosary seems to be either a Christian or an Indo-Buddhist borrowing. The Buddhist monastic centre in Central Asia, named Balkh, later became the home of a number of eminent Ṣūfīs. Thus it is clear that Ṣūfism willingly borrowed from Buddhism, but it is also evident that at heart the two traditions remain far apart. As R. A. Nicholson puts it, "The Buddhist moralizes himself; the Ṣūfī becomes moral only through knowing and loving God."[35]

The inter-action of Islam with Hinduism is much more significant than its encounter with Buddhism. One of the early comprehensive treatments of Hinduism within Islam comes from the pen of the medieval scholar al-Bīrunī (C. 1000 A.D.). Waardenburg notes that al-Bīrunī opened the eyes of educated Muslims to Indian besides Greek science and philosophy, and held that both could be integrated into one higher intellectual worldview. The content of this higher insight, maintained al-Bīrunī, was: (1) that both Hindu and Greek philosophers arrived at the truth of one God, in conformity with the teachings of the prophets; (2) this kind of universal religious thought is known to only the literate elite, while the illiterate masses both within and outside Islam fall prey to the innate human disposition to idolatry; and (3) both Greeks and Hindus knew God as the One and sought spiritual unification (*ittiḥād*) leading not only to scholarly knowledge but also to insight of the mind.[36]

A hundred years after al-Bīrunī divided Hindus into the educated and the uneducated, ash-Shahrastānī compares Hindus with the Sabians and grades them in terms of degrees of idol-worship.

> The Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas are like the Sabian *aṣḥāb ar-rūḥāniyyāt*: they venerate Viṣṇu and Śiva as Spiritual Beings or mediators who were incarnated and brought laws albeit

> without a scripture, so that they cannot be called idolators in the real sense of the word. Those adoring Āditya and Candra (sun and moon considered as deities) are star worshippers (*'abadat al-kawākib*) which is a grade lower but still not idolatry. Only those who adore and prostrate themselves before real idols are real idolators (*'abadat al-asanām*) of the lowest rank, like the Arabs of the Jāhiliyya.[37]

Since the Sabians are understood by ash-Shahrastānī as followers of the ancient Greek figure Hermes (identified with the Qur'ānic Idris or Enoch), the Sabians are loosely grouped with Jews and Christians as people of the Book. Thus, by equating Hindus with Sabians, ash-Shahrastānī attempted to interpret much of Hinduism as being within a positive and acceptable context.

Two recent articles by Yohanan Friedmann[38] are noted by Waardenburg as providing further evidence for a positive attitude towards Hinduism by medieval Muslim scholars. Friedmann shows that the Muslim Ḥanafī and Mālikī schools of law were willing to include Hindus within the category of the *ahl-al-dhimma*, and thus they were not treated according to the *Shari'a's* prescriptions for the *mushrikūn* (polytheists): conversion, departure, or death. Friedmann also identifies six Muslim thinkers living between 1000A.D. and 1781 A.D. whose attitudes to Hinduism are positive in varying degrees. For example, prince Dārā Shikōh (C. 1650 A.D.) in looking for a bridge between Hinduism and Islam suggests "that all holy books including the Vedas stem from one source, that they constitute a commentary on each other, and that the advent of Islam did not abrogate the religious truth contained in the Vedas or supersede the religious achievement of the Hindus."[39] The last of these thinkers is the Ṣūfī Jān-i-Janān (1781 A.D.) who divided Hindus into two groups. Those who lived prior to Muhammad's mission pleased God with their religion. However, Hindus born after Muhammad are guilty if they do not convert to Islam once it has been preached to them.[40] A persistent criticism of the Hindus is that while they honour the unity of God they fall short because of their denial of prophecy. An Egyptian Ṣūfī master Abd al-Karim al-Jīlī (1304 A.D.) writes, "They (the Hindus) testify to His (God's) Oneness in Being, but they deny the prophets and messengers completely."[41] Al-Jīlī also provides an interesting example of how Islamic views were sometimes superimposed upon Hinduism:

> They (Hindus) claim to be the children of Abraham — upon whom be peace — and say that they possess a book (the Veda) written for them by Abraham — upon whom be peace — himself, except that they say it came from His Lord. In it the truth of things is mentioned and it has five parts. As for the four parts they permit their reading to everyone. But as for the fifth part they do not allow its reading except to a few among them, because of its depth and unfathomableness. It is well known among them that whoever reads the fifth part of their book will of necessity come into the fold of Islam...[42]

Al-Jīlī, like other Ṣufīs, separated out Hindu daily practice and searched for Hindu metaphysical notions which could be identified with the doctrine of divine unity in Islam. He sought to approach Hinduism by penetrating its esoteric truths to reveal the presence of the One God behind the veil of the many.

The translation of Hindu works is an aspect of the Islam-Hindu encounter that has yet to receive careful scholarly study. Early, al-Bīrunī translated Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* into Arabic.[43] But it was the translations of Hindu texts into Persian during the Moghul period that had the most significant impact. The Moghul prince Dārā Shikōh (1615-1659 A. D.) was responsible for the translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Yoga Vāśishṭha* and the *Upaniṣads*. (It was from these Persian translations that the Latin translations were made — which subsequently were read by the philosopher Schelling and the poet Blake.) Dārā was a Ṣufī of the Qādiriyyah order, and in his translations he attempted to translate Hindu ideas into the framework of Ṣufism so as to create a bridge between Hindu and Islamic metaphysics. Dārā believed the *Upaniṣads* to be the "Hidden Books" to which the Qur'ān refers (56:78), thus it is one of the sacred books a Muslim should know, just as he knows the Torah, the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels.[44] He believed that the *Upaniṣads* contain the essence of unity.[45]

Dārā Shikōh was the great-grandson of the Emperor Akbar (1556-1605 A.D.) whose unique approach to religions demands special attention. Although Akbar was born into a Ṣūfī culture, it was an Indian Ṣufism which had lost its dynamism.[46] Early in life Akbar began exploring other religions and evidencing considerable eclecticism.[47] He married Hindu wives (permitting them to continue in Hindu worship) and engaged in debate with scholars from the other religions. In 1578 Akbar met Tāj-al-dīn Ajodhanī, a heterodox Ṣūfī,

strongly influenced by Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (mentioned above). According to one Islamic scholar, "This contact, instead of restraining Akbar within the fold of traditional Islam, seems to have unintentionally smoothed his path to a heretical application of al-Jīlī's conception of the Perfect Man to himself."[48] About the middle of his life Akbar announced the formation of his own religion, the *Din-i-Ilahi.* The tenets were simple: prayer three times a day, no meat, rebirth and *karma* were accepted; gentle words were recommended for daily communication; and forgiveness, toleration and kindness toward all living creatures were stressed.

> The sun was worshipped as the body of the Divine, and unification with God was the ultimate goal. There was no priesthood, no clergy. Akbar alone was the Holy Magnifying Glass through which the rays of the sun were focused onto humanity. He was, in essence, a god on earth. "*Allahu Akbar*" was stamped on his coins; and since "Akbar" also means "great," the phrase could be read either as "God is great" or "Akbar is God."[49]

The facts that it was nearly a thousand years since the birth of Muhammad, and that within Indian Islam messianism was rife, exerted a strong influence upon Akbar. Equally important was the comparative religion interests of Akbar's close associate Abu'l Fazl.[50] Fazl's curiosity about other religions undoubtedly helped Akbar decide to build the Emperor's House of Worship at Fathpur Sikri. There academic discussions were held with scholars of all the major religions, often with Akbar chairing the debate.

Aziz Ahmad concludes that there is little evidence of direct Hindu influence on Akbar. In spite of the constant Hindu presence, due to the religious practice of his wives, only a few isolated features of Hindu ritual seem to have attracted, and not the Hindu religion itself.[51] He celebrated *rākhi* (wearing a band on the arm), participated in the festival of *d pāvali*, drank Ganges water, wore the *tilak* and sometimes the sacred thread Probably the most far reaching Hindu influence in the palace was the sacred fire of his Hindu wives. But Akbar's tendency toward sun worship seems to have come more from Zoroastrian or heterodox Ṣufī Muslim origins — although it must be remembered that Hinduism had earlier influenced the latter. Ahmad concludes that Akbar showed a surprising indifference to Hinduism, but his liberal treatment of the Hindus is remarkable — although at some

points probably mixed with political motivations. He abolished the *jizya* or polltax. He permitted Hindus converted to Islam to revert to Hinduism and justified this action on the Qur'ānic teaching, "Let there be no compulsion in religion."[52] However he did interfere with Hindu practices such as *sati* which he considered unjust. He supported Hindu arts and sciences, and sponsored translations of Hindu scriptures into Persian. In education he introduced courses in Sanskrit and opened the way for the equal participation of Hindus with Muslims in high civil service offices. Akbar's religious views remain a dilemma for scholars. Ahmad notes, "...European historians generally regard him as an apostate from Islam, while modern Hindu historians consider him a liberal Muslim"[53] Perhaps the most helpful evaluation of Akbar is given by M. G. S. Hodgson:

> The universalist sort of culture and moral life which Akbar fostered, and which was largely accepted as the basis for court life by Muslim and Hindu officials alike, was not in itself inconsistent with Islam. Indeed, it was cast in Islamicate terms, and attracted its most explicit support chiefly among Muslims rather than among Hindus. But it presupposed an alternative interpretation of Islam, as it bore on life and culture, which excluded the more particularistic, communalistic, interpretation of the Islamic mission in the world which had always been upheld by the Sharī-ah-minded...[54]

IV. Conclusion

The encounter of Islam with other religions dates back to the prophet Muhammad himself. Throughout this history the basic attitude has been that the other religions are deviations from the one primordial religion, of which Islam is the full revelation. During the medieval period especially, certain categories were developed by Muslim scholars to understand other religions. Buddhists are sceptics, Hindus are rationalists who deny prophecy, Christians are tritheists and Jews are corrupters of prophecy. Often these judgemental categories were assumed before the factual evidence relating to the religion in question was investigated. Indeed, because Islam was the full revelation and therefore the norm of all religion, there was little felt need within Islam to study and understand other religions on their own terms. And since Islam, until modern times, was mainly lived in a self-enclosed Islamic state where Islam was the majority, there was little cultural or political pressure to do otherwise. Throughout the

centuries the basic approach to other religions was the search for some basic structures behind all deviations from true Islam.[55] Other religions were at fault because they have lost or corrupted the original revelation or fallen into doctrinal error. While this scheme worked well for dealings with the other biblically based religions (Judaism and Christianity), it has produced some farfetched results when extrapolated to account for Buddhism and Hinduism. Nowhere is the Buddhist refusal to accept God taken seriously, and in one case the Veda is interpreted as a piece of biblical prophecy producing conversion to Islam.

A major obstacle for the understanding of other religions was the lack of good information. Analysis of Judaism and Christianity by Muslim scholars was often based not on those religions themselves, but on the tenets of Judaism and Christianity as they are described and evaluated in the Qur'ān. However, much information came from converts and more from the polemical discussions. Information about Hinduism and Buddhism was very limited during the medieval period and often distorted so as to fit familiar categories, e.g. the identification of Brahman with Abraham.[56] However, in general, Islamic scholars on encoutering strange or new religions did not dismiss them as mere idolatry (a move which the important sin of *shirk* must have rendered quite tempting), but rather treated them as deviations from the one true religion and therefore deserving of respect. In recent centuries, especially with the expansion of Islam to the East and the modern migration of Muslims to Europe and America, Muslims are getting to know other religions on their own terms rather than as presented via the Qur'ān and *hadith*. In India and in the West, Muslims find themselves in the unfamiliar position of being minority groups within a host of culture of another religion. This may well have the effect of calling forth a sharper delineation of Islam from other traditions so as to enable the minority Muslim community to retain its identity. A recent study in Canada indicates that the educational emphasis in mosques is shifting from passive receptivity to an active rejection of that which is against the Islamic tradition and as such against the will of God.[57] A European Muslim leader states, "The greatest task that besets us in America and Europe is not only to conserve our ideological and cultural identity, but also to develop true Islamic character in the individual and establish dynamic Muslim

community at the social level"[58] In a minority situation the importance of strong Islamic communities within the host culture is seen as crucial if the goal of reforming society according to Islamic principles is to be retained. In Europe and America, the goal is still described as resisting assimilation into the host culture and instead absorbing and reforming it so that it may conform to the religious ideas of Islam — the one true primordial religion! While the vision may still be clear, the practical problems of living in a modern secularized Christian based society poses serious and, as yet, unsolved problems for Islamic law (*sharī'ah*).

In India and the Far East the Ṣūfī influence has produced an essentially mystical response to the encounter with other religions. The traditional Islamic doctrine of Divine Unity is taken as foundational and the *logos* notion appropriated to account for diversity. According to this interpretation (first offered by Ibn 'Arabī and later by al-Jīlī) the founder of each religion is an aspect of the universal *logos* which is identified with the revelation of Muhammad.[59] The Ṣūfīs not only assert the unity of revelation but also consider themselves as the guardians of Islam, and of all other religions. The Ṣūfī master Jalāl al-Din Rumī describes this viewpoint using an image very familiar to Hindus:

> Though the ways are various, the goal is one. Do you not see that there are many roads to the Kaaba? ... So if you consider the roads the variety is great and the divergence infinite; but when you consider the goal, they are all of one accord and one.[60]

Ṣūfism sees itself as providing the key necessary for opening the door to a true encounter with other religions. The Ṣūfī vision provides Islam with a way of recognizing the truth present within other traditions when seen as divergent paths on the way to "the Kaaba" — the experience of unity with the one God. Because Islam has the full revelation and experience of "the Kaaba", its role is to be the guide for the others on their upward journey. Islam remains the norm, but sincere believers of other faiths are embraced as spiritual brothers, and helped along their own path toward the final goal of "the Kaaba." While this view has been very helpful to Muslims living as minority communities in host cultures such as Hindu India, it has posed problems for orthodox Islamic law and doctrine which have yet to be resolved.

As a final comment it can be observed that, with the exception of Akbar, there is little evidence that Muslims really saw Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish or Christian religion. Instead, they saw images presented in the Qur'ān or developed in their own cultural experiences and filtered through Islamic rules and problems.[61] In most instances these images were formulated in the social-political context of an Islamic state or empire. Today, with Islam increasingly having to experience itself as a minority within a foreign host culture, these traditional views of other religions will undoubtedly be modified. The impact of modern education in which Muslims will have the opportunity to understand each religion in terms of its own culture, history, world-view and truth claims is also bound to have an effect on Islamic self-perception. The religious pluralism of the modern world will force Islam to come to grips with the rather provincial character of some of its past views of other religions. In this regard Islam finds itself in much the same position as the other traditions.

NOTES

1. J.A. Hutchinson, *Paths of Faith*, 3rd. ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981, p. 399.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 400.

3. Jacques Waardenburg, "World Religions as Seen in the Light of Islam" in *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, ed. by A. Welch and P. Cachia. Edinburgh: University Press, 1979, pp. 248-249.

4. 'Abd Al-Tafāhum, "Doctrine" in *Religions In the Middle East: Three Religions in Concord and Conflict*, ed. by A. J. Arberry, vol. 2 "Islam." Cambridge: University Press, 1969, p. 393.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān.* Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980, Appendix II, p. 163.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

8. *Ibid.*

9. As quoted by Rahman, *Ibid.*, p. 165.

10. As quoted by Rahman, *Ibid*, p. 167.

11. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam.* New York: Anchor, 1966, pp. 15-16.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

13. See, for example, M. Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism" in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. by S.D. Goitein. Cambridge: Assn. for Jewish Studies, 1974, pp. 103-138.

14. Waardenburg, *op.cit.*, p. 255.

15. For an itemized listing see Waardenburg, *Ibid.*

16. Waardenburg, *Ibid.*, p. 256.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 257. This argument turned into a two-edged sword since Muslim scholars then read the Torah and found mention of the coming of Muhammad and Islam.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

20. W. Montgomery Watt, "The Christian criticized in the Qur'an", *The Muslim World*, vol. LVII, no. 3, 1967, pp. 197-201.

21. Waardenburg, *op.cit.*, p. 259.

22. Evidence for the above statements is given in detail by Waardenburg, *op.cit.*, pp. 260-261.

23. The following is taken from Waardenburg, *op.cit.*, pp. 261-262.

24. See H.G. Dorman, Jr., *Toward Understanding Islam; Contemporary Apologetic of Islam and Missionary Policy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1948.

25. William Shepard, "A Modernist View of Islam and Other Religions," *The Muslim World*, Vol. LXV, No. 2, 1975, pp. 79-92.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

29. M. Freedman, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 95, 1975, p. 219.

30. F. Rahman, *Islam, op.cit.*, p. xxii.

31. *Ibid.*

32. The above summary of Buddhism in medieval Islam is based on Waardenburg, *op.cit.*, pp. 251-252.

33. F. Rahman, *Islam, op.cit.*, p. 159.

34. Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, pp. 125-126.

35. R.A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam.* 1914. Reprint. Chester Springs, Pa., 1962, pp. 16-17.

36. Waardenburg, *op.cit.*, p. 253.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid*,, p, 254. Friedmann's articles are entitled "The Temple of Multān. A note on early Muslim attitudes to idolatry," *Israel Oriental Studies*, ii, 1972, pp. 176-182; and "Medieval Muslim Views of Indian Religions" JAOS, XCV/2, Apr. - Jun. 1975, pp. 214-221.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

41. As quoted by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays.* New York: Schocken Books, 1977, p. 139.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

44. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975, p. 361.

45. *Sufi Essays, op.cit.*, p. 141.

46. *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment, op. cit.*, p. 167.

47. He would appear in council with the Hindu *tilak* mark on his forehead and celebrate Dewali with the ardency of a devout Brahmin. He would also wear a Parsis girdle and prostrate himself before the sun in typical Parsi fashion. Jain devotees convinced him of the validity of *ahiṁsā*, and spokesmen of Sikhism found Akbar an attentive listener. Taoist and Confucian scholars arrived from China and Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka. In 1578 he sent to Portuguese Goa for representatives of Christianity. From *The Taj Mahal* by David Carroll. New York: Newsweek Books, 1972, p. 40.

48. Aziz Ahmad, *Studies In Islamic Culture ...* , *op.cit.*, p. 167.

49. *The Taj Mahal, op. cit.*, p. 41.

50. *Studies In Islamic Culture ... op.cit* , p. 169.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

54. M.G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. III. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 80.

55. Waardenburg, *op.cit.*, p. 266.

56. *Sufi Essays*, *op.cit.*, p. 139.

57. Yvonne Haddad, "Muslims In Canada" in *Religion and Ethnicity* ed. by Harold Coward and Leslie Kawamura. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978. p. 85.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Sufi Essays*, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

61. Waardenburg, *op.cit.*, pp. 268-269.

4

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND HINDUISM

Unlike the Western traditions, Hinduism does not have an easily identifiable starting point. Although its early history is not available in recorded form, it seems clear that Hindu religion developed in the same fertile soil that nourished Jainism and Buddhism. All three religions shared the presuppositions of *karma*, *saṁsāra* and *jīva* as being *anādi* (beginningless) and the belief that by following a particular spiritual path (*mārga*) release could be realized.[1] Each religion posed a different understanding of the divine or absolute to be experienced at the end of the spiritual path. For the Brāhmanical tradition reality was conceived as "pure being" — pure unchanging substance — as expressed in the *ātma* doctrine of the Upaniṣads. The Buddhists took the opposite position, the *anātma* doctrine of the Buddha, and perceived reality as "pure being" — reality as momentary (*kṣaṇika*), unique (*svalakṣaṇa*), unitary (*dharmamātra*) and in constant flux. The Jaina seems to have taken the middle path between these two opposing views by describing reality as giving equal reality to substance and its modes — to "being" and "becoming." T. R. V. Murti suggests that the Jaina view "may be said to constitute the third stream of Indian Philosophy — lying mid-way between the two extremes..."[2] It was un-Brāhmanical, because it accepted a changing *ātman*; and, it was un-Buddhistic because it accepted a permanent entity (*ātman*) as well as change. Murti suggests that the Jaina tradition, in its mid-way position, found favour with neither of the other traditions, and as a result has had comparatively little influence on the development of Indian philosophy.[3] But the Brāhmanical and Buddhist traditions to a large extent shaped each other through mutual opposition and debate.

P.T. Raju argues that two similar opposing trends can be found at the beginnings of Western thought: the Orphic, concerned with man's inner spirit, and the Olympic, concerned with outward nature.[4] The two are balanced in Plato, but the latter becomes dominant in Western thought through Aristotle, while the former is passed on through the minor tradition of Plotinus and the mystics. Although it has yet to be established whether these two trends of thought were born in India and carried to the West, or vice versa, or spontaneously arose on both sides, the two trends do seem fundamental to religious experience. Hinduism, as understood through the Brāhmanical tradition, claims for itself revelation of the identity of the inner self — the unchanging pure being (*ātman*) — with ultimate reality, the absolute, the divine.[5] The Upaniṣads, which are mostly assigned to periods predating Mahāvīra and Buddha, contain discussions on *jīva*, *karma* and *saṁsāra*, but focus on knowledge of the inner spirit and the means of its realization. The result of this inward search is the Hindu belief in one divine reality which can phenomenalize in many different forms. The Hindu typically sees the different sects within Hinduism and the other religions as different manifestations on the one, external divine reality. Since all manifestations lead back to the same source, there should be no conflict between traditions. Co-operation, brotherhood and mutual respect should obtain among all believers. Let us examine the way in which this philosophic perspective has functioned in the encounter of Hinduism with other religions.

I. The Classical Period

According to the Hindu view, all aspects of the world come from a common ancestry. "There is of necessity some sort of equivalence between sounds, forms, numbers, colors, ideas, as there is also between the abstractions of the subtle and transcendent worlds on one side and the forms of the perceptible universe on the other. ... The whole of Nature (*prakṛti*) is but the symbol of a higher reality."[6] From the viewpoint of the perceiver it is rather like looking at a piece of sculpture from different angles. The whole form can only be grasped when the sculpture has been looked at from different sides: the front, the back, the profiles. Although each of these views is different from the others and although some aspects of their description may seem incompatible, yet even from these contradictory reports a good general

overall description of the sculpture can be reached, which could not be obtained from only one angle. In the Hindu view the various religions are understood as different and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the one divine reality. In fact divinity is sometimes described as "that in which opposites coexist."[7] According to this logic Hinduism should be tolerant and open to other religions since the more aspects of the divine we can perceive, the more complete our understanding will be. Even within Hinduism itself broad tolerance is required to include all denominations (e.g. Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism), and all points of view (*darśana*), from the experimental or logical perspective of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika to the supramental psychology of Sāṅkhya-Yoga and the dialectical and metaphysical outlook of Vedānta. Within these Hindu viewpoints, the conceptions vary from atheistic, to pantheistic, to deistic, to monistic and mystical according to the presuppositions of the various schools. Each of these is true within its own perspective, that is, each viewpoint is a logical conclusion based on the presuppositions of its own perspective. The fact that the expressed truths of each viewpoint may conflict is to be expected, since each viewpoint is only a partial perspective of the divine. The aim of scholars within each view is to expand it to the utmost limit of our human faculties in a particular direction. The builders of the various *darśanas* within Hinduism are described as seers of divine reality (*ṛṣi*). Each *ṛṣi* sees the whole of reality but due to the neccessity of human finitude has to choose one form (out of the many possible forms) through which to convey his revelatory vision to others. For classical Hinduism other religions could be understood as additional visions of the same divine reality seen by new *ṛṣis* such as Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and Buddha.

The religious seeker starts with whatever path matches his sensibilities and is within his reach. Since all paths are different views of the divine, it would not seem to matter much which path is selected. Theoretically, all paths eventually reach the same goal. "Persecution or proselytization of other religious groups, however strange their beliefs may seem to him, can never be a defensible attitude from the point of view of the Hindus."[8] However, classical Hinduism does seem to exert a qualifying clause. Although each of the religions moves one toward the goal of release from *karma-saṁsāra* and union with the divine, only with the aid of the revelation of the Vedas can one go the

whole way to complete release. Raju offers a reasonable explanation as to how this Vedic criterion came to be the norm for Hinduism.

> Vedic religion, after the development of its own inwardness, spread by inwardizing and incorporating all other religions with which it came into contact. All of them took pride in tracing their origins to the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Some of them, Saivism, Saktism and Vaishnavism, had their own scriptures called the *Āgamas*, to which they give even now as high a place as to the Vedas. Yet they later began writing commentaries on the original Upaniṣads and wrote their own Upaniṣads and added them to the list. Thus both in the past and present, no religion can be alien to the Indian, provided it emphasizes the truth of inwardness. The Vedic or the Upaniṣadic tradition in philosophy is the tradition of the truth of inwardness.[9]

The growth and spread of Jainism and Buddhism produced a Hindu intensification of "inwardness," as Raju puts it, or the *ātma* tradition in opposition to the *anātma* tradition of Buddhism. The inward emphases of Vedic religion did not result in a lack of attention to outward forms. Within the Vedic tradition, social duties were required; and, the way to tread the path of inward realization was carefully marked out through the order of castes and the *āśramas* or stages of life. The duties accorded to each caste and allotted to each stage of life were meant to discipline the individual and lead by stages to the goal of inner spiritual realization. Thus, within Hinduism both the strength and maintenance of society, and the opportunity for inner spiritual realization were provided. To a large extent the Hindu social and ceremonial ordering of society was adopted by Indian Buddhism.

The challenge of Buddhism not only produced an intensification of the Hindu *ātma* emphasis but, in line with Brāhmanical philosophy, all that was considered new and good in Buddhism was quietly absorbed. Gauḍapāda (7th century A.D.), the teacher of Śaṅkara, wrote his *kārikās* on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*[10] which incorporated the best methods of Buddhist philosophy while retaining Vedic content. Śaṅkara systematized the developments of Gauḍapāda and others into the Advaita Vedānta school. Śaṅkara also travelled the length and breadth of India debating with Buddhists,[11] "and apparently leaving behind monastic orders (again borrowing from Buddhist practice) in the north at Badrinath, in the south at Sringeri, in the east at Puri, and in the

west at Dwaraka."[12] However, Hindu practice differed significantly from the Buddhist (and Christian) in that each branch monastery maintained very real autonomy. The Buddhist monastic practice, modified for increased autonomy and flexibility, has played an increasingly central role in Hinduism through the medieval period to the present day.' As David Miller effectively argues, it may make more sense to think of medieval and modern Hinduism in terms of a *sampradāya* or monastic teaching tradition with a *guru* as its core, than as sectarian groups classified according to particular deities.[13]

The absorptive tendency was also evident in the development of the new form of *bkakti* or devotional Hinduism. Buddha was absorbed and made one of the *avatāras* or incarnations of Viṣṇu. The account of this event in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*[14] reads as follows:

> When the mighty Vishnu heard their request [the request of the gods to be protected from the Daityas (Asuras) or evil ones], he emitted from his body an illusory form, which he gave to the gods, and thus spake: "This deceptive vision [Buddha] shall wholly beguile the Daityas, so that, being led astray from the path of the Vedas, they may be put to death; for all gods, demons, or others, who shall be opposed to the authority of the Vedas shall perish by my might, whilst exercised for the preservation of the world. Go then, and fear not; let this delusive vision precede you; it shall this day be of great service to you, oh gods!"[14]

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* goes on to recount how Viṣṇu in the form of Buddha succeeds in seducing all the Daityas from their study of the Vedas and their proper social duties by promising them a secret path to liberation and teaching the equal truth of contradictory tenets. When the gods see that the Daityas have given up the Vedas, the only true religious armour, battle is enjoined with the gods obtaining an easy victory followed by the Daityas' destruction.[15] The followers of the Vedas are purified and renewed, while the heresy of Buddhism — having served its divine purpose — perishes within India, at least. A similar interpretation is offered in the *Agni Purāṇa*.[16] Buddha is absorbed into the Hindu tradition, but this *bhakti* interpretation given to Buddhist believers is certainly not at all positive. The negative interpretation of Buddhists may be conncetcd with anti-Buddhist persecution of which Basham offers historical examples. In the 6th century, for example, the Huṇa king Mihirakula destroyed Buddhist monasteries and killed

monks.[17] Upto the recent period, however, the Hindu response to other religions has generally been marked by an approach of peaceful absorption rather than the harsh opposition as characterized in the above Purāṇic account.

The Purāṇic account of Buddha as *avatāra* again highlights the key position of the Vedas in Hinduism. Hindus consider the Vedas to be eternal, impersonal (not composed by any person or god), and the most perfect revelation of divine truth. From the Vedas comes all knowledge of *dharma*, and without the Vedas release (*mokṣa*) is not possible.[18] This raises the question as to how Hindus view the scriptrures of other religions. In the case of the Jainas and Buddhists this question is not hard to answer. Since both Jainas and Buddhists reject the concept of scriptural revelation and treat the teachings of Mahāvīra and Buddha as examples to be tested out and proven for oneself, it is quite natural for the Hindus to simply reject such teachings in relation to the revealed Vedas.

During the classical period within Hinduism itself there is an interesting case of pluralism in relation to the Vedas. How are different texts such as the Epics and Purāṇas to be related to the Vedas. The Hindu tradition solved the problem by giving such texts the status of secondary revelation — of re-revealing the truth of the Vedas in a form more suited to the increased *karma* of the age. The Epics and Purāṇas add nothing new but they represent the original Vedic revelation in simpler forms such as stories, historic events like the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, etc. The overriding principle seems to be that of continuity based on the Vedas through changing times and conditions.[19] This same principle operates in Hindu scholarship by the writing of commentaries which bring out the teachings inherent in earlier texts so as to establish an unbroken series, reaching backward in time and necessarily ending (or beginning) at the Vedas. Perhaps this "continuity" principle can somehow be applied by Hinduism to scriptures of other revealed religions (i.e. Christianity and Islam).

Another perspective on the response to pluralism can be found in the Classical Hindu treatment of evil. In her recent study of Evil in Hindu thought, Wendy O'Flaherty notes that early Vedic religion is largely healthy-minded, ignoring (rather than denying) the more tragic aspects of life.[20] The Upaniṣads pay more attention to the evil and

suffering in life. The rest of Hinduism, Epic and Purāṇic attempts to integrate the evil in life with the positive goals of the Vedic life-view. O'Flaherty sees this changing approach to evil as having developed in inter-action with Buddhism. The Vedic approach, with its doctrine of *svadharma*, assumes that all roles, good and evil, are necessary for the variety which constitutes society as a whole. Although the individual has no choice of roles, society is arranged in such a way that the contribution of each person is important to the total mosaic — some of these individual roles, as parts of the whole, necessarily involve suffering and evil. O'Flaherty suggests that Buddhism, the Upaniṣads and *bhakti* challenge the above approach by emphasizing individual moral responsibility and an individual spiritual goal (release frome *karma-saṁsāra*) rather than the *svadharma* of the earlier view. "Under the influence of Buddhism, the Upaniṣads and the bhakti cults, the individual is given a choice of action, freedom from the strictures of caste; instead of creating his life from *objets trouvés*, he may choose his medium and free himself from karma "[21] Of course the choice is not entirely free. In Buddhism the choice is conditioned by past *karma*, in *bhakti* theory God is often seen as choosing the worshipper, yet in terms of action the individual consciously changes his life.

The one aspect of Hindu doctrine which O'Flaherty leaves out of the above analysis is the notion of "stages of life." Part of the distinction made between the Vedic and the latter approach may, at least, be partly removed by seeing *svadharma* as a required duty during the first two stages of life. When the duties of the student and householder stages have been met (and here there seems little room for individual free choice), then in the last two stages one has individual freedom to pursue spiritual development toward release. It does not yet seem clear whether the idea of the individual freedom of the last two stages comes from Buddhism, is original to Hinduism, or is a shared development. O'Flaherty is correct in her observation that in the *svadharma* context evil is defined as the threat of impurity, defilement, mixing of castes, etc.[22] She is also right in pointing out that the *svadharma* notion of wholeness never allows evil or impurity to become an autonomous principle or be dispensed with, for it is always regarded as functioning in the service of purity. This classical perspective does seem to contrast with the *bhakti* viewpoints which develop in response to Buddhism and the Buddhist challenge of caste. As O'Flaherty puts it:

> The *svadharma* view of orthodox Hinduism is an ethical system based on the pluralism inherent in the social system of caste (whose goal is the preservation of social and moral balance); the *bhakti* philosophies deny the validity of the caste system in favour of a more universalistic and apparently more individualistic ethical system, whose goal is salvation.[23]

Taken as a whole Hinduism does not see these different philosophic perspectives as exclusive, but rather as different viewpoints on reality. Thus, it is possible for Hinduism to imply that evil in human life is necessary and desirable, on the one hand, and yet to assume at the same time a universally valid "good" toward which all mankind should strive. "'Evil' must be accepted, but 'good' must be sought; these views together provide a working solution to the problem of evil, a framework in which mankind as a whole, and each individual, may function in the face of an ultimately insoluble problem."[24] True to its fundamental philosophic and religious insight of diversity and the manifestation of unity, Hinduism demonstrates its ability to cope with the problem of evil in relation to good — perhaps the most difficult paradox in life. Analysis of the problem of evil leads back to the basic source. As one text puts it:

> There are many religions — that of the Vedas, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Pāśupatas, Vaiṣṇavas — and one person chooses this path another person another path; because of the variety of preferences, favouring a straight path or a winding, you are the one goal for men, as the ocean is the one goal for all rivers.[25]

II. Hinduism's Encounter with Islam

Arabs visited India long before the days of Muhammad, and small coastal Muslim communities seem to have existed from the 8th century A.D. Basham states that the Māppilā (Moplah) community of Malabar is descended from settlers and converts prior to the Muslim invasion of India. But there is no clear evidence of any influence of Islam on Hinduism until after the Muslim couquest.[26] It was the second wave of Islamic expansion that brought the first Muslim invaders into India to do battle with Hindu forces. Debal, a port near modern Karachi and Aror, north of Hyderabad were both captured in 711-712 A.D., and Muslim rule established.[27] However, it was not until the ninth and tenth centuries that the full Muslim invasion was launched and powerful Islamic dynasties obtained control of large

section of India. Ṣūfīs, the missionaries of Islam, soon arrived to take up residence at court, and the encounter with Hinduism began in earnest. On the Islamic side the immediate effect was an infusion of new life from Hindu mystical religion into the Ṣufī tradition, which was experiencing a period of stagnation. There does not, however, seem to have been any comparable immediate effect on the Hindu side. Even though Hindus were given high places in the Islamic bureaucracy, and Hindu scholars summoned to dialogue with Muslims, Hinduism seems to have kept itself apart. The pattern seems to have been one of cultural and religious apartheid.

Like Buddhism and Jainism before it, Islam attacked Hinduism by breaking down caste. "Before Allah all men were equal; in the sphere of religion there was no privilege of birth."[28] This anti-caste emphasis did reinforce and provide a point of contact with the Hindu *bhakti* movements. From the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries a long succession of *bhakti* saints and prophets strove for the purification of Hindu religion. Many of them were Muslim converts to Hinduism.[29] Another point of mutual reinforcement between *bhakti* Hindu movements and the Islam of India was the production of religious literature in the common man's language. One such *bhakti* poet prophet was a low caste Hindu called Nāmdev (c. 1300 A.D.). The fundamental emphasis in Nāmdev's teaching was the sense of lowly dependence and personal repentance required from the worshipper. An early experience of sin and forgiveness gave Nāmdev great confidence in the universal presence, forgiveness and love of God. Nāmdev found much in his religious approach that paralleled Islam, including rejection of the devotional service to religious idols as being futile. "Why bathe it when God was in the multitudinous species of the water; why weave a garland of flowers which the bee had smelled, when God was already in the bee?"[30]

The rejection of caste, the use of the common language, Nāmdev's stress on sin and repentance and the giving up of idols lay the groundwork for attempts at drawing together Hinduism and Islam. Two notable attempts demand mention — the Hindu based attempt of Kabir, and the Muslim based attempt of Akbar. Like Nāmdev, Kabir (c. 1500 A.D.) is another poet singer of *bhakti*. Born the son of a Muslim weaver, Kabir was raised in a Muslim house and constantly

surrounded by Islam.[31] The most authoritative record of his teaching is entitled the *Vījak*, which was apparently dictated by Kabir to a disciple named Bhagwan Das.[32] Like Nāmdev, Kabir shunned outward symbols of religious life including caste, idols, pilgrimage, austerities, and taught in a common language — Hindi. Kabir was influenced by teachers of both the Hindu and Islamic communities, and he had very close contact with the Ṣufīs.[33] He was a tireless critic of empty formalism, when found in either religion. In Kabir's view "The same God is sought after in all religions which differ only in naming Him."[34] This makes futile all religious quarrels that go on between Hindus and Muslims and all other religions. Kabir's religious prescription is that every person must give up ego and vanity, and consider the other as one's own self.

Another aspect of Kabir's appeal was that he did not believe in ascetic denial, but, rather, that by living a natural life, in a pure manner, one can carry on one's *sādhanā*. The universe, he says, is within one's own self.[35] And the way to know that God within is to repeat his name until one "Becometh as he."[36] Like Islam, Kabir's vision sees everywhere the action of a divine revealer using the *Logos* or Word as his educative and devotional instrument. Kabir, in line with the Bhartṛhari's Grammarian philosophy of language,[37] takes the word to be the foundation of all spiritual experience, and the chanting of the Word as a spiritual discipline. "Kabir says: 'Listen to the Word, the Truth, which is your essence.' "[38] Kabir's emphasis upon the Word provides a natural bridge between Islam and Hinduism. Both traditions treat the scriptural word as divine, eternal and powerful. But where Kabir's Hinduism is more like Sūfism, than the orthodox Grammarian tradition, is in its use of Hindi instead of classical Sanskrit. As Kabir puts it, "Sanskrit is the water of the well, while the spoken languages (*bhāṣā*) are water of the running stream."[39] Anchoring himself in the Sanskrit tradition, influenced strongly by Islamic Sūfism, Kabir gave a fresh expression to Hinduism in the Hindi tongue of Northern India.

In contrast to Kabir, Akbar seems to have had little in the way of a lasting encounter with Hinduism. Just as Kabir was dominantly Hindu, so Akbar was basically a Muslim. Akbar's wives continued their Hindu ritual unimpeded, and distinguished Hindu scholars

instructed the Emperor but without apparent impact. Hindu scholars, joining in the general adulation of the Emperor, found prophecies of his kingship in the *Laws of Manu* and proclaimed him an *avatāra*.[40] Akbar attempted to transcend the conflicts and inadequacies of both Islam and Hinduism by creating his own religion, the Tauhīd-i-Ilāhī or "Divine Monotheism." Akbar's religion gained few converts and did not last beyond his death. However, Tulsī Das, a poet of Akbar's reign had a very strong effect on the Hinduism of Northern India. As a boy Tulsī Das learned Persian and thus had some influence from Islam. His major contribution to modern Hinduism was to revivify it, in the face of the Islamic challenge, by rewriting Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* in Hindi as the "Lake of Rāma's Deeds." For all practical purposes this became and remains the scripture for the majority of Hindus in Northern India.

P. T. Raju claims that the main legacy of the Muslim invasion upon Hinduism was enervation.[41] When the Muslims destroyed Buddhist Universities and libraries, much orthodox Hindu literature also perished. Hindu scholars hid their books in out of the way places, so that simple vernacular *bhakti* religion became dominant.

III. Hinduism and the Sikhs

Nānak (1469 A.D.) the founder of Sikhism, wrote in Hindi and criticized caste and idol worship.[42] He expounded a system of worship which was a synthesis of Ṣufism, Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, and the ideas associated with the Nath *yogis*.[43] The strongest interaction between Sikhism and Hinduism seems to have occurred during the period 1708-1849 when the Sikh religion experienced a period of decline. The absorptive power of Hinduism was asserting itself in the face of inner weakness within Sikhism. During this period there was a general tendency to abandon Sikh customs and symbols and to take on orthodox Hindu practices.[44] Some Sikhs even went so far as to proclaim themselves a special variety of Hindus.[45] However, during the last century, there has been a Sikh resurgence including the sending out of missionaries and the conversion of Hindus. Within the Punjab itself, Sikh and Punjabi Hindus shared a common history of persecution, social patterns and religious tradition. "Moreover, Arya Samājists with whom educated Sikhs initially identified and co-operated,

insisted that Sikhs were Hindu."[46] But a decade after the introduction of the Arya Samaj in the Punjab (1877), Sikh cooperation turned to hostility. Quickly the Arya Samaj became identified as the number one enemy of Sikhism. Battles over Sikh-Hindu relations, with the Punjab political overtones involved, continued into the twentieth century.[47]

Nanak, more clearly than Kabir, did attempt to fuse and transcend both Hindu and Muslim elements in his teachings.[48] But the background of his wisdom seems more Hindu than anything else.[49] God is at once the formless Absolute (*nirguṇa*) and the manifested reality (*saguṇa*). Following Kabir emphasis is placed on the confession of sin and repentance. Humane and vigorous activity is demanded of all. Certainly there was much influence from Hinduism to Sikhism. Perhaps the major impact of Sikhism on Hinduism was its resistance to the absorptive attempt of the Arya Samaj, and its breaking down of caste and race barriers.

IV. Hinduism and Christianity

There is much speculation as to the early encounters of Hinduism with Christianity.[50] According to the early Christian historian Eusebius (4th century A.D.), Thomas was allotted a mission territory reaching across NW India as far as the Indus, although no definite trace of Christianity can be found in that region. Catholic tradition, however, continues to connect Thomas with India and Gregory (Bishop of Tours, 573-593 A.D.) mentions that Thomas's relics had rested in an elaborate Church and monastery in India. Marco Polo (c. 1290 A.D.) locates this church in Mylapore, just South of Madras. Little is known of the connections of this Church with Thomas, but across the Adyar river excavations turned up a piece of granite adorned with a cross and inscription. A similar cross and inscription have been found in a Church at Travancore in Kerala. The Persian language of the inscription suggests a Persian, perhaps Nestorian Christian community in the 7th or 8th century A.D. composed mainly of Persian settlers. There seems to have been little, if any, impact upon Hinduism.

It was with the arrival of the British and Portuguese traders in India (17th century A.D.) that the way was paved for Christian missionaries from Europe.[51] As early as 1573 Akbar had summoned Jesuit

Christians from Goa to appear before him and take part in theological debate. However, it was not until the Mughal Empire collapsed and the British took control to protect their trading interests that the Christian missionaries arrived in force. British rulers wanted to govern the Hindus according to Hindu law and religion, and so established the Asiatic Society of Bengal for the study of Indian philosophy and literature. Christian missionaries also began taking an interest in Hindu thought — mainly so as to be able to criticize and get converts.[52] The cumulative effect of these and other activities produced the Hindu Renaissance, which aimed at reforming and rationalizing Indian religion in various ways.

Rāmmohun Roy set out to recover from obscurity the ideas of Vedic Hinduism, which had become neglected in favour of shallow idol worship. Roy was deeply interested in the new religious teachings of the Christian missionaries. On reading the *New Testament*, he formed the idea of selecting out its ethical teachings as universally consistent with the laws of nature. These he translated into Sanskrit as *The Precepts of Jesus* so as to improve the hearts and minds of his fellow Hindus.[53] Because he had rejected the divinity of Christ, Roy caused an uproar among the Calcutta Christian missionaries. After more than three years of debate with the Christians, Roy began to write in "...Vindication of the Hindoo Religion Against the Attacks of Christian Missionaries."[54] In public letters he effectively argued that Hinduism is not inferior to Christianity (as the missionaries were suggesting), but that the mysteries of each religion equally transcend human understanding so that one cannot be preferred to the other.[55]

Roy's programme of incorporating the ethical teachings of Jesus into Hinduism resulted in a campaign against the Hindu practice of *sati* (widow burning) — a practice which finds no basis in the *Dharma Śāstra* or Hindu Law Code. In opposing the practice Roy argued against the low view of women as "subject to passions," "unworthy of trust," "lacking in intelligence" current in the Hinduism of his day. He pointed to the ability of women to succeed in education, spiritual discipline, virtue, etc., if given the opportunity.[56] Roy's views on women exemplify the way in which he "carefully distinguished between English errors, and defended Hinduism against the criticisms of missionaries as he challenged the orthodox to abandon its excrescences."[57] In order to

defend Hinduism against the Christian charges that it was a pagan and idolatrous religion, Roy and his colleagues set out to reform it. For this purpose the Brāhmo Samaj was formed Its goal was to "purify Hinduism and immunize it against the Christian ideas and practices."[58] This strategy initiated by Rāmmohun Roy was passed to Keshub Chunder Sen, and then to Dayānanda Saravatī. But before moving on to examine each of these Hindu reformers, it is worth noting the role played by Roy in the introduction of English into Hindu education.

It was Roy's view that the only way to modernize Hindus was through the introduction of English language education. He opposed British attempts to introduce traditional Sanskrit education, and instead argued effectively for modern Western learning through the medium of English.[59] The subsequent emphasis on English and lack of stress on Sanskrit has had an impact on Hinduism which has yet to be evaluated. Certainly it turned the minds of young Indians to the West and away from the traditional wisdom of Hindu Sanskrit texts.

Keshub Chunder Sen was willing to go much further than Rāmmohun Roy in approaching Christianity. Indeed in the last years of his life he did something reminiscent of Akbar — he experimented in synthesizing elements from the major world religions. "Although he borrowed devotional and yogic practices from Hinduism, he drew even more heavily on Christian teachings and practices."[60] Sen went so far that he was virtually excommunicated from Hinduism, and his conversion to Christianity was constantly expected. Whereas Roy had accepted only the ethical teachings of Jesus, Keshub embraced Christ as the fulfilment of Hinduism's devotional strivings. He argued for the Asiatic nature of Christ, the Apostles and the Gospel and concluded "in Christ, Europe and Asia, the East and the West, may learn to find harmony and unity."[61] Keshub not only thought that Christianity and Hinduism could coalesce, but also Islam. He thought that the resulting new religion would both sustain India and lead the world into a worldwide spiritual brotherhood. The Hindu religious genius in continuity with the Old and New Testament revelations would, he felt, be able to reconcile all conflicting religions.

> How the Hindu absorbs the Christian; how the Christian assimilates the Hindu! Cultivate this communion, my brethren, and continually absorb all that is good and noble in each

other. Do not hate, do not exclude others, as the sectarians do, but include and absorb all humanity and all truth.[62]

While Chunder Sen was preaching the one extreme of a Christian-Hindu universal religion in Bengal, an opposing viewpoint was put forth by a stern ascetic Hindu in Northern India. *Dayānanda Sarasvatī* (1824-1883) was also an ardent reformer, but he wanted to go in the opposite direction. "Standing foursquare on the authority of the Vedas, he fearlessly denounced the evils of post-Vedic Hinduism."[63] Early in life Dayānanda learned Sanskrit, and, at age fourteen, revolted by idol-worship, ran away from home and became a *sannyasī*. He was taught complete reverence for the Vedas and a disdain for all later texts. He devoted his life to lecturing on the exclusive authority of the Vedas.

Dayānanda's approach was to challenge those with whom he disagreed to do battle in debate. Hindus would be attacked for their practices which, Dayānanda argued, could not be supported from the Vedas: *e. g.*, idol-worship, untouchability, arranged marriages, the subjection of women, and the restriction of the study of the Vedas to brahmins. Caste, he said, should be decided functionally in accordance with one's merits. Like a biblical prophet Dayānanda spoke out against the immoral living of a prince — an action which cost him his life. Because of the fervour of his reforms and preaching, he was called "the Luther of India." His followers are grouped together in the Ārya Samāj which became especially strong in Punjab, and now, with the emigrations from India to many countries, has spread around the world.[64]

Dayānanda's approach to other religions and other groups within Hinduism is aggressive and militant. This marks a considerable change from the traditional Hindu attitudes of passive tolerance for all other beliefs. Dayānanda's approach to Christianity was to engage a minister in debate and to demonstrate the logical inconsistencies of Christian belief.[65] Dayānanda devoted careful attention to Islam reading the Qur'ān in translation and formulating his objections to each passage. The conclusion of his study was that "God was presented in the Qur'ān as a being whose qualities were unworthy of human worship."[66] Islam, he argued, lacks a valid basis whereas the Veda was the firm foundation for true religion.

> Such teachings [Islam] deserve to be utterly discarded. Such a book, such a prophet and such a religion do nothing but harm. The world would be better off without them. Wise men would do well to discard a religion so absurd and accept the *Vedic* faith which is absolutely free from error.[67]

One branch of Dayānanda's followers under the leadership of Pandit Lekh Ram devoted their energies toward open conflict with Islam at obtaining Hindu converts. A very "Christian-looking" system of specially educated paid preachers (*updeshaks*) was established for proselytization purposes.[68] Dayānanda's militant response to other religions, especially Islam, has helped to fan the hostility between Muslims and Hindus, and has also been a contributing factor in the development of Hindu nationalism.[69] Apparent adoption of some Christian practices is evident in the move of the Ārya Samāj away from the traditional Hindu tolerence of other religions to the *śuddhi* or conversion movement of the 1920's.[70] This led to the outbreak of Hindu-Muslim communal riots which continue to reappear in Northern India.

If Dayānanda attempted to relate to Christianity by taking over its fundamentalist and missionary thrust, *Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan* made the opposite move of seeking out the universalist aspects of Christianity that would show contiguity with the Vedāntic teachings of Hinduism. Radhakrishnan represents the response of orthodox Hinduism to the challenge of Christianity and the modern West. Hinduism and the Vedas are still the ultimate truth of religion, but a truth which may be universally accepted by all. He has been described as a *"liaison* officer" between India and the West.[71] Certainly his appointment to the Spalding Chair of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford, and his lectures there during 1936-1938 have made a considerable contribution to the West's understanding of Hinduism.[72] Perhaps because of his time at Oxford, Radhakrishnan was very aware of the challenges modern pluralism present to religion. As he put it, "Neither a contented fatalism nor religious expectancy nor reversions to the past can give meaning to a world which is in search of its soul."[73] The secure foundations of the past no longer seem to apply, everything is changing. This should not depress us, however, since the great periods of human history have always been marked by doubts and the infusion of foreign influences, including influences from other religions. Consequently, suggests Radhakrishnan, perhaps the difficulties of the modern Christian inspired West can be helped by the infusion of some wisdom from

the East. In particular it is with the Indian rational approach and emphasis on individual experience, rather than belief in an objectified deity, that is especially suited to the needs of 20th Century religion.[74]

> Real religion can exist without a definite conception of the deity but not without a distinction between the spiritual and the profane. ...
>
> Religion is not so much a revelation to be attained by us in faith as an effort to unveil the deepest layers of man's being and get into enduring contact with them.[75]

With this Vedāntic conception of religion, Radhakrishnan states an approach which he feels can be acceptable to Christians, Buddhists and all other traditions. The remainder of his lectures seeks to demonstrate this contention, particularly with regard to Christianity.

In Radhakrishnan's view the different religions today must delelop the spirit of mutual comprehension which characterized Hinduism even in its earliest beginnings. Already in the Indus valley excavations (c. 1500 B. C.) there is evidence of four different groups peacefully co-existing.[76] In the *Ṛg Veda* there is evidence of conflict between many groups, Aryan, Dravidian and Aboriginal, but also of resolution which absorbed aspects of each. This resolution and acceptance of other cults was given explanation as follows: "The real is one, the learned call it by various names, Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan."[77] The *Upaniṣads* give further development to the same view. Brahman is one; the different deities are merely manifestations of the various aspects of Brahman.[78] Radhakrishnan ascribes the same attitude of the one and the many to Buddha. A Buddha is one who has the vision of the whole, while members of the various religions are each attached to their own partial views. Within Hinduism the attitude is given explicit statement in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: the divine accepts those coming to Him on the Paths of the different religions, and in his supreme vision Arjuna sees the different deities within the boundless form of the Divine.[79] Hiduism, says Radhakrishnan, has practiced what it has preached. Christians, Jews, Parsees and Muslims have all lived in Hindu India for hundreds of years in an atmosphere of tolerance and religious freedom. Occasional outbursts of Hindu militancy and intolerance are interpreted by Radhakrishnan as imitations of Islam and Christianity provoked by those religions.[80] Because of its tolerant attitude,

Hinduism itself has become a mosaic of almost all the types and stages of religious aspiration and endeavour. "It has adapted itself with infinite grace to every human need and it has not shrunk from the acceptance of every aspect of God conceived by man, and yet preserved its unity by interpreting the different historical forms as modes, emanations, or aspects of the Supreme "[81] Radhakrishnan's claim is that no other religion (with the exception of Buddhism, which he lumps in with Hinduism) has this genius for religious diversity and unity, that makes it the prototype answer for the modern challenge of religious pluralism. The attitude of the cultivated Hindu to other forms of religion is one of sympathy and respect.

The reason that Hinduism can be so tolerant of other religions is because it assumes that religion is a matter of personal realization. "Creeds and dogmas, words and symbols have only instrumental value... The name by which we call God and the rite by which we approach Him do not matter much."[82] According to Radhakrishnan this Hindu approach receives confirmation from the experience of mystics of all traditions. He also appeals to Christian scripture for support. He quotes the statement of Jesus regarding the good samaritan, "He that doeth the will of God, the same is my brother and my sister and my mother." The roots of Christian exclusiveness he ties to the inherited semitic creed of the "jealous God" which Christians have translated into "Christ as the only begotten son of God."[83] For the Hindu, Christ can be accepted as an *avatāra* or incarnation, but not as the only incarnation. Christ, Krishna, Buddha, and others must all be seen as equally valid incarnations of God. In Radhakrishnan's view the validity of each religion is found in its instrumental value. It is valid to the degree that it allows its followers to achieve realization.

> If the Hindu chants the Vedas on the banks of the Ganges, if the Chinese meditates on the Analects, if the Japanese worships on the image of Buddha, if the European is convinced of Christ's mediatorship, if the Arab reads the Qur'ān in his mosque, and if the African bows down to a fetish, each one of them has exactly the same reason for his particular confidence. Each form of faith appeals in precisely the same way to the inner certitude and devotion of its followers. It is their deepest apprehension of God and God's fullest revelation to them. The claim of any religion to validity is the fact that only through it have its folowers become what they are.[84]

In line with classical Hinduism, Radhakrishnan views the different religions as various historical formulations of the one formless truth. Every historical tradition is to be valued in its own right because of its ability to carry a particular racial/cultural group to the Divine. Christianity is well suited to the European, for whom another tradition such as Hinduism or Buddhism is not at all appropriate. "Religion is like the string of a violin: if removed from its resonant body, it will give the wrong tone, if any."[85] The solution to the problem of religious pluralism is not to collapse or do away with individual religious traditions, but rather, to confirm and respect the faith of others even though we might not have any share in it. Traditions are societies' memories of their own paths and the instrumental means for release. Removing the individual from his traditional roots leaves him abstract and lost. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, says Radhakrishnan, has a clear understanding of this dynamic and warns against taking away the psychological comfort of people by unsettling their faith.[86]

Radhakrishnan observed the difficulty that just as faith in one's nation seems to kill faith in mankind, so also "faith in one religion seems to kill faith in others."[87] The common tendency is to attempt to impose one's own faith on others. But this only robs religion of the richness of the diversity of the various paths to God. Hinduism recognizes this truth. The route taken by the Hindu sage, for example, may be too straight and steep for the majority of Hindus, therefore the need for a variety of paths to the same goal. Religious liberty is required to allow the individual to choose freely the path suited to his nature and cultural background. Hinduism also recongnizes the close relationship between each religion and its own culture. Religions and culture can grow. They reform and develop themselves by interpretation and adjustment to one another. "The Hindu attitude," says Radhakrishnan, "is one of positive fellowship, not negative tolerance."[88] The Spiritual attitude is one of constant striving towards higher perfection and truth. This ceaseless striving for truth may be taken as the goal for all religion.

> The greatest requirement of human life is to be loyal to truth as one sees it. Above all, one must learn to be loyal to the spirit of loyalty in other people, even when we do not share their visions of the truth...This world loyalty is the essence of religion...[89]

The Hindu contribution to the modern challenge of religious pluralism is to encourage the enquiring siprit and devotion to truth which is larger than any individual tradition. "Religious life becomes a cooperative enterprise binding together different traditions and perspectives to the end of attaining a clearer vision of the perfect reality."[90]

In looking back over the result of the Hindu encounter with Christianity, it seems evident that Rammohun Roy's hope has been fulfilled. Through its various reactions to Christianity in the past two centuries, Hinduism has revived and reformed itself. And now, its philosophy, as expressed by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, is presenting itself to the other traditions as *guru* — as a guide to the future.

V. Hinduism and Secular India

Aside from the inspiring philosophizing of Radhakrishnan, another perspective on the Hindu response to religious pluralism can be obtained by studying *The Constitution of India.* As Robert Baird notes, the Constitution not only makes provision for religion in modern pluralistic India, but is itself a religious document.[91] In contrast to the *Manusmṛti*, the Constitution ignores the doctrines of *karma* and *saṁsāra* and restricts itself to concerns relating to this life. And, in contrast to the class system assumed by Manu, the Constitutional religious model adopts the principle of the equality of all.[92] The Constitution also defines religious liberty in such a way that it will not infringe upon the principle of equality. Religious freedom is subject to public order, morality, health, and cannot stand in the way of social reform.[93] In order to distinguish between areas of religious freedom and religious restriction, the sacred/secular distinction is introduced. It is the duty of the secular realm to ensure equality for all. Over and above that is the religious realm, and there the freedom of each tradition to follow its own beliefs is obtained. The task of distinguishing between these two realms is given to the Supreme Court of India. The Supreme Court rejects the definition of "religion" accepted by the American Supreme Court because it would define out of existence as religions Buddhism and Jainism.[94] The practice adopted by the court requires first a definition of the tenets of the religion in question, and then a judgment as to whether the matter at issue is secular or religious. If the matter is judged religious then the tenets of the tradition, as defined by

the court, are the criteria against which the judgement is made. While this legal approach does allow for religious pluralism, it depends for justice on the ability of the court to understand and apply the tenets of all religious traditions. It also tends to reify each religious tradition into a set of established tenets — something which conflicts with Radhakrishnan's understanding of the need for change and adaptability in modern religion.

It is perhaps worth noting that Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the drafter of the Constitution, has in his own life posed a serious challenge to modern Hinduism. From his life experience of being born as an untouchable, he laid much of what he felt to be injustice at the feet of the Hindu tradition. Perhaps this is why matters of equality are separated in the Constitution and the former given priority in the case of conflict. In Ambedkar's view Hinduism is beyond reform. He dismissed Gandhi's attempts to deal with the problem of untouchability as mysticism and mere name changing. To get himself and the untouchables a new identity and religious freedom he felt it necessary to leave Hinduism and adopt the casteless religion of Buddhism.[95] As a result some three million followers are said to have left Hinduism in the span of a few years (1951-1961).[96] That three million Hindus can apparently suddenly become Buddhists seems on the one hand to be a living demonstration of the long claimed tolerance of Hinduism and of the religious freedom guaranteed in Ambedkar's Constitution. On the other hand, it also poses a modern challenge for the kind of adaptation and development within Hinduism that Radhakrishnan envisaged. The practice of untouchability has certainly changed radically. The influence of caste on marriage, employment is also showing signs of change, but such a deeply ingrained notion cannot be legislated out of Hindu consciousness overnight.

There does seem to be a fundamental conflict between the presuppositions of the Constitution, and those of Hinduism. The Constitution proposes that all persons be treated as equals — suggesting some kind of *tabula rasa* view of human nature. Hinduism, in contrast, understands the nature of each person to be different, and to be the natural result of the individual's own action in this and previous lives. It is the cumulative traces (*karma*) of such past actions that is the nature of the individual prior to the realization of

mokṣa or release. It is this understanding of *karma-saṁsāra* which underlies the notion and practice of caste and is a basic fundamental for Hindu psychology. There seems no obvious way to resolve this head-on clash between the tenets of Hinduism and the theory of human nature assumed in the Constitution. Since the Constitution is now the law of India, the home of Hinduism, this challenge from within cannot be avoided and may well be the testing ground for the Hinduism of the future.

NOTES

1. *Karma and Rebirth In Classical Indian Traditions*, ed. by W. D. O'Flaherty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, p. 139.

2. T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1960, pp. 11-12.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

4. P.T. Raju, "The Development of Indian Thought" in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 13, pp. 528-550.

5. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Cp. 6.

6. Alain Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*. New York: Pantheon, 1962, pp. 3-4.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

9. P. T. Raju, *op. cit.*, p. 533.

10. *The Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad with Gauḍapāda's Kārikā* trans. by Swami Nikhilananda. Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1968.

11. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*. New York: Grove Press, 1959, p, 265.

12. David M. Miller and Dorothy C. Wertz, *Hindu Monastic Life and the Monks and Monasteries of Bhubaneswar*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976, p. 4.

13. David Miller, "The Guru as the centre of sacredness," *Studies In Religion*, 6/5, 1976-77, pp 527-33.

14. *The Vishṇu Purāṇa* trans. by H. H. Wilson. Calcutta: Punth Pustak, 1972, pp. 269-270.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 272. Some commentators even suggest that the destruction of the Daityas refers to the actual destruction of the Buddhists by the invading Moghuls (see p. 272, note 8).

16. *Purāṇic Encyclopedia* by Vettam Mani. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, p. 165.

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81. *Ibid.*, p. 313.

82. *Ibid.*, pp. 316-317.

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84. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 328. This view is very much in line with C.G. Jung's notion of archetypes as racial memories.

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5

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND BUDDHISM

The Buddhist attitude to other religions has been described as "critical tolerance" combined with a missionary goal.[1] Buddhism has spread widely from India: South to Sri Lanka and South East Asia; North to Tibet; East to China and Japan; and recently to Europe and America. In all of these regions Buddhism encountered established religions, yet there is little evidence of war or persecution. Buddhism has demonstrated a remarkable degree of tolerance and flexibility in the course of its historical expansion. Unlike some other religious expansions, the spread of Buddhism has been accomplished more through the spread of ideas than by migration of peoples. A modern Western historian, Arnold Toynbee, credits the Hindu context in which Buddhism arose as, at least, a partial source of "Buddhist Tolerance."[2] Toynbee commends this Hindu-Buddhist tolerance as a requirement for peace in today's pluralistic world.[3] In addition to its attitude of critical tolerance, Buddism's stress on compassion provides a natural point of contact with other religions. Its critical assessments of other religions arises from the particular Buddhist experience of *prajñā* (wisdom) as the outcome of meditation.[4] Buddhism rejected the worship of God or gods, and the performance of religious rituals as a means to release. It also rejected speculations about ultimate beginnings, especially about whether the self and the world were eternal, and a number of speculations about the ultimate state of the self in the future.[5] To understand the way in which these three factors of tolerance, compassion and *prajñā* function in the Buddhist encounter with other religions, let us begin with the Buddha's own experience.

I. Early Buddhism and other Religions[6]

Although Buddha was born into a Hindu society, it was a Hindu period marked by considerable pluralism of philosophy and practice. In philosophy, it was a time of a large number of mutually conflicting theories about the nature and destiny of man in the universe. With regard to religious practice, many varieties of ascetic self-discipline were being pursued as ways of release.[7] Some of these were undoubtedly Jaina and Yogic in background. It was in this Hindu yet plural world that Buddha pioneered the path of Buddhism. A contemporary Buddhist scholar, K. N. Jayatilleke, observes that the very presence of such a variety of religious theories and practices is a tribute to the tolerance of the Hinduism of the day. Like Toynbee, he suggests that the non-dogmatic attitude of Buddhism, at its inception, may be due to a sharing in the Hindu tolerance then dominant.[8] Many of the theories and practices of the day are summarized by Buddha in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, which focuses on the concept of survival after death. By examining this Sutta evidence of Buddha's reaction to other religions can be obtained.

This Sutta is titled "the net of religio-philosophic theories." It claims to include in its list of sixty-two subjects all possible views. All ascetics and brahmins who construct systems about the past or the future, or both, are said to be caught in this net where they plunge about.[9] It was a "net" designed to catch the brahmins and ascetics of this period who were apparently cultivating the skills of metaphysics and logic in their search for release. The *Brahmajāla Sutta* analyzes survival after death in the following way. Logically there are four points of view that can be adopted:

a. that we survive death as disembodied spirits (a single after-life theory)

b. that we are reborn on earth or some other planet (rebirth theory)

c. that we are annihilated with death (materialist theory)

d. that we cannot discover a satisfactory answer, or there is no satisfactory answer (sceptical or agnostic theory).

Several variants of each of the above questions are formulated. For example, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* classifies the variants on (a) a single after-life theory as follows: it says that there are religious teachers who assert that the soul after death is (1) conscious (*sa ñi*), (2) unconscious (*asaññi*), or (3) superconscious, literally, neither conscious nor unconscious (*nevasaññināsaññi*). There are sixteen variations of the conscious-theory and eight of each of the other two.

The sixteen are:

I. Variations regarding the *form* of the soul
   - (i) has a subtle material form
   - (ii) has no such form
   - (iii) has a subtle material form for sometime and then has no such form
   - (iv) intrinsically has no such form but has the power of manifesting such a form.

II. Variations regarding the *duration* of the soul
   - (i) comes to an end, e.g. theory of 'second death' in the Brāhmaṇas
   - (ii) is of eternal duration
   - (iii) changes its state after sometime and becomes eternal
   - (iv) does not exist in time.

III. Variations regarding *nature and extent of consciousness*
   - (i) conscious of unity
   - (ii) conscious of diversity
   - (iii) of limited consciousness
   - (iv) of unlimited consciousness.

IV. Variations regarding the *hedonic tone* of experiences
   - (i) extremely happy
   - (ii) extremely unhappy
   - (iii) both happy and unhappy
   - (iv) not experiencing happiness or unhappiness.[10]

Only variations I (i) - (iv) and II (i) - (iv) are judged applicable to those who hold that the soul was (2) unconscious or (3) superconscious after death.

While previous scholars have argued that these various views cannot be equated with Brāhmanical, Jain, or other positions current at the time of Buddha,[11] Jayatilleke finds no difficulty in identifying them with actual theories. For example, in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8:12, Prajāpati argues on the basis of rational and metaphysical speculation that the soul was "conscious and having its own form after death" — position (a.) I (i). Uddālaka held that the soul was "conscious and without form" after death — position (b.) I (ii). The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (3:10:5) maintains that for a while the soul has a subtle material form which then disappears — position (a.) I (iii). In addition to these single after-life theories, says Jayatilleke, there are several rebirth theories in the pre-Buddhistic traditions of the Upaniṣads, the Ājīvikas and the Jains.[12] They range from assertions that the soul is reborn even as "herbs and trees" (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5:10:6) to suggestions that in each rebirth the soul takes on "a newer and more beautiful form" (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4:4:4).

The Materialist viewpoint, common in Buddha's day, denied survival altogether. Many of them seem to be referred to in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, the most extreme being that there is no mind or soul apart from the body. The mind was said to disintegrate on the dissolution of the body at death — position I (iii). Debate between the soul theorists, who argued for survival, and the materialists, who denied it, led to scepticism (e.g. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1:20) of various kinds.[13]

The reason for outlining the above information is to demonstrate that Buddha was intimately familiar with a broad plurality of views, and formulated his own position within such a context. Buddha accepts rebirth, although not in terms of a soul, and gives evidence for this not from reason or scripture but from empirical experience — his own ability to recall his past lives. Many of his disciples also report having been able to remember previous lives.[14] On this point Buddhism is at-one with Hinduism and Jainism, but differs distinctively from Judaism, Christianity and Islam. A similar broad range of views on topics such as free will versus determinism, moral responsibility versus no moral responsibility, theism versus atheism, were present at the time of Buddha. It is not surprising that Buddha referred to them as a tangle or net of views in which one could be trapped and pulled down. Such a pluralism of views is again encountered in today's world. The

opening verse of the *Visuddhimagga* in the Pāli Canon provides an apt description of the thinking person caught in such a situation:

> Tangle within, without, lo! in the toils
> Entangled is the race of sentient beings,
> Hence would I ask thee, Gotama, of this:
> Who is it can from this tangle disemboil?
>
> *Kindred Sayings*, 1:20[15]

The method developed by Buddha for getting disentangled was based on "critical tolerance" and the empirical criterion of "personal experience." Rather than proceeding by blind faith or authority (either scriptural or institutional), Buddha taught a "provisional faith" to bef ollowed by the testing of personal experience. Such personal testing out of the view taken "provisionally" would either prove or disprove it. To base religion on a dogmatic attitude or to accept any of the many possible Vedic or non-Vedic views uncritically would, in Buddha's view, be self-defeating. Thus to those bewildered by the choices and conflicts of religious pluralism, "Buddha advocated a critical outlook, recommending that they test the validity of any particular religion or philosophy which appeals to them in the light of their personal experience."[16]

> There are certain religious teachers, who come to Kesaputta. They speak very highly of their own theories but oppose, condemn and ridicule the theories of others. At the same time there are yet other religious teachers who come to Kesaputta and in turn speak highly of their own theories, opposing, condemning and ridiculing the theories of these others. We are now in a state of doubt and perplexity as to who out of these venerable recluses spoke the truth and who spoke falsehood.
>
> O Kalamas, you have a right to doubt or feel uncertain for you have raised a doubt in a situation in which you ought to suspend your judgement. Come now, Kalamas, do not accept anything on the grounds of revelation, tradition or report or because it is a product of mere reasoning or because it is true from a standpoint or because of a superficial assessment of the facts or because it conforms with one's preconceived notions or because it is authoritative or because of the prestige of your teacher. When you, Kalamas, realise for yourself that these doctrines are evil and unjustified, that they are condemned by the wise and that when they are accepted and lived by, they conduce to ill and sorrow, then you should reject them...
>
> *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, I. 189

This critical attitude should be focused on Buddhism itself:

> If anyone were to speak ill of me, my doctrine or my Order, do not bear any ill-will towards him, be upset or perturbed at heart; for if you were to be so, it will only cause you harm. If, on the other hand, anyone were to speak well of me, my doctrine and my Order, do not be over-joyed, thrilled or elated at heart; for if so it will only be an obstacle in the way of forming a realistic judgment as to whether the qualities praised in us, are real and actually found in us.
>
> *Digha Nikāya*, 1.3

Religion, then, for Buddhism is what one finds to be reasonable and true after having taken it provisionally on faith and tested it out for oneself. Such a faith which ends in knowledge, Buddhism calls a "rational faith" (*ākāravatī saddhā*) as opposed to a blind or baseless faith (*amūlikā saddhā*).[11]

The Buddhist approach of critical tolerance is also based on the causal conception of nature (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). This is a causal system in which there are physical laws (*utu-niyāma*), biological laws (*bīja-niyāma*), psychological laws (*citta-niyāma*) as well as moral and spiritual laws (*kamma-dhamma-niyāma*). These laws are like the law of gravity, they are simply there. What the Buddha does is to discover and pass on these laws to us to aid in our attainment of the spiritual life. As the *Samyutta Nikāya* 11:25 puts it:

> Whether Tathāgatas arise or not, this order exists, namely, the fixed nature of phenomena, the regular pattern of phenomena or conditionality. This the Tathāgata discovers and comprehends; having discovered and comprehended it, he points it out, teaches it, lays it down, establishes, reveals, analyses, clarifies it and says, 'Look.'

Buddha has discovered the law of causation as true description of reality. He passes this on to others not to be accepted on his authority, but to be tested out in their own critical experience. It is an approach much like that of modern science. Laws or theories discovered by one scientist must be experimentally tested and verified before another scientist will accept them. This conception of the Buddha as a discoverer of truth, rather than an authoritative law giver, is tolerant in that it leaves open the possibility for others to discover aspects of truth or the whole truth for themselves (e.g. the Buddhist acceptance of

Pacceka-Buddhas, who discover the truth for themselves).[18] Other religions may also provide ways to discover the causal law of the universe, the one truth.

The missionary motivation comes with Buddha's directive that the *dharma* is to be preached to all persons so as to encourage those who are spiritually minded to try it out for themselves, just as a scientist passes on his new discovery to his colleagues, so that it can be tested and verified by others, and so enable them to reach new knowledge (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* 1:20:1).

Although all of this clearly allows for spiritual growth and salvation or release outside Buddhism, all religions are not considered to be equally true. In this context the word for religion in early Buddhism was *dhammavinaya*, which literally means "doctrine and discipline" or "truth and practice."[19] A religion in this view must "practice what it preaches" or live the truth of its teaching. From this perspective an ideology like Marxism could be included in the broad classification of religion. The way in which religions are judged by Buddhism is outlined by Ānanda in the *Sandaka Sutta*. Reporting the teaching of the Buddha, Ānanda says that there are four false religions (*abrahmacariyavāsā*) and four religions which are unsatisfactory (*anassāsikam*) but not necessarily false.[20] The false religions are: (1) Materialism, which asserts the reality of the material world alone and denies life after death; (2) any religious philosophy which recommends an immortal ethic; (3) any religion which denies free will and moral responsibility and asserts that persons are either miraculously saved or doomed; and (4) any religion which asserts the inevitability of eventual salvation or release for all.[21] This classification would seem to group the following as examples of false religions: Marxism and any ideology which either denies life after death or believes that the end justifies the means; certain forms of Calvanistic Christianity where divine predestination of salvation is believed; and some forms of Islam for the same reasons.

The four unsatisfactory but not necessarily false religions are those which in some sense recognize the necessity for a concept of life after death, moral values, freedom and responsibility and the fact that salvation or release is not inevitable. Religions in this category are to include those based on: (1) the omniscience of the founder in his conscious and unconscious periods of existence (e.g. Christian theologies

taking Jesus as only an apparent man); (2) revelation or tradition (e.g. Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism); (3) logical and metaphysical speculation (e.g. some Greek religions); (4) pragmatic religions based on sceptical or agnostic foundations (e.g. Stoicism). In this category we see that Buddhism is judging the satisfactoriness of a religion in terms of the degree to which it approaches the core requirements of the Buddhist religion itself (i.e. rebirth, moral values, freedom and responsibility to achieve release).[22] This logic does not seem much different from many of the Christian theologies discussed earlier, especially the theology of Karl Rahner — other religions were means of salvation to the extent that they conformed to the criterion of Jesus Christ. In Buddhism it is Buddha's experience of truth (*dhamma*) which fulfills the criterion role played by Christ for Christianity. Based on the Buddha's experience, religions dependent upon the founder's omniscience, revelation or tradition, metaphysical speculation or pragmatic scepticism are judged as helpful but unsatisfactory in that they are grounded on uncertain foundations. The point being made in the Buddhist argument is that whereas a founder's omniscience, revelation, tradition, metaphysical arguments and speculation may be either true or false and cannot be verified, Buddhism is, in its core teaching of rebirth, moral values, freedom and responsibility and the need to achieve salvation, a religion which can be verified by reason and experience.

It could be noted in passing that all of the other religions reviewed would claim to have the same kind of verification available, namely, reason and experience. Thus, Buddhism does not seem, on this count, to be in a qualitatively different category (i.e. the only verifiable religion), although it clearly believes this to be the case.

Since "moral values" are included as one of the requirements in the Buddhist criteria for true religion, the question may be raised as to the conception of moral values assumed. The Buddhist understanding of moral value may be found in its explanation of "the right view of life" (*sammā diṭṭhi*). The definition given is as follows: "There is value in alms, sacrifices and oblations; there is survival after death and recompense for good and evil deeds; there are moral obligations and there are religious teachers, who have led a good life and who have proclaimed with their superior insight and personal understanding of the nature of this world and the world beyond" (*Majjhima Nikāya*

3:72).[28] This summary of the right philosophy of life is broad enough to give general recognition and respect to the basic teachings of the other religions, although there are clear differences of interpretation with regard to points such as the nature of survival after death. But it does seem clear that the early Buddhist conception of the nature and destiny of man is not in basic conflict with the other religions. The critical distinction that the Buddha would make — and this is a move not unlike that of Karl Barth in Christianity — would be to examine all religions, including all Buddhist religions, for ways in which they have fallen short of living and realising the core criteria of survival after death, moral values, freedom, responsibility, and the non-inevitability of salvation or release. The difference between someone like Barth, a *bhakti* Hindu, a Sufi, and the Buddhist is that the former believe that it is God's grace that makes possible such religious attainment, whereas for the Buddhist it is human effort, not supernatural intervention, that is effective. But it is the end of salvation or release that concerns the Buddhist. So that, if the Jew, Christian, Muslim or Hindu finds that he has to believe in a god to reach salvation, that is quite acceptable. The danger of such a devotional tactic (i.e. believing in a supernatural god who gives grace) is that it may become a hindrance to one's own sense of moral responsibility, and one's own efforts toward release. If such theistic beliefs do not get in the way, then there is no objection. Indeed, as we shall see, Mahāyāna Buddhism itself employs just such "spiritual devices" as aids to release.

Since belief in God is a major point of distinction between Jews, Christians, Muslims, most Hindus and the teachings of Buddhism, it would seem worthwhile to examine briefly the Buddhist arguments against theism. To begin with, it should be noted that the specific brand of theism the Buddha was reacting to was that of Makkhali Gosāla who believed that God had predestined salvation for all. Gosāla's view seems to have been that everything has been preplanned and takes place according to the will of God, like the unravelling of a ball of string thrown upon the ground. Such fatalistic and deterministic theism was most repulsive to the Buddha because it denied free will, moral responsibility and militated against human effort. The two arguments against this kind of theism in the Buddhist scriptures are: (1) " If God designs the life of the entire world — the glory and the misery, the good and

the evil acts — man is but an instrument of his will and God is responsible." (Jātaka, V:238); (2) some evils are inexplicable if the truth of such a theism is granted, e.g. if a good god is all controlling why does he create injustice? (Jātaka, VI:208).[24] Both arguments attack the moral irresponsibility that a theism such as Gosāla's produces. But in his conversations with Hindu brahmins, Buddha also made it clear that so long as theism allowed for individual freedom and moral responsibility and produced compassionate behaviour, then it should not be treated in the same negative way as Gosāla's theism. On pragmatic grounds belief in God is not to be discouraged so long it is an incentive and not a hindrance to moral and spiritual development.[25]

A contemporary example of such an open approach to religions, including theistic religions, is found in the Theravāda Bhikku, Buddhadāsa of Bankok. Stressing non-attachment and compassionate action, he declares that to the extent these are found in all religions, all religions are the same.[26] If belief in God in other religions achieves such ends, then God as world saviour may be judged as equivalent to *Dharma* as world saviour — but he does urge that God be understood in impersonal terms.[27] In a comparative analysis of Christian and Buddhist teachings regarding sin, death and non-attachment he finds little significant difference between the two.[28] It seems clear that for early Buddhism and for contemporary Theravāda thinkers like Buddhadāsa, religion, including theistic belief, is to be judged according to its instrumental value in the realization of truth and the compassionate life.

II. Mahāyāna Buddhism and Other Religions

The tolerant but critical attitude of the Buddha toward the plurality of religious views is taken up and made into a rigorous philosophic approach by the Mādhyamika Buddhists. Like Buddha, the Mādhyamika purpose in criticism was not negative but positive. The critical analysis of the beliefs of a religious view was not aimed at rejecting that religion or demonstrating its inferiority in relation to other religious views (including even other Buddhist views), rather the goal of Mādhyamika was the removal of ego attachment to any religious philcsophy or theology so that true spirituality could be experienced and lived.[29] Thus the image of Buddha as the physician

who prescribes the correct medicine (i.e. the critical outlook) to cure the disease of ego attachment to religious theologies or philosophies. If, as the Buddha discovered, the goal of religion is compassion, then, say the Mādhyamika, the biggest obstacle to realizing that goal is attachment to our own religious beliefs in such a way as to make them absolute. Philosophy/Theology and scripture have useful roles to play as guides, as providing the contents for " provisional faith." But as soon as such viewpoints become ego attached and made absolute, they destroy the capacities for tolerance, objective criticism and compassionate action. The unending and often destructive history of philosophical/theological argument between religions and within particular religions is cited as evidence of the truth of the Buddha's insight.

Based on the above understanding, the Mādhyamika Buddhist's attitude towards other religions (and the various viewpoints within Buddhism) is one of openness and indeed a "missionary desire" to enter into dialogue. But the dialogue will be of a specific kind. Following the lead of the great Mādhyamika thinker Nāgārjuna, the Mādhyamika will first attempt to clearly understand the position of the other, and then ruthlessly subject it to dialectical criticism until it collapses due to its own internal inconsistencies. The technical details of Nāgārjuna's dialectical technique of "four-pronged negation" (*Cātuṣkoṭi*) has been well presented elsewhere.[30] Our concern is with its effect upon other religions.

Over the centuries the Mādhyamika critique of other religious views has had a considerable impact. Within Hinduism it influenced Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara in the systematizing of Advaita Vedānta. It seems clear that there was a borrowing of method from Mādhyamika Buddhism by Vedānta.[31] Within Buddhism itself, the Mādhyamika has had the purifying effect of reminding all Buddhists that neither the Buddha's words nor the formulations of any Buddhist school are to be taken as absolute truth. Now that Madhyamika texts have been translated and made available in the West, Christian, Jewish and Islamic thinkers will also begin to receive the benefit of the Mādhyamika philosophic presentation of Buddha's critical outlook. In one sense Mādhyamika would seem to be the most intolerant of approaches in that it negates all possible views without exception. In another sense

it can accommodate and give place to all religious views, so long as they don't claim to be absolute. Thus Nāgārjuna's statement:

> All is concord indeed for him who to Śunyatā conforms;
> All is not concordant for him who conforms not to Śūnyatā.[32]
> M. K. XXIV, 14.

While a most able representative of the critical outlook of the Buddha toward other religious views, the danger in Mādhyamika is of becoming ego attached to the critical outlook itself and so losing touch with Buddha's tolerance and compassion. This would be the absolutizing of the dialectic and may well be as real a temptation for the unpurified Mādhyamika, as the absolutizing of a particular view will be to the proponent of a position. Mādhyamika has recognized this danger and prescribes purificatory meditation alongside the dialectic.

One point at which Mādhyamika Buddhism would seem to diverge from all other religions is in its insistence that the critical outlook (dialectical reason) plus meditation is sufficient for the realization of release. Judaism, Christianity and Islam all allow roles for reason, but maintain that without scriptural revelation salvation cannot be reached. And, although Hinduism has a great variety of views regarding the place of revelation, there is general agreement that the Veda is necessary for release. The root of the disagreement here would seem to be centred in different assessments of the status of ego attachment in human nature. From the perspective of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, ego attachment (man's sinful nature) can be controlled, but never completely overcome. God's grace can control ego attachment so as to make spiritual life and salvation possible. Hinduism maintains that the revelation of the Vedas plus reason and some form of spiritual discipline destroys ego attachment and allows for the realization of release. Buddhism, like Hinduism, radically differs from the Western religions in holding that it is possible for ego attachment to be completely removed. But Buddhism differs from Hinduism in maintaining that revelation, though it may be used, is not necessarily required. For the Mādhyamika only the critical outlook (the dialectic) and meditation are required for the full removal of ego attachment.

Yogācāra Buddhism turned the focus to the stream of consciousness itself and the realization of it as pure compassion. Rather than

dharma, vijñāna (the stream of consciousness) is identified as the ground of all religions. The various systems of belief are seen as different obstructions of consciousness to be purified by meditation for the realization of *nirvāṇa* or release. Because of its inward focus on meditation and consciousness, there seems little to report in relation to other religions. The common Buddhist features of critical tolerance and compassion toward others seem to have been maintained. The stress on "consciousness alone" suggests the possibility of some influence from Advaita Vedānta.

As it has developed Mahāyāna Buddhism absorbed significant influences from Hinduism in India, Taoism in China and Bon in Tibet. In a recent article Y. Krishnan analyses the interaction between Hinduism and Buddhism.[83] He notes that the Buddhist development of the doctrine of *karma* as an ethical law posed a serious threat to Vedic Hinduism. The Buddhist identification of the moral aspects of *Pratītya-samutpāda*, the law of causation, with *karma* meant that good conduct produces good effects and evil conduct produces evil results. Thus the good and bad experienced in life are not the result of gods or mysteries but are conditioned by one's own action through the law of causation. Thus such Vedic practices as sacrifice to the gods were rendered powerless in the face of this law of the universe, which operates outside the realm of the gods. Consequently it seemed that there was no way of countering, neutralizing or escaping from the effects of *karma*. Of course this also posed a problem for Buddhism, namely, the necessity for some apparent ongoing entity able to carry *karma* from one birth to the next. The problem for the Hindu was that his system of sacrifice to the gods no longer seemed to have any power over the course of events (controlled by the law of *karma*), thus why should such activities be continued? According to Krishnan, it was to answer this challenge from Buddhism that the Purāṇas came into existence in Hinduism. The Purāṇas accept the law of *karma* in full, but develop the Vedic concept of *tapas* (austerity), the new notion of *avatāras* (incarnations) along with such practices as pilgrimage, religious observances, charity, etc., as means for mitigating the effects of *karma*.[84] Thus various means of grace were introduced (and made available to all regardless of caste, sex, etc.) so that the Buddhist moral law of *karma* was absorbed and Vedic notions of divine power retained, notwithstanding the apparent

inconsistencies this entailed. It is Krishnan's contention that this Hindu resolution had a significant influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism:

> In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the doctrine of *puṇya parinamnā* (transferenee of merit) and of the *Bodhisattva mahāsattva*, who renounces *nirvāṇa* again and again to bring deliverance to suffering humanity, were patently inconsistent with the teachings of the Buddha. They necessarily implied a serious modification of the law of *karma*. These were the Buddhist versions of the Hindu doctrine of grace and *avatāras* (incarnations) and were in the nature of a compromise the Buddhists were forced to make to meet the counter-attack of Hinduism.[35]

In China the Taoist influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism was significant. In the third and fourth centuries A. D. Chinese thought was dominated by the study of *Tao-te-ching*, *Chuang-tzu* and the *I-ching*. These three works constituted the so-called metaphysical scriptures (*san-hsüan*).[36] To these was added the study of Buddhist works, and Buddha, as their author, was judged to be a sage, like the sage of the *Tao-te-ching*. Often the two sages become amalgamated. Buddha's enlightenment, his *prajñā* is the Sage in the aspect of Seer who should know, and reveal in scripture, the secret of immortality and the all-embracing power of Nature, so eagerly sought by the Taoists.[37] Chinese thinkers asked the *sūtras* of the Buddha questions, Chinese questions. It is not suprising that the answers they found in the texts led to quite a different understanding than the same texts had engendered in India. Buddha for the Chinese was not an Indian, but a Chinese Sage who had gone to India to convert the barbarians. As such he was received by the Chinese with open arms.[38] This mixing together of Buddhism and Taoism is seen in works such as the *Chao-lun* where the Indian notion of the Middle Path assumes another appearance. In the *Chao-lun*, it is not the Middle Path of Gotama the Buddha, nor that of Nāgārjuna which appears, but a new interpretation of the term expressing the identity of the two states of the universe, the unspoiled and the spoiled, the true and the seeming.[39] It was in this way that the Taoist philosophy of Nature was incorporated into Mahāyāna Buddhism in China, and later carried into Japan as well as other East Asian countries.[40] In terms of popular religion, the figure of Amida (Amitābha) became the focus for both Indian and Chinese religious imagination producing a cult of devotion similar to Hindu *bhakti* piety. This popular Mahāyāna practice was also carried over into Japanese Buddhism.

As Mahāyāna expanded to the North, it encountered the traditions of Tibet. Western scholars have frequently referred to the pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion as Bon, understanding Bon to refer to some form of primitive animism or shamanism.[41] Recent scholarship, however, is calling this understanding into question. David Snellgrove, on the basis of a thorough study of Bon-pos texts, concludes that "there are good reasons for believing that Buddhist yogins and hermits, and probably Hindu ascetics as well, had already familiarized the villagers of western Tibet with Indian teachings and practices before Buddhism was formally introduced by the Tibetan religious kings."[42] Thus it may well be that the followers of Bon (*bon-pos*) take their rise not from primitive animism or shamanism but from a form of Indian Buddhism — probably strongly influenced by some Tantric variety of Kashmir Hinduism. This Bon Buddhism would seem to have been present in Tibet before the official introduction of orthodox (*chos*) Buddhism to Tibet by the kings in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D.,[43] and to have developed side by side with the *chos* as a parallel form of Buddhism. Thus it may well be that the new influences that Bon introduces including such things as "methods of prediction," "placating and repelling local divinities" and "destroying enemies py fierce tantric rites" may well be influences from Hindu Tantrism.[44] Here again, as in the encounter with Chinese Taoism, the Buddhist ability to accommodate itself and merge with other forms is manifested.

In conclusion then, it is the attitude of critical tolerance and a willingness to accommodate that has characterized Buddhism down through the ages. From Gotama Buddha's reaction to the various beliefs all around him, to Chinese and Tibetan developments, it is this open and yet firm attitude that has dominated. Today in Europe and America this same critical openness is allowing Buddhist thought to interact with modern science and psychology in new and exciting ways.

Finally, it is of interest to note the attitude of a contemporary Mahāyāna Buddhist to other religions. In a recent article the Dalai Lama states that the various religions have a common goal — the making of better human beings. The differences between religions should be recognized, but understood within the context of this common goal. Thus mutual respect should develop among all religions.

> Each system has its own value suited to persons of different disposition and mental outlook. At this time of easy

> communication we must increase our efforts to learn each other's systems. This does not mean that we should make all religions into one, but that we should recognize the common purpose of the many religions and value the different techniques that they have developed for internal improvement.[45]

This would seem to be a nice summation of the Buddhist approach to religious pluralism.

NOTES

1. K. N. Jayatilleke, *The Buddhist Attitude to Other Religions.* Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975.

2. Arnold Toynbee, *A Historian's Approach to Religion.* London: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 272.

3. Arnold Toynbee, *America and the World Revolution.* N. Y.: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 49.

4. Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development.* N. Y.: Harper Torchbooks.

5. Edward J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967, p. 91.

6. Although there is considerable debate in recent literature as to the use of the term "religion" for anything other than the theistic traditions, I have not entered into that debate here. I simply assume the use of the term religion current in contemporary scholarship where the earliar narrow definition of religion has been broadened so as to include both Hinduism and Buddhism. Many contemporary Buddhists seem also to accept this veiw. See, for example, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's view that Buddhism can be called a religion in, *Dharma — The World Saviour.* Bangkok: Friends Muslim Mission, N. D., p. 10. See also Seyfort Ruegg, "On the Supramundane and the Divine in Buddhism," *The Tibet Journal*, 1, 1976, p. 25.

7. Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 11 ff.

8. Jayatilleke, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

9. Thomas, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

10. Jayatilleke, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-11.

11. Thomas, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

12. Jayatilleke, *op.cit.*, pp. 11-13.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

15. As quoted by Jayatilleke, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Majjhima Nikāya* 1 : 515-518.

22. Jayatilleke, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

26. Buddhadasa, *No Religion*. Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, N. D.

27. Buddhadasa, *Dharma — The World Saviour*. Bangkok: Friends Muslim Mission, N. D. p. 16.

28. *No Religion, op.cit.*, p. 16 ff.

29. This point is clearly made by T. R. V. Murti, "Śūnyatā is not Positivism: it has a spiritual goal," *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1960, p. 331.

30. See T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, Ibid.*, Chapter 5.

31. See T. R. V. Murti, *Ibid.*, p. 337.

32. As quoted by T. R. V. Murti, *Ibid.*, p. 337.

33. Y. Krishnan, "Buddhist Challenge and Hindu Response" in *Studies in Pali and Buddhism*. Delhi: 1979, pp. 217-227.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Chao Lun: The Treatises of Seng-chao*, trons. by W. Liebenthal. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1968, p. 21.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Buddhism in the Modern World*, ed. by H. Dumoulin. New York: Collier Books, 1976, p. 160.

41. David S. Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon.* Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1980, p. 20.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

43. Per Kvaerne, "Aspects of the Origin of the Buddhist Tradition in Tibet," *Numen, XIX*, 1972, p. 32.

44. Snellgrove, *Ibid.*, p. 12.

45. Dalai Lama, "Spiritual Contributions to Social Progress" in *Tibetan Review*, Vol. XVI, Nov. 1981, p. 18.

6

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE FUTURE OF RELIGIONS

> The time will soon be with us when a theologian who attempts to work out his position unaware that does so as a member of a world society in which other theologians equally intelligent, equally devout, equally moral, are Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and unaware that his readers are likely to be Buddhists or to have Muslim husbands or Hindu colleagues — such a theologian is as out of date as is one who attempts to construct an intellectual position unaware that Aristotle has thought about the world or that existentialists have raised new orientations or unaware that the earth is a minor planet in a galaxy that is vast only by terrestrial standards. Philosophy and science have impinged so far on theological thought more effectively than has comparative religion, but this will not last.[1]

Religious pluralism is a special challenge facing the world religions today, yet in another sense religious pluralism has always been with us. As the preceding chapters have shown, each religion arose in a religiously plural environment and shaped itself in reaction to that pluralism. The creative tension pluralism occasions has often been the catalyst for new insight and religious development. It was out of the welter of views, the Brahmanical/Jain/Materialistic/Agnostic pluralism of his day, that Buddha's enlightenment arose. It was in the midst of the Meccan admixture of Jews, Christians, Zorastrans, Manicheans and others that the prophecy of Alla through Muhammed burst forth. It was in the midst of the numerous territorial gods of the Ancient Near East that God covenanted with Abraham and Moses. It was the challenge of Gnosticism and Greek philosophy that helped Early Christians to identify their separateness from Judaism. And it may be said of Hinduism that plurality has been its strength right up to the

present day. Certainly there were times in history of each of these religions when the pluralistic challenges receded to the background, often signalling a period of spiritual stagnation, e. g. Christianity through the Middle Ages or Islam just prior to the Sufi encounter with Hinduism. And when the challenge of pluralism reasserted itself, it usually infused new life into the tradition confronted. Thus, although the challenge of religious pluralism is in one sense the crisis of our age, it is at the same time its opportunity for spiritual growth.

It is as yet too early to detect the new contents and forms that will arise from the modern challenge of religious pluralism. But the analyses of the previous chapters indicate some beginning outlines of the religions of the future — religions which will be able to live comfortably side by side in a global community. To conclude our study let us examine the major features of the current situation, and then make some observations as to the future of religions.

I. Religious Pluralism: The Current Situation

Our study of how each religion has responded and is responding to the challenge of religious pluralism has pointed up three themes or principles which generally seem to be held in common: (1) that the logic by which the fact of religious pluralism can best be understood is the One manifesting as the many — transcendent reality phenomenalizing as the various religions; (2) that there is a common recognition of the instrumental quality of particular religious experience; and (3) that spirituality is identified and validated by the superimposing of one's own criterion upon other religions. Also held in common are several difficulties posed by modern pluralism. Let us examine each of these points in detail.

1. *A Common Logic: the One and the Many*

From the perspective of philosophy or theology the logic of a source reality experienced in plurality of ways seems to be the most satisfactory way of accounting for the facts of religious pluralism. The oldest formulation of this logic is encountered in the Vedic notion of the One which is called by many names. For Buddhism the causal law of *karma* is the one reality which the religions are trying to cope with in various ways. Judaism and Christianity share the Biblical perception

of all peoples and nations as under the one God, as well as the *Logos* notion of Greek Philosophy. In Islam there is the "Mother Book" of which the earthly books of the various religions are copies. Contemporary scholars of religion such as Karl Jaspers,[2] John Hick[3], and Wilfred Cantwell Smith[4] also adopt this logic, as do current thinkers in each of the religions surveyed. The logic of the one and the many is both the oldest and the most current contemporary explanation of religious pluralism.

The attempt to reduce all religions to one common universal — all religions are really the same — has been unacceptable to the religions surveyed and, as Charles Davis shows, it is philosophically unacceptable because it leads to a violation of the principle of freedom.[5] A universal religion would amount to religious coercion. Unity without diversity leads to a denial of freedom. Thus plurality in matters of faith and morals should be accepted positively. With regard to the internal relationship between the one and the many, all religions would seem to agree that emphasis should be placed on the One as the creative source. The identifying of the creative or spiritual source with the One rather than the many allows the many (the individual traditions) to change without destroying the One. It is a one-sided identity relationship. This is why the richness of plurality provides the dynamic to lead the many religions back to their creative source. Thus, the centre of gravity is kept in the One, without overthrowing the many. What is required is to use one's own particular religion as the means of access to the deeper creative source of all religions.

2. *Religion Is Instrumental*

The diversity and plurality of religion points out its instrumental function. The revelations, doctrines and spiritual disciplines of the many religions are the means by which the One is reached. The sayings of the Buddha, the monastic rules, the philosophic schools, and the Bodhisattvas all function as instruments of enlightenment in Buddhism. They are the "boats" to help one across the river of *karma-saṁsāra* to enlightenment on the other side. But once the goal is reached, the "boat" employed is left behind. Buddhism is not Buddha's sayings or the monastic institution but the enlightenment experience itself — the *dhamma* as Buddhadasa would say. Similarly, in Hinduism the Vedas, though necessary, are left behind in the realization of *mokṣa* or release.

The Vedas are the "ladder" by which Brahman is reached. But when the instrumental function of the Vedic "ladder" has been accomplished, for the released soul at least, the Veda is no longer required. *Gurus*, ashrams, images and yogas are likewise instrumental in their function within Hinduism.

The scriptures, forms and practices of Western religions differ in that their instrumental function is never totally transcended in the experience of the devotee.[6] The *Torah*, *New Testament* or *Qur'an* are never transcended and left behind in the way that they may be by the Hindu or Buddhist who has achieved release. But even though they cannot be totally transcended, the function of scripture in the Western religions is to be the instrument or means by which God is revealed. In a similar way, theology, prayer, the singing of hymns and the partaking of sacraments are variously employed in the western religions as the means by which the one God is responded to, gives grace and is known, although each religion varies in its acceptance and use of these instruments. Thus it becomes clear that much of what is commonly taken to be the core of the various religions, is really a particular collection of instrumental means by which the One may be reached. Understood in this way, the various religions need not be treated as fixed, unchanging truths, but rather as developing traditions of religious instrumentality. It is the One, not the many which is the absolute and therefore unchanging.

Problems arise within religious pluralism when it is the form of the various religions that are absolutized rather than the One. Both Karl Rahner, within Christianity, and Nāgārjuna, in Buddhism, may be seen to be in common on this point — although of course their understanding of the One is quite different. But both see the religions as imperfect instrumental forms by which the One may be apprehended. To this the Jewish prophets, Muhammed, and Śaṅkara would surely give ascent. Much misunderstanding between religions can be avoided if the instrumental nature of the plurality of religious experience can be grasped. In the past the lack of such awareness, and the absolutizing of the instrumental forms of religion has often been the cause of religious conflict.

Wilfred Smith has recently argued that the problem with much scholarly study of religion, especially in the modern West, is the taking

of religions to be fixed, unchanging, forms.[7] This absolutizing and reifying of religion has missed the cumulative and developing nature of religious traditions — a major plank in Troeltsch's analysis. Smith suggests that the various religions have never been distinct entities. In their instrumental forms, as the preceding chapters have demonstrated, the religions have constantly borrowed from and inter-acted with each other. Smith suggests that if scholars gave serious study to the Chinese concept of *san chiao* (the three traditions) and the Japanese concept of *Ryobu Shinto* (two-sided Shinto) a better understanding of this aspect of religious pluralism could be achieved.[8]

3. *The Superimposition of Validating Criteria*

Another common feature observed in our study is the practice of responding to the challenge of pluralism by superimposing one's own validity criterion upon the other religions. If, for the Christian, Christ is the validating criterion, then true spirituality within any other religion is to be identified by the superimposition of Christ upon that religion — thus Rahner's "anonymous Christians" and Panikkar's "Unknown Christ of Hinduism". For Buddhadasa, the *dhamma* is the truth of all religions. For Islam, the *Qur'an* is the validating revelation against which all others must be tested. Just as the Jews have been elected by God to fulfil a certain role in history, so other religions are to be understood in terms of their particular election by *Yahweh*. And since, for the Hindu, all paths must lead to the one Brahman, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad and Moses may be validated as *avatāras* of *Brahman*. Fundamental to religious pluralism is the fact that commitment within each tradition is experienced as absolute and is universalized by superimposing it upon the others. The reasons for this may well be found in the psychological and philosophical limits of human nature. This possibility will be explored later. An important point to be noted here, however, is that the validation criteria adopted by each of the religions arose out of "the wrestle" of each with the challenge of pluralism. The validation of traditions came after contacts with others. The criteria of Christianity, for example, were formulated after contact with Greek Philosophy and Gnosticism. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the same process can be observed in each of the religions.

Before moving on to discuss the future of religions, some common dangers and difficulties in present day religious pluralism should be briefly identified. An obvious area of difficulty is the missionary activity which occurs when the superimposition of one's own criterion upon the other is followed by efforts to convert the other. It is part of our nature as human being that we want to share our most treasured convictions with others. Often, as in the cases of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, that tendency is reinforced by the teachings of the tradition. Difficulty ensues when this desire and direction to carry one's preaching or teaching to others is made militant or exclusive. Our study indicates that militant or exclusive approaches are today being severely questioned in terms of each tradition's own teaching. In addition, once good information about the other traditions is made available, as it now is, the resulting understanding usually produces a rethinking of the missionary philosophy and method. Examples of such a result can be seen in Islamic Sufism in India, and modern day Christian Theology. Pluralism will always demand that we share our particular understanding of religion with one another. If done in sympathy and respect for the integrity of the other, such sharing, as past and present examples demonstrate, can result in spiritual growth and enrichment for all. In the open experience of other traditions the possibility for conversion always exists. But, as the history of pluralism within each tradition shows, the result is more often one of the strengthening and enrichment of one's own religion. The alternative of a closed-minded attacking of others has frequently produced both internal stagnation and inter-religious conflict, often violent, of the sort that all religions would now see as a negation of spirituality.

Throughout the preceding chapters the difficulty of the divergence between the theistic religions and Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta Hinduism (Taoism and Confucianism can probably be also included here) continually reappeared. This problem has caused scholars of religion no end of trouble, often tempting them to solve the difficulty by uncritically imposing the concept of God on Advaita Vedānta and Buddhism — John Hick was noted as a scholar engaging in just such a "solution". Wilfred Smith attempts a more honest resolution of the problem.[9] Employing his corporate self-consciousness approach, he tries to demonstrate that as a general symbol for the transcendent, the term 'God' could be acceptable to Buddhist scholars. The

Theravādin, imagines Smith, would agree that for purposes of general discussion the notion of *dhamma* could be fruitfully compared with the concept of God in the Western religions. Buddhists have held *dharma* as a transcendent truth, which is beyond the capabilities of words, and yet immediate and lived. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the *Bodhisattva* as a symbol of the transcendent may be a functionally parallel term to the theistic term 'God'. For the Advaita Vedāntin, it may be Brahman symbolized as *sat* (pure being), *cit* (pure consciousness), and *ānanda* (pure bliss). The Buddhists and monistic Hindus might well be prepared to admit that while conceptualizations across traditions may differ the secondary status which they accord conceptualizations in any case allows them not to be overly disturbed by such difficulties. Taken on that secondary level, the concept of God might be accepted as a heuristic term in discussion across traditions. Smith does not suggest that we all simply agree to use the term 'God' and leave it at that. He strongly urges the necessity of learning each other's languages and thought forms. Only then will the vocabulary problem become soluble.[10] As a contribution to the process that must go on while we are learning each other's languages, he offers the following suggestion as a possible basis for discussion between theists and non-theists:

> ... that by the term 'God' one means a truth — reality that explicitly transcends conception, but in so far as conceivable is that to which man's religious history has at its best been a response, human and in some sense inadequate. ...[11]

Smith adds that in religious history he includes, in addition to Buddhism and Hinduism, the Western classical tradition, metaphysical humanist-idealist, where transcendence has appeared as Truth, Beauty Justice and the Good. In case someone were to assume that the provision of an encompassing description implies also that all religions are true, or equally true, Smith responds as follows:

> That would be indeed silly. I, of course, hold that not even one 'religion' is *equally* true, abstractly in all its instances through history; rather, it becomes less or more true in the case of particular persons as it informs their lives and their groups and shapes and nurtures their faiths. ... What I do urge is that the problem of religious truth is in principle not different but in practice much improved, if one takes the whole of religion rather than a sector of it as the question.[12]

Although the findings of our current study would seem to generally support Smith's interpretation, there is one point on which we might find it necessary to differ. Smith strongly urges that "our understanding of each other's concepts be anchored in history, even for history-transcending and self-transcending concepts such as 'God'.[13] While this assertion will be acceptable to Judaism and Christianity, it would seem unacceptable when applied to Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. While Judaism and Christianity explicitly experience God's truth in and through history, it seems most unlikely that the Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist can share this perception. While admitting that there is history in religion, i.e. traditions do change through time, for them the truth is not "anchored" or revealed in that historical process, but in the reality that is behind or beyond it. As Smith urges, we must learn and respect each other's language and thought forms. In this instance his training as a modern Western historian has perhaps prevented him from following his own advice.

Yet another difficulty in contemporary religious pluralism is the conflict between constitutional statements of "equality" (e.g. U. S. A. and India), and religions which understand persons to be at different stages of spiritual realization, and thus not equal (e.g. the law of *karma* in Hinduism and Buddhism). When such a conflict arises, as it now has in India, the requirement of equality may legally override the teachings and practices of a religion such as Hinduism, and thereby violate religious freedom. Since constitutions calling for equality usually also enshrine the principle of religious freedom a serious internal contradiction results. At this point, the politicians, the law-makers, usually throw up their hands and pass the problem on to the courts. Since the problem is not a legal one, but a conflict of views or presuppositions (egalitarian humanism versus the *karma* theory of Hinduism, in the case of India), it is really a classic pluralism type of problem. Here the experience and wisdom of religions could helpfully inform the modern humanist or secularist. The problem and principles of religious pluralism are in many ways parallel to those of present day cultural pluralism.

The equality problem is only one of many occasioned by modern cultural and religious pluralism. Starting from the other side, the religious trrdition, we can well imagine the Islamic goal of absorbing

and taking over a nation such as Canada, which is bicultural, if not multi-cultural in its Constitution, being perceived as subversive. In this case the self-perception of Islam as a state religion will obviously require reinterpretation as it increasingly finds itself a minority in pluralistic host cultures.

A danger to the creative contribution of pluralism to religion is the 'backlash' response of becoming a militant exclusivism in the face of the modern challenge (e.g. Christian or Islamic fundamentalism). Such a reaction is always to be regretted in that, as our study has suggested, it usually breeds spiritual stagnation, and 'religious violence' as the history of modern Iran demonstrates. As in a family, the accepting of differences in the context of mutual respect and appreciation can be a powerful catalyst for good. Egocentric narrow-mindedness is always destructive, and is the opposite of true religion in any tradition.

Having examined some of the factors evident in the current situation, let us now turn to prescriptions for the future.

II. The Future of Religions

Within modern Western thinking, we have noted that Schleiermacher inaugurated a "bottom-up" approach to religion. This has had the effect of drawing attention to the universal nature of religious experience in its many different traditions — thus the relativising approach of Earnest Troeltsch. In addition to turning attention away from metaphysics, rationalism or revelation (top-down approaches), the focus on the humanity of religion has had the effect of highlighting some of the limitations in human nature that must be taken seriously in all future religion.

(1) *Future Theology and the Limits Inherent in Pluralism*

For the purpose of this discussion, let us give the term theology a broad, general meaning, namely, knowledge of religious truth in all of its pluralistic forms. Although this may seem uncomfortable for a Buddhist or monistic Hindu, we would ask him to agree to such a heuristic interpretation for purposes of our current discussion. The question to be examined is: "What are the limits to be respected in all

future theologizing?" Within the Christian religion Karl Rahner has discussed this issue at length. He demonstrates that pluralism requires a shift from the scholastic method of the past to a new approach as yet not fully grasped. But as a first step toward future theology some important limitations can be stated — limitations which will apply to future thinkers in any religion.

Theology, says Rahner, can no longer follow the simplistic pattern of the past where the problem of pluralism was overcome by application of the principle of non-contradiction — i.e. when two theological positions were seen to be contradictory alternatives, then according to the principle of non-contradiction by which both could not be right at the same time, a decision could be taken one way or the other as to the right, and the pluralism or the contradiction would be overcome. This was the pattern which typified the scholastic theology of the past. It is a pattern which can no longer serve in the face of the challenge presented by the encounter of religions. As Rahner recognizes, theology finds itself in a new situation:

> The pluralism of which we are speaking here, rather, consists precisely in the fact that it is quite impossible to reduce the theologies and their representative in this manner, in the fact that they exist side by side with one another as disparate and mutually incommensurable.[14]

In the above quotation Rahner is speaking of the pluralism that he finds currently to be the case within Christian theology alone. It is a pluralism which is insurmountable because no common basis can be found between the various theological schools upon which to arrive at a comparative understanding and logical judgment between alternatives. If Christians find this to be the case between the various theologies put forth within Christianity itself, how much more will such a difficulty obtain when the competing claims of the various theology is seen to have two limiting dimensions. First, there is the fact that rival viewpoints may adopt starting so different that little or no common intellectual ground can really be established. And without the basis of this common ground, individual propositions cannot be discussed in such a way as to arrive at a positive "right" or "wrong" judgement. Although the two partners in the dialogue may anticipate similarities and differences in their positions, the lack of a common ground, says Rahner, "means that the representatives of the different schools

cannot achieve, even indirectly, a position in which they can explain to one another consciously and unambiguously in what precisely the difference between their respective intellectual outlooks consist."[15] Here Rahner is pointing to the experience which he has (and he thinks others have) when one's partner in theological dialogue constantly proceeds from different starting points than one's own, uses terms differently and assumes points as established which are alien to one's own thinking. This results in no conclusion being reached and the discussion being broken off for lack of time or other reasons which make it impossible to continue. In any case the lack of a common intellectual basis, preventing the reaching of positive conclusions is a limit which necessitates pluralism in theology.

A second limiting dimension which Rahner identifies as necessitating theological pluralism has to do with the finite nature of the human mind. All the various theological positions and full knowledge of the various world religions can no longer be mastered by any one mind. Even if a single world civilization or religion were to emerge, says Rahner, there would still be interior differences which would manifest an increasing pluralism of theologies with respect to "their methods, their structural developments, their outlooks, their terminologies, and the practical trends to which they give rise. These differences will be so great that as theologies it will be quite impossible for them to be covered by, or subsumed under, any one single homogeneous theology."[16] This means, then, that there cannot be any *one* theology, even when one's gaze is restricted to a particular religion. If, by reason of the limited capacity of the human mind, dogmatic judgements cannot be made within one religion, how much more must that be the case when theological reflection takes place within the larger context of the many religions. Within the world religions context, theological pluralism is the rule.

Both of these limitations will have to be taken seriously by scholars functioning within a particular tradition or within the world religions context. Since the time of Nāgārjuna[17] in the East and Immanuel Kant[18] in the West, the intellectual limits of the human mind have been known — if not always respected. But perhaps more important for theologizing in a pluralistic context will be the first limitation indicated above — the lack of a common intellectual basis upon which

dialogue or debate may be conducted. A theologian of one of the Western religions, i. e. Judaism, Christianity or Islam, will quickly encounter this difficulty if he begins to think through his concept of creation with a Hindu or his notion of God with a Buddhist. A common intellectual ground just does not seem to exist. Understanding, albeit partial and blurred, seems to come only when he suspends or brackets his own viewpoint and attempts to adopt the assumptions of the other, and "see" the universe through those alien concepts.

But here too certain psychological limits arise and must be taken seriously by the theologian. In any intellectual exercise in which he attempts to "see" with the concepts of another religion, the psychological dynamics of his own mind will never allow him to be completely objective or neutral in his perceptions. His first impulse will be to identify similarities between the position of the other and himself. Usually this signals an act of intellectual reductionism, or what Freud termed "projection".[18] Instead of a real similarity having been identified, the theologian has simply indulged in the self-protective mechanism by saying: "Oh yes, I see what you mean by that; it is exactly the same as I mean by this." He projects his viewpoint onto the person of the other religion and then claims to discover that it is the same as his own. Of course this is very comforting in several ways. It suggests that there is only one truth after all, that he has it (probably in full*er* or full*est* measure, and thus implicitly or explicitly claims superiority for his view), and therefore no change is required. A making of what is more likely the true discovery, namely, that real difference does exist, naturally produces emotional insecurity, and doubt that one's theological position is absolute.

This universal human characteristic of ego-attachment to one's own position has been given much attention by Nāgārjuna and other Mādhyamika Buddhists. They approached the problem as follows. Since human beings are by nature ego-attached to their own view or theological position, no amount of counter-arguing from opposed positions will have any effect. The theologian in question will simply reinterpret an objection or counter position in such a way as to fit his system. In other words by the mechanism of projection he will attempt to force you off your presuppositions and onto his. And since you will be attempting to do the same to him (both are ego-attached to their

positions and cognitively cannot let go), an endless and unhelpful debate will ensue. With this psychological insight in hand the model developed by the Mādhyamika Buddhist for theological debate was simple and devastating. The Mādhyamika entered the debate with no theological position of his own. His aim was to so completely understand the position of his opponent, so that he would be able to find the internal inconsistencies inevitably present in every theological system, and then by *reductio ad absurdum* argument bring the whole thing crashing down around the ears of his opponent. To be defeated by one's own system brings on a severe psychological shock — one which might even convince the theologian to give up theologizing for good. And that, of course, was the very thing the Mādhyamika was hoping for. Once a theologian put down his pen and let go of his favorite concepts, the way was cleared or emptied of intellectual obstacles so that he could finally "see" reality as a pure perception and live his life appropriately.

The Mādhyamika and Freudian analyses both make clear that any attempt to absolutely conceptualize reality is inevitably tied to the finite limitations of one's cognitive processes and self-centred distorting emotions attached thereto.

When the above limitations are taken seriously and applied to current theological models, a helpful critique results. With regard to Christianity, for example, it means that there is no longer any ground upon which a theologian can make absolute claims for a particular theological position. For example, Hans Kung's argument that one should be a Christian because Jesus of Nazareth is "ultimately decisive, definitive, and archetypal for man's relations with God, with his fellow man, with society"[30] is found to violate the limits of theologizing on at least two counts. The first problem, of course, is that Kung is making the very kind of absolute claim to knowledge that the finite limits of the human mind rule out of court. Second, as Paul Knitter has pointed out in his careful assessment of Kung's argument, it is based on a badly blurred view of other religions.[31] In spite of Kung's warning to other theologians that they must not reach theological conclusions without a clear knowledge of the other world religions, Knitter's analysis shows Kung's own understanding to have been seriously distorted by the basic *a priori* of his thinking, namely, that Christ is the final norm

for all religions.[22] Kung has engaged in Freudian projections (seeing Christ as the unknown fulfilment of all other religions) and intellectual reductionism (incorrect and simplistic understandings of other religions, so as to fit them into his own categories).

Kung's approach fits with those of the Christocentric theologians that is reviewed in Chapter Three. Whereas all religions are recognized (in varying degrees) to be particular manifestations of God, Christianity is seen as the only religion which fully (or most fully) manifests God and therefore must serve as the criterion for all others. Theological approaches which presuppose a universal *logos* as foundational for all religions and then identify the *logos* as Christ are simply a variation on the same theme and suffer from the same failings of psychological projection and intellectual reductionism. If, for example, a Jew were to be told that the basis of his religion was the *logos* of which Jesus Christ was the criterion manifestation, his response to such a theology would likely be that the theologian in question had never really understood the Jewish religion and indeed was taking a Christianized version of Judaism to be read Judaism. Christians frequently have the same sort of response when told by a Hindu that Christianity is fully encompassed within Hinduism as yet another particular manifestation of the one Brahman. It is not surprising that the Christian finds it difficult to recognize his own belief and practise in such a Hinduized version of Christianity. In all of these examples theological limitations have not been respected and the result proves itself to be unacceptable when seen in the context of religious pluralism.

Another approach developing from the modern humanistic emphasis resolves the problem by moving in the opposite direction. It attempts to overcome the difficulty by seeing Christianity along with the other world religions as simply various manifestations of one common humanity. This is the method frequently taken by theologians who have been seduced by the psychologists, sociologists or historians of religion. It is also a reductionism, but this time in the opposite direction. Instead of seeing the various religions as merely particular manifestations of the one divine, this solution reduces the transcendent experiences of the various religions to being no more than particular expressions of a common humanity. In the first the human diversity of religious experience is reduced to a common transcendent reality; in

the second, the plural experiences of the transcendent are reduced to a common human experience.

The implication of this discussion would seem to be that the Mādhyamika Buddhists are right. When the limitations on theologizing are taken seriously, all future theologizing in the sense of establishing ultimate claims to knowledge must cease. Is the correct vision for the future one in which thousands of theologians of the various religions all around the world simultaneously put down their pens? What then — silence? While the Mādhyamika Buddhist might approve, and modern sceptics and positivists for different reasons, silence must be rejected as the correct vision for the future of theology and religions.

2. *The Future of Religions in Dialogue*

The inherent desire to conceptualize and share religious experience is simply too deeply ingrained in human nature to render silence an acceptable answer. In fact the Mādhyamika himself has been far from silent. To be precise his prescription of silence was only intended to apply to claims of *absolute* knowledge. As long as that limitation is honoured then discussion of any sort, including theological discussion, could take place. As a first step, then, let us attempt to indicate some of the presuppositions upon which the religious dialogue of the future should be grounded. These presuppositions will be drawn inductively from our prior analysis of the present situation in religious pluralism. (1) That in all religions there is experience of a reality that transcends human conception. (2) That that reality is conceived in a plurality of ways both within and between religions, and that the recognition of plurality is necessary both to safegaurd religious freedom and to respect human limitations. (3) That the pluralistic forms of religion are instrumental in function. (4) That due to our finite limitations and our simultaneous need for commitment to a particular experience of transcendent reality, therefore, our particular experience, though limited, will function in an absolute sense as the validating criterion for our own personal religious experience. (5) That the Buddha's teaching of critical tolerance and moral compassion always be observed. (6) That through self-critical dialogue we penetrate ever further into our own particular experience of transcendent reality

(and possibly also into the transcendent reality of others). Let us consider each of these in more detail.

Presupposition (1) simply states the recognition found in each religion surveyed, namely, that God, Brahman, or *Dhamma* is a transcendent reality over and above the mundane, which cannot be fully conceptualized. It does not judge as to whether transcendent reality is the same or different across religions. Such a judgement would be absolute, would exceed the limits of human knowlege; and therefore, is best left to God, Brahman, *Dhamma*, etc. The statement does, however, distinguish dialogue as religious, (i.e. although acceptable to all religions it is not a statement the humanist or materialist could accept). This distinction would seem to be challenged by Wilfred Smith who argues for the inclusion of the humanist — although he restricts inclusion to the rational humanist.[38] Certainly the merits of a dialogue involving all the possible pluralities within the global community is deserving of careful study. But, I would argue that even if such a global dialogue were deemed advisable, there would still be a need for a separate caucus composed of those who could, in some sense, share an experience of transcendent reality.

Presupposition (2) arises from the limitations on theologizing discussed above, and the fact of religious pluralism witnessed to in the preceding chapters. It safegaurds against the claims of absolutism of a kind that would cause religious dialogue to self-destruction. It also safegaurds religious freedom.

Presupposition (3) following from (2) gives importance to the instrumental function of religious forms through which religious experience takes place — that the revelations, doctrines and spiritual disciplines of the many religions are the means by which transcendent reality is reached. By implication the plurality of instrumental forms also points up the variety of spiritual dispositions in persons — a fact which the religious absolutisms of the past have, to their detriment, often ignored.

Presupposition (4) is perhaps the most important and the most difficult. On the surface it might appear to conflict with presupposition (2) which safeguards the plurality of religions, but it does not. The absolutism ruled out in (2) is the sort that would impose the

experience of one's own religious commitment upon all others as ultimate truth. By contrast the term absolute in (4) is simply to describe the felt nature of commitment to the transcendent through a particular personal experience of religion. It is a recognition that deep religious commitment is necessarily felt as absolute, and as such functions as the validating criteria for all of one's personal experience. This, however, does not impose it on others or rule out the recognition that in other persons there is a similar absolute commitment to a particular experience, which (presupposition 2) will be different from one's own. As Jaspers correctly observes:

> The language of transcendence, then, is spoken only in particular languages... In such particularity the truth which is heard is absolutely true, yet the speaking and hearing is such that it cannot be taken as universally or normatively true, but must admit the possibility of other, even of opposed truths.[24]

Thus, one is able to honour one's own commitment as absolute for oneself and at the same time respect the different absolute commitments of others. In this way the limitations outlined above are respected, yet the necessity for absolute religious commitment to a particular religion is allowed. In a dialogue situation it would mean the preservation of our differences in dignity and mutual respect.

Presupposition (5) describes the character of mutual respect as one of critical tolerance and moral compassion. Standing secure in our difference we are encouraged to constructively criticize and so learn from one another. Our criticism is to be constructive, tolerant and undergirded by a moral compassion toward others. In such an atmosphere pluralism provides the opportunity for spiritual self-judgement and growth. It suggests that all theologizing activity should, as it were, be overheard by theologians of the other religions. The resultant theology would be more honest and humble than we have often been accustomed to in the past.

The final presupposition (6) states that spiritual growth arises not from religious isolationism or exclusivism, but rather in the context of religious pluralism. Our previous survey of each religion demonstrated that in all cases the creative periods were those marked by the challenge of pluralism. It also squares with the experience of those now seriously engaged in dialogue, namely, that the result is an enriching

and deepening of one's own religious experience. Whether such spiritual deepening can reach a sense of a shared experience of transcendence (as Samartha reports) or, as Tillich puts it, a point where particularity breaks through to spiritual freedom — and to a vision of the spiritual presence in other expressions — that possibility remains for future dialogue to explore.

A basic prerequistie for such future dialogue is that all participants have good information about each other's religions. This is probably the single biggest obstacle to the success of religious dialogue. The majority of people today are illiterate of their own religion as well as the religions of others. In this regard the academic discipline of Religious Studies has a major role to play, if future dialogue is to succeed. Intellectual knowledge of the facts of all religions is needed, but alone that will not be sufficient. We will not be able to empathize with the sense of transcendent reality that the forms of each religion seek to convey if only surface or intellectual knowledge is all that is achieved. True empathy and understanding requires that we learn each other's languages, for therein lie the important nuances of transcendent experience that are often lost in translation. Thus, the educational prerequisite for future dialogue is a stiff and serious one, requiring dedication and effort from all who would partake.

In the past many efforts at dialogue have failed because this prerequisite has not been observed. Groups of well meaning Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists have held polite and gracious gatherings and returned home without having significantly entered into each other's thought forms. Although such meetings have produced a pious respect for others as fine religious persons, they have not generated the deep self-criticism and spiritual renewal (presupposition 6) which future dialogue must achieve. If serious study, including knowledge of each other's languages, is to be obtained, it is here that Religious Studies Departments have an important and timely contribution to make. In Canada, the United States, Australia, England and Europe universities have good offerings of this kind. But in India a serious weakness exists. While the opportunity is well provided for the serious study of Eastern Religions, including Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese languages, the same cannot be said for opportunities to study Western religions and the languages of Hebrew, Greek and Arabic.

Until this fundamental deficiency is corrected, Indian participants will be hampered through the lack of prerequisite requirements for effective dialogue. The establishing of Religious Studies Departments in which equal opportunity is provided for the study of all major religions and languages is an urgent need in Indian universities. Let us go one step further and hope that in the future, seminaries would also see this as a necessary prerequisite for theologizing.

In his most recent book, *Towards a World Theology*, Wilfred Smith gives careful attention to the importance of language in future religious dialogue. While agreeing that knowledge of each other's languages is essential, he takes the further step of suggesting the need for some common operational or generic terms in which communication across religions can take place. He proposes the construction of conceptual categories to facilitate dialogue, and attempts a beginning by redefining the terms 'faith', 'salvation', 'theology', and 'God'.[25] Now while we have in this present discussion already made similar moves to facilitate discussion (e. g. our general use of 'theology' above), there is a very real danger in such an approach. Knowing the penchant of scholars to create their own cognitive universe through the construction of generic terms, there is a very real danger that the construction of such categories ends up as a metalanguage, which is yet one more thought form to add to those already existing. Of course, this need not happen if scholars are careful not to give ontological status to their descriptive categories. The best safeguard against such a danger would be to, as much as possible, let the various religions speak in their own languages and thought forms. If in the course of dialogue useful and acceptable operational terms arise, as they undoubtedly will, then the process of communication will be aided. But for scholars to self-consciously set out to construct the generic terms for future dialogue (as Smith seems to propose) is dangerous and ill-advised.

The above presuppositions and prerequisites are but a beginning attempt to formulate the requirements for future religious dialogue. As such they are necessarily sketchy, incomplete and in places probably misconceived. But they represent one attempt to self-critically reflect on the experience of the past, and on that basis to formulate some guidelines for dialogue. For in such a dialogue lies the future of religions.

NOTES

1. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, an address presented to the Canadian Theological Society, Montreal, May, 1961 and reprinted in *Religious Diversity*, ed. by W. Oxtoby. New York: Harper and Row, 1976, p.9.

2. See John F. Kane, *Pluralism and Truth in Religion*, Scholars Press, 1981.

3. John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973.

4. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981.

5. Charles Davis, "Religious Pluralism" a lecture read at the Annual Meeting, Canadian Society for the Study of Religion, Montreal, May, 1980.

6. Schleiermacher does say that scriptures are mainly for beginners in religion, *On Religion, op. cit.*, p. 34, and Paul Tillich does stress the self-transcending quality of scripture (it participates in that to which it points), *Dynamics of Faith*, New York: Harper & Row, 1957. But neither would allow the total transcendence of scripture found in Advaita Vedānta and Buddhism. It is also true that within Hinduism (e.g. Pūrva Mīmāṁsā, Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, Bhakti, etc.) and in certain forms of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism total transcendence of instrumental forms is not accepted.

7. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Traditions in Contact and Change: Towards a History of Religion in the Singular" in *Traditions in Contact and Change*, ed. by P. Slater, D. Weibe, H. Coward and M. Boutin. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, forthcoming.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Towards a World Theology, op. cit.*, see pp. 137-139, 151-153 and p. 183 ff.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

14. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XI, trans. by David Bourke, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974, p. 7.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

17. Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamādhyamikakārikā*. trans. by K. K. Inada, Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1970. Nāgārjuna's date is given as c. 150-250 A.D.

18. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960.

19. Calvin S. Hall, *A Primer of Freudian Psychology*. N. Y.: Mentor, 1958, pp. 89-91.

20. Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian*, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1976, p. 123.

21. See Paul F. Knitter, "World Religions and the Finality of Christ: A Critique of Hans Kung's 'On Being a Christian" in *Horizons*, 5, 1978, pp. 151-164.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

23. *Towards a World Theology, op. cit.*, p. 123 and pp. 145 ff.

24. Jaspers' position paraphrased by John Kane, *Pluralism and Truth in Religion, op. cit.*, p. 113.

25. *Towards a World Theology, op. cit.*; pp. 180-191.

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