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THE HISTORICIST APPROACH TO THE CONFLICTING TRUTH-CLAIMS OF WORLD RELIGIONS

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ABSTRACT

THE HISTORICIST APPROACH TO THE CONFLICTING TRUTH-CLAIMS OF WORLD RELIGIONS

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[illegible] world religions [illegible] of religions. [illegible] between [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] for [illegible] religions. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

DAVID VAUGHN ROSSOUW

15th day of February, 1988.

In Memory of my Daughter

Bernadette Anne

d. 24-06-1985

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PREFACE

This work is the result of a search for a solution to a personal dilemma. Having been raised in the Christian tradition since birth, my reading in the field of Biblical and Religious Studies at tertiary level brought me into contact with other religious beliefs. This contact was not solely restricted to academic studies as many of my fellow students, who became personal friends, were adherents of non-Christian faiths. This experience led me seriously to question the claim to absoluteness on the part of my faith. I was no longer convinced that non-Christians were the "heathens" that Christian theology made them out to be.

My studies led me to the realisation that my particular faith was but one amongst many. Secondly, it became clear to me that I had spent most of my years in strict isolation from other religious beliefs. Thirdly, it dawned on me that I was a Christian by virtue of my geographical and sociological situation. Had I, for example, been born in India, the probability exists that I would have been raised in either the Hindu or the Muslim faith.

Given this situation, I was now faced with a serious multi-faceted problem. Was I to abandon my Christian tradition in favour of a new faith? Was I to stand firm in my faith and defend it against these others?

Perhaps, after all, my doubts of certain Christian beliefs were just a passing fancy. Was I, therefore, to tolerate other beliefs in the hope that they would one day see the light and accept Christianity as the ultimate revelation of God to mankind? This option was most problematic as I felt that if God had meant Christianity to be the final revelation to man, then I could not comprehend His reasoning behind sending another final revelation, namely, Islam.

As I saw it, the only solution to this dilemma was for me to enter into dialogue with these other beliefs in order that I might understand the diversity of the revelation of God to mankind. I could not foresee a historical world in which Christianity would finally truimph. Nor could I contemplate a God who was prepared to destroy most of mankind for persevering in their traditional mode of revering Him.

Having reached this point, the next problem that I faced was that of working out a feasible basis according to which this dialogue could take place. The major world religions are radically different from one another. Furthermore, the absolutist claims of both Christianity and Islam present a great stumbling-block in the path of meaningful dialogue. Therefore, the central tenets of each of the major world religions will be outlined in chapter one of this work so as to put the problem of religious pluralism into perspective for the reader.

In view of this problem, the question arises as to the possibility of these faiths being able to interact in dialogic encounter. This question led me to read intensively in the fields of philosophy and history of religions; a venture that proved to be a startling revelation. I realised that I was not alone in harbouring the above thoughts. The plethora of publications on the issue of religious pluralism indicated that many shared the same concerns and were groping towards a solution whereby mutual concord between religions could be achieved.

The call for interfaith dialogue has currently come under the spotlight as being the most realistic way of arriving at a solution to the problem of the conflicting truth-claims of world religions. Many feel that insight and mutual appreciation of the non-negotiable aspects of the various truth-claims can lead to greater harmony. It is also felt that such dialogue is feasible, despite the differences that exist between religions, in view of the fact that they all have a "common essence", namely; God. A critical evaluation of this basic philosophy will therefore be undertaken in chapter two.

The "common essence" approach to religious pluralism, however, raises the problem of relativism. It has the potential of reducing the world religions to mere relative entities for the sake of brotherhood. If each religion accepted that it is a mere relative entity, then there would be no conflicting truth-claims problem. Such an approach, however, would rob a particular

religion of its essence and meaning for its particular adherents. Chapter three will therefore deal with the historicist world-view as propounded by the late Ernst Troeltsch as an attempt to solve the problem of relativism. This world-view deeply impressed me as being a feasible solution to the problem of religious pluralism. It may therefore surprise the reader to find a rather negative critique of Troeltsch's application of historicist principles to the field of religion towards the end of the chapter. This is necessary in order to indicate to the reader the reasons for Troeltsch's non-prominence in more current attempts to solve the problem of religious pluralism. There is an apparent anomaly in his thought pattern.

Chapter three will culminate in a comparison between the historicist method per se and the "common essence" view that was outlined in Chapter two. The fundamental historicist basis of these attempts will be indicated. Whereas Troeltsch may have misapplied his own principles to the field of religion, it is evident that he was able to articulate the basic ground-rules which have governed all attempts at interreligious dialogue on the basis of commonality.

Historicist principles allow for a final revelation from God that lies beyond the historical realm. Thus, in chapter four, the eschatological approach to the problem of religious pluralism will be highlighted. This examination will, however, be limited to Judaism and Christianity only. The second half of this

chapter looks forward to the near future by anticipating the centenary of the 'World Parliament of Religions' (Chicago, 1893). A review of this event in the light of the more recent interfaith debate serves as an orientation towards the activities of the proposed 1993 sitting.

My thanks go to my wife, Delia, for typing the script and for all the encouragement she has given along the way. Also to St. George's Home for Boys, in particular Mr Ken McHolm and Mr John Power, for their arrangement of financial assistance through the Henry Dawson Clement Trust of Metboard Ltd. I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues at the Pretoria College of Education for all their encouragement and assistance in this venture. Lastly, I wish to thank my mentors, Dr. Jocelyn Hellig and Professor Ben Engelbrecht of the Department of Religious Studies , University of the Witwatersrand, for all their assistance.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION : DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

1. CONTACT BETWEEN RELIGIONS.

The communications revolution of the twentieth century has resulted in daily contact between peoples across the globe. Total isolation of any community from the rest of mankind is now well-nigh impossible. The world has become a "global village".

Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1940:39 - 40) is of the opinion that man's feeling of fellowship with the whole of humanity is implanted in his nature, despite the imposition on him of such artificial restrictions as tribe, race, and nation. He believes that this fundamental humanity of man wells up on occasions. So, for example; "When there is an earthquake in Japan or a famine in India, an explosion in a mine in Great Britain ... our hearts go out to the victims. When there is an act of heroism or daring, an achievement of genius in science or art, we feel elated and do not pause to ask the religion or the race to which the author belongs."

This intense awareness of a sense of global community has brought the various religions of mankind* into much closer

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*For the purposes of this work, attention will only be paid to the five major world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

contact with each other than has been the case in the past. No longer do adherents of these beliefs live in isolated societies at different ends of the globe. This has made it obvious that, as far as religion is concerned, societies have become pluralistic in character and any particular faith is but one amongst many.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962a:11) states the above point thus: "No longer are people of other persuasions peripheral or distant, the idle curiosities of travellers' tales. The more alert we are, and the more involved in life, the more we are finding that they are our neighbours, our colleagues, our competitors, our fellows. Confucians and Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims, are with us not only in the United Nations, but down the street. Increasingly, not only is our civilisations destiny affected by their actions; but we drink coffee with them personally as well."

Religious coexistence, however, does not erase the fact that these beliefs differ from each other as to the nature of Truth. In particular, it does not alter the major stumbling-block that lies in the path of an empathetic understanding amongst different faiths; the absolutist stance of both Christianity and Islam. Given this situation, religious pluralism has the potential of becoming analogous to a fermentation pot, the lid of which has not been properly secured. The resultant process is able to blast the lid completely away, for the "battle of the religions" continues on a ideological level and at

times still manifests itself in the form of violence.

Thus, the issue of the conflicting truth claims of different religions "emerges as a major topic demanding a prominent place on the agenda of the philosopher of religion today and in the future" (Hick, 1973a:119).

2. THE CONFLICTING TRUTH CLAIMS

A precise definition of any of the major world religions is almost impossible. This is especially due to the fact that within each, there exists a diversity of forms and thus one must avoid any generalisations. What follows, therefore, is a brief description of the central tenets of each faith with a view to highlighting the points at which conflict arises.

2.1 THE EASTERN RELIGIONS

2.1.1 HINDUISM

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru describes Hinduism thus *: "Hinduism as a faith is vague, amorphous, many-sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or, indeed to say definitely whether it is a religion or not, in the usual sense of

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*This quotation is cited by Ringgren and Ström from Nehru's: The Discovery of India (1946), the full bibliographical details of which are not cited.

the word. In its present form, and even in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed or contradicting each other" (Nehru in Ringgren and Strőm, 1967:334 - 335).

This religion is not known to have stemmed from the teachings of any single founder. It has no prescribed rituals, dogmas* or creeds that are universal to it and, despite widespread allegiance to a collection of sacred writings known as the Veda, is also not dependent on any single authoritative scripture.

Strictly speaking, Hinduism is also not a missionising faith as it pertains only to the 'peoples of India'.** Whilst outsiders may aspire to it, converts are not accepted and birth into a Hindu family is the only means of entry.

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*R.C.Zaehner points out that the absence of dogma in Hinduism can be overemphasized. Some presuppositions, despite the wide diversity of practices, are rarely, if ever disputed. These are 'samsara', 'karma', 'moksha'/ 'mukti' and 'sanatana dharma'. Zaehner, R.C. (1977). Hinduism, Reprint. London: Oxford University Press, pp. 4 - 5

**In the present day, Hinduism has begun to missionise. Disciples of Swami Vivekenanda have been active in America. In Europe there are mission stations in London and at Gretz near Paris. See: Ringgren, H. and Strőm, A. Religions of mankind. Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, pp.334 -335. See also: Sooklal, A. (1987). "The Hare Krishna movement in South Africa." In: Religion in Southern Africa, vol. 8, no. 2. July, pp.19 - 21; where a brief historical perspective is given of the "International Society for Krishna Consciousness" (ISKCON) which was established by Srila Prabhupada in New York with a view to gaining converts. Of the seven stated purposes of this movement, the second expressly declares that it is "to propogate a consciousness of Krishna, as it is revealed in the Bhagavad Gita and Srimad Bhagwatam." (Sooklal, 1987:20).

This apparent exclusivism must not be misunderstood. Throughout its history, this religion has shown itself to be ready to absorb and adopt ideas and norms from elswhere. This fact explains its amorphous nature. In any event, the concept of 'samsara' allows all individuals the opportunity for birth into a Hindu family, and thereby a chance at attaining 'mukti'.

Hinduism clashes with the Abrahamic faiths because of its apparent polytheistic nature. Arguably, it can be shown to be a polytheistic faith in that its adherents revere God in many diverse forms. For the educated Hindu, however, the religion has a distinctly monotheistic character. This is apparent in the Rig Veda in the statement: "The Real is One, though sages name it variously" (Rig Veda, i.164.46.).

Despite this argument for the monotheistic nature of Hinduism, the fact that many other gods are revered, especially in tangible forms, is not likely to lead to a widely accepted change in attitude towards it on the part of the Abrahamic faiths. To the Abrahamic faiths, such practices are idolatrous.

The Hindu concept of 'sanatana dharma' with its widely accepted axiom, namely, the concept of the transmigration of souls (samsara) also contradicts the view of the Abrahamic faiths. Samsara holds that one's individual soul (atman) passes through a series of rebirths. History is thus a cyclic process as opposed to the linear process advocated by the Abrahamic faiths.

Samsara provides a philisophical solution to the problem of evil in the world in that the condition into which the soul is reborn depends upon one's good or bad actions (karma). Thus, if people are sick, poor, or oppressed, then it is taken for granted that they have deserved it, if not in this life then in some previous existence (Parrinder,1968:31). Although there is a link with the reward-punishment ethic that is found in different forms in the Abrahamic faiths, the above solution to the existence of evil differs radically from their viewpoint of a single eschatological judgement after which evil will be eradicated.

The Hindu aims ultimately to escape rebirth by seeking release (moksha/mukti), which is possible to all despite the divergent philosophical views as to how it should be attained. Many Hindus accept the view laid down in the so-called "Identity Texts" of the Upanishads, namely that release is gained when one has realised that there is no difference between the individual soul (atman) and Brahman (Smart, 1969:124 - 125). This concept of Brahman-Atman; that divinity inhered in man, is unacceptable to the Abrahamic faiths in which there is a clear separation between creator and creation.

'Brahman' can be understood in a variety of ways from the abovementioned impersonal 'Absolute' (universal soul or being) to the personal Lord, Ishvara. Some Hindus, therefore, experience the phenomenal world as an illusion (maya). Brahman is the only Reality that exists and all things are one with it (advaita).

Radhakrishnan (1940:31) emphasises that Reality (Brahman) and existence are not to be set against each other as metaphysical contraries. By 'advaita' and 'maya', one must understand that "nothing on earth is utterly perfect or utterly without perfection." Therefore, those who have the vision of perfection (Brahman) strive continually to increase the perfection and diminish the imperfection by striving to become one with Brahman.

Other Hindus do not experience reality in terms of maya-advaita. These deny that man and God are one because if this were so, there would be no possibility of man worshipping God. They further argue that if man were indeed God, "then he ought to be all-wise and all-powerful, and no man is that" (Parrinder, 1968:21). Thus they developed the concept of 'dvaita' whereby, through the personal commitment to God (in whatever form he is revered), release from samsara is also possible.

2.1.2 BUDDHISM

The Buddha rebelled against many aspects of Hinduism. Primarly, he opposed its methods of achieving liberation and offered instead a clear-cut path towards the attainment thereof. He also laid no great stress on the worship of Hindu gods, whom he regarded as being impermanent like other living beings* (Smart, 1969:121).

*The Buddha considered the human individual to be an impermanent being consisting of five impermanent 'heaps' or 'categories' (skandas) which are subject to decay.

These differences with Hinduism should not be seen in terms of violent conflict. Buddha did not campaign for any crusade against Hindu believers. Whilst it is true that Buddha offered the Four Noble Truths as the only way to cure the ills of humankind in the world and also that he perceived his mission as a cosmic one, such absolutism was at least accompanied by tolerance. The fact that Hinduism later absorbed Buddhist teaching as part of its diversity serves to illustrate the lack of any real conflict between the two. The Buddha's attitude to gods, however, does stand in sharp conflict with Abrahamic monotheism. Apart from his teaching that they are impermanent and thus also need to escape rebirth, he also held that the gods have no spiritual power. They do not know the secret of existence, except insofar as they listen to the Buddha himself. He is above the gods (Smart, 1969:121).

D.T. Suzuki (1969:71) sees the doctrine of no-soul (anatta) as being the feature which distinguishes Buddhism from all other religions. Edward Conze (1969:62) sees the doctrine as comprising two statements, namely: "It is claimed that nothing in reality corresponds to such words or ideas as 'I', 'mine', 'belonging', etc. In other words, the self is not a fact. We are urged to consider that nothing in our empirical self is worthy of being regarded as the real self." This promotion of the ego is the cause of humankind's pain in the world.

The term which the Buddha ascribed to the state of liberation is

that of 'Nirvana'. As to the exact meaning of this concept there is little clarity. The one affirmative quality that the Buddha did venture was that of 'Bliss'. Etymologically the word means 'to blow out' , "not transitively but as a fire ceases to draw fuel. Deprived of fuel it goes out" (Smith, 1965:125 - 126). What it essentially means, therefore, is that once one has managed to divorce himself from desire, the cause of all suffering, then there will be no rebirth. One drops all behaviour patterns which would promote the ego or self and continue to fuel the pain and dislocation of life (dukkha).

Some comparative religionists argue that Nirvana is a God-concept, or is as close to an equivalent as Buddhism allows in the sense of an inspiration and goal of effort. The vocabulary used to describe it is very similar to that used to describe God: 'unknown', 'infinite', 'indestructable'. Parrinder (1968:51) comments that "perhaps a closer analogy is the kingdom of heaven, or heaven itself purged of symbolism."

Today Buddhism manifests itself in two distinct forms, namely, Theravada and Mahayana. An interesting aspect of Mahayana is its concept that salvation is open to all by means of the 'bodhisattva' (Buddhas-to-be). According to this doctrine, "the Buddha -to-be acquires, through his countless lives of self sacrifice, a virtually infinite store of merit. Out of this great store he can distribute merit to the otherwise unworthy faithful. The person who calls on the Bodhisattva in faith will, on death, be reborn in paradise - not through his own merits,

but through the Bodhisattva's (Smart,1969: 134 - 135). Here, Buddhism comes close to the Judaeo-Christian idea of the vicarious suffering of an individual on behalf of others. It is also particularly similar to the idea of Christ being sent to die for mankind in order that they might have salvation. The radical differences between the Bodhisattva and Christian teaching are, however, self evident.

Increased metaphysical speculation on the bodhisattva ideal led to the transmogrification of the Buddha into a God. The 'Pure Land' sect in particular developed a theory of belief in celestial Buddhas who could be worshipped and prayed to in order that one might attain Nirvana. However, not all Mahayana schools sanction Buddha worship. Many apply the Theravadan principle that the gods deter one from the goal.

Whilst Buddha worship would be acceptable to Hindus because of their tolerance of the worship of many deities, this practice is incompatible with that of the Abrahamic faiths. Judaism and Islam do not accept that God can be incarnated in human form. Christianity, on the other hand, does accept such a theory, but the belief that this took place "once and for all" in the person Jesus, renders Buddha's divine status "irrelevant" and "misleading".

Despite the divergent schools of Buddhism, Christmas Humphreys (1951:51 - 52) points out that they exist in tolerance side by

side. Citing Suzuki, he further points out that: "There are not two Buddhisms; the Mahayana and the Hinayana are one, and the spirit of the founder of Buddhism prevails in both. Each has developed in its own way, according to the difference in environment in which each has thriven and grown, understanding by enviroment all those various factors of life that make up the peculiarities of an individual or nation."

2.2 THE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS

2.2.1 JUDAISM

As the 'children of Abraham', the Jews believe in the one God. This God differed from the many other deities that were being revered in the Ancient Near East at that time. These tended to have a higher or lower status in a particular pantheon. By contrast, Yahweh (the name by which this God eventually became known) was monotheistic in character.

This point immediately separates Judaism from the Eastern religions. The view that there is only one God is not compatible with the concepts of deity of the religions discussed above.

A further point that leads to a parting of the ways with the East is the Jewish view of creation. Yahweh, the eternal, is the creator of all that is for the manifestation of his glory. He is the supreme ruler over all that exists. Thus Judaism has a

definite starting point for history - the creation. This event is viewed as a positive occurrence and is unlike the Eastern viewpoint discussed above where one finds a constant search to escape from the phenomenal world and its suffering. Judaism is a world-affirming and not a world-denying faith (Allen, 1981:43).

According to the Hebrew Bible, God makes Himself known to His creation through revelation. The key revelatory event is the Exodus; through which the power of Yahweh over nature and history had been proven. Hyam Maccoby (1984:63) points out that for Judaism, the deliverance from Egypt is "an event from which all else flows." It had a marked effect on the God-concept of this new faith in that with the eruption of monotheism, it "postulated a God who transcends all cyclical processes, and who acts only in accordance with his untrammelled will." In this instance, he had chosen to deliver the Jews from bondage, thus, the Hebrew Bible strikes the note of thankfulness to God throughout its contents.

For this reason, the Jews see the entire historical process as 'Salvation History'. History is the arena for the unfolding of God's plan of salvation for all mankind. This plan involved Israel in a very special way in that it was to her that God chose to reveal his Law (Torah) via Moses at Mount Sinai. There a covenant was made between God and Israel in the form of the Decalogue, which formed the basis of a legal system which governs every aspect of life (The six hundred and thirteen mizvot).

This covenant "was a new relationship to a sole deity who would lead them and protect them" (Smart, 1969:347). However, in return the Israelites were under obligation to walk in the way of their God as laid down by the Torah. He had made them a 'Chosen People' (Deut. 7:6ff) - a nation 'set apart' from other nations as God's own possession in order that they might practise His ways and make them known to the nations of the world. If Israel remained faithful to this covenant, she would be rewarded in that "she would dwell safely in the land which had been promised to her. Infidelity to the covenant obligations would result in exile from that land" (Hellig, 1985:1). However, despite the fact that Israel could be punished for not observing the Torah, her chosenness could never be annulled.

Jocelyn Hellig (1985:1)* points out that this doctrine of chosenness is quite clearly a potential area for explosive misunderstanding**, and, therefore, a source of anti-Semitism. "Implicit in the doctrine is the belief that what has happened to Jews, and what continues to happen to them, is at the centre of human history" (Hellig, 1986:1). It is largely for this reason that antagonism of the Jews arose. "Without their supernatural

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*Also: Hellig, J. (1987). "The Doctrine of Chosenness and Anti-Semitism." Unpublished. p.1.

**Hellig defines anti-Semitism as: "an imprecise term which has come to denote the irrational hatred of the Jewish people, the demonisation and thus dehumanisation of them, and the ascription to the Jews of cosmic powers of evil." See: Hellig, J. (1987). "The Doctrine of Chosenness and Anti-Semitism." Unpublished. p.3.

role in human history, it is unlikely that there would be such irrational hatreds of them, nor that they would be subjected to impossible standards of morality, not expected of any other people in the world" (Hellig, 1986:7).

Rosemary Ruether (1974), in her examination of the rivalry between the Jews and the Christian Church, points out that although anti-Judaism was prevalent in the pre-Christian pagan world, this was not nearly as bad as the later anti-Semitism that was espoused by the Christian Church. She states (1974:28) that "we must recognise Christian anti-Semitism as a uniquely new factor in the picture of antique anti-Semitism." Their anti-Semitism is of course inextricably linked to their understanding of the doctrine of chosenness which will be highlighted in 2.2.2 below as an area of conflict.

The doctrine of chosenness presents the Jews as being a particularistic people with a particularistic faith that excludes all others. The former premise is, of course, true; especially if one considers such instances as the attempt by Nehemiah and Ezra in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., to restrict marriages to those of Jewish birth only (Ezra 10:2 / Neh. 13:23ff), and the later Maccabean resistance to Syrian intervention.

The latter premise, however, needs further qualification as there exists in Judaism a "strange tension" between Jewish

particularism and the universalism that is also implied in Jewish monotheism (Hellig, 1985:5). Thus, as Emil F kenheim (1966:54) puts it: "only an infinite and therefore universal God can single out the particular." Hellig (1985:4) points out that monotheism dictates that God is universal. "If there is only one God, the Jews must be chosen for a purpose." She defines this purpose as follows: "A particular people, a holy and treasured people, through following a holy way of life, will ultimately lead the entire world to knowledge of the Lord" (Hellig, 1987:2).

This purpose should not be misunderstood as meaning that Israel has the only path to redemption. Citing Isaiah 19:25, Ruether (1974:236) points out that: "God is the God of both Israel and the other peoples, each in their own histories and contexts. ... All may join Israel, but all need not join Israel or adopt its specific identity to be saved."

The universal nature of monotheism does not dictate that Gentiles need to adhere to the six hundred and thirteen mizvot. According to rabbinical tradition, they need only follow the Seven Noahide Laws.* Thus provision is made for the "righteous pagan" to be included in God's eschatological kingdom. However, the question remains as to whether the Seven Noahide Laws are sufficient in order to include all mankind in God's salvific plan. According to Judaism they are. The point is how other religions perceive this Jewish claim. It has the potential of being regarded as aristocratic conceit.

In any event, this salvific plan which is to be ushered in on the 'Day of Yahweh' by a Messiah is inextricably linked to a national redemption of the people, Israel. The problem thus arises as to whether such a view of redemption, although it does have universal overtones (cf. Micah 4:1 - 5) will in fact cater for all mankind.

In terms of the conflicting truth-claims, it must also be noted

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*"The seven Noahide laws are injunctions given traditionally to the sons of Noah. They are considered binding on Jew and gentile alike. The first six are prohibitions against: 1) blasphemy 2) idolatry 3) sexual immorality 4) murder 5) robbery 6) eating any portion of a living animal. The seventh is an injunction concerning the administration of justice, demanding the establishment of courts of justice. These, in many ways, include the entire range of social legislation. In the Jewish view, the gentile who observes these laws and acknowledges their divine source, is considered to be a pious man who will inherit the kingdom of heaven." Hellig, J. (1985). "The Doctrine of Chosenness Reassessed." Unpublished. p.9.

that the idea of a national redemption of Israel differs from the Eastern belief in the denial of the phenomenal world. It is also in conflict with the Christian viewpoint of universal redemption via faith in a personal saviour.

2.2.2 CHRISTIANITY

This religion follows on the 'salvation history' of Judaism by seeing its fulfillment in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This belief remains the "central fact" of the Christian faith, despite the many diverse forms in which it manifests itself (Hick, 1983:17).

The prime source for the life and teachings of Jesus is the New Testament. The conservative Christian viewpoint is that this document, along with the Hebrew Bible, forms a unit which is the divinely inspired Word of God. In terms of modern historiography, however, the reflection of the main figure of the Christian faith as presented in the New Testament is a highly problematical one. Factors such as discrepancies in details; accurate origin; dating and authorship of the documents; and the time gap between the life of Jesus and the written account thereof, make it impossible for one to determine exactly what Jesus said and did.

The more liberal view of the Christian New Testament is that it consists of the writings of a community who wish to preserve the memory of Jesus. Thus, stories of Jesus flowed into a kind of

corporate memory, which lived powerfully on. These memories became part of the consciousness of the church, interacting in its life with the other factors that affected it and becoming embodied in documentary form as the New Testament picture of Jesus as Lord and Saviour (Hick, 1983:58).

Leaving these two views of the New Testament aside, it is apparent from the Gospels that the basic message propagated by Jesus was that the promised 'Messiah' that was expected by Judaism, had in fact arrived in his person; and thus the envisaged eschatological 'Kingdom of God' was now at hand. This was the 'good news' proclaimed by him and to which he urged people to turn by means of repentance (cf. Mark 1:14 -15). This message in effect means that the promises contained in the Hebrew Bible had culminated and had been fulfilled in Jesus. "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Such an approach to the Hebrew scriptures led to their being incorporated with the new documents at the time of the canonization of the Christian Bible. Christians recognise that the same God speaks in both the Old and New Testament, however, they believe that it is only through the New Gospel that the Old Testament is rightly to be understood. This understanding of the Hebrew Bible is highly problematic in terms of Jewish-Christian relations. The irony of this situation is that Christianity could not totally reject Jewish belief because her teachings were

greatly dependent on the promises contained therein. Therefore, Hellig (1986:3) argues that "continued Jewish existence is, from one perspective, a verification of the truth of Christianity, and from another, a scandal which threatens the truth-claims of Christianity."

Richard L. Rubenstein (1966:194) points out that, in actual fact, Christianity cannot be understood apart from its own chosen-people doctrine; the claim that the Church has replaced the Synagogue as the New Israel. Because of the special role claimed by the Jew in the divine drama, he assumes inordinate importance for Christianity as chosenness passed from the Old Israel to the New Israel. This results in dynamics of jealousy not unlike those operative in sibling rivalry as to which son is the Father's favourite.

But, the question must be raised as to whether this description of the conflict between Judaism and Christianity as mere "sibling rivalry" is apt. Ruether (1974) points out that the Christians took this rivalry much further by developing it into a perfidious anti-Semitism. Troubled by the Jewish refusal to accept her message, the Church tried to find in her scriptures the prediction of the "blindness" of Israel (Baum, 1974:12). This 'blindness' was to assume great significance with regard to discrediting the status of Jewish religious law, leadership, worship, and even its history.

"The crux of the conflict lay in the fact that the Church erected its messianic midrash* into a new principle of salvation. For Christianity, salvation was now found no longer in any observances - ritual or ethical - founded on the Torah of Moses, representing the covenant of the past. Rather, salvation was now found solely through faith in the messianic exegesis of the Church about the salvic role of Jesus as Prophet - King - son of man, predicted by the prophets (Ruether, 1974:78). The writings of the apostle, Paul, had a profound influence on the Church in its formulation of the above teaching.

Norman Ravitch (1982:45) points out that the Church's insistence on maintaining the connection with the Jewish Scriptures fatally and necessarily led it to attack the living people Israel. Citing Arnold Toynbee , Ravitch points to the example of Marcion, who wanted to relativize the Hebrew Bible in relation to the Christian faith. Had Marcion not been declared a heretic by the Church, and had his views become accepted Christian practice, Christianity might have left the Jews alone as another irrelevant religious sect in the great religious cauldron of the Middle-East.

The blame for the deification of Jesus and the transformation of

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*Midrash is a term applied to the rabbinical method of interpretation of scripture. The rabbis adhered to set laws for such hermeneutic, for example, the Seven Laws of Hillel. Paul, having grown up in the rabbinical tradition, applied this hermeneutic method to reveal the fulfilment of the promises contained in the Hebrew Bible in Christ.

the Hebrew Bible into this new Messianic hope is laid by many biblical scholars on Paul of Tarsus. Paul Johnson (1976:37 - 39), however, points out that the new doctrine was not invented by Paul, but that everything in it had already been implicit in the teachings of Jesus. What Paul had succeeded in doing was to Hellenize Jesus' message, thus making Judaic monotheism accessible to the entire Roman World.

Johnson (1976:38) , however, contradicts himself by stating that it was inevitable that Paul's gospel would clash with Judaism, especially insofar as he introduced a new attitude to the Torah. "For him the law became a curse, for no man could fulfil its 613 commands and prohibitions completely; thus it made sinners of everyone. In some ways it was a direct incentive to sin" (Galatians 3 / Romans 6 - 9).

Closely linked to Paul's refutation of salvation via adherence to the Jewish Law is the Christian concept of the new and 'true' Israel. The Church took over the Jewish concept of the chosen people and changed the criteria for membership. Physical descent was no longer valid, but only belief in Jesus Christ * (Romans 2:28f.;9:6ff.).

Ruether (1977:81) sums up the consequences of this negation of

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*On this issue, however, Paul suffers from a great deal of ambiguity in that elsewhere (cf. Romans 7:12, 22, 25) he purports the Law to be holy and good.

Torah as follows : "The dialectic of judgement and promise is rendered schizophrenic, applied not to one elect people, but to two peoples; the reprobate people, the Jews, and the future elect people of the promise, the Church."

The reestablishment of the State of Israel in 1948 has caused tremendous problems for Christianity's view of itself as the "new" and "true" Israel. Because of the Christian view that the Jews were blind to the truth of Jesus' message, there arose within Christianity a highly developed theology which claimed that Jews, for the remainder of human history, were to be subjected to continual suffering and to live in a state of perpetual wandering without a homeland as a punishment for their grave sinfulness (Pawlikowski, 1980:1).*

The prime reason such a punishment lay in the accusation (which was based on the New Testament accounts of the trial of Jesus) that because the Jews had crucified Jesus, they had in fact killed God. Thus the Jews had been responsible for deicide.

Since 70 AD until 1948, the Jews fitted into this theological mould. Until the Second coming they were to be the wandering, reprobate people, suffering because of their refusal to accept the truth of Christianity . This suffering served as positive

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*In this regard see also: Ruether, R.R. (1974). Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism. New York: The Seabury Press, pp.58 - 60.

proof that Christianity was indeed the new Israel. The Jewish return to Israel is, however, a contradiction of this viewpoint.

The Holocaust has also caused problems for conservative Christian theology. For many Christians, it has served to indicate exactly how un-Christian this anti-Semitism that found its roots in the New Testament can become. In particular it has awoken many Christians to the fact that despite their belief in the redemption of the world through Jesus, the world is in fact still unredeemed.* As Baum (1974:7) puts it: "What the encounter of Auschwitz demands of Christian theologians, therefore, is that they submit Christian teaching to a radical ideological critique."

Sensitive Christians have taken up this challenge and are critically examining their scriptures to uncover the roots of the "teaching of contempt". Names such as Rosemary Ruether, Gregory Baum, John Pawlikowski, Tom Driver, and Monika Hellwig, stand out as key figures in this quest. The implications of their findings for solving the problem of religious pluralism will be pursued in chapter four.

2.2.3 ISLAM

The followers of this faith, Muslims, surrender to the will of

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*See later discussion in Chapter Four.

the one God - Allah. Their authoritative scriptures, the Qur'an are regarded by them as being the only true account of revelation. It is the eternal and uncreated infallible Word of God. Being as such it supersedes the scriptures of both Judaism and Christianity. The Old Testament and the New Testament are thus regarded as faulty records of true revelation.

This doctrine seems on the surface to have the potential for violent conflict with the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Parrinder (1968:130) however, points out that although modern Muslims are of the opinion that the differences between the scriptures of these three faiths are due to corruptions of the Torah and the Gospel, the Qur'an itself does not express this sentiment. On the contrary it gives Jews and Christians a better status than pagans by describing them as 'people of the Book' (ahl-al-kitab). This is because they had received revelation from the one God. However, they are still regarded as second-class citizens subjected to humiliation.

This special status as 'people of the Book' serves somewhat to dampen the potential for conflict that exists between these three faiths. Hellig (1987:11) points out that this is so because Islam is not dependent on the word and letter of the scriptures of either of these faiths. Christianity had to coerce the fulfilment of the Old Testament in the events of the New Testament. Thus, Jews were "blind" to the meaning of their scripture as they did not agree to this "fulfilment". Because

Islam sees the Old and New Testaments as faulty, there is no need to coerce an outcome from statements in scripture which preceded the Qur'an.

Nevertheless, both of these faiths failed to recognise Muhammed's revelation as being valid. This fact possibly explains the change in attitude (namely to one of outright rejection) that occurs in passages of the Qur'an which date to later years of Muhammed's life.

The Qur'an also emphasises that the genetic line of the great prophets had reached finality. This line is traced back to Adam and runs through Abraham to Jesus, but, ends with Muhammed. He is the last - the 'Seal' of the Prophets; for in him God's revelation reached finality (Smart, 1969:487). This emphasis on finality obviously negates the truth-claims of any other religion.

Islam does not base its entire belief on the Qur'an alone. During the first two centuries of its existence, theologians and lawyers worked out the 'Shari'a' - the 'Law' of Islam, from which a whole way of life emerged.

An interesting aspect of the above that is very pertinent to the problem of conflicting truth-claims is the Hadith which classifies Jews and Christians as 'dhimmis'. Because of their status as 'people of the Book', they enjoy a guarantee of

security to life and property, p >tection in the exercise of their religion and defence against others. They may not, however, become citizens of the Muslim state unless they convert wholly to Islam. They are also required to pay taxes to the Muslim state and must provide the necessary supplies for her armies when the need arises (Gibb and Kramers, 1953:75 - 76).*

These 'dhimmis' are distinguished from the 'kafirun', a term that was first applied by Muhammed to the unbelieving Meccans, but, was later defined as referring to all infidels. It is these people "who are threatened with God's judgement and Hell" (Gibb and Kramers, 1953:205 - 206).** Thus whilst there appears to be a special dispensation for Christians and Jews as far as the Last Judgement is concerned, the Eastern Religions are definitely not tolerated. The scene is set for conflict.

In the early stages of Islamic expansion throughout the Arabic world, Muslims applied the practice of a 'Hc'y War' (jihad). This practice was continued as the faith was spread into Europe, India and Africa. Gradually the military aspect of the jihad waned and it never came to be regarded as one of the 'Pillars' of the faith (Parrinder, 1968:136). Nevertheless,

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*This article also appears in: Houtsma, M. Th. ed. (1913). The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. 1. Leiden: E.J.Brill; London: Luzac and Co, pp.958 - 959.

**This article also appears in: Houtsma, M. Th. ed. (1927). The Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. 2. Leiden: E.J.Brill; London: Luzac and Co, pp.618 -620.

militancy in Islam is very important. The world is divided into two basic arenas: 'Dar al Islam' (the territory of Islam) and 'Dar al Harb' (the territory of war). By implication, therefore, the entire world must be won over for Islam.

This aspect of Islam remains problematic for modern times even though most Muslim teachers nowadays take the territory of war to mean war against sin in oneself. Many of the current Muslim sects have revived the military understanding of the jihad concept and are currently "at war" , either against the influx of Western ideas into Muslim society, or in the name of the spread of Islam in various states.

3. FACING THE PROBLEM

The above brief outline of these religious beliefs serves to indicate their potential for explosive collision. Despite past attempts on the part of any particular faith to establish itself as the only true religion, the different beliefs have survived as separate entities and show no signs of fading from the arena of history.

The "global village", however, does not allow a total separation of the different religious cultures. The question thus arises as to whether or not it is possible for them to coexist on the basis of mutual understanding in the light of such diversity.

In this regard, Hinduism with its amorphous nature, has no major problems. Because it does not prescribe the courses of action or beliefs to be held by other religions, each individual may worship the god or gods of his own choice. In any event, the concept of 'samsara' allows all individuals the opportunity for birth into a Hindu family and thereby a chance at attaining 'mukti'.

Buddhism too has tended to be tolerant in the face of religious diversity. The Buddhist solution to the conflicting truth-claims problem is perhaps best depicted in the story related by the Buddha concerning a certain king of Benares who gathered together a number of beggars who had been blind from birth and offered a prize to the one who should give him the best account of an elephant. Each beggar felt a different part of the elephant and proceeded to describe what he perceived to be the truth pertaining to the phenomenon "elephant". And yet, not one could give a full description of the animal because they each experienced only a part of the truth.

So it is with the differing religions. Each sees Truth from its particular perspective whilst not knowing the full Truth. Radhakrishnan (1940:308) comments thus on the significance of the abovementioned Buddhist tale: "In theological discussions we are at best blind beggars fighting with one another." Nevertheless, the fact that the Buddha perceived his mission as a cosmic one and prescribed the Eightfold Path as the true path to salvation

serves to contradict the above.

The Abrahamic faiths pose the greatest threat to peaceful coexistence among men. The Jews claim to be God's chosen people. Christianity too makes this claim as the "New Israel" and holds firm to the belief that the salvation of mankind is only possible through belief in Jesus as God. Islam, in turn, claims to be the final revelation of God to man and that the Qur'an is the only true record of such revelation. All of these views set the scene for conflict rather than for peaceful dialogue. Not only do they stand in sharp opposition to each other, but they also are contrary to fundamental Eastern philosophies.

Three possible solutions have been proposed according to which the problem that is posed by religious pluralism can be adressed. The first is that of synthesis by addition, which involves the adding together of the most important features of each faith so as to create a new uniform world faith. The second is that of synthesis by reduction, which requires that all religions be reduced to "the smallest possible common denominator of which it may be assumed that all of them have it in common". The third is that of interfaith dialogue (Gensichen, 1976:33 - 35).

In the light of the above outline of the conflicting truth-claims, it is evident that the proposal of synthesis by addition is doomed to failure. D.H.W. Gensichen (1976:33) spells out the reasons for this failure as follows:-

"Religions are not like machines, made up of component parts which can be exchanged at random or artificially combined in a new structure. Each religion is rather a living organism, animated by the faith of the believers and expressing itself in forms and symbols which cannot simply be transferred into a different setting."

Gensichen also rejects the solution of synthesis by reduction on the above grounds. He further comments (1976:34) that "the realities of religions, in the plural, militate against any such attempt at abstract reduction." Thus, he aligns his support with the third solution, namely, interfaith dialogue. Such a solution, for Gensichen, provides "a measure of realism which is able to take into account both the existing religions as they are, in their particularity and peculiarity, and the school of secularism which is leading the religions to a reappraisal of their heritage which, again, will bear the peculiar stamp of the respective religion."

This third solution has served as the prime motivation for the pursuit of this work. It has currently come under the spotlight of being the most realistic way of arriving at a solution to the problem of the conflicting truth-claims. However, it is the very nature of the peculiarity of each religion that gives rise to our problem. Thus to recognise peculiarity and yet at the same time to propose a dialogue that in the end will not lead to the breakdown of the very essence of the conflict, namely,

particularity; is in my opinion, a hopeless ideal. It still does not solve the problem. However, many are of the opinion that insight and mutual appreciation of the non-negotiable aspects of the various truth-claims can lead to greater harmony.

The aim of this work is, therefore, threefold. Firstly it serves as a critical evaluation of the basic philosophy that underlies the call towards interfaith dialogue. This will be done in chapter two by concentrating mainly on the models provided by two of the most renowned current proponents of interfaith dialogue, namely, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and John Hick. Their views, however, must not be seen in isolation from those who paved the way for the praxis of a global theology. Thus the views of Paul Tillich, Carl Gustav Jung and Arnold Toynbee will also form part of this analysis.

The key issue that will be raised by the above analysis is that of the reduction of the many particular faiths to mere relative entities. Thus, the second aim of this work will be the provision of a critical analysis of the model provided by Ernst Troeltsch with regard to the problem of relativising religious beliefs. This will be undertaken in chapter three.

Troeltsch attempted to come to terms with the problem of relativism by means of the historicist method. This method will be examined and the flaws will be pointed out. The culmination of this chapter, however, will be the proposal for the

recognition that, despite the flaws in Troeltsch's argument, he was able to articulate the basic ground-rules from which students of religion are at least able to attempt to come to terms with the problem of religious pluralism. In this regard, it will be necessary to compare the historicist approach to that of global theology as outlined in chapter two.

The third aim of this work, to be pursued in chapter four, will be to highlight the eschatological approach to the problem of the conflicting truth-claims. In this regard, the thoughts of Rosemary Ruether and Tom Driver are pertinent. This might strike the reader as being somewhat odd in terms of the proposal for the recognition of historicist principles as the basis for a feasible solution to the problem. The fact of the matter is that although, in my opinion, historicism does provide such a basis, inevitably it does not remove the corflict. Like interfaith dialogue it gropes towards a solution but the problem continues to exist.

Nevertheless, historicist principles do allow for a final revelation from God that lies beyond the historical realm. Perhaps such an approach is the only way of solving the problem of religious pluralism.

CHAPTER 2 THE UNITIVE PLURALISTIC BASIS FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

1. INTRODUCTION

In the light of the discussion in the previous chapter concerning the conflicting truth-claims of different religions, it is evident that the student of religion is faced with a vexing problem. The beliefs and practices of the Eastern religions do not seem to be at all compatible with those of the Abrahamic faiths. Also, the internal conflict that exists between the latter faiths is in itself a fundamental problem. For all intents and purposes, therefore, the ideal of a wide-scale interfaith dialogue in order to overcome these areas of conflict appears to be a hopeless one.

Notwithstanding this dilemma, the "global village" has brought the world religions into increasing contact with one another and by so doing, has in effect, forced a confrontation of truth-claims. Yet, in the current age of detente in politics, the tendency is towards solution of a conflict via mutual dialogue rather than violent encounter. As far as religion is concerned, therefore, there has been a strong move towards interfaith dialogue with a view to gaining insight and mutual appreciation of the non-negotiable aspects of the various truth-claims. It is

believed that such an approach to the conflict can lead to greater harmony.

The above viewpoint is largely governed by the belief that, despite the peculiarities of each particular faith, there exists a unity between them that is based on their common essence. Theorists of the common essence of religions school, such as Paul Tillich (d. 1965), Carl Gustav Jung (d. 1961), Arnold Toynbee (d. 1975), John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith seek to identify the essential sameness of all religious beliefs, despite the obvious differences in outlook. According to them, once this is done, mutual dialogue becomes possible on the basis of what is common to all faiths and the path is open towards a unitive pluralism of world religions.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the views of Smith and Hick, two of the main proponents of the above view. Smith and Hick should not, however, be seen in isolation from other luminaries who reached such a thesis on the basis of their particular studies in the field of religion. In this regard, the models provided by three past exponents of the viewpoint, namely, Tillich, Jung, and Toynbee, will be examined briefly in order to provide an adequate background to the contemporary call on the part of Smith and Hick for a global theology of religions which is based on the recognition of unitive pluralism.

2. TILLICH, JUNG AND TOYNBEE: IDENTIFICATION OF THE COMMON CORE OF ALL RELIGIONS

If mutual dialogue between the differing religions is to take place on the basis of what is common to them all, then this commonality needs to be clearly defined. What follows is an outline of three different definitions of such a common essence. Tillich, identified this common essence as "ultimate concern". Jung, held that it lay in the human psyche. Toynbee, was of the opinion that it was to be found beyond what he termed the "nonessentials" of religious beliefs.

Although each of the above scholars viewed the unity of mankind's religious history from their respective perspectives of systematic theology, psychology and history, they were all involved in the quest for wider interreligious dialogue on the basis of the essential sameness of all religious beliefs. Their common contribution to the study of religion lies in their identification and definition of a common core which forms the basis of all religions. By doing so they provided a theoretical basis according to which meaningful interfaith dialogue could be feasibly pursued.

2.1 PAUL TILLICH: ALL PARTAKE IN ULTIMATE CONCERN

The key to Tillich's views on interreligious dialogue lies in his definition of the concept: 'religion'. Tillich (1963:4)

defines this phenomenon as: "the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life." Tillich further points out that the predominant religious name for the content of such an ultimate concern is God - a god or gods. Such a definition of religion, therefore, includes both theistic as well as non-theistic faiths and suggests a unity that underlies them all, namely, ulitimate concern.

Tillich emphasised that whilst religious beliefs should be regarded as the medium through which one many reach the Ultimate, they should not see themselves as <u>being</u> the Ultimate. He argues (1958:44) that religions, because they belong to the realm of finite reality, cannot claim ultimacy. The true ultimate transcends this realm infinitely and as such, "no finite reality can express it directly and properly". Elsewhere (1953:97) he states that: "truth is relative to a group, to a concrete situation, or to an existential predicament."

Tillich (1953:240) points out that demonic consequences follow the consecration of finite concerns to the status of ultimacy. He contends that "this happens continually in the actual life of most religions. The representation of man's ultimate concern - holy objects - tend to become his ultimate concern. They are transformed into idols. Holiness provokes idolatry."

Tillich (1953:16) explains this idolatry as being "the elevation of a preliminary concern to ultimacy. Something essentially conditioned is taken as unconditional, something essentially partial is boosted into universality, and something essentially finite is given infinite significance (the best example is the contemporary example of religious nationalism)."

Finite concerns, according to Tillich (1953:169) are always made ultimate at the expense of other, legitimate finite concerns. "To decide for something as true or as good means excluding countless other possibilities, ... many of which might have been better and truer than the chosen one." For this reason, Tillich stressed that religious beliefs should direct ultimate concern beyond themselves to that which is ultimate; to God.

In order that the various religious beliefs might achieve this ideal, they give concrete content to ultimate concern by means of symbolic language. Tillich (1958:44) states this point thus: "Whatever we say about that which concerns us ultimately, whether or not we call it God, has a symbolic meaning. It points beyond itself while participating in that to which it points. In no other way can faith express itself adequately. The language of faith is the language of symbols."*

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*In this regard see also: Tillich, P. Systematic Theology. Herts: James Nisbet and Co. Ltd. vol. 1.(1953), p.123;and vol.2.(1957), p.10 and p.265. See also: Kimball,R. ed. (1964). Theology of Culture. New York: Oxford University Press, chapter five.

Although the different faiths use symbols to express the Ultimate, Tillich (1966:81) emphasises that "revelatory experiences are universally human. Religions are based on something that is given to man wherever he lives. He is given a revelation which always implies saving powers." Tillich therefore recognises the validity of all religious beliefs.

Tillich was of the opinion that these differing beliefs would be able to realise their common concern with the Ultimate through dialogue with each other. Commenting on this call for interfaith dialogue, Green (1973:422) states that "the primary purpose of this dialogue is to penetrate to the depths of their own respective visions of the divine so that they become more transparent to the infinite and unconditional reality which transcends and is present in them."

Such a dialogue, Tillich (1963:62) argues, should take place according to the following ground-rules:-

"It first presupposes that both partners acknowledge the value of the other's religious conviction (as based ultimately on revelatory experience), so that they consider the dialogue worthwhile. Second it presupposes that each of them is able to represent his own religious basis with conviction, so that the dialogue is a serious confrontation. Third, it presupposes common ground which makes both dialogue and conflicts possible, and, fourth, the openness of both sides to criticisms directed

against their own religious basis."

Having established the rules, Tillich (1963:58 - 59) then suggests the method by which dialogue should proceed. He proposes a method based upon a typology of religions which he organises by means of the different elements that are intrinsic to the nature of the Holy, namely, the sacramental, the mystic, and the ethical. These three elements, he holds, are present in each religion, and since each religious belief highlights a different element of the Holy, it is necessary for them to enter into a dynamic relationship with each other.*

The result of interfaith dialogue, according to Tillich (1966:88), would not be a synthesis of all religious beliefs into one world religion.** He does, however, point out that such a synthesis, should it ever occur, could only be regarded as a future possibility. At present, it could not be fully identified with any of the current religious beliefs. In this regard it can perhaps be argued that Tillich hinted at an ultimate eschatological solution to the problem of the conflicting truth-claims.

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*An example of the typological dialogic method is given in Tillich, P. (1963). Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions. New York: Columbia University Press. Chapter entitled: "A Christian - Buddhist Conversation".

**Tillich terms such a religion: "The Religion of the Concrete Spirit".

However, his main contribution to the problem of religious pluralism is that, by identifying a common core of religious belief in "ultimate concern", he at least made it theoretically possible for people of differing faiths to look beyond the confines of their particular symbolic language and enter into mutual dialogue with one another on the basis of their common essence.

2.2 CARL GUSTAV JUNG: A COMMON BASIS IN THE HUMAN PSYCHE

Jung argued that the common essence of all religions was to be found in the human psyche. His studies in psychology led him to postulate that the realm of the unconscious could be entered by means of "archetypes" which he defined as being: "the hidden foundations of the conscious mind" (Jung, 1970:31).

Jung described the general contents of the archetypes as being concerned with concepts such as light and darkness, death and rebirth, wholeness, sacrifice and redemption. He thus concluded (1938:63) that the archetypes were the common seedbed of all religions. He further postulated the means by which archetypes are able to be decoded by man. In this regard his thought is strikingly similar to that of Tillich in that this decoding is done through the concepts of 'symbol' and 'myths' through which, according to Jung, we are put into contact with our unconscious domain (1970:11).

The archetypes were common to all religions, yet, the symbols and myths of each were obviously different in form as these were dependent on the varying cultural and historical contexts of each faith. Jung explained the common archetypes and similar symbol patterns within the diverse cultures as being due to a fundamental, hidden unity that animates all humanity. This unity he termed the "collective unconscious", a phenomenon which in some way contained: "the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual" (Jung, 1953a:158).

One of the archetypes, which he termed the "Self", (which represents the process by which the ego systematically confronts the contents of the unconscious, namely, "individuation"), is of particular importance to his theory of the common essence of all religious beliefs. This is so because he was unable to distinguish between this archetype and the characteristics that religious persons and theologians have given to the reality which they term: 'God'. Thus, Jung concluded that the human being is "an entity endowed with the consciousness of relationship to Deity" and that belief in God, therefore, seems to be a psychological necessity. Without it, the Self would not be realised (Jung, 1953b:10 - 11).

Jung's classic statement in support of the above view reads as follows:

"Among all my patients in the second half of life ... there has

not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age had given to their followers, and none of them has really been healed who did not regain his religious outlook."*

This statement is not closely tied to any particular religious belief. It has to do with the vital role played by religion in mediating between the "divine content" of the unconscious and a person's conscious awareness. "So Jung could call the world religions the great psychotherapeutic symbol systems of the world; they provide the symbols by which the archetypes can be touched and called forth" (Knitter, 1985:60).

Notwithstanding this psychological fact, Jung stressed that an absolute religion is an inconceivable concept as no definite figure is capable of expressing archetypal indefiniteness (1953b:18). The image of God (and, therefore, the Self) remains an utter mystery to us and can never be fully captured in any one form. Therefore, according to Jung, religious pluralism must continue to exist in that a final, absolute religion would mean that the vital process of individualisation would be brought to an end.

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*This quotation is taken from Bechtle, R. (1973). "C.G.Jung and Religion." In: Heaney, J.J. ed. Psyche and Spirit. New York: Paulist, p.69. The bibliographical details of the original reference are not cited.

Thus, unlike Tillich, Jung does not hint at any future possibility of one world religion as an ultimate solution to differing truth-claims. He rather proposes an interreligious dialogue which, despite the existence of differing individual faiths, is theoretically possible because of the common psychic essence of all religious beliefs. Jung pointed out that through such dialogue, the East, which has "long been aware of the reality of the unconscious and the necessity of penetrating its depths" could provide the West "with the challenge and the means of discovering the divine within us" (1964:26).

Jung, however, cautioned Westerners against conversion to Eastern faiths as he believed that man is limited by his particular cultural experiences. He thus stressed that dialogue between East and West, rather than lead to conversion to any side, should balance and enrich the participants through a paradoxical unity of opposites.

In terms of the theoretical feasibility of an interfaith dialogue, despite conflicting truth-claims, Jung, like Tillich, identified a common core from which such mutual interaction could take place. Furthermore he saw the continued existence of religious pluralism as a necessity in view of the fact that man, who is a definite being, will never fully grasp the mystery of God, who is an indefinite being. In particular, man as definite being is limited by the particular cultural and historical context in which he finds himself. As such, therefore, religious

Thus, unlike Tillich, Jung does not hint at any future possibility of one world religion as an ultimate solution to differing truth-claims. He rather proposes an interreligious dialogue which, despite the existence of differing individual faiths, is theoretically possible because of the common psychic essence of all religious beliefs. Jung pointed out that through such dialogue, the East, which has "long been aware of the reality of the unconscious and the necessity of penetrating its depths" could provide the West "with the challenge and the means of discovering the divine within us" (1964:26).

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beliefs cannot be synthesised into a uniform entity. Yet, given that all religions have their common core in the human psyche, Jung paved the way for the possibility of a unitive pluralism of religions.

2.3 ARNOLD TOYNBEE: COMMON ESSENCE; COMMON PURPOSE

Toynbee (1956:262) held that the different religions of the world had their common essence in that which lies behind what he terms as the "nonessentials" of the particular manifestations of faith. These nonessentials consist of the entire complex of Creed (symbols, doctrines, theology), Code (ethical systems), and Cult (ritual, liturgy), through which the different faiths try to communicate their respective messages (Knitter, 1985:39).

Commenting on the above institutions, Toynbee (1956:266) states that "one generic evil of an institution of any kind is that people who have identified themselves with it are prone to make an idol of it." When this happens, Toynbee argues that man then forgets the true purpose of religion, namely, to make man aware of the spiritual presence that lies within all reality. This spiritual presence, according to Toynbee, was present in all the major religions of the world. Therein lay their common essence. In this regard his similarity to Tillichian thought is self-evident.

Toynbee (1969:159) is, again, similar to Tillich when he urges

religious beliefs to ever reconsider their nonessentials in order that they be able to continue to speak to a people implanted in an always changing history. Tillich had called for the need to supersede symbolic religious language and enter into dialogue with a view to realising the ultimate reality that lies at the basis of all religion. On this issue, he is linked with Toynbee's call for a reconsideration of nonessentials. However, Toynbee goes beyond Tillich by introducing a further purpose of such a venture. Not only does he believe that it will assist religions to recognise this common core, but it will also help them to cope with the state of flux in which history constantly finds itself.

Because of this state of flux in history, Toynbee envisioned a time when all religions would be intermingled with each other throughout the world. Their different cultural heritages would thus become the common possession of all mankind. Thus he believed that differing religions would learn from and change each other (Toynbee, 1966:8*). In this regard, Toynbee's thought is similar to that of Jung.

According to Toynbee, the intermingling of different religious ideas would only result should they all pursue what he regarded as their common purpose. He defined this common purpose (1956:2

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*See also: Toynbee,A. (1969). "What Should be the Christian Approach to the Contemporary Non-Christian Faiths?" In: Thomas, O.C. ed. (1969). Attitudes toward Other Religions. London: SCM, pp.165 -166.

- 3) as the overcoming of the selfishness that results from what he termed: "man worship" - that is, the worship of collective human power.* This phenomenon inflicts much devastation on the world and leads to evil.

To offset such havoc, Toynbee argues that humans realise or rather, they believe that they must recognise and be in harmony with some greater reality. Thus the various religions were born. These differ in outlook because of their respective historical circumstances, but, because of their common essence and purpose, Toynbee (1969:159) suggests that they "ought to subordinate their traditional rivalries and make a new approach towards one another in the face of a fearful common adversary: a revival of the worship of collective human power, armed with new weapons, both material and spiritual."

Such an approach could be one of pluralism as he believed, on the basis of his common essence: common purpose theory, that one could be fully committed to one's own faith without allowing the nonessentials to blind one from the truth of others. Should a particular religion hold onto its nonessentials as superior or absolute however, the result would be a further persistence of self-centredness which will have lost sight of the essential oneness of all religions.

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*For a full explanation of this concept see: Toynbee, A. (1956). A Historians Approach to Religion. London: Oxford University Press, pp. 263 - 266.

Toynbee's contribution to the theoretical basis of interfaith dialogue is thus twofold. Firstly, like Tillich and Jung, he identified a common core that lies behind the differing faiths. Secondly, as a historian, he foresaw the global village of mankind when the differing faiths would have much closer contact with each other than was the case in the past. Such a time would necessitate a reinterpretation of the nonessentials of each faith in order that religion might keep up with the flux of history.

3. CURRENT PROPONENTS OF THE COMMON ESSENCE VIEWPOINT: WILFRED CANTWELL SMITH AND JOHN HICK

With regard to the call for religions to enter into dialogue with each other on the basis of a unitive pluralism, this has been met through conferences and seminars and through the establishment of numerous interfaith organisations throughout the world.* It appears therefore that the idea of meaningful encounter between religious beliefs on the basis of their common essence has come of age.

Nevertheless, such dialogue and encounter has not solved the problem of conflicting truth-claims. If anything, it has served to accentuate the differences that exist between religions. This problem has led many to pursue the quest of arriving at a new

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*For a survey of interfaith dialogue since 1893, see: Braybrooke, M. (1980). Inter-faith Organisations 1893 - 1979: An historical directory. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.

global theology of religions which was not fully worked out by the three models discussed above in that they did not show how the differing faiths should actually reinterpret their differing symbols in order to deal with religious pluralism.

Two prominent proponents of a theory of global theology are Wilfred Cantwell Smith and John Hick. In working out their respective theories, they were able to draw on the ideas of the "common essence" school. Using the theory of unitive pluralism as their basis, both Smith and Hick attempted to indicate the feasibility of a global theology of religions on the basis of the radical reinterpretation of traditional religious language.

3.1 WILFRED CANTWELL SMITH: FAITH AS PARTICIPATION IN TRANSCENDENCE

3.1.1 THE FUNDAMENTALS OF SMITH'S PHILOSOPHY

Smith was confronted head-on by the problem of the conflicting truth-claims during his time as a teacher at Forman Christian College (1941 - 1945) in Lahore, India. Despite the fact that the college existed under the banner of Christianity, many of the teachers and pupils were of the Hindu and Muslim faiths. Nevertheless, these three differing beliefs somehow coexisted peacefully, not only in a spirit of toleration, but also of mutual respect. This situation of religious diversity was typical of the city and of India at rge. In reflecting on this

situation and applying it on a broader scale to the religious life of the whole of mankind, Smith mapped out his solution to the issue of the conflicting truth-claims.

The central thought that was to govern all Smith's subsequent research in the field of comparative religion was that if the religious life of mankind is to be lived at all in the future, it can only be lived in a context of religious pluralism (Smith, 1962a:9). Smith (1962a:11) further pointed out that he did not foresee that there would be many conversions from the one religious tradition to the other within the next hundred years. He did, however, foresee that there would be "increasing encounters among the varying traditions and subsequent ferment within each group." As far as both of the above thoughts are concerned, the similarities to the Jungian model, outlined above, are self evident.

Smith (1962a:13) defines the religious problem for modern man as follows : "The problem is for us all to live together with our seriously different traditions, not only in peace, but in some sort of mutual trust and mutual loyalty....which means also to arrive at a point where we can appreciate other men's values without losing allegiance to our own." In another work (1962b:10 - 11) he sees religious coexistence as being at least "an immediate necessity and indeed an immediate virtue."

He is so strongly disposed towards the creation of a world in

n religious coexistence would become a reality that he calls a rejection of the term: 'religion',and argues that it is a rn concept that does not do justice to the phenomenon that is supposed to describe. Use of the term has made this omenon into a thing wheras in fact it is "a quality of onal living" (1967:115). He proposes, therefore, that gious life should be understood in terms of a process in n persons of faith participate rather than in terms of a fied" and packaged entity (1981:23).

, according to Smith (1967:123), "religious life begins the fact of God; a fact that includes His existence, His y, His love for all of us without exception, without rimination, without favour, without remainder. Given that - and it is given; absolutely, and quite independently of ner or how we human beings recognise it; given that movable fact, religious life then consists in the quality of response." Titles for the various religions do not bring point to the fore and thus have become inadequate in our rn age. They fail to do justice to the true meaning of man's gious life, namely, his involvement and faith in scendence (Smith, 1962b:201).

2 THE ROLE OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION IN THE REALISATION OF THE "BROTHERHOOD OF MAN"

n (1962a:15) points out that with the introduction of

departments of comparative religion at universities throughout the world, students from differing religious backgrounds have been given an opportunity of learning about the faith of other men. This has been an important step towards the realisation of the problem posed by religious pluralism and of the need to come to terms with it. This problem, he argues, "is at least as important for mankind as that of nuclear physics; as intellectually challenging, as intricate, as exciting, as consequential". However, Smith (1962a:17) is quick to caution us that the mere acquisition of knowledge about the various faiths does not solve the religious problem. One may know a great deal about a particular religious system and yet fail to understand the people whose life it involves. He thus firmly believes that courses in comparative religion should not primarily promote the acquisition of knowledge about the various * beliefs.

According to Smith (1950:42) those scholars who have adopted such a "handbook approach" to the study of world religions "might uncharitably be compared to flies crawling on the outside of a goldfish bowl, making accurate and complete observations on the

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*Smith expresses these same sentiments in other works. See: Smith, W.C. (1950). "The Comparative Study of Religion: Reflections on the Possibility and the Purpose of Religious Science." In: Mc Gill University, Faculty of Divinity, Inaugural Lectures. Montreal: Mc Gill University Press, p.51. See also: Smith, W.C. (1973). "Comparative Religion : Whither and Why?" In: Eliade, M. and Kitagawa, J.M. eds. The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p.34.

fish inside ... and indeed contributing much to our knowledge of the subject; but never asking themselves, and never finding out, how it feels to be a goldfish."* This is a very real problem. No matter how much we may empathise, we are always outsiders to any religion but our own. Thus, Smith suggests that comparative religion should rather be presented in such a way that students are led to see the world, or at least some aspect of it, through the eyes of a member of another faith.

Only when this is done, Smith (1962a:16) argues, will the believer of one faith have any hope of being able to understand the believer of another. Comparative religion has the potential to make this possible, however precarious and difficult the task may seem to be.

Once the student of comparative religion has attempted to understand the faith of the other individual the next step, according to Smith (1962a:20), will be "the attempt to understand the fact of faith itself." In the light of the history of faith,

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*Thus, for example, he contends that: "We understand the faith of Hindus only when, like them, we can use the religious tradition of Hindus to enable us to see all of life, from medicine to nuclear weapons, from economic development to the disloyalty of a friend, through Hindu eyes." See: Smith, W.C. (1964). "Mankind's Religiously Divided History Approaches Self-Consciousness." In: Harvard Divinity Bulletin, 29. See also: Smith, W.C. (1957). Islam in Modern History. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.8; where he asserts that: "To know ... any religion, is not only to be apprised of, even carefully acquainted with, its institutions, patterns and history, but also to apprehend what these mean to those who have the faith."

Smith argues that the student must attempt "to understand it as a well-nigh universal phenomenon, immensely diversified in particular, remarkably persistent in general"

Smith (1962a:82) asks whether one can make any sense out of the bewildering panorama of facts that emerge out of comparative religious studies. He believes that to ask about other men's faiths is in itself to raise important issues about one's own. To illustrate this point he examines three levels at which the faith of other men has implications for one's own and vice versa. These are: the levels of personal experience; theological doctrine; and moral interrelation. The examples used apply to the Christian believer, yet can be translated in terms of encounters between comparative religion students of all faiths.

3.1.2a THE LEVEL OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The Christian who encounters Islam, for example, will soon realise from his research experience, that the two faiths refer to many concepts that are similar. This realisation brings the two religions together. However, despite this similarity, the second step is for the Christian to discover that the Muslim talks and thinks about these concepts in a different way. Such a step moves the two religions apart. However, a third step involves the realisation by both parties (on the basis of comparative religious studies) that God is greater than our own ideas of Him. This may or may not bring them together again. It

depends on both parties and especially on what kind of Christian one is and on what one does about it.

3.1.2b THE LEVEL OF THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINE

In the field of theology, the Christian has been brought up to believe that other men's faiths are false. Thus, if the Christian comparative religionist takes this theological current seriously, "then he comes to the task prejudiced, in the literal sense of having made up his mind before he begins his study as to what he is going to find. Sometimes he has made it up very firmly indeed, even to the disastrous point of feeling his own faith threatened if he finds other men's faith more valid and real and true and deeper than the theologians had told him it would be" (Smith, 1962a:91).

Therefore Smith reminds us that theology and faith are not synonymous terms. The two should not be confused. He defines theology as "the attempt on the part of the theologian, who is quite human, to give an intellectual statement for his faith" (1962a:91). Seen in this light, the Christian student of comparative religion is able to realise that his theology in the field of relations with other men, is not adequate for today's world.

Furthermore, Smith (1962a:92) predicts that the time will come when a truer Christian theology pertaining to the faith of other

men will be worked out. Such a theology, he argues, must be guided by the principle that if the Christian revelation is at all valid, then it follows that the faith of others is also genuine.

3.1.2c THE LEVEL OF MORAL INTERRELATION

Personally, Smith sees the clear moral imperative with the Christian as providing the basis for the revised theological position advanced above. Morally, the Christian imperative is towards brotherhood, concord, reconciliation and love. Christian theological doctrines have, however, served to create "a great cosmic gulf" between Christians and believers of other faiths and as such have served to prevent the realisation of brotherhood. For example, Christian theological doctrines have led to crimes such as anti-Semitism, apartheid and colonialism - a far cry from the moral imperative!

The moral level of interrelation with other faiths, according to Smith, involves that the Christian; a) should not be unsympathetic towards the faith of others and b) should "strive to construct a world of reconciliation and peace, of mutual understanding and global community, of universal human dignity" (1962a:95).

The three levels at which the faith of other men has implications for one's own faith, make it clear that comparative religion can

do far more than promote mere knowledge of the various beliefs. Smith believes that the comparative religionist has a legitimate and serious task of formulating ideas that attempt to do justice to both the profundity and the diversity of mankind's religious system, in the hope of constructing theories that would prove acceptable as well as being cogent within the academic tradition. He therefore urges more people to take up this task.

3.1.3 A WORLD THEOLOGY?

In his conclusion to: The Faith of Other Men, Smith (1962a:110) expressed his conviction that this proposed, variegated and yet harmonious world community was theoretically possible. His 1981 book: Towards a World Theology, pursues this conviction and offers a detailed comparative religionist perspective as to why a world theology is possible.

In a similar vein to the common essence viewpoint, Smith (1981:3), argues that there is a unity or coherence in the religious history of mankind which at one level is a historical fact and at another is a matter of theological truth. As far as the former level is concerned, Smith points out that, historically, religions can be shown to be part of a coherent unity. The differences between them are due to the state of flux of history, yet the unity can be historically traced.

Not only can the unity of mankind's religious history be shown on

a historical level, but it can also be shown to exist on a theological one. Behind the differing faiths lies a unity in the transcendent; God. Smith contends that once man realises the fact that his religious history forms a unity on both these levels and that the two are inextricably linked, then a "brotherhood of man" becomes possible.

3.1.3a THE HISTORICAL UNITY OF MANKIND'S RELIGIOUS HISTORY

In a similar vein to Toynbee, Smith points out that, like history, the religious life of man is in a state of flux. Buddhism grew out of Hinduism. Christianity and Islam grew out of Judaism. The new constantly shows itself to have built onto the old. This is not only true of the major religions themselves but also of the diversity that exists within them. A new sect breaks away from an old one and builds onto it as for example was done with Protestantism developing as a result of dissatisfaction with Catholicism.*

In terms of the above, Smith (1981:23) concludes that religious life should rather be understood in terms of a process in which persons of faith participate and not in terms of a particular religious system. He further points out that man has now reached a point in time at which he is becoming conscious of the fact

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*For the full exposition of this thesis see: Smith, W.C. (1981). Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion. London: Macmillan, pp.7 -23.

that the various religious processes have participated in each other's development. This consciousness, he argues, opens the door towards the realisation that despite our diversity, we are all involved in the world process of religious convergence. "For ultimately, the only community there is, is the community, world-wide and history-long, of humankind" (Smith, 1981:44).

Having made this point, Smith then links it to his earlier views on the value of comparative religion in the realisation of a brotherhood of man. He holds that the locus of faith is not data, but persons. The secular aspect of man's life cannot be divorced from the religious as to be fully human involves both these aspects. Thus, the history of religion is the history of man. Through this discipline it becomes possible to understand the faith of the other men and to realise that, despite differences in perspective, we are one humankind participating in the religious process (Smith, 1981:50 - 51).

At the outset of this work, Smith cautions us not to misunderstand his thesis to mean that all religions are the same.* This is clearly not the case. They are however, "historically interconnected in that they have interacted with the same things or with each other, or that one has 'grown out of' or been 'influenced by' the other; more exactly, that one can be

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*See also: Smith, W.C. (1976). "Participation: The Changing Christian Role in Other Cultures." In: Oxtoby, W.G. ed. Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith. New York: Harper and Row, p.136.

understood only in terms of a context of which the other forms a part" (Smith, 1981:5 - 6). The several histories of the different religious communities on earth can be better understood and in the end can be understood only in terms of each other: "as strands in a still more complex whole."

3.1.3b THE THEOLOGICAL UNITY OF MANKIND'S RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Because of the above argument that our different religious processes are all part of a total complex, Smith contends that there is, therefore, also a theological unity which underlies our diverse religious processes.

This point was emphasised by Smith in one of his earlier works (1962b). There he pointed out that the end (i.e. the goal) of religion is God. "Once He appears vividly before us, in His depth and love and unrelenting truth all else dissolves; or at least religious paraphenalia drop back into their due and mundane place, and the concept 'religion' is brought to an end" (1962b:201).

Smith (1981:3) is convinced, through his historical studies, that history, because it is human, " has transcendent overtones." The same studies have also convinced him that truth, including ultimate truth (i.e. God), manifests itself in history. Consequently, because comparative religious studies have enabled

However, Smith (1981:4) points out that empirical awareness of God vividly indicates the diversity of forms in which He makes himself known to mankind. Consequently Smith is of the opinion that through comparative religious studies, man will be able to recognise the truth that despite divergent religious beliefs there is a unity (God) in the religious history of mankind. Given this as a fundamental premise, it becomes possible to work towards the realisation of a 'world theology' of religions.

Smith does not dictate to us what this new theology should entail. Instead he calls upon us all to contribute towards a more adequate theology of religions which takes each religious position seriously and strives to make sense of the fact of religious pluralism in the modern world. This task of building on earth a new world community will not be an easy one. Its results will be radical. Yet the task will remain an impossibility unless each of us brings to it the resources of his or her mind, and his or her faith (1981:129 - 130).

3.1.4 SMITH'S CONTRIBUTION TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Smith's call for interreligious dialogue on the basis of unitive pluralism is not unique. Nevertheless, he offers some new insights towards its ultimate realisation.

His main contribution in this regard is his contention that the study of religion involves not so much the examination of

religious systems but rather that of persons. He reminds us, therefore, that one will never fully know a particular religious system unless one enters into an encounter with people who adhere to such a system. Through comparative religious studies whereby one examines the beliefs and practices of differing people, Smith believed, we will attain a vaster insight into the nature and character of God.

Smith is also well known for his rejection of the term: 'religion', and titles that attempt to classify particular religious traditions. By so doing he does not attempt to deny that religious practices are different, but, he wishes to show that such titles do not take into consideration that the phenomena and systems that they attempt to describe are, like history, in a state of constant flux.

He encourages us, therefore, to take cognisance of this fact. Indeed, he goes so far as to demonstrate this state of flux. Toynbee had pointed us in this direction. Smith's historical studies, however, show the point at which the flux has now arrived, namely, that of interreligious convergence.

In order for mankind to be able to cope with interreligious convergence, Smith stresses that we need to realise that our differing traditions that have now come together in a global community, have always been historically intertwined. For this reason, therefore, he believes that a global theology of

religions that is needed to cope with this new phase of history, can be realised.

3.2 JOHN HICK: GOD HAS MANY NAMES

Hick is perhaps the best known of the exponents of a unitive pluralism of religions. The basis of his thesis is a call for all religions to recognise that the one God is perceived by mankind in a plurality of ways. He argues that it is through such a recognition that it then becomes possible for all faiths to be recognised as vehicles of His revelation.*

He suggests that wider interreligious encounter could lead to something more exciting and far reaching than mere coexistence. It could lead to "an important religious discovery in which we (Christians) and they (adherents of other faiths) both learn more of the many-sided being and activity of God" (Hick, 1980a: vii).** Underlying this statement is the recognition that a global theology of religions is possible. Once man realises that his particular belief is but one of many diverse ways of revering the one God of all mankind, then religious barriers, despite their continued existence, fall away. God, therefore, forms the common

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*This thesis is fully expounded in the following works: Hick, J. (1973). God and the Universe of Faiths. New York: St. Martin's Press; Hick, J. ed. (1977). The Myth of God Incarnate. London: SCM Press; and Hick, J. (1980). God Has Many Names. London: Macmillan Ltd.

**Brackets are my own.

essence of all religions. Hick arrives at the above conclusion by means of his theory of the "Copernican Revolution"* of religion.

3.2.1 THE "COPERNICAN REVOLUTION" THEORY OF RELIGION

Using the analogy of Copernicus, namely, that the sun and not the earth was the centre of our solar system, Hick (1983:81 - 82) argues that "it seems to many of us today that we need a Copernican revolution in our understanding of religions."

Hick (1983:82) clarifies this statement from within his own Christian perspective. The pre-Copernican view of religion therefore is "the traditional dogma that Christianity is the centre of the universe of faiths, with all the other religions seen as revolving at various removes around the revelation in Christ and being graded according to their nearness to or distance from it." The Copernican view, however, involves "a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centred or Jesus-centred to a God-centred model of the universe of faiths. One then sees the great world religions as different human responses to the one divine Reality, embodying different perceptions which have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances" (Hick,

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*Hick outlines this theory in several works. See: Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths, p. 131; Hick, God Has Many Names, pp. 5 - 6; and Hick, J. (1983). The Second Christianity. London: SCM Press, pp.81 -82. The last work cited above is a reprint of two earlier editions which were published under different titles. See: Hick, J. (1968). Christianity at the Centre. London: SCM Press; and Hick, J. (1977). The Centre of Christianity. London: SCM Press.

1973b:131).

Commenting on the implications of the above theory for world religions, Hick (1980a:52) states that "this must mean that the different world religions have each served as God's means of revelation to and point of contact with a different stream of human life." Such a theory, for Hick, is a logical one in that it ties in with our knowledge of the history of religions.

The first period of this history was characterised by different forms of natural religion. But, around 800 B.C. there began what Hick terms an "axial period"* in which God somehow revealed himself to different peoples of different religious traits who at that stage lived in isolation from each other. Because of this Hick (1980a:53) argues, "there could not be a divine revelation, through any human means to mankind as a whole, but only separate revelations within the different streams of human history."

Today, however, these religions have been propelled into the 'global village' where contact with each other is a frequent

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*Here Hick follows the notion of an 'axial period' of humankind which was propounded by Karl Jaspers. See: Jaspers, K. (1953). The Origin and Goal of History. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. See also: Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths, pp. 135 - 136; Hick, God Has Many Names, pp. 51 - 53; Hick, The Second Christianity, pp. 8 - 9; Hick, J. ed. (1974). Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth Claims. Philadelphia: Westminster, pp. 149 -151; and Hick, J. and Hebblethwaite, B. eds. (1980). Christianity and Other Religions. Philadelphia: Fortress, pp. 182 -183.

occurrence. "The scientific study of world religions, inter-faith dialogues and conferences, the experience of religious pluralism in many large cities, have brought us all closer to men of other faiths. The religions of the world have begun to share their insights"* (Hick, 1983:89).

Thus, if God lies at the centre of all the different faiths, then the possibility of a global theology that is designed to interpret the religious experience of mankind as it occurs within the great streams of religious life, is a highly feasible one. Hick, like Smith, points out that this task would be a vast project that would require the co-operative labours of many individuals and groups. It will involve increasing comparative and constructive studies of both particular areas and larger systems of belief, which, in the end, will reveal "a common human history and a common human relationship to the mysterious transcendent reality which we in the West call God" (1980a:8 - 9).

Thus far, Hick has not been unique in his thought. Most of the elements of his thesis have already occurred in the models that were discussed above. What sets Hick apart from them, however, is his attempt, as a Christian, at a reinterpretation of the central symbol of his faith, namely, the doctrine of the Incarnation.

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*Note the similarity to Smith.

3.2.2 THE MYTH OF GOD INCARNATE

The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation whereby Jesus, the man of Nazareth, is exalted to the status of the divine Christ, provides a major stumbling-block to the realisation of a global theology of religions. Hick therefore presents a reinterpretation of this central symbol of the Christian faith so as to remove the implication that man's salvation is only possible through this belief.*

Hick argues that the dogma of the Incarnation should be understood as a myth and, therefore, should not be interpreted literally. The rationale behind this view is that the doctrine does not form part of the original message of Jesus as recounted by the writers of the Synoptics. The church based the doctrine on the fourth gospel which modern critical scholarship has shown to be a re-writing of Jesus' teaching by "a Christian writer who is expressing the view of Christ which had been arrived at in his part of the church, probably two or three generations after Jesus' death" (1977a:176).

Thus, according to Hick (1977a:170), the doctrine rather represents a symbolic-mythic model which was used by the early

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*This theory is expounded by Hick in several works. See: Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths, pp. 148 - 149; Hick, The Myth of God Incarnate, pp. 167 - 185; Hick, God has Many Names, pp. 59 - 79; and Hick, The Second Christianity, pp.26 - 32. As these sections are repetitions of the same essay, I will cite largely from: Hick, The Myth of God Incarnate.

followers of Jesus in their attempt to describe what He meant to them.

Hick (1980a:60 - 61) compares the elevation of Jesus to divine status with that of Gautama, the Buddha. Here too, a real historical figure "came to be revered as much more than an outstanding individual who had lived and died." In both cases it appears that this elevation of a human to divine status reflects the projection of ideals upon an individual to answer man's spiritual needs.

In the case of Christianity, the followers of Jesus developed the Jewish image of the 'son of God', a title that was often used for the expected Messiah, but could also be applied to any extraordinary religious person. The reason for this, Hick (1977a:172) argues, was because Jesus was "so powerfully God-conscious that his life vibrated, as it were, to the divine life; and as a result his hands could heal the sick, and the 'poor in spirit' were kindled to a new life in his presence." Thus Hick (1983:27) contends that "it was natural for Jesus to call men to become his disciples. And it was equally natural for them to follow him as their Lord and to preach his message to others. It was natural again that after his death and Easter appearances his disciples, filled with the spirit, should proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour to all who should respond to him."

Later deification of Jesus resulted from the influence of the Graeco-Roman thought world on Christian ideas (Hick, 1977a:168). Here the idea of the divine being embodied in human life was widespread and so, in Hick's opinion, a natural change in Christian attitude towards their expression of Jesus took place. "Jesus' specially intimate awareness of God, his consequent spiritual authority and his efficacy as Lord and as giver of new life, required in his disciples an adequate language in which to speak about their master. He had to be thought of in a way that was commensurate with the total discipleship which he evoked. And so his Jewish followers hailed him as their Messiah, and this somewhat mysterious title developed in its significance within the mixed Jewish-Gentile church ultimately to the point of deification" (Hick, 1977a:173 - 174).

The important point to note here is not so much the fact that Jesus was deified, but, rather that the language used to express this deification belonged to the particular cultural milieu within which his followers found themselves. Hick therefore contends that had the Christian gospel moved East, into India instead of West, into the Roman Empire, "Jesus's religious significance would probably have been expressed by hailing him within Hindu culture as a divine Avatar and within Mahayana Buddhism ... as a Bodhisattva. ... These would have been appropriate expressions within those cultures, of the same spiritual reality" (Hick, 1977a:176).

Concerning the argument that Jesus himself was conscious of being God-incarnate, Hick points out that such an assumption is based largely on the fourth gospel. It has already been noted above that such statements do not appear to be authentic statements of Jesus.

Hick (1977a:178) contends that although Orthodoxy endorsed the language of the Incarnation, it has never been able to give the idea any content. "It remains a form of words without assignable meaning. ... How ... the same person can have the full attributes of both God and man - has never been explained, and seems indeed to be on a par with the statement that a figure drawn on paper has the attributes of both a circle and a square." Thus today the question as to the meaning of the doctrine is being raised and its mythological intrepretation is being stressed by many.

The literal interpretation of the doctrine excludes the large majority of the human race from salvation. The mythological understanding, however, makes allowance for the possibility that the 'agape' (Love) of God that the early Christians experienced can be seen as being but a finite mode of the expression of 'agape' per se which exceeds all historical boundaries (Hick, 1973b:159). Seen in this light, all religions can be taken to be valid vehicles through which God manifests himself in history.

Hick doubts that the traditional language concerning Jesus will become obsolete. But he foresees " a growing awareness of the

mythological character of this language, as the hyperbole of the heart, most naturally at home in hymns and anthems and oratories and other artistic expressions of the poetry of devotion" (1977a:183).

3.2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HICK'S THEORIES FOR A UNITIVE PLURALISM OF RELIGIONS

In his conclusion to his essay: "Jesus and the World Religions", Hick (1977a:183 -184) expresses the hope that "Christianity will outgrow its theological fundamentalism as it has largely outgrown its biblical fundamentalism." By so doing, this faith will have removed a key stumbling-block to meaningful interreligious dialogue and to the realisation of a global theology of religions.

Implied in his approach to the central symbol of Christianity is a call for all world religions to understand the Tillichian premise that religious language is essentially symbolic and should therefore not be understood literally. Comparing Christology with Buddhology, therefore, Hick (1973b:117) states that the myth of the incarnation is much like the Trikaya myth with which Mahayana Buddhists attempted to speak about the mystery they had encountered in Buddha. He does not, however, dictate for Buddhism the way in which she should reinterpret her myth. As a Christian, he does not have the expertise to do this. Nor can he do so for other faiths.

But, for Hick (1977a:180), (like the theorists described above), it seems clear that the differing religions "are being called today to attain a religious vision which is aware of the unity of all mankind before God and which at the same time makes sense of the diversity of God's ways within the various streams of human life." The other world religions have also produced great saints, mystics and thinkers, and have been sources of spiritual and moral life and orderly frameworks of social existence, for many millions of men and women through many centuries. "To dismiss them as inferior now seems dangerously reminiscent of the traditional arrogance of the white man towards the black and brown majority of mankind" (Hick, 1983:78).

Hick further emphasises the above point by calling our attention to the fact that, in most cases, the religion which one follows depends largely upon where one happens to be born.* Thus, he contends that, given the fact that there are various cultural ways of being human, we can to some extent understand that differing religions are but different 'lenses' through which the divine Reality is differently perceived.

Here lies Hick's fundamental contribution to the realisation of a global theology of religions. Because humankind consists of diverse cultures, we should not expect that God should have made

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*Hick expresses this sentiment in many works. See:Hick, God and the Universe of Faiths, p. 135; Hick, God Has Many Names, p. 44; Hick and Hebblethwaite, Christianity and Other Religions, p. 172; and Hick, The Second Christianity, p. 78.

his revelation to mankind in a single mighty act. Once this point is grasped, adherents of the differing religious manifestations will be able to look beyond their secondary, human interpretations of the divine, to the Divine Reality itself. All the main religious traditions agree that the ultimate divine reality is infinite. It follows, therefore, that this reality cannot be defined or encompassed by human thought. Thus no religious tradition (which is but a human interpretation of the divine reality) can draw boundaries round the nature of God and say that he is this and no more. All must be seen as equal ways of reaching out to God (Hick, 1973:173 - 179).

4. UNITIVE PLURALISM : A CRITIQUE

The above attempts at recognition of a unitive pluralism of world religions at least represent the genuine attempt on the part of many to grope towards a viable solution to the problem of conflicting religious truth-claims. All the models discussed above remind us that finite man cannot ever fully describe the nature of our infinite God. As such, therefore, we are called upon to look beyond our differing inadequate ways of describing God, to the central core of all religion, namely, God Himself. Such an approach should, paradoxically, unite us in religious diversity.

Whilst unitive pluralists have spelt out the theoretical basis for a new global theology of diverse faiths, it remains to be

seen whether the ideal can be successfully implemented in practice. Those involved in current interfaith dialogue do not represent the large majority of religious men who still staunchly adhere to the traditionalist claims of their particular faiths. Arguably, this majority can be led over to the unitive pluralistic approach through education. But, since most education systems throughout the world are based on a particular religious (or non-religious) ideology, it is doubtful whether such education will ever succeed.

The key problem in this regard is that the premise that a central belief of a particular faith is but a mere symbol or must be regarded by the believer as a 'nonessential' of true religion, is a contradiction in terms. Hick, for example, with good intention, attempts to reinterpret the central belief of Christianity in order that Christians might see beyond the symbol and realise the fact of diverse perceptions of the <u>one</u> God. But, by recognising the Incarnation as a myth, he denies the very essence of the Christian faith. Such an approach will never be fully accepted by the vast majority of adherents to any particular faith. To ask that they see their essential beliefs as myths is tantamount to asking that they give up their meaning in existence.

In this regard, Ben Engelbrecht , for example, contends that the Christian faith, by definition, stands or falls by the doctrine of the Incarnation. He further points out that the question as

to exactly what was incarnate in Jesus, cannot be answered with a reference to that which, to a greater or lesser degree was made incarnate in all the prophets of God. Such an approach would result in Christendom ceasing to be Christendom (1981a:25).*

In terms of Engelbrecht's argumentation, therefore, Smith, seems to provide a more feasible approach to that of Hick whereby the fact of unitive pluralism can be promoted amongst people of diverse faiths. Smith indicates, from a historical perspective, the manner in which the differing faiths have in fact always participated in the same religious process. On this point, he and Hick concur, but, Smith does not go so far as to reinterpret the essence of any faith. Instead, he presents the unitive pluralism of religions as an empirical, historical fact. He further contends that this fact needs to be recognised by all faiths in order for a brotherhood of man (a moral imperative in all religions) to become a reality.

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*This citation is a free translation of the following passage: "Die liberale Christologie maak hom te maklik af van die geheimenis van Christus, die geïnkarneerde Seun van God, en daarmee bevraagteken hy in die grond van die saak die bestaansreg en bestaansregverdiging van twintig eeue van Christendom. Want die Christelike geloof is per definisie dit, dat daar geglo word in Jesus Christus as die definitiewe openbaringswerklikheid. Dit staan of val met die dogma van die inkarnasie. En die vraag wat presies in Hom geïnkarneer is, kan nie beantwoord word met 'n verwysing na dit wat bv. in al die profete van God in 'n mindere of meerdere (Mohammed?) mate ook "geïnkarneer" was nie. Christendom sou daarmee ophou om Christendom te wees." Engelbrecht, B. (1981). "Die Familie van Abraham," Unpublished. A report submitted to the H.S.R.C. on the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Conference held at the University of Birmingham. 21 - 24 September 1981.

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One must, however, question Smith's call for the abolition of the term: 'religion' as well as titles for the various religions. Whether these accurately describe the phenomena they purport to define or not, they cannot simply be disregarded. They too form part of the long historical process of the religious development of mankind and certainly cannot be divorced from it.

Finally, it was noted above that the unitive pluralists take all religious beliefs very seriously as being manifestations of the Divine Reality. Such an attitude does not, however, cancel out the question as to whether it is at all possible for any faith fully to accept such an idea without becoming a mere relative entity.

This fear of relativism on the part of many staunch adherents of differing faiths is perhaps a major reason for their refusal to endorse the thesis of global theology. In the following chapter, the model provided by Ernst Troeltsch as a solution to this particular issue will be examined.

CHAPTER 3 HISTORICISM: FACING THE PROBLEM OF RELATIVISM

1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter pointed towards a dialogue between the different religions on the basis of what is common to each. From that discussion it is apparent that there is much to suggest that a feasible solution to the problem of religious pluralism is to be found in the essential unity which lies at the root of all the major religions of mankind.

However, the phenomenon of a unitive pluralism of religions raises the obvious contention that all faiths are therefore merely relative to one another. The danger of the above view is that it tends to make fundamental nonsense of each faith as it leads to an attitude of "anything goes".

A significant figure who sought to come to terms with this particular problem is Ernst Troeltsch (1865 - 1923). The driving force behind this quest was his deep interest in historical thinking (which he refers to as 'historicism'*) and its effect on the modern consciousness.

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*The essay in which Troeltsch deals with historicism, namely, "Der Historismus und seine Probleme" (1922) has yet to be translated. I am thus reliant upon secondary sources for an exposition of the concept.

"According to this mode of thought, all historical phenomena must be approached empathetically and objectively. They must be interpreted in their own terms before any value judgements are applied to them" (Santmire, 1973:367). Therefore, no religion or set of values should be denied its own irreducible significance.

Troeltsch realised that such a thought pattern would seriously question the traditional claims of any religion to exclusiveness. Christianity, for example, was to be recognised as being but one religious belief amongst the many others that have manifested themselves in history. In historicist terms there can be no 'absolute' religion.

Having recognised this, however, he made it his life task to ensure that historical thinking did not result in the conclusion that all religious beliefs are merely relative to one another. "In the face of the absurdity of absolutism ... on the one hand, and of the emptiness of cultural relativism on the other, he looked for a new statement of the valid ground for meaning. His struggle was a passionate one against meaninglessness" (Adams, 1961:98); especially that form of meaninglessness, namely, an aimless 'cultural relativism', to which the logical positivists of his day subscribed.

As a deeply religious man, Troeltsch sought to remain true to historical thinking as well as to his Christian faith. This struggle was no mere intellectual one. It was profoundly

personal and practical. Thus, whilst he rejected the notion of an 'absolute' religion in terms of historical thinking, "he would not abandon the attempt to discern in history a pattern of development that would support the Christian faith claim of universality" (Johnson, 1962:220).

He therefore attempted to present a view of Christianity whereby it "would retain its historically relative identity, while still being acknowledged as representing the highest stage of man's present spiritual development, and as indicating the direction of his future growth" (Johnson, 1962:220).

2. THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF HISTORICISM

Historicism developed out of two world-views which had preceded it; namely, traditionalism and rationalism.

To the traditionalists, Christianity was the absolute religion. Awareness of other religious cultures was very superficial. When Christians did come into contact with other cultures such as in the East through the voyages of discovery during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries C.E., the tendency was towards conflict rather than dialogue because the traditionalists held firm to their absolutist stance (Hick, 1973a:118).

Reaction to traditionalism took the form of rationalism which came to full flower during the Enlightenment period of the

eighteenth century C.E. This epoch saw the quest, on the part of those who were unhappy with the traditional mythological and supernaturalistic explanations of reality, towards more rational causes for all phenomena.

Rationalists therefore believed that all cultures and value systems, whether past or present, were to be seen as mere historical 'shells' in that they exist in history, but, their true meaning lies beyond it in the form of reason itself.

Prominent proponents of this view were men such as David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Gotthold Lessing and Sir James George Frazer. Their main contribution to the study of religion was that by viewing reason as the central core behind everything historical, it became possible for the differing religious cultures to coexist peacefully in that they were seen as being different manifestations of reason.

This attitude is particularly noticable in Lessing's play, Nathan the Wise (1779), in which a sold gold ring which represents the good moral life is confused with two exact replicas. The rings are worn by a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim respectively and yet they are so much alike that none of the wearers knows who has the original.

This idea of the rationalists gave rise to the historicist view that the various religions are but differing manifestations of

the Divine.

The rejection of rationalism developed out of a disappointment with the 'Age of Reason' during the late eighteenth century C.E. One contributing factor was the terror that had been brought about by so-called "enlightened" leaders of the French Revolution. Another was that many philisophical thinkers now felt that the historical realm was not secondary to the rational core that lay behind it, but was just as essential to human experience as reason and should therefore be taken seriously. Men now turned to the study of the distant past (historic and mythological) in order to seek meaning in this life (Santmire, 1973:373). This age has been labelled: 'romanticism', whereas it in fact marks the dawn of the historical consciousness of man which Troeltsch was later to term: 'historicism'.

The method used in their study of history was that of "Einfühlung", according to which one transcends one's own cultural context and seeks to understand the cultural context of others. Johann Gottfried Herder, the main proponent of this method, describes it thus: "First sympathise with the nation, go into the era, into the geography, into the entire history, feel yourself into it."*

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*Cited in Neff, E. (1947). The Poetry of History: The Contribution of Literary Scholarship to the Writings of History Since Voltaire. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 23. The emphasis is mine.

Another great "romantic", was the German historian, Leopold von Rancke. He emphasised the historicist impulse to find uniqueness and value in every historical era through his expression: "jede Epoch ist unmittelbar zu Gott" (every epoch is immediately present to God). According to H. Paul Santmire (1973:375), this attitude of von Rancke towards history, provided the historicist approach with a certain theological underpinning. It was Max Mueller, however, who applied the science of history as found in Herder and von Rancke to the study of religion. His aim was to investigate the various religions, as if from the inside, through the eyes of the believers of those faiths. Only once this had been done could the question of meaningful patterns of historical events be raised.

3. TROELTSCH'S DEFINITION OF 'HISTORICISM'

Troeltsch set forth his conception of the assumptions and consequences of the modern historical method in an essay written in 1900 entitled: "Uber Historische und Dogmatische Methode in der Theologie".* There he emphasised three aspects of the

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historical method.

The first is the habit of mind associated with historical criticism. This habit of mind is a highly critical one which is exercised with no limitations. All traditions are placed under scrutiny, but, in doing so, the historian aims to approach the data with an empathetic understanding whilst at the same time being an independent and autonomous entity.

David Quarberg (1961:123) quotes Troeltsch as saying that "the implication of this aspect of the historical mode of thought is that in the realm of history there are only judgements of probability." Thus, the certainty that was characteristic of previous non-historical thought was no longer possible. Such reasoning would obviously have far-reaching ramifications for tradition.

The second aspect of the historical method is that of analogy which is employed as the instrument whereby historical criticism becomes possible. Historical phenomena are compared with each other in order to establish the similarities that exist between them. This process involves the comparison of past historical phenomena to those of the present. The data that has been drawn from the analysis of a present historical phenomenon is linked to past historical situations. In this way it is possible to be critical of the 'given facts' of past historical phenomena and ultimately to impute probability as to their historicity.

Analogy is related to the third aspect of the historical method; the correlation of all historical happenings. Having been compared, it is assumed that the various historical phenomena are related to each other. There is an interaction of all phenomena in the history of civilisation. Analogy and correlation, therefore, bring all of history into a common arena. According to Adams (1971:9), they provide the method of "levelling" all historical phenomena.

Troeltsch held that the employment of these three devices by the historical method produces a "mutually interacting web of activities flowing out of the human mind which at no point are independent and absolute, but are in relationship at every point." He further sums up the craft of the historian as "the art of entering sympathetically into the original content of historical events, and of discovering correlative and mutually determining changes."*

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*These quotations are translated by Quarberg from Troeltsch's: "Uber Historische und Dogmatische Methode in der Theologie." (1900). Quarberg, however, does not cite the page numbers from which the quotations are taken. See: Quarberg, D. (1961). "Historical Reason, Faith and the Study of Religion." In: Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1:1. October, p. 123.

In later works,* Troeltsch presents several categories of historical analysis.** The prime one is that of "individuality", whereby the historian divides history into various epochs in order to expose the unique aspects of each "individual totality" (historical unit). The relationship of past individual totalities to those of the present is governed by the category of latency whereby old individual totalities produce new ones through the organisation of various elements of the individuality which are then moved onwards by attraction or repulsion into new constellations.

The new individual totalities which emerge from the old are categorised by Troeltsch as developments. These are revealed in social and institutional forms in a variety of ways. Latency is therefore never exhausted by a single manifestation but continually moves towards fuller articulation. For this reason, one must constantly raise the question as to the origin of an individual totality, its direction and its function in civilisation.

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*See: Troeltsch, "Der Historismus und seine Probleme." (1922). The content of this work is outlined for English readers in Tillich, P. (1961). "E. Troeltsch: Historismus Und Seine Probleme," (A review). In: Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1:1. October. See also: Troeltsch, E. (1911). "Contingency" and "Historiography" in: Hastings, J. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. 4. Edinburgh: T and T Clarke.

**The discussion which follows is based on the exposition given in: Stackhouse, M.L. (1962). "Troeltsch's Categories of Historical Analysis." In: Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1:2. April, pp. 224 - 225.

A category that plays a role in the determining of developments is that of contingency. By this, Troeltsch refers to the convergence of several series of mutually independent causes which brings about a pattern of its own. Examples of such causes are the impact of food supplies, death, and the birth of genius. To the historian, these are contingencies; and it is his task to note the convergence of these laws in the concrete and expose the peculiar patterns formed by their convergence.

Contingency in turn makes the category of freedom a real possibility in that a person or individuality may become one of the converging causes that determine the developmental process of a particular individual totality. As such, a person or individuality is not totally at the disposal of any historical process or social determination.

Besides the above categorisation as to the way in which history operates, Troeltsch also describes the categories that the historian must use in approaching historical phenomena. Through limited selection of those factors in history which expose the characteristic features of history and their subsequent representation through particular examples as characterising the particular unity, the historian can discern the unity of value (or significance) of a historical unit. This process is necessary in that judgements of value must be made in regard to the peculiarities of each historical unit.

These judgements, representations and selections must, however, ultimately be swallowed up by history itself. The reason for this is that the judgement of the historian is conditioned by the historical individuality in which he stands and by which he is called to make the effort to understand history.

Troeltsch's hopes of producing a work in which a fully developed philosophy of history was envisaged were halted by his premature death in 1923. The possibilities of sound historical method were thus never exhausted by him.

4. TROELTSCH'S APPLICATION OF THE HISTORICAL METHOD TO RELIGION

4.1 MIRACLE AND EVOLUTIONARY APOLOGETIC

The abovementioned essentials of historical method were applied by Troeltsch to the field of religion (with particular reference to the Christian religion) in his work: The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions (1902).* He begins by pointing out two ways in which Christianity has laid claim to absoluteness, namely: "miracle apologetic" (1971:47 - 48) and "evolutionary apologetic" (1971:49 - 50).

Miracle apologetic defends Christianity as being the absolute

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*Troeltsch, E. (1902). The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions, tr. David Reid (1971). Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press.

faith because of the fact that it is attended by miracles. Troeltsch, however, failed to see how one could give credence to the Christian miracles and yet deny the validity of those which are claimed by non-Christian religions. Furthermore, he argues (1971:48) that "however frequently one may discern something supernatural in the ethical power of the inner life, no means exist by which to construe the Christian's elevation above sensuality as supernatural while interpreting that of Plato or Epictetus as natural."

Evolutionary apologetic appears to be a break from the traditionalist "miracle" approach and reflects a more rationalistic line of thought. This view holds that the essence of religion lies in religion itself. In other words, religion per se is the core behind the various historical religious manifestations. These apologetics also pose an evolutionary process of religion ranging from the primitive through to the highest religion which is seen as being Christianity.

Against this, Troeltsch (1971:85) argues that Christianity must be viewed in every moment of its history as "a purely historical phenomenon, subject to all the limitations to which any individual historical phenomenon is exposed, just like the other great religions." He argues further (1971:69) that "history gives us no indication whatever of any graded progression such as evolutionary apologetic might lead us to suspect." Such a theory runs counter to the individuality of historical events and

cultures and, therefore, terms such as absolute religion or absolute personalities are self contradictory. All historical phenomena have their own unique individuality and are relative to one another. As such, Christianity cannot lay claim to the status of the absolute religion.

4.2 AN AIMLESS RELATIVISM?

Having discarded both miracle and evolutionary apologetic, Troeltsch investigates the problem posed by historical relativism. It was his commitment as a Christian theologian that led him to fight against an aimless relativism that could so easily result from the historicist view of individuality.

To resolve this problem, Troeltsch (1971:94 - 95) proposed that the possibility existed "of comparing the most important elements and values of the main religious orientations, ranking them in accordance with a criterion of value and subsuming them under the idea of a common goal". He thus applied the historical principles of analogy and correlation to religion.

Thus, according to Troeltsch (1971:95), the different religious manifestations "can be measured and compared with one another as regards the simplicity, depth and power with which they disclose a higher transcendent life in God". The criterion of value will emerge from the religion that is strongest and most profound. Troeltsch grants the fact that this is a subjective criterion but

he points out (1971:96) that there is no other way to obtain a criterion that will enable us to choose among competing historical values.

In effect, therefore, what Troeltsch suggested was the existence of a universally valid goal towards which all religions are directed. The goal is a transcendent one but can only be sought from within a particular historical situation via the various religious manifestations. The goal of religion lies beyond history but the means to the goal lies within it. Some religious manifestations reveal the goal with more clarity than others and thus there exists a natural gradation of religions within history.

According to Troeltsch (1971:98 - 99), this gradation gives rise to "the expectation that the goal-directed impetus existing in this idea of an ultimate objective may lead to a revelation that is in principle definitive and final". The realisation of this final revelation, he believed would not come from any new religion but would arise out of the existing religious manifestations as "within culture generally, really new developments are exceptional". This final revelation would, however, be: "the purest and most profound idea of God" (Troeltsch, 1971:103).

4.3 CHRISTIANITY AS THE HIGHEST RELIGION "FOR US"

The next point which Troeltsch raises is the question of whether historicism includes the positive acknowledgement of Christianity as being the highest religion for us.* He answers in the affirmative on the basis of a comparison of Christianity with the other great world faiths. In this comparison, he differentiates between those faiths which he regards as impersonal and those which are personal.

As far as the Indian (Eastern) religions are concerned, Troeltsch (1971:110) argues that in them, "divinity now comes to mean pure, highest being, or the supreme order of the world, in relation to which the world process signifies that this being, this order, is made obscure and finite." In terms of redemption, therefore, this means "the annulment of the world process and the obliteration of everything personal in pure being, since the existence and value of the personal constitute no problem for this type of religious apprehension."

Judaism and Islam are defined by Troeltsch as being "religions of law". Such religions, he argues, "are inferior in their ability to plumb the depths of the distinction between the world of the senses and the world of higher, transcendent values. They simply juxtapose the two worlds and call for an ascent to the higher by

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*See: Troeltsch, Absoluteness..., pp. 107 - 116.

the summoning up of powers that exist in the nature of the soul" (1971:109). Therefore, according to Troeltsch (1971:110), these religions also lack personalism in that "redemption conceived on the basis of law remains forever bound to achievements that man produces out of his own nature, while the redeeming divinity ... always remains a thing-like being that lacks the vital, activating power needed to tear men away from the world and return them, transformed, to confront the world again."

In contrast to the above faiths, Troeltsch (1971:110) argues that in Christianity, "we find a complete and radical disengagement of God and of souls from the world; the elevation of both into the sphere of personality where nature is shaped and overcome and where unconditioned value is realized; and the overcoming of all that is given merely existent, by an infinite and intrinsic value that bursts forth from the depths of the world and finds expression in practical conduct."

In terms of the comparison of the great world faiths, Troeltsch (1971:114) concluded that Christianity was not only "the culmination point", but also "the convergence point of all the developmental tendencies that can be discerned in religion". Through it, man no longer had to obey a code of laws or wade through an illusory world in order to achieve salvation. Whilst the religions of law do proclaim the divine will, "they leave the natural man to overcome the world in his own strength". On the other hand, the Eastern religions "dissolve man and the world in

the divine essence but in the process forfeit all positive meaning and content in the divine nature." Yet, Troeltsch affirms, it is only Christianity that "has disclosed a living deity who is act and will in contrast to all that is merely existent, who separates the soul from the merely existent and in this separation unites it with himself".

Thus, for Troeltsch, Christianity is the <u>one</u> religion that has truly come to grips with the complexity of the relationship between this world and a higher, a-historical world. In this religion, "the soul, purified from guilt and pride and granted assurance and security, is set to work in the world for the upbuilding of a kingdom of pure personal values, for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God" (1971:114).

Troeltsch recognises that a higher revelation than Christianity may yet take place (although he doubts that this will happen). For this reason he states (1971:115) that we cannot and must not regard Christianity as an "absolute, perfect, immutable truth." It is rather: "the loftiest and most spiritual revelation that we know at all. It has the highest validity" (Troeltsch, 1957:21). Only in this sense, Troeltsch (1971:117) argues, can one refer to the "Absoluteness " of Christianity.

4.4 CHRISTIANITY AND THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE VALIDITY OF OTHER RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The next question which Troeltsch considers is whether the Absoluteness of Christianity, as he explained it, can satisfy ordinary devout people in their acknowledgement of and quest for God.* In other words, the question under consideration is whether one can be a Christian and yet at the same time acknowledge that there are other "absolute" religions.

Troeltsch answers in the affirmative in that the ordinary religious man does not need to believe that he possesses the truth exclusively or that he possesses it in a complete and final form. The Christian can believe that in his religion he has actually found God and that this faith will never deceive him. That is all that matters.

Applying this logic to the religious man per se, Troeltsch (1971:122) states the following: "All he can do is to desire true participation in and true inner contact with the absolute and to seek the most forceful and profound God-centred life in the various historical manifestations where such participation is indicated." However, Troeltsch cautions the religious man not to wish to possess the absolute in an absolute way as to do so is a delusion.

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*See: Troeltsch, Absoluteness..., pp. 117 - 129.

In term of Christianity, therefore, "all that the Christian needs ... is the certainty that within the Christian orientation of life there is an authentic revelation of God and that nowhere is a greater revelation to be found. ... With complete composure he can consign to the world to come the absolute religion that represents not struggling faith but changeless and certain knowledge of the truth" (Troeltsch, 1971:123).

4.5 CHRISTIANITY - THE ABSOLUTE AMONGST ABSOLUTES?

The final point discussed by Troeltsch is whether historicism has any positive significance for Christianity at all if it turns Christianity's ecclesiastical theory of absoluteness into a special instance of self-understanding common to all religion.

Troeltsch is of the opinion that the absoluteness that any aspect of life, be it law, religion or whatever, asserts for itself is a universal characteristic of what is termed the "naive" way of thinking. What is also universal is the process that eventually dissolves naive thinking, namely the thinking that arises from comparison with other manifestations of the same type. This phase results in a certain amount of pain, anxiety and distress for fear of insecurity if one breaks away from something that was originally naturally regarded as absolute.

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*See: Troeltsch, Absoluteness..., pp. 131 - 163.

Eventually adjustments are made to the initial naive view. In the case of religions, Troeltsch (1971:133) states that the adjustment process continues "until all the different kinds of religions have been juxtaposed, until all the contradictions and antitheses have been matched point for point in an effort to discover in these correlations an ultimate principle that will make possible a unified, coherent account and assessment of the whole. In this way the naive world view changes into a scientific one." This scientific approach does not necessarily lead to total disruption of the original absoluteness, but, rather liberates previous narrow-mindedness by allowing for a more tolerant attitude towards other manifestations of the same type.

To illustrate which religious manifestation has reached the point of ultimacy that is required by the absolute religion (as opposed to naive absoluteness), Troeltsch (1971:141 - 144) once again examines various religious beliefs. His examination shows that the primitive religions were bound by ethnic ties and kinship and thus they lacked the universalism of the final absolute. Pantheistic and mystic religons also lack this universalism in that their absoluteness depends upon the "thought and action of man" and "not upon an invading, apprehending will of the divine" (Troeltsch, 1971:141). Zoroastrianism is strictly a Persian religion and so, too, lacks universalism. Judaism too is bound to blood and cult. Islam binds its followers to the Qur'an (which Troeltsch regards as being confused because of the way in

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which it was compiled) and Arabic law and custom.

Troeltsch (1971:145) therefore concludes that it is only with Christianity, with the "personalistic religious idea and its liberating power" (as discussed earlier) as well as its preaching of the Kingdom of God, that we find "the complete individualisation and humanisation of religion." This makes its natural absoluteness "the purest and most inwardly-orientated expression of the power of religion" and therefore also the highest religion thus far until the appearance of any higher religious life.

5. THE ADEQUACY OF TROELTSCH IN SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF THE CONFLICTING TRUTH-CLAIMS OF WORLD RELIGIONS - A CRITIQUE *

Having outlined Troeltsch's application of historicism to the field of religion, it is now necessary to examine the adequacy of his views as a solution to the problem under investigation, namely, the conflicting truth-claims of world religions.

Troeltsch's view that there exists within history a natural

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*The following critique is largely my own. This is because most of the sources that were consulted on Troeltsch are merely translations of some of his essays. Those sources that do raise questions about Troeltsch's historicist method concentrate mainly on issues that are pertinent to the perspective of the particular author. As most of these authors (with the exception of Knitter) wish to praise the legacy of Troeltsch for Christian theology, the type of critique that is presented here does not occur.

gradation of religions is problematical in that he appears to have lost sight of his own argument which he presented as a polemic against evolutionary apologetic. If history gives us no indication of any upward movement within itself and each historical phenomenon has its own uniqueness and individuality, then the natural gradation of religion which he suggests represents a blatant contradiction of his historicist principles.

Santmire (1973:366) points out that Troeltsch's assertion that the ordinary religious man need not believe that he possesses the truth exclusively or in a complete and final form does not tie up with the fact that the three great Abrahamic faiths, "in their classical forms and in various ways, have been self-consciously exclusivistic." Coupled with this is the fact that both Christianity and Islam profess their absolute status as an article of faith to which their "ordinary believers" hold firm. Troeltsch appears to have lost sight of this reality in his argument.

As to the question of whether historicism includes the positive acknowledgement of Christianity as the highest religion for us, another problem has to be faced, this being the incompatibility between historicism and a historical phenomenon that is recognised as being the highest one. It is surely a grave contradiction in thought to assert, on the one hand, that "history is no place for 'absolute religions' or 'absolute personalities'" (Troeltsch, 1971:78), and yet on the other hand,

to use historicism to show that Christianity is the highest religion for us.

In this regard, Santmire (1973:367) points out that it must be remembered that Troeltsch was a deeply religious man. As a historicist he had to recognise the validity of other faiths for their believers, yet, as a committed Christian believer, he was defiant of an aimless relativism which resulted if one followed historicist principles to the letter. He thus used historicism to try and show the importance of Christianity to the Christian believer. By advocating a highest religion, he did not wish to discard the validity of other faiths. He rather wished to show the Christian believer that for him, Christianity is the highest religion and the only one through which Christians can realise the divine reality.

Paul Knitter highlights a key problem with this vein of Troeltschian thought. He poses the question as to whether something that is regarded as being the truth for some can only be confined to that particular group. Furthermore, he asks: "Do we not feel that it can also be the truth for others, that others will find fuller life in embracing it? Stated philosophically, all truth is experienced as having universal revelance. Truth drives us to dialogue with others, to overcome the cultural, historical walls that separate us. Historical relativism, as Troeltsch presented it and as many others today embrace it, is perhaps not sufficiently aware of this" (1985:36). This issue

causes Santmire (1973:392) to pose the question for Troeltsch as to whether a religious and ethical position that is developed solely in terms of one's own culture can ever be sufficient for mankind as a whole.

A further problem with this vein of Troeltschian thought is that if he wishes us to infer from it that for the Jew, Judaism is the highest religion, for the Muslim, Islam and so on, he never actually commits this point to writing. Santmire (1973:383) defends Troeltsch's failure in this regard as follows: "Troeltsch would say, indeed, that as a Christian it would be presumptuous of him to try to reestablish, let us say, the validity of Judaism."

One must, however, concede Troeltsch the point that a final revelation has not yet appeared and thus each adherent of each different religion is left only with the structure of his particular belief within which to realise the divine higher reality. As such, each religious believer considers his particular faith to be the highest revelation of God to man. Troeltsch, however, throws himself wide open to being interpreted as a Christian evangelist who aims to gain converts by indicating the inferiority of other faiths. His analysis of these other beliefs certainly does not assist the objective reader of his writings to conclude otherwise.

For example, whilst there is a great deal of truth to the

statement that Judaism and Islam are "religions of law" in that adherents of these faiths live by a legal system, such a definition represents a gross over-simplification of two highly complex religious systems. In any event, the term: "religion of law", could also be applied to Christianity in that the Christian believer, who, by adhering to certain fundamental principles that are laid down by the faith, is able to gain access to Heaven as opposed to Hell at the eschaton.

Troeltsch's statement that the Eastern faiths lack personalism on the grounds that they view this world as illusory, is also open to doubt. The Hindu concept of the unity of one's soul with that of the Ultimate can surely be equated with Troeltsch's idea of a "personal" Christian deity "who separates the soul from the merely existent and in this separation unites it with himself" (Troeltsch, 1971:114). Troeltsch therefore appears to contradict himself on this point.

Troeltsch's assertion that Christianity is the highest revelation yet known to man cannot prove that this is in fact the case. This is because a confession of any nature as regards religious claims would be a dogmatic one on the part of the believer. In any event, after almost two millennia of Christianity, the "lower" religions are still in existence. It follows, therefore, that if there was a gradation of religions culminating in the one which has the "purest and most profound idea of God" (Troeltsch, 1971:103), these "lower" faiths would surely have petered out if

religion indeed had an evolutionary nature and Christianity was in fact the highest point of this evolution.

The question can also be raised as to whether Troeltsch has in fact solved the problem for Christian believers as to which is the highest religion of all. If we are to take his whole historicist thought literally, this would mean that all the religious manifestations are the highest ones for their particular adherents and that none of them may lay claim to the status of being the Absolute. Yet he goes to great lengths to show that Christianity <u>is</u> the highest of all the religious manifestations. He does not provide an argument as to how the other faiths are to be regarded as the highest for their adherents. His arguments for Christianity also make it difficult to perceive how Judaism, for example, would be higher than Christianity for the Jews since his reasoning shows the opposite to be the case.

Troeltsch (1911:239, did call for an abandonment of "the attitude which regards Jesus as the centre of the universe, or even the centre of human history." Nevertheless, Knitter (1985:35) points out that in the person of Jesus, the Christians believe that "they have the Absolute become history, divinity incarnated in humanity. And therefore in this man, ... there <u>is</u> present the full, final, normative revelation of God. The incarnation is the one grand exception to Troeltsch's otherwise iron-clad law of historical relativity." Clearly, therefore, the problem of the

strongest and most profound religion still remains.

There also seems to be a contradiction in Troeltsch's argument as to whether there will or will not be a revelation superseding Christianity. His arguments asserting Christianity as the highest revelation yet known to man do leave room for a higher revelation. On the other hand, his doubt that such a revelation will ever take place, as well as his obvious bias towards the Christian faith serve to illustrate the opposite.

In a lecture entitled: "The Place of Christianity among the World Religions" (1923), which was never delivered, but, was published posthumously, Troeltsch seems to have recognised this flaw in his original thought pattern. He repeated his assertion that Christianity is valid and true for Christians by stating that "it is final and unconditional for us, because we have nothing else, and because in what we have we can recognize the accents of the divine voice" (Troeltsch, 1923:25). But, he continues by commenting that "this does not preclude the possibility that other racial groups, living under entirely different cultural conditions, may experience their contact with the Divine Life in a quite different way, and may themselves also possess a religion which has grown up with them, and from which they cannot sever themselves so long as they remain what they are" (1923:25 - 26).

Thus Troeltsch modified his former theories as to the position of Christianity as opposed to the other religions. Indeed, it is

striking to note his change of attitude as to the lack of 'personality' in religions other than Christianity. He argues that the concept of personality "is always itself already one of the fundamental positions of the several religions, and is determined by them according to those respective general attitudes of theirs"(1923:25 - 26).*

Having changed his attitude towards religions that he previously regarded as being of a lower status than Christianity, Troeltsch (1923:30) states that if each religion "strives to fulfil its own highest potentialities, and allows itself to be influenced therein by the similar striving of the rest, they may approach and find contact with each other." Not only does this apply to the great world religions, "but it also applies to the various religious denominations, and to individuals in their intercourse with one another."

Troeltsch concludes this final lecture of his with words that strongly echo the unitive pluralist school and the current call for a global theology of religions. If there were ever doubts as to the application of his historicist principles to the field of religion because of contradiction, these are now dispelled by the following statement:-

"In our earthly experience the Divine Life is not one, but many.

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*Emphasis is mine.

to apprehend the one in the many constitutes the special acter of love" (1923:31).

this statement, historicism, as a solution to the flicting truth-claims of world religons, regains its sibility. No one religion is recognised as being absolute. , they cannot be regarded as being mere relative entities. h of them is the very truth and life to their respective erents.

HISTORICISM REASSESSED

order to illustrate how historicism lays the basic ground- es according to which we in the present world can attempt to e to terms with the problem of religious pluralism, it is cessary to compare this approach to that of unitive pluralism. om such a comparison, the following points arise:-

All these proponents of dialogue call for a recognition of e separate existence of each religious manifestation. By ipulating this principle, they entrench the historicist tegory of the individuality of each historical epoch.

These proponents call for a dialogue on the basis of empathy wards all religious beliefs. None of them stipulate that a rticular faith system is invalid. All religious beliefs are aken seriously. The link between this attitude and the istoricist principle empathetic understanding is self

evident.

3. All these views point towards a dialogue on the basis of commonality. Such common ground is sought by means of limited selection of particular facts that are common to all faiths. These facts serve as representations of the unity of value between differing religious systems. In other words, the historicist principles of analogy and correlation of facts are applied in order to arrive at their conclusion.

4. The recognition by some proponents of the common essence view that a final, all-embracing religious belief will only be realised in an a-historical situation ties up with Troeltsch's view that such a religion is a possibility.

5. The historicist principle that no historical epoch can claim to be final or absolute is distinctly evident in the common essence viewpoint.

6. The view that all religions have their common essence in some or other form of Divine Reality links up with the strictly historicist view that every epoch is immediately related to God.

7. Propagators of the common essence view strongly emphasise that their thesis must not be misunderstood as a call for one world religion. Troeltsch's attempt to support the absoluteness of his particular faith is ironically linked to this principle. As was seen earlier, his intention was to defend the vitality of his faith despite the fact of other 'natural' absolutes.

8. The call for dialogue between Eastern and Western faiths in the hope of realising a global theology, although not a specific historicist principle, ties up with the analogy and correlation

of historical facts. Such a dialogue will only be able to be pursued on this basis. In this regard, the historicist categories of limited selection of facts, representation and unity of value are also applicable.

9. Lastly, the call for Eastern and Western faiths to co-operate towards change in the new pluralistic 'global village' cannot be divorced from the historicist categories of latency, developments, and contingency. The category of latency is the fact that all religious beliefs appear to have the potential for peaceful existence with each other. This has now been fully exposed with the dawn of the pluralistic society in which modern man finds himself. The category of developments is evident in the many current attempts at dialogue towards a more global theology. The 'global village' situation is a contingency that has affected traditionalist attitudes and has led to change so that the historicist category of freedom (in the form of a true "brotherhood of man") may hopefully be fully realised in the future.

It appears, therefore, that although Troeltsch does not feature prominently as a proponent of unitive pluralism, he has articulated the basic ground-rules according to which the common essence view of religions has been formulated. Despite the rather negative critique that was given above, the greatness of Troeltsch lies in the fact that, at a time when Christianity was forced to come to terms with the existence of other world religions because of the firm establishment of the

'Religionsgeschichtliche' movement, he posed a solution by calling for an empathetic understanding of all historical epochs.

With such an understanding there can be no absolutes in history and the basis is laid for dialogue among equals rather than monologue in which one party dictates in order to dominate the others. Applied to religion, the way is then open for dialogue among the differing religious beliefs without any absolutist claims on the part of any faith. This dialogue will then eventually, through the historicist principles of analogy and correlation, give rise to a greater understanding among world religions.

Historicism does not fully solve the problem of relativism, but, it does tend to avoid the issue of aimless relativism through the principle of empathy. It also does not cancel out the fact that two of the major world faiths (Christianity and Islam) are fundamentally absolutist. On the other hand, it lays down the principles for change in absolutist stance should this latency one day lead to developments in these faiths.

Nevertheless, when all is said and done, historicist ground-rules or not, the conflict between the differing religions remains a reality. Since the death of Troeltsch in 1923, comparison and correlation of the various religious manifestations has hardly led to peaceful coexistence among men of differing faiths. Indeed, the tendency has rather been towards sharp conflict

than towards a desire to really co-operate and adopt various ideas. The only religious manifestation that has a structure that can accommodate all the faiths is that of Hinduism, which stands in sharp ideological conflict to Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Historicism, therefore, gropes towards a solution to the problem of religious pluralism. In practice, however, the conflict remains unresolved. Yet, Troeltsch himself had hinted at historicism culminating in a final eschatological solution by consigning the absolute religion to the world to come. Thus, whilst the 'global village' requires that we attempt to come to terms with the conflict in praxis, ultimately it seems that God, at the eschaton, will have the ultimate answer. This approach will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

1. INTRODUCTION: AN ESCHATOLOGICAL SOLUTION

The earlier discussion of unitive pluralism pointed towards the theoretical feasibility of a global theology of religions. The key problem with such an approach, however, is that it tends to relativise each faith. As a solution to this, Troeltsch proposed the historicist method, according to which, the value and meaning of each particular religion for its adherents is taken seriously. The proviso is laid down, however, that the particular may not be absolutised.

It was noted in the previous chapter how the historicist method in fact laid the ground - rules according to which interfaith dialogue should be pursued. These ground-rules, however, do not serve to remove the conflict that exists between religious beliefs. Whilst they provide the guidelines according to which mutual understanding between men of differing faiths can be achieved, they do not provide an ultimate solution to the conflict.

It seems, therefore, that an ultimate solution lies beyond the historical realm at the eschaton. It was noted earlier how Troeltsch, in his application of historicist principles to

religion, had hinted at such a possibility. Thus, an eschatological solution to the problem of religious pluralism, although not fully developed by Troeltsch, forms part of the historicist approach and is worthy of consideration.

Hick (1973b:147) expresses the opinion that beyond the current attempts at interfaith interaction, "the ultimate unity of faiths will be an eschatological unity in which each is both fulfilled and transcended - fulfilled insofar as it is true, transcended insofar as it is less than the whole truth. ... In the eternal life there is no longer any place for religions; the pilgrim has no need of a way after he has finally arrived."

A key issue as regards the conflicting truth-claims concerns the conflicting eschatological perspectives of Judaism and Christianity. Whilst the Jews still await the Messiah, the Christians believe that the final eschatological era has begun with Christ. Yet history shows no signs that mankind has been redeemed. Martin Buber, speaking of Judaism and Christianity, notes that: "Pre-messianically, our destinies are divided. Now to the Christian, the Jew is the incomprehensibly obdurate man, who declines to see what has happened; and to the Jew, the Christian is the incomprehensibly daring man, who affirms in an unredeemed world that its redemption has been accomplished" (1974:276). Furthermore, he presents his particular eschatological approach to the conflict that exists between Jews and Christians thus: "The faith of Judaism and the faith of

Christendom are by nature different in kind, ... and they will indeed remain different, until mankind is gathered in from the exiles of the 'religions' into the Kingship of God" (1961:173 - 174).

In proposing an eschatological solution to the problem of religious pluralism in this chapter, I wish to specifically concentrate on Christianity and its relationship to Judaism as a central issue. The reason for the isolation of these specific faiths is that, because I have been raised according to the Christian tradition, the perspective from which I approach the problem of conflicting truth-claims is largely confined to the Judaeo-Christian debate. Also, as far as the call for a move towards better interfaith relations is concerned, many Christian scholars have confined themselves to this particular issue. Furthermore, the theorists who were referred to in previous chapters of this work as well as those whose theories will be expounded in this chapter, also fall within the Judaeo-Christian frame of reference.

This Judaeo-Christian approach should not, however, be seen as a narrow one. The problem of conflicting truth-claims extends far beyond the confines of these two faiths. Nevertheless, I perceive the opposing eschatological viewpoints of these two faiths as a key issue in the conflicting truth-claims debate. If a feasible eschatological solution can be reached whereby these opposing views of the eschaton can be reconciled, the way will be

clear to a recognition of the validity of all faiths until the final eschatological age arrives.

Frans Rosenzweig, a Jew who was on the verge of conversion to Christianity, but, in the end found fulfilment in Judaism, hinted at such an eschatological perspective. In a letter (October 31, 1913) to his cousin, Rudolf Ehrenberg (a Christian), he writes:-

"Chosen by its Father, the people of Israel gazes fixedly across the world and history, over to the last, most distant time when the Father, the One and Only, will be 'all in all'" (Letter cited from Glatzer, 1961:341 - 342). As far as Christianity's claim to being the sole path of salvation is concerned, Rosenzweig points out that this cannot be so for the Jew. Even if all Jews were to submit to Jesus, Rosenzweig contends that, according to the New Testament, Jesus himself would ultimately "turn over his dominion to the Father, and then God will be All-in-All" (1970:412).

For Rosenzweig, therefore, the Jews do not need to convert to Christianity for salvation. The reason for this is simple. To the Jew, the fact that God is his Father "is the first and most self-evident fact." Therefore, the Jew has no need for a third person between himself and the Father in heaven. The Jews are God's chosen people. Thus, Rosenzweig asks: "Should I 'be converted,' when I have been 'chosen' from birth? Is that a real

alternative for me?"*

As God's chosen people, the Jews are already with the Father. Because the patriarch Abraham heard the call of God and answered it, the Jew no longer needs to become one with the Father in some decisive moment of his individual life as Christianity demands of him. "The decisive moment, the great Now, the miracle of rebirth, lies before the individual life. In the individual life there is found only the great Here, the viewpoint, the station, the house and the circuit, in short all that is granted to man in the mystery of his first birth" (1970:396).

Until the arrival of the eschaton, Rosenzweig recognised that the church and synagogue must go their separate ways with very distinct but equally important roles in the spiritual structure of the world (1970:415). Nahum Glatzer (1961:342) quotes Rosenzweig as saying that, despite these separate paths, both religions look forward to the same ultimate hope that is rooted in their common ground - the hope of being with God at the eschaton.

Matt Hershel (1975) also recognises that these two faiths must exist as separate entities until the eschaton when the messianic

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*These quotations are taken from Rosenzweig's letter to Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (October,1916;the exact day is not given). For a full translation of the German original, see: Rosenstock-Huessy, E. ed. (1969). Judaism Despite Christianity. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, pp. 107 -118.

goal is to be achieved. Both, however, pursue this common goal despite their blindness to each other's true nature and to the full measure of each other's validity. However, "together they can, and are obliged to, both work and wait for the coming of the promised messiah. And together they can cherish the certainty - since each knows that the Lord has promised but one messiah - that he whose second coming is awaited by the Christian and he whose coming is awaited by the Jew will be seen, when he comes, to have the same face..." (Hershel, 1975:405).

This statement is problematical in that it implies that Jews will then recognise Jesus' messianic/divine status. On the other hand, it brings home the point that, whoever this messiah is to be, he will be the one chosen by God. And if he happens to be Jesus, the Jews still would not have needed to convert to Christianity, and likewise, the Christian would not have needed conversion to Judaism as a prerequisite for entry into the Kingdom of God.

Rosenzweig expressed these sentiments in another letter to Ehrenberg, dated November 1, 1913. There he wrote:-

"I know that I have vanished only before the will of your Lord ; but I am not forgotten by God - that God whom one day your Lord too will serve" (Letter cited in Glatzer, 1961:28 - 29).

This common eschatological hope of both faiths was recognised by

a conciliar declaration of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church which states that: "In company with the prophets and the apostle Paul, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will adress the Lord in a single voice and 'serve him with one accord' (Zeph. 3:9; cf.Isa. 66:23; Ps. 65:4; Rom. 11:11 - 32)" (Abbot, 1966:665).

The question must however be raised as to whether these views of Rosenzweig, Hershel and Vatican II are adequate as a solution to the conflicting eschatological ideologies of these two faiths. Of the many examples of Christian persecution of Jews over two millennia which serve to illustrate the Jewish viewpoint that the world as yet is not redeemed, the one that is most vivid to present day Jewry is that of the Holocaust. It has already been noted how the New Testament laid down the ideological basis for this atrocity.*

Eliezer Berkovits, an ardent opposer of all attempts at Jewish-Christian dialogue that does not take the above fact into account, points out that from a Jewish point of view, "the theological meaning of the concentration camps and the crematoria is that the guilt of man has never been taken away from him through any divine self-sacrifice. But for the non-Jew, too, man's historic experience, especially in the 20th century, has shown that the God who according to Christian teaching came into

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*In this regard see also: Berkovits, E. (1978). "Facing the Truth." In: Judaism, vol. 27, no. 3.

the world for the specific purpose of human salvation, was nowhere when salvation was most needed" (1966:80).

Gregory Baum (1974:7), from a Christian perspective, recognises this problem for Christianity and states that an examination of the very centre of the Christian proclamation as well as a reinterpretation of the gospel is therefore necessary. The encounter of Auschwitz demands that this be done.

Baum (1974:8) points out that "the holocaust teaches the Church that any monopolistic claim to divine truth or any form of ecclesiastical self-elevation will eventually translate itself ... into social attitudes and political action and hence generate grave injustices that eventually accumulate to become major crimes."

Another Christian theologian, Tom Driver (1981:3 - 4), reflects thus on the present historical state of man. "We live on a sick planet. The earth is sick with suffering, and we who dwell here are like the inhabitants of a city struck by plague. In such a time, what, if anything, should the church teach about Christ? Is Jesus our savior now, or has he also caught the contagion? What has the church to say to the world on the verge of collapse?"

Thus there is currently an urgent call for a reinterpretation of the traditional Christian belief of an already realised

eschatology in Christ. A fruitful Christian-Jewish encounter cannot be realised unless this call is heeded.*

A few Christian scholars have indeed heeded this call. Hick's reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Incarnation, for example, has already been noted. With regard to a reinterpretation of the Christian understanding of eschatology, however, Rosemary Ruether stands out as a key figure. Her reinterpretation, to be discussed below, takes cognisance of the present unredeemed state of man and provides the basis for a final, as yet unrealised, eschatological solution to the Jewish-Christian conflict.

2. ROSEMARY RUETHER: A REINTERPRETATION OF CHRISTIAN "REALISED ESCHATOLOGY"

Ruether (1974:238 - 239) argues that the Christian eschatological viewpoint "does not take seriously the independent histories and identities of other peoples." Furthermore, it represents but a particular language about the universal whereas "the only universality which can be truly said to be 'of God' is one that transcends every particularity, guaranteeing the integrity of each people to stand before God in their own identities and histories (Mic. 4:5)."

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*In this regard see also: Pawlikowski, J. T. (1977). "Christ and the Christian-Jewish Dialogue." In: Chicago Studies, 16, pp. 367 -368; and Pawlikowski, J. T. (1982). Christ in the light of Christian-Jewish Dialogue. New York: Paulist, p. 7.

Christianity, by assuming that the Messiah has already come, has,according to Ruether (1974:240), applied to itself the characteristics of the "eschatological era" and, by so doing, has historicised the eschatological. In effect, therefore, "the 'two eras' - the historical world and the messianic age to come - become the Christian historical era, over against Judaism as the type of unredeemed humanity."

Ruether (1974:242 - 247) outlines the main flaw of such thinking in terms similar to those already expressed above. "The claim that the eschatological Body of Christ is one's institutional foundation, ... is read with a literalism that renders the Church unable to account for the imperfection of its historical existence. ... The reality of unredeemed existence continues despite these tricks of realized eschatology played upon history." For this reason, Judaism cannot accept that the Messiah has already come.

"For Israel, the coming of the Messiah and the coming of the Messianic Age are inseparable. They are in fact the same thing. Israel's messianic hope was not for the coming of a redemptive person whose coming would not change the outward ambiguity of human and social existence, but for the coming of that Messianic Age which ... is 'the solution to the riddle of histor'" (Ruether, 1974:247).

Ruether (1974:248) contends that the Church's historicising of

the eschatological is illegitimate and that the ultimate eschatological event must still signify a "final" future. Jesus, had expressed the eschatological expectation with his proclamation: 'the Kingdom is at hand'. As such, he became to be remembered as a "paradigm of that final hope which has not yet been accomplished, but still lies ahead of our present possibilities."

Such a paradigm may, according to Ruether, be experienced again and again in that community which preserves the memory of Jesus. "But this experience and person in the past does not become the final eschatological event of history, placing all history before that time in an obsolescent and morally inferior relation to itself or invalidating the access to God of those who go forward on other grounds" (1974:248).

Driver (1981:60) expresses these same sentiments thus: "As I look at the suffering world today, at the role the far-flung churches play within it, and at my own stumbling life, I come to think that the church's big mistake has been to <u>imprison</u> God in the likeness of Jesus. Something done for our freedom has been turned into a mold in which we try to hold God fixed. Since God cannot be contained, we encapture only ourselves."

In this regard, Ruether (1974:249), concludes that "the messianic meaning of Jesus' life ... is paradigmatic and proleptic in nature, not final and fulfilled." Jesus provides his followers

with a basis for their refusal to take evil as the last word and for their hope that God will win in the end. Jesus also points to a finality that lies in the future and towards which we must constantly strive.

If Jesus is not the final paradigm of hope for the eschatological future, then it follows that paradigms of other faiths can carry out the same function. Therefore, the Christian paradigm of the Resurrection is complementary or parallel to the Jewish paradigm of the Exodus. "In each case the experience of salvation in the past is recounted as the paradigm for continued hope experienced in the present and pointing to the final hope which is still ahead of both Jews and Christians. When Easter is seen, not as superseding and fulfilling the Exodus, but as reduplicating it, then the Christian can affirm his faith through Jesus in a way that no longer threatens to rob the Jew of his past, eliminate his future, and surround his present existence with rivalrous animosity" (Ruether, 1974:256 - 257).*

Ruether (1974:250) believes that this paradigmatic and propleptic view of the messianic work of Jesus is the only theologically and historically valid way of interpreting it consistent with biblical faith and historical realism.

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*See also: Ruether, R. R. (1981). To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism. New York: Crossroad, pp. 42 -43.

Relating this paradigmatic understanding of Christian eschatological perception to the Christian theology of the "New Covenant", Ruether asks whether Christians should not say today "that this messianic covenant lies as much ahead of the historical reality of Christianity as it does that of Judaism?" She further asks, before God, whether Christians should not see themselves as being in the same historical situation as the Jews in that both of them are "still on the way through the desert between the Exodus and the Promised Land, with many a golden idol and broken tablet along the way" (1974:253).

Ignaz Maybaum expresses the above sentiments in terms of the Jewish diaspora. He points out that when the Jews call the diaspora galut, "this Hebrew connotation reminds us that both the State of Israel and the diaspora outside Israel are galut: as long as the Messiah has not yet come, every community lives in the galut, in the unredeemed history of man chosen to carry the yoke of the galut, moving in travail, in suffering and in hope towards the kingdom of God" (1973:174).

In order that Christians might realise the non-finality of the paradigm of Jesus, Ruether suggests that they must learn the story of the Jews after the time of Jesus. This history has been suppressed by Christianity because of her claim to being the new and true Israel. Ruether (1974:257), however, argues that such a method of learning history negates ongoing Jewish existence. ... For Christians to incorporate the Jewish tradition after Jesus

into their theological and historical education would involve ultimately the dismantling of the Christian concept of history and the demythologizing of the myth of the Christian Era."

3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF RUETHER'S REINTERPRETED CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

The implications of Ruether's reinterpretation of Christian eschatological thinking for the problem of religious pluralism are clear. "God, who creates the many peoples, also can allow for many ways to the Father, which only become one at the end of history which is truly "final" " (Ruether, 1974:260 - 261).

However, the same criticism can be levelled at Ruether as was levelled at Hick earlier, namely, that her call for a paradigmatic understanding of the story of Jesus is tantamount to robbing Christianity of its essence.

Nevertheless, it is very clear from Ruether's analysis of Christian teachings that these have provided the fuel for two millennia of Jewish persecution. The question must surely be asked whether an essence that promotes such atrocities is at all worthwhile pursuing. The call for a radical reinterpretation of Christian teachings on the part of many Christian theologians is, therefore, justified.

Driver (1981:10) points out that it is immoral for any religion

to merely repeat or perpetuate a course of action simply because it existed in the past. Such an attitude causes a religion to mirror the past without critical reflection.

As far as Christianity is concerned, the fact that it claims to be an absolute faith, leaves little room for critical reflection on her central teachings. To do so is regarded as heretical.

In the light of our discussion above, however, it is evident that these teachings can no longer go unquestioned. "If the Church wants to clear itself of anti-Jewish trends built into its teaching, a few marginal correctives will not do. It must examine the very center of its proclamation and reinterpret the meaning of the gospel for our times" (Baum, 1974:5). As to whether or not this is possible without invalidating the Christian claims altogether is a frightening question.

One way of reinterpreting Christian truth-claims is to follow Hick and to regard the nature of the language used by the early Christians to speak about the divinity and uniqueness of Jesus as being mythic in nature. Hellwig (1970) suggests this approach as a starting point.

Driver (1981:24), suggests an ethical hermeneutic approach to Christology. He sees the current task of Christology as being "to define the role of Christ in the fulfillment of individual and social conscience." Therefore, he suggests that we "view

Christ as a party to ethical development" rather than as its norm or ethical completion.

The basis for Driver's approach to Christology lies in his view that Christ, far from being outside or above the ethical history of the world, is radically within it. "This means that Christ also has an ethical history and is not forever the same." Therefore, Christians "should be prepared to meet Christ in forms not predicted in the New Testament" (Driver, 1981:24).

Ruether's revision of Christian eschatological thought was prompted by an ethical motive, namely, to indicate the disastrous (unethical) consequences of following the New Testament to the letter. This causes her to reach the conclusion (held by most liberal Christian theologians) that some texts of the New Testament "may simply be unusable and will have to be put aside or relativized historically, not unlike other scriptural texts which condone practices which modern Christians no longer accept, such as slavery" (1974:232).

The implications of such an approach to the New Testament for the essence of Christianity have already been discussed in the earlier critique of the unitive pluralist school of thought. John Pawlikowski, however, suggests a more subtle approach to th reinterpretation of the New Testament so as to do away with passages that convey an anti-Semitic flavour.

Firstly, he suggests that if the gospels are read with some sophistication, they do present a case for basic Roman responsibility for the death of Jesus.* This is an issue that the churches have not yet squarely addressed (1980:29).

Secondly, with regard to Roamns 9 - 11, Pawlikowski points out that "Paul shows a greater love and respect for the continuing validity of Jewish religious expression" than many would care to admit (1980:29). He argues further that "what we can say is that Romans 9 - 11 undercuts any attempt by Christians to totally invalidate the meaningfulness and beauty of the Jewish religious covenant" (1980:30).

Thirdly, Pawlikowski points to a growing consensus as a result of recent Johannine studies, to the effect that the fourth gospel's condemnation of the Jews is limited to the specific community of the writer's day. Pawlikowski cites Raymond Brown as saying that the term, "the Jews", constitutes a theological category that symbolises any person, Christian or non-Christian, Jewish or pagan, who would reject with full knowledge the news of salvation through Christ (1980:12). On these grounds, therefore, Pawlikowski is convinced that it is possible to present the Johannine Christology without of necessity denigrating Judaism as such. Nevertheless, he doesn caution us to be aware that "the

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*This theory is fully expounded in the following works: Brandon, S.G.F. (1967). Jesus and the Zealots. Manchester: Manchester University Press; and Brandon, S.G.F. (1968). The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth. London: Batsford.

issue of the anti-Semitism of John is far from a settled question" (1980:30).

Fourthly, Pawlikowski points to new research on the issue of Jesus' renunciation of the Pharisees. Such research has shown that a considerable part of the hostility towards the Pharisees may in fact be explained in terms of inter-Pharisaic contestation. Citing Paul Winter, Pawlikowski points out that Jesus might well have been a representative of pre-rabbinical Pharisaism, not only in his ethical teaching, but also in his eschatology. Pawlikowski further quotes Winter as saying that in the whole of the New Testament we are unable to find a single historically reliable instance of religious differences between Jesus and members of the Pharisaic guild, let alone evidence of mortal conflict (1980:101).

Lastly, Pawlikowski notes that the attacks against so-called "Judaisers" (cf. Galatians) can be disposed of rather easily. He argues that many Jews, besides Paul, would also have objected to the rigidity in Torah interpretation that was followed by this group. Furthermore, he points out that it is also likely that these "Judaisers" were not even Jewish by birth (1980:31).

Thus, in terms of a reinterpretation of the anti-Semitic passages found in the New Testament, Pawlikowski is adamant that when these passages are read without explanation, the average Christian may take them as being condemnations of Judaism as a

whole. "Here again we meet head-on the problem of background material that remains unsolved at the popular level" (1980:31).

Ruether (1974:228), however, points out that "possibly anti-ɜism is too deeply embedded in the foundations of Christianity ɔo be rooted out entirely without destroying the whole structure." Thus she suggests that "we may have to settle for the sort of ecumenical goodwill that lives with theoretical inconsistency and opts for a modus operandi that assures practical co-operation between Christianity and Judaism."

In any event, in terms of an eschatological perspective to the problem of religious pluralism, the final solution lies with God. In the meantime, however, Christianity is called to reinterpret past, absolutist claims (no matter how difficult this may be) lest the fratricide of the Holocaust be repeated. If Christians can come to terms with this approach to the problem of religious pluralism, the road will be paved for a genuine encounter with men of other faiths.

4. QUO VADIS? THE WORLD PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS CENTENARY, 1993

The above discussion concentrated on the Judaeo-Christian eschatological conflict as a major issue in the conflicting truth-claims debate. At this point, however, I wish to return to the context of wider interreligious dialogue. Whilst an

eschatological approach to the problem of the conflicting truth-claims maintains the status quo between differing faiths until the end of time arrives, there is a definite need for a current praxis of interfaith whereby men of differing religious persuasions can seek to understand each other so that violent conflict can be avoided. The 'global village' has made the ideal of interfaith dialogue become a necessity. Indeed, much of the current political conflict is exacerbated by religious rivalry as can be observed, for example, in Lebanon and India. It therefore seems imperative for the very survival of the modern world that a solution be found to the problem of religious pluralism. A "brotherhood of man" will never be realised without it.

What follows, therefore, is a brief overview of certain key attempts at meaningful interfaith dialogue. This survey is done with a view to the anticipation of the planned World Parliament of Religions Centenary that is to take place in 1993.

In 1893, an attempt was made towards interfaith in the form of a World Parliament of Religions. This Parliament sat in Chicago as part of the Columbian Exposition which marked the fourth centenary of Columbus' discovery of America. Ten religions were represented by leaders from all over the world and the proceedings lasted seventeen days.*

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*The full report of the proceedings of this Parliament can be found in Barrows, J.H. ed. (1893). The World's Parliament of Religions. Chicago: Parliament.

M.Braybrooke (1980:179) has outlined the main aims of this meeting as follows:-

1. To bring together in conference for the first time in history the leading representatives of the great historic religions of the world.
2. To show men, in the most impressive way, what and how many important truths the various religions hold and teach in common.
3. To promote and deepen the spirit of human brotherhood among religious men of diverse faiths, through friendly conference and mutual good understanding, while not seeking to foster the temper of indifferentism, and not striving to achieve any formal and outward unity.
4. To set forth, by those most competent to speak, what are deemed the important distinctive truths held and taught by each religion and by the various chief branches of Christendom.
5. To indicate the impregnable foundations of Theism and the reasons for man's faith in immortality, and thus to unite and strengthen the forces which are adverse to a materialistic philosophy of the universe.
6. To secure from leading scholars (representing the Brahman, Buddhist, Confucian, Parsee, Mohammedan, Jewish and other faiths, and from representatives of the various churches of Christendom) full and accurate statements of the spiritual and other effects of the religions which they hold, upon the

Literature, Art, Commerce, Government, Domestic and Social Life of the peoples among whom these faiths have prevailed.

7. To enquire what light each religion has afforded, or may afford, to the other religions of the world.
8. To set forth, for permanent record to be published to the world, an accurate and authoritative account of the present condition and outlook of religion among the leading nations of the earth.
9. To discover from competent men, what light religion has to throw on the great problems of the present age, especially important questions connected with Temperance, Labour, Education, Wealth and Poverty.
10. To bring the nations of the earth into a more friendly fellowship in the hope of securing permanent international peace.

Many looked upon this event as the dawn of a new era of mutual understanding between the different religions of the world. This was certainly one of the express aims of the Parliament. Alas, despite this attempt, the result was a reaffirmation, on the part of the Christian delegates present, of the superiority of the Christian faith. Barrows (1897:312 - 313), the organiser, describes the results of the Parliament thus:

"It was generally felt and said by Christian ministers, journalists, and teachers, that the Christianity of Christ displayed its glorious supremacy, its peerless character from

first to last, and some went so far as to affirm that the non-Christian religions would never be willing to appear again in a great world congress, and show their little tapers by the side of Christianity's solar orb."

Braybrooke (1980:8), however, is more positive in his assessment of the Parliament. He holds that: "whilst the Parliament seems to have been something of a seventeen-day wonder, and only possible because it was held under the auspices of an international exposition, it remains a remarkable pioneer event, and no subsequent interfaith gathering has come near to it in size or complexity."

A. Durwood Foster (1986), on the other hand, does not share the above view. He points out that with regard to the first aim, the Parliament fell short of covering the vast diversity of existing religions. Religious movements such as the Baha'i World Faith and Mormonism were quite deliberately excluded from participation. Also "the internal divisions of historic faiths subsumed under common labels" were not adequately reflected at the Parliament (1986:1). As far as the achievement of the second aim is concerned, Foster comments that, instead of showing what the religions held in common, profound differences seemed to become more pronounced; especially between the Eastern religions as opposed to the Abrahamic faiths.

Foster is however not entirely negative about the outcome of the

Parliament. In his opinion (1986:2) the third goal in particular was fulfilled and has continued to be advanced since then by the process of interreligious dialogue. He further comments (1986:6) that whilst there was a majority party at the Parliament "which reaffirmed the integrity of existing denominations and traditions", there was also a minority party who "succeeded in adding the seventh goal regarding the sharing of light". It is precisely this "shared light" that began in 1893 which has not left things the same but has inevitably brought about transformation of religious existence and identity.

The greatest failure of the Parliament, according to Foster (1986:6) lies in its lack of success in the implementation of the tenth goal. The ninety intervening years since 1893 have seen the most horrendous intervening events, many of which have been directly caused by interreligious strife.

Commenting on this failure on the part of the Parliament, Foster (1986:6) points out that "when we absolutize our own cause, religion gives us the freedom of conscience and the fanatic resolve to take life - to destroy others, not just randomly but rationally and systematically, as on the 'killing fields' of Cambodia, as the current film* depicts so horrifyingly". For this reason, therefore, many today pursue interreligious dialogue with new seriousness.

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*The film to which Foster refers is: "The Killing Fields". This film deals with the horrors of the Vietnam conflict.

Attempts at dialogue on a more empathetic basis have been pursued since 1893 and have met with some success, albeit on a somewhat limited scale. Some more recent examples are cited below.

4.1 INTERFAITH IN AMERICA: THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

During the 1920's, approximately three hundred years of anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism came to a head with the violent activities of the Ku Klux Klan against Blacks, Jews and Catholics. In particular, a vicious wave of anti-Catholicism swept over the country in the 1928 Presidential Campaign in which Al Smith, a Roman Catholic, had dared to present himself as a candidate.

This wave of hysteria was the motivation behind the organisation of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ), commonly referred to as the 'interfaith' movement. This movement was a fusion of Catholics, Protestants and Jews who were dedicated to the principle of establishing a more united America on the grounds of the Judaeo-Christian dicta: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Hyatt, 1978:268 - 269). A series of programmes was introduced in order that the above aim be achieved.

Since its inception, the NCCJ has extended it programmes far beyond the promotion of mutual understanding between Jews and

Christians. Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism have also been included on the agenda of events. The movement now embraces a wide diversity of problems that stand in the path of its ultimate goal.

Alfred Wolf (1978:298) comments thus on the road ahead for interfaith: "The initial purpose of the interfaith movement was to overcome prejudice, to change attitudes. This goal remains and must remain, as long as there is anti-Semitism or, for that matter, anti-Catholicism, anti-Protestantism, anti-Islamism, or any hatred rooted in religious differences. At the same time, mutual understanding has matured sufficiently so that we can enter into a new phase of interreligious activity: to search for joint goals and for mutual interests, to labour together for the common good."

4.2 VATICAN II

The initiation of the Second Vatican Council (1962 - 1965) by Pope John XXIII (d. 1963) was a major turning-point for interfaith movements. The "Declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions" that emerged from this council stands out as a "watershed" in the field of interreligious dialogue. As far as Jewish/Christian dialogue is concerned, this council cleared the Jews of the charge of deicide and recognised the right of religious liberty for all. Furthermore, it supported all efforts at the promotion of mutual

understanding between the various religions of mankind.

Paul Knitter (1985:124), however, emphasises that however positive the attitude of Vatican II towards other non-Christian religions may be, "we cannot deny a residual ambiguity in its understanding of just how effective the truth and grace within the religions are and, especially, how far Christian dialogue with them can go." The ambiguity, he argues, "stems from the same tension between God's salvific will and the necessity of the church that is evident throughout the history of Catholic thought. Although the council has said some very new and positive things about the religions, it still maintains that 'the Church is necessary for salvation' and that 'it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvacion can be found.'"

Michael Wyschogrod (1982), on the other hand sees the Council as representing "a new stage in Jewish-Christian dialogue". In this article he praises two books* that were written by Roman Catholics who have taken the contents of the document 'Nostra Aetate', which deals specifically with the attitude of the Catholic Church towards Judaism, to heart by attempting a meaningful dialogue between them without demeaning Judaism in any

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*The books under review are: Thoma, C. (1980). A Christian Theology of Judaism. tr. H.Croner. New York: Paulist Press; and Mussner, F. (1979). Traktat über die Juden. München: Kosel Verlag.

way.

Despite these differing opinions on the value of Vatican II for interreligious dialogue between these two faiths, at least with the official backing of Rome behind attempts at interfaith, the road was now cleared for the majority of Catholic clergy, who had at first been hostile to such movements, to participate in their activities.

4.3 THE TEMPLE OF UNDERSTANDING, INC.

This organisation was founded in 1960 by Mrs Dickerman Hollister. It is a "nonprofit corporation dedicated to education about the world's religions, and to the proposition that education will bring an understanding on which the religions may build a future of co-operation and mutual respect" (Dunne, 1970:210).

Under its auspices, the First Spiritual Summit Conference was held in Calcutta in October, 1968. At this event, papers were presented on the topic: "The Relevance of Religion in the Modern World", by delegates who represented a vast variety of world religions.

In a declaration that was unanimously adopted by the delegates at this Conference, the sentiment was expressed that the Conference had "demonstrated that interreligious communication is possible and fruitful" (Dunne, 1970:208). It was also felt that all

religions should actively seek increased communication with one another and together speak to the total human community in order to assist in creating conditions for the better world.

The delegates at the Summit Conference further gave the Temple of Understanding the mandate to implement the guidelines for interreligious communication and to create pools of information on the world religions and develop facilities to create materials for the mass-media.

Since 1968, the Temple has organised many international conferences with a view to promoting the above ideals and has become a strong force in the interfaith movement.

4.4 THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON RELIGION AND PEACE (WCRP)

This interfaith organisation was established in 1970. The main aim of this body was to gather men and women of whatever faith with a view to sharing their concerns about those things which serve as a threat to world peace.*

Since its inception it has hosted four international conferences, at the following venues:-

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*For a detailed survey of the activities of this movement, see: Braybrooke, M. (1980). Inter-faith Organisations 1893 -1979: An historical directory. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, pp. 70 - 90.

1. Kyoto, Japan (1970). Theme "Religion for Peace".
2. Louvain, Belguim (1974). Theme: "Religion and the quality of life".
3. Princeton, U.S.A. (1979). Theme: "Religion in the struggle for world community".
4. Nairobi, Kenya (1984). Theme: "Religions for human dignity and world peace".

This movement currently enjoys support worldwide among a wide spectrum of world religions. Unfortunately, these religionists are not the policy makers of international governments. In an age in which religion and politics are seen to be two separate entities, their influence on world politics has thus far been minimal. It therefore seems that the tenth goal of the World Parliament of Religions remains far from realisation despite attempts at world peace.

4.5 THE BIRMINGHAM CONFERENCE: TRIALOGUE BETWEEN JEW, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM

Ignaz Maybaum (1973) had recognised in the Middle-East Crisis, a grave need for mutual understanding between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He emphasised the point that such a trialogue can only be pursued in a situation where these three faiths can remain separate entities as "brothers in doctrinal disagreement" (1973:44).

It was in this spirit that a conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims was held on the initiative of John Hick at the University of Birmingham in September, 1981. The aim of the conference was to make a contribution to the promotion of meaningful dialogue between the great Abrahamic faiths.*

Ben Engelbrecht (1981a:1 - 2) cites Hick's report on the conference as stating that if dialogue between differing faiths is to be fully realistic and at all relevant, it would ultimately have to include all of the great world faiths. This sentiment was agreed to by all present.

5. SYNTHESIS

From these few examples, it is clear that the wheel of interfaith is in motion. In 1993, however, it is hoped that a centenary of the World Parliament of Religions will take place. This event is currently being planned under the auspices of the Unification Church.

In this regard, an interfaith conference has already taken place (November 1985) at McAffee, New Jersey. There, a far greater representation of the multiplicity of world faiths was evident

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*For a detailed report on the proceedings of this Conference, see: Engelbrecht, B. (1981). "Die Familie van Abraham." Unpublished. A report submitted to the H.S.R.C. on the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Conference held at the University of Birmingham, 21 - 24 September, 1981.

than was the case in 1893. A second conference is planned for 1989 and the third (1993) will coincide with the centenary of the Parliament.

With all that has taken place since 1893 in the realm of interfaith activity, the centenary can surely not be dictated to by a call for the Absoluteness of any particular faith. It is therefore hoped that the results of the centenary Parliament will be radically different from that of its great-grandparent and that the spark towards mutual understanding that was begun in 1893 will become an even larger flame.

If God is working his purpose out in history, then right now it seems that he is calling mankind to realise that the differing religions of the world are various ways of reaching the divine. He is calling us to participate in interfaith dialogue for the realisation of the "final" eschatological era: the "brotherhood of man".

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