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How to cite:

Perry, T.S. (1996) *The Christian Message in a Postmodern World: a critical re-appropriation of Hendrik Kraemer's theology of religions*, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/5351/

T.S. Perry

The Christian Message in a Postmodern World:
A Critical Re-Appropriation of Hendrik Kraemer's Theology of Religions

Doctor of Philosophy
1996

Abstract

This thesis is a critical re-appropriation of Hendrik Kraemer's theology of religions. Part I introduces theology of religions through the now familiar threefold typology: Karl Barth represents 'exclusivism,' Karl Rahner, 'inclusivism,' and John Hick, 'pluralism' (Chapter 1). It then argues that the typology implicitly represents non-pluralist approaches as theologically deficient and ethically insensitive while masking problems in pluralist positions (Chapter 2). It thus releases Kraemer from the typology and from the more emotive charges directed against 'exclusivism.' Part II chronologically and thematically surveys Kraemer's theology of religions, describing his missiological and theological contexts (Chapter 3) and summarising his major works (Chapter 4).

The crux of the argument comes in Part III. First, a survey of the contemporary philosophical climate is offered through a summary and critique of Jean-François Lyotard's interpretation of the postmodern condition. Subsequently, three theological responses are assessed with Mark C. Taylor's a/theology and John Milbank's theology presented as avoidable extremes while the work of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck is offered as a mediating position which is dubbed 'postmodern orthodoxy' (Chapter 5). Second, after reviewing key themes in Kraemer's position, theological and phenomenological criticisms are outlined and evaluated. Though they do not seriously threaten the position, these criticisms prohibit extreme interpretations of, and lead to slight modifications in, Kraemer's work (Chapter 6). Finally, when re-read through the lenses of postmodern orthodoxy, Kraemer's thought is shown to offer to contemporary theology of religions avenues of theological creativity which are nevertheless faithful to the Christian tradition (Chapter 7). The thesis concludes that Hendrik Kraemer's theology of religions is worthy of critical re-appropriation.

The Christian Message in a Postmodern World: A Critical Re-Appropriation of Hendrik Kraemer's Theology of Religions

T.S. Perry

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Durham
Department of Theology

1996

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Acknowledgements

Declaration

I confirm that no part of this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or any other university. I also confirm that the thesis conforms to the word limit set out in the Degree Regulations.

Introduction

"The question of Christianity's attitude and relationship to the religions of the world will not go away - and neither should it."[1] So Gavin D'Costa opens what is now a major collection of essays among the increasing amount of literature falling under the rubric of Christian theology of religions. Despite their expanding number, the various books and articles usually fall into one of three related but distinct methods of approaching the problem: historical, philosophical/theological and ethical.[2] This study is a contribution to the second dimension, for it is a theological argument for the critical re-appropriation of Hendrik Kraemer by contemporary Christian theology of religions. In order to properly introduce the study, the remaining paragraphs limit its scope, outline its argument, and summarise its aims.

1.   The Scope of the Study

The study's scope is confined explicitly to Christian theology of religions. It is not therefore a phenomenological study of specific religions or certain beliefs and practices. Though the value of careful investigation into the lives of diverse religious communities is not denied, such an activity is not undertaken here.[3] Second, neither is the study an example of comparative

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1. Gavin D'Costa, 'Preface' in <u>Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered</u>, ed. Gavin D'Costa, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), p. viii.

2. This deliberately parallels the 'three bridges' used by the contributors to <u>The Myth of Christian Uniqueness</u> to 'cross the Rubicon,' from the 'shores of exclusivism or inclusivism to pluralism.' They are 'The Historico-Cultural Bridge,' 'The Theologico-Mystical Bridge,' and 'The Ethico-Practical Bridge.' See Paul F. Knitter, 'Preface,' in <u>The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions</u>, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), pp. ix - xii.

3. See, for example, George Alfred James, <u>Interpreting Religion: The Phenomenological Approaches of Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye, W. Brede Kristensen, and Gerardus van der Leeuw</u>, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

theology, which is to say 'the detailed consideration of religious traditions other than one's own' which sometimes leads to innovative theological construction within the home tradition.[4] Finally, it is not an exercise in apologetics, either as a defence of the truth-claims of Christianity or as a challenge to the truth-claims of other religions.[5] Rather, the study attempts to understand, to assess, and to redeem the contribution of one member of the Christian community, Hendrik Kraemer, to the Christian understanding of other religions.

It is thus an example of Christian systematic theology: it is a critical and ordered reflection arising out of and remaining linked to a particular community of Christian faith. Explicitly and 'un-apologetically' confessional in nature, the study is written by a Christian and is intended for Christians. It is not and does not purport to be a metacritical theory of religion to which Muslims, Buddhists, or others should subscribe. It is incumbent upon them to construct their own theologies or atheologies of religions. So to summarise, subsequent chapters comprise a systematic reflection on the contribution of Hendrik Kraemer to Christian theology of religions in order to show that it continues to offer insights to Christians wrestling with the problem of religion particularly in the context of postmodernity.

2.   The Argument of the Study

Part I of the study provides an overview Christian theology of religions, thus setting the stage for an introduction to the life and work of Hendrik Kraemer. Chapter 1 explores the convention of the 'threefold typology' which organises Christian theology of religions into the following types. First, 'exclusivism' has been conventionally defined as that type which confines salvation within the borders of Christianity; second, 'inclusivism' holds that the salvation which occurs throughout the world is always the salvation of Christ; finally, 'pluralism' argues that the great religions are independently authentic contexts of salvation/liberation.[6] Each is explored through the contribution of one widely recognised representative, respectively Karl Barth, Karl

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4. Francis X. Clooney, 'Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books (1989 - 1995),' in Theological Studies, 56 (1995), p. 521.

5. For a defense of apologetics undertaken in an interreligious context, see Paul J. Griffiths, An Apology for Apologetics, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).

6. See for example John Hick, 'Review of Glyn Richards' Towards a Theology of Religions,' in Religious Studies, 29 (1990), p. 175.

Rahner, and John Hick. Chapter 2 then offers a suspicious reading of the threefold typology as a polemical device caricaturing actual exclusivist and inclusivist theories while masking serious problems in pluralist ones. First, an examination of its genealogy shows that the typology conceals a thesis about the inevitability of pluralism. Second, a comparison of the definitions set out above with actual exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist theories shows them to be reductionist. Finally, an attempt to rescue the typology by redefining the types in relation to questions of truth rather than related but distinct questions of salvation is shown to create more problems than it solves. This analysis is undertaken in order to liberate exclusivist and inclusivist approaches from the highly emotive, negatively charged baggage attributed to them in part through the typology. The typology cannot and should not be used, therefore, to prohibit reflection on openly traditional theologies of religions. Part I is a piece of conceptual analysis; its chapters amount to investigations *of*, rather than *in*, theology of religions.

Part II moves from these general remarks to the contribution of Hendrik Kraemer to the debate. Chapter 3 situates Kraemer in his historical context in three stages. It opens with a brief biography, from his birth in Amsterdam in 1888 to his death in Dreibergen in 1965, and a chronological introduction to his major publications. The second section sketches the early history of ecumenical Protestant missiology and its first three international conferences: the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, 1910, the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, 1928, and the Tambaram Meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1938. Particular attention will be given to Kraemer's contribution to the latter two conferences. His own theological development is set out in the third section, focusing specifically on his student and missionary years, his encounter with Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, and finally, his reaction against the American philosopher of religion, William Hocking. A direct encounter with Kraemer's theology of religions takes place in Chapter 4. It presents a systematic exposition of Kraemer's theology of religions as it is found in his more widely read works: The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, written in preparation for the Tambaram meeting; 'Continuity or Discontinuity,' his contribution to the post-Tambaram discussion, as reprinted in The Authority of the Faith; and finally Religion and the Christian Faith, the largest and most nuanced articulation of his position.[7]

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7. Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, (London: Edinburgh House, 1938); 'Continuity or Discontinuity' in The Authority of the Faith, ed. William Paton, (London: Oxford University Press, 1939); and Religion and the Christian Faith, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965).

Part II, then, constitutes a chronological and thematic survey of one position in theology of religions.

Part III argues that Kraemer's theology of religions not only stands up well to contemporary criticism, but suggests a position which is both philosophically and theologically sophisticated. Chapter 5 opens with a brief, two-step assessment of the current philosophical and theological climate. The first sketches postmodernism and postmodernity, centering specifically on the work of the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. It contends that while his prescriptive response to the end of modernity is deeply problematic, there is no reversing the postmodern turn. The second then considers theological responses to the postmodern turn. The a/theology of Mark C. Taylor and the theology of John Milbank are presented as extremes which can and should be avoided, while the work of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck is proposed as a more fruitful mediating position, which I call 'postmodern orthodoxy.' The stage is set for the critical re-appropriation of Hendrik Kraemer's theology of religions.

Chapter 6 begins the rehabilitation in three sections. In the first, four key themes are set out to summarise Kraemer's overall position. After expositions of biblical realism, the totalitarian approach, adaptation and the point of contact, the second then considers five theological criticisms. The first of these, attacking Kraemer's view of Scripture, both misunderstands that view and is itself deeply problematic. The remaining four, although more or less accurate, fail to consider Kraemer's historical context, his habit of rhetorical overemphasis, and the more subtle articulation of later work. Though they provide important boundaries against extreme readings, they do not therefore seriously undermine Kraemer's position. The final section considers two phenomenological criticisms: that Kraemer can account neither for intrareligious nor interreligious development. Though the validity of these objections is uncontested, I argue here that they can lead to a slight but not inconsequential modification in Kraemer's phenomenology rather than a wholesale rejection of it.

In three sections, the final chapter draws together the postmodern orthodoxy of chapter 5 and the key themes of chapter 6 in order to show that Kraemer's theology of religions continues to suggest ways of faithful theological creativity for Christians wrestling with the problem of religions in a postmodern world. The first shows that for postmodern theology of religions, biblical realism

entails both that it recognise the explicitly Christian nature of theology of religions and that it appreciate religious diversity as part of the Christian metanarrative. The second contends that the totalitarian approach brings to a postmodern theology of religions a suspicion of universal and neutral evaluative criteria, a resistance to the metacritical quest for a common religious 'core,' and an allowance that other religions are successful in bringing 'salvation' to their adherents. Finally, the third shows how the theme of adaptation rules out a strict incommensurability thesis by underscoring the need for both comparative theology and apologetics and how, through Kraemer's dialectical point of contact, legitimate but incomplete communication between traditions is possible.

3.   The Aims of the Study

If this argument is successful, it makes a strong case, first of all, for the reintroduction of Hendrik Kraemer's theology of religions to contemporary discussion.   Remembering his contribution is more often than not restricted to the missiological wing of the World Council of Churches, where his pioneering spirit, if not his theology, is honoured; Gavin D'Costa is perhaps the only contemporary theologian seriously to consider and criticise Kraemer at length. This study assesses and responds to the major criticisms in order to show that his contribution is not as easily dismissed as some might think. Second, the study seeks also to re-appropriate critically Kraemer's theology of religions.   In so doing, it presents a defensible position aware of contemporary philosophical and theological difficulties and how they impinge upon the theology of religions. This study is thus a theological argument for the critical re-appropriation of Hendrik Kraemer by contemporary Christian theology of religions.

PART I
THE THREEFOLD TYPOLOGY AND BEYOND

Chapter 1

The Threefold Typology

Introduction:

The classification of different approaches to Christian theology of religions according to type has become commonplace over the last decade.[1] For John Hick, 'the now fairly standard threefold division into exclusivism (salvation is confined to Christianity), inclusivism (salvation occurs throughout the world but is always the work of Christ), and pluralism (the great world faiths are different and independently authentic contexts of salvation/liberation)...' remains 'the simplest and least misleading classification....'[2] That this division is 'fairly standard' is undisputed; that it is the 'simplest and least misleading' is debatable. The following two chapters argue that this typology is useful for introductory, pedagogical purposes, but when pressed beyond these basic goals, it becomes a hindrance.

In order to demonstrate the first objective, this chapter uses the typology to introduce readers to Christian theology of religions. It centres on three theologians, each epitomising one

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1. See for example, Alan Race <u>Christians and Religious Pluralism</u>, (London: SCM, 1983; second edition, 1993); John Hick, 'A Philosophy of Religious Pluralism,' in <u>The World's Religious Traditions: Essays in Honour of Wilfred Cantwell Smith</u>, ed. Frank Whaling (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984); Gavin D'Costa, <u>Theology and Religious Pluralism</u>, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Jacques Dupuis, <u>Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions</u>, trans. Robert R. Barr, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989); Chester Gillis, <u>A Question of Final Belief: John Hick's Pluralistic Theory of Salvation</u>, (New York: St. Martin's, 1989) and <u>Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology</u>, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.).

2. John Hick, 'Review of Glyn Richards, <u>Towards a Theology of Religions</u>,' in <u>Religious Studies</u>, 26 (1990), p. 175. See also John Hick, ed. <u>Problems of Religious Pluralism</u> (New York: St. Martin's, 1985), chapters 3 and 4.

type: Karl Barth represents exclusivism, Karl Rahner, inclusivism, and John Hick, pluralism. This representational approach should not obscure the fact that each type is in reality a loose cluster of positions: though adherents may be united in the presuppositions from which they address the relationship between Christianity and other religions, the solutions advocated often vary. I have nevertheless chosen this approach for two reasons. First, by focusing on well-known, widely-recognised spokespersons, I hope to avoid accusations of bias. Second, the limited space limits me either to a broad examination of several exponents or a more thorough analysis of one; in order to give the reader a sufficiently detailed introduction, I have opted for the latter strategy. With these caveats in mind, I turn now to exclusivism and its representative, Karl Barth.

1.1   Exclusivism: Karl Barth

Caution is required when looking to Barth as a spokesman for exclusivism for three reasons. First, while Barth is commonly and correctly cited as an exclusivist, he does not represent all exclusivists; moreover despite his status in Reformed thought, neither does he speak for all Reformed exclusivists. This difficulty is compounded for in the vast majority of the literature, no contemporary exclusivist is extensively engaged. As S. Mark Heim observes, 'This either represents a failure in dialogue or, more likely, an inherent difficulty with a typology in which one type is hard to populate with actual representatives or exists simply to be condemned.'[3] Second, unlike Rahner and to a lesser extent Hick, Barth never produced a proper theology of religions.[4] One must therefore avoid the danger of forcing him to answer a question he never addressed. Finally, the Barthian corpus is extensive, and records significant development in Barth's thought. Consequently, one cannot simply confine the analysis to his early writings. Ignoring these dangers can only result in a misrepresentation of Barth and of exclusivism; however, awareness of them should yield an accurate exposition of both.

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3. S. Mark Heim, 'Criscrossing the Rubicon: Reconsidering Religious Pluralism,' in The Christian Century, 108 (1991), p. 689. I will explore this observation further in chapter 2.

4. J.A. Veitch, 'Revelation and Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth,' in Scottish Journal of Theology, 24 (1971), pp. 1 - 22, suggests that Barth intended to devote his attention to this problem after completing Volume V of the Dogmatics. According to Veitch (p. 20), Barth 'would probably have recognised other religions as occupying a place in the dialectic between Revelation and Religion which is synonymous with religiosity.'

The exposition opens with a brief reminder of Barth's theological method. Second, it considers 'The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion,' his only extended treatment of 'Religion' in the Church Dogmatics.[5] Finally, this consideration is supplemented by a brief look at both his doctrine of election and his views on the possibility of extra-Christian revelation in order to show that the Divine 'No!' to religion, with which many of Barth's critics are preoccupied, is balanced by his Divine 'Yes!' to humanity.[6]

For Barth, Christian theological method should be and inevitably is confessional. He unpacks this methodology in Fides Quaerens Intellectum,[7] which argues against dominant philosophical and theological opinion that Anselm was not a rationalist, but sought to bring reason into the service of faith. On this view, the ontological argument is not Anselm's attempt to prove God's existence but his endeavour better to understand that which has been revealed by God and apprehended by faith. Barth summarises his position in these words: 'We must be consistent here and confess that it is not possible to speak undogmatically about the confessional attitude of dogmatics, instead of standing ourselves within the confessional attitude.'[8] Whether or not this interpretation of Anselm is correct is, at this point, irrelevant; it nonetheless remains the most important statement of Barth's theological method.

To leave the matter here, however, would beg the questions, What has been given? What is confessed? Barth answers that the sole source of all Christian theology is a message beyond human anticipation; one which 'is not the right human thoughts about God... but the right divine

5. Karl Barth, 'The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion,' in The Church Dogmatics, Volume I.2, The Doctrine of the Word of God, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1978), pp. 280 - 361. Cited hereafter as CDI.2.

6. These can be found in Church Dogmatics, Volume II.2, The Doctrine of God, Part 2, trans. G.W. Bromiley, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957); and Volume IV.3, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, trans. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1961), respectively. Cited hereafter as CDII.2 and CDIV.3. Though this section follows the Dogmatics closely, it is important to note that the problem of religion is also a major theme in his commentary, The Epistle to the Romans, sixth edition, trans. Edwin C. Hoskyns, (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), especially pp. 42 - 49, 65 - 70, 229 - 270.

7. Karl Barth, Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, trans. Ian W. Robertson, (London: SCM, 1960).

8. CDI.2, p. 825.

thoughts about men.'[9] It is the threefold Word of God: the Church's proclamation of the gospel (the Word of God preached), the Scriptural witness to the gospel (the Word of God written), and the gospel event itself, Jesus Christ (the Word of God revealed).[10] 'We are speaking of three different forms of the Word of God and not of three different Words of God. In this threefold form and not otherwise - but also as the one Word only in this threefold form - the Word of God is given to us.... There is no distinction of degree or value between the three forms.'

> The revealed Word of God we know only from the Scripture adopted by Church proclamation or the proclamation of the Church based on Scripture.
> The written Word of God we know only through the revelation which fulfils proclamation or the proclamation fulfilled by revelation.
> The preached Word of God we know only through the revelation attested in Scripture or the Scripture which attests revelation.[11]

Thus, 'The possibility of knowledge of God's Word lies in God's Word and nowhere else.'[12]

Negatively speaking, this grounding in God's Word results in a firm rejection of all natural theology, i.e. the demonstration of certain truths concerning God's existence and nature, operating from premises knowable by any rational person independently of revelation. Barth writes,

> Christian natural theology very respectfully and in all humility re-casts revelation into a new form of its own devising. But for all that its behaviour is so respectful and forbearing, for all that it subordinates itself so consciously and consistently, natural theology has already conquered it at the very outset, making revelation into non-revelation. This will certainly show itself in what it does with the revelation that has been absorbed and domesticated by it.[13]

Positively speaking, because it accepts that humans are in themselves unable to know God, this grounding affirms that any and all knowledge of God must be revealed. For Barth, this revelation takes place in Jesus Christ: 'the eternal God is to be known in Jesus Christ and not elsewhere.'[14]

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9. Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 1.

10. Karl Barth, The Church Dogmatics, Volume I.1, The Doctrine of the Word of God, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1975), pp. 88 - 120 Cited hereafter as CDI.1.

11. CDI.1, pp. 120 - 121.

12. CDI.1, p. 222.

13. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Volume II.1, The Doctrine of God, Part 1, trans. T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1957), pp. 139 - 140.

14. Karl Barth, CDII.2, pp. 191 - 192.

Thus, the entire Barthian corpus is at bottom, a christological exercise. This must be kept in mind as I now move to consider the most extended treatment of religion in the <u>Dogmatics</u>.

'The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion' falls into three sections, the first addressing the problem of religion for theology. As Barth describes it, the possibility and reality of revelation are no less than the being and acting of God. 'We could not, therefore, regard the event of revelation as an interplay between God and man, between grace and nature.'[15] Revelation stands over all human activity, including religion. At the same time, however, revelation encounters humans and must therefore have the aspect and character of an human phenomenon. The human form of revelation is the Christian religion. 'It is something which may be grasped historically and psychologically. We can inquire into its nature and value as we can in the case of all others. We can compare it with other phenomena of a more or less similar type.'[16] Thus, the problem of religion in theology is not whether the non-Christian enjoys salvation, but how an historical, human religion has become the vehicle for the revelation of God's Word - Jesus Christ.[17]

This problem immediately raises a question of precedence: 'Does it mean that what we think we know of the nature and incidence of religion must serve as a norm and principle by which to explain the revelation of God; or *vice versa*, does it mean that we have to interpret the Christian religion and all other religions by what we are told by God's revelation?'[18] Whereas the Reformers

15. <u>CDI.2</u>, p. 280. See also his remarks against Emil Brunner's so-called 'natural theology,' in <u>Natural Theology: Comprising 'Nature and Grace' by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply 'No!' by Dr. Karl Barth</u>, trans. Peter Fraenkel, (London: Gefforey Bles, 1946), pp. 65 - 128 and his 1937 - 38 Gifford Lectures, <u>The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation: Recalling the Scottish Confession of 1560</u>, trans. J.L.M. Haire and Ian Henderson, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938). See especially 'Lecture I: "Natural Theology" and the Teaching of the Reformation,' pp. 3 - 12.

16. <u>CDI.2</u>, p. 281.

17. He writes, 'The revelation of God is actually the presence of God and therefore the hiddenness of God in the world of human religion. By God's revealing of Himself the divine particular is hidden in a human universal, the divine content in a human form, and therefore that which is divinely unique in something which is humanly only singular. Because and in so far as it is God's revelation to man, God Himself, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the incarnation of the Word, can be seen from this side, in the hiddenness which is obviously given to it along with its true humanity as a religious phenomenon, as a member of that series, as a particular concept within general observation and experience, as one content of a human form, which can have other contents and in which the divine uniqueness of that content cannot be perceived directly.' <u>CDI.2</u>, pp. 282 - 283.

18. <u>CDI.2</u>, p. 284.

sought to interpret the world (and hence religion) in light of revelation,[19] beginning in the seventeenth century, Protestant theology reversed the priority, subsuming revelation under religion.[20] Consequently, 'theology lost its object, revelation in all its uniqueness. And losing that, it lost the seed of faith with which it could move mountains, even the mountain of modern humanistic culture. That [Neo-Protestantism] really lost revelation is shown by the very fact that it could exchange it and with it its own birthright for the concept, "religion."'[21] Barth believes that he can solve the problem of religion in theology by restoring revelation to its proper place: the starting-point of all Christian theological reflection.[22] Thus reoriented, Barth can now discern how God's revelation is present in the world of human religion: 'Our basic task is so to order the concepts of revelation and religion that the connexion between the two can again be seen as identical with that event between God and man in which God is God, i.e., the Lord and Master of man, who Himself judges and alone justifies and sanctifies, and man is the man of God, i.e., man as he is adopted and received by God in His severity and goodness.'[23] The study, then, is not one based on the 'essence'

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19. CDI.2, pp. 292.

20. It 'fell prey to the absolutism with which the man of that period made himself the centre and measure and goal of all things. It was its duty to participate in this trend and lovingly to investigate it. But it was certainly not its duty to co-operate in it, which is what it did when in the time of Buddeus it openly turned "religionistic." But is was not what theology did that was really serious. It was what it did not do: its weakness and vacillation in the very substance of faith. In fact and in practice it ceased to regard the cardinal statements of the Lutheran and Heidelberg confessions as definite axioms. Originally and properly the sin was one of unbelief. It was that belittling of Christ which begins the moment He is no longer accepted as our One and All and we are secretly dissatisfied with His lordship and consolation.' CDI.2, pp. 293 - 294.

21. CDI.2, p. 294.

22. 'There can, therefore, be no question of a systematic coordination of God and man, of revelation and religion. For neither in its existence, nor in its relation to the first, can the second be considered, let alone defined, except in the light of the first. The only thing we can do is to recount the history of the relationships between the two: and even that takes place in such a way that whatever we have to say about the existence and nature and value of the second can only and exclusively be made plain in the light of the first, i.e., in the course of God's sovereign action on man. It is man as he is revealed in the light of revelation, and only that man, who can be seriously treated theologically. Similarly, the problem of religion in theology is not the question how the reality, religion, which has already been defined (and usually untheologically), can be now brought into an orderly and plausible relationship with the theological concepts, revelation, faith, etc. On the contrary, the question is uninterruptedly theological: What is this thing which from the standpoint of revelation and faith is revealed in the actuality of human life as religion?' CDI.2, pp. 296 - 297.

23. CDI.2, p. 297.

or 'evolution' of religion, but a theological one, starting from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.[24] He turns to this task in the chapter's remaining sections, 'Religion as Unbelief,' and 'True Religion.'

With these preliminaries in mind, I may now unpack Barth's view of religion, summarised as follows, 'religion is unbelief. It is a concern, indeed, ... the one great concern, of godless man.'[25] Despite the abrasive appearance of these sentences, Barth intends no negative value judgement. It is rather, simply a repetition of the judgement of God:

> this proposition is not in any sense a negative value-judgment. It is not a judgment of religious science or philosophy based upon some prior negative judgment concerned with the nature of religion. Above all it affects ourselves also as adherents of the Christian religion. It formulates the judgment of divine revelation upon all religion. It can be explained and expounded, but it cannot be proved by any phenomenology or history of religion. Since it aims only to repeat the judgment of God, it does not involve any human renunciation of human values, any contesting of the true and the good and the beautiful which a closer inspection will reveal in almost all religions, and which we naturally expect to find in abundant measure in our own religion, if we hold to it with any conviction. What happens is simply that man is taken by God and judged and condemned by God. That means, of course, that we are struck to the very roots, to the heart. Our whole existence is called into question.[26]

That religion is unbelief is the inevitable conclusion of an evaluation conducted from the standpoint of the revelation recorded in Scripture.

First of all, therefore, Barth sees revelation as extrinsic, coming to humanity from God. 'Revelation encounters man on the presupposition and in confirmation of the fact that man's attempts to know God from his own standpoint are wholly and entirely futile; not because of any necessity in principle, but because of a practical necessity of fact.'[27] Since revelation necessarily

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24. CDI.2, pp. 297 - 298.

25. CDI.2, pp. 299 - 300.

26. CDI.2, p. 300. Moreover, this starting point requires a tolerance which neither arises from a sloppy indifference toward religion, nor masks a condescending belief in one's superior knowledge or in one's religious scepticism. It demands one born of humility. 'Self-evidently, this kind of tolerance, and therefore a theological consideration of religion, is possible only for those who are ready to abase themselves and their religion together with man, with every individual man, knowing that they first and their religion, have need of tolerance, a strong forbearing tolerance.' CDI.2, p. 299.

27. CDI.2, p. 301.

tells humanity something completely new, any human attempt to speak of God which takes no account of God's revelation is unbelief. 'From the standpoint of revelation religion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God in his revelation wills to do and does do. It is the attempted replacement of the divine work by a human manufacture. The divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily and wilfully evolved by man.'[28] Through religion humanity tries to replace what God offers in revelation. 'In religion, man bolts and bars himself against revelation by providing a substitute, by taking away in advance the very thing which has to be given by God.'[29]

Not only is revelation extrinsic, but in the light of the human sinfulness just described, it is also utterly gracious. Here, Barth argues that 'revelation is the act by which in grace He [God] reconciles man to Himself by grace,'[30] and concludes that revelation necessarily contradicts religion just as religion opposes revelation. 'For what is the purpose of the universal attempt of religions to anticipate our own images of the One who is known only where He gives Himself to be known, images which are first spiritual, and then religious, and then actually visible?'[31] In revelation, God acts to save humanity; in religion humanity attempts to save itself. This is especially true of the 'pious elements' in the various religions. 'It is the characteristically pious element in the pious effort to reconcile Him to us which must be an abomination to God, whether idolatry is regarded as its

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28. CDI.2, p. 302.

29. CDI.2, p. 303.

30. CDI.2, p. 307. He elaborates: 'Jesus Christ does not fill out and improve all the different attempts of man to think of God and to represent Him according to his own standard. But as the self-offering of and self-manifestation of God He replaces and completely outbids those attempts, putting them in the shadows to which they belong.... The revelation of God in Jesus Christ maintains that our justification and sanctification, our conversion and salvation, have been brought about and achieved once and for all in Jesus Christ. And our faith in Jesus Christ consists in recognising and admitting and affirming and accepting the fact that everything has actually been done for us once and for all in Jesus Christ. He is the assistance that comes to us. He alone is the Word of God that is spoken to us. There is an exchange of status between Him and us: His righteousness and holiness are ours, our sin is His; He is lost for us, and we for His sake are saved. By this exchange... revelation stands or falls. It would not be the active, redemptive self-offering and self-manifestation of God, if it were not centrally and decisively the *satisfatio* and *intercessio Jesu Christi.*' p. 308.

31. CDI.2, p. 308.

presupposition or its result or perhaps as both.[32] For these reasons, wherever revelation graciously confronts religion, religion is revealed to be unbelief.

These observations sharpen the question posed above to read, 'How can an historical, human religion become the vehicle for the revelation of God given that all religion is unbelief?' Barth answers this question in the third section of the chapter by contending that 'we can speak of a "true" religion only in the sense in which we speak of a "justified sinner."'[33]

> The abolishing of religion by revelation need not mean only its negation: the judgment that religion is unbelief. Religion can just as well be exalted in revelation, even though the judgment still stands. It can be upheld by it and concealed in it. It can be justified by it, and - we must at once add - sanctified. Revelation can adopt human religion and mark it off as true religion. And it not only can. How do we come to assert that it can, if it has not already done so? There is a true religion: just as there are justified sinners. If we abide strictly by that analogy - and we are dealing not merely with an analogy, but in a comprehensive sense with the thing itself - we need have no hesitation in saying that the Christian religion is the true religion.[34]

Before this contention can be explored further however, it must be made clear that Barth is neither assuming nor proving the superiority of the Christian religion. For as a religion, it is also unbelief. 'We must insist, therefore, that at the beginning of a knowledge of the truth of the Christian religion, there stands the recognition that this religion, too, stands under the judgment that religion is unbelief, and that it is not acquitted by any inward worthiness, but only by the grace of God, proclaimed and effectual in His revelation.'[35] Christianity is also judged by revelation. 'It is the same self-exaltation of man.... But this time it is in place of and in opposition to the self-manifestation and self-offering of God,... it is in disregard of the divine consolations and admonitions that great and small Babylonian towers are erected....'[36] Yet if the Christian religion is unbelief, wherein lies its truth? It lies, says Barth, solely in its fourfold relationship to Jesus Christ. First, the relationship between Christianity and Christ is an act of divine creation: Christianity is

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32. <u>CD</u>I.2, p. 310.

33. <u>CD</u>I.2, p. 325.

34. <u>CD</u>I.2, p. 326.

35. <u>CD</u>I.2, p. 327.

36. <u>CD</u>I.2, p. 327.

grounded in the reality of Jesus Christ.[37] Second, it is the result of divine election. Though the rise

of Christianity may be attributed to many social, religious, and political factors, Barth says these

are secondary. The rise of Christianity results primarily from the gracious election of God in Jesus

Christ.[38] Third, it is an act of divine justification. 'If the Christian religion is the right and true

religion, the reason for it does not reside in the facts which might point to itself or its own adherents,

but in the fact which as the righteousness and the judgment of God confronts it as it does all other

religions, characterising and differentiating it and not one of the others as the right and true

religion.'[39] Rather, it 'is only as forgiveness that the truth adopts the Christian religion. It is only as

forgiveness that it can be known as a definition which in the last resort is inalienably peculiar to the

Christian religion.'[40] Finally, it is an act of divine sanctification. Christianity's holiness and

authority is always and only the holiness and authority of Jesus Christ. It is not justified because it

is holy, but because it is justified, it becomes holy. And this act of sanctification takes place only as

Christianity proclaims Jesus Christ.[41] Thus, Barth answers the question, 'How can an historical,

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37. CDI.2, p. 346. He writes, 'The Christian religion is the predicate to the subject of the name of Jesus Christ. Without him it is not merely something different, it is nothing at all.... It was and is and shall be only in virtue of the act of creation indicated by this name. And it is because of this act of creation that along with its existence it also receives its truth. Because it was and is and shall be through the name of Jesus Christ, it was and is and shall be the true religion....' p. 347.

38. 'That it pleased God at that time and place and in that way to reveal Himself in the name of Jesus Christ, is something which had its necessity in itself, and not in circumstances and conditions prior to that name. From that day to this it is election by the free grace and compassion of God if in virtue of the name of Jesus Christ the Christian religion is a reality and not a nothingness. As there is a *creatio continua* so also there is an *electio continua*, better described, of course, as God's faithfulness and patience.' CDI.2, p. 349.

39. CDI.2, pp. 353 - 354.

40. CDI.2, pp. 354 - 355. He continues, 'It means that the Christian religion is snatched from the world of religions and the judgment and sentence pronounced upon it, like a brand from the burning. It is not that some men are vindicated as opposed to others, or one part of humanity as opposed to other parts of the same humanity. It is that God Himself is vindicated as opposed to and on behalf of all men and all humanity. That it can receive and accept this is the advantage and pre-eminence of Christianity, and the light and glory in which its religion stands. And as it does not have this light and glory of itself, no one can take it away from it. And it alone has the commission and the authority to be a missionary religion, i.e., to confront the world of religions as the one true religion, with absolute self-confidence to invite and challenge it to abandon its ways and to start on the Christian way.' CDI.2, pp. 356 - 357.

41. 'The Christian religion is the sacramental area created by the Holy Spirit, in which the God whose Word became flesh continues to speak through the sign of His revelation. And it is also the existence of men created by the same Holy Spirit, who hear this God continually speaking in His revelation. The Church and the children of God do actually exist. The actuality of their existence is quite unassuming, but it is always visible and in its visibility it is significant. It is an actuality which is called and dedicated to the

human religion become the vehicle for the revelation of God given that all religion is unbelief?' quite simply: it is only through the creating, electing, justifying and sanctifying grace of God in Jesus Christ that this can and does occur.

The phrase, 'Religion as Unbelief' thus characterises what in Barth's view is the Divine 'No' to human religion. Let us now briefly consider the Divine 'Yes' as it is found first in his doctrine of election. As with all his theology, Barth's doctrine of election is Christocentric. In Jesus Christ, the elect one, God damns and elects all humanity: 'The rejection which all men incurred, the wrath of God under which all men lie, the death which all men must die, God in his love for men transfers from all eternity to Him in whom He loves and elects them, and whom He elects at their head and in their place.'[42] Unlike traditional Reformed theology, there is no 'terrible decree' whereby God elects some to salvation, passing over the rest to His judgement.[43] Rather, in Christ, all humanity is at once damned and elect: 'in the election of Jesus Christ which is the eternal will of God, God has ascribed to man... election, salvation and life; and to Himself He has ascribed... reprobation, perdition and death.'[44] As has been seen, Barth maintains that Christianity alone has the divine mandate to be a missionary religion.[45] He picks up this theme again when he writes that, for Christians, truth is not a possession but a vocation: 'The essence of their vocation is that God makes them His witnesses.'[46] The Church is to proclaim to all that Jesus Christ has lived, died and lives again for them, that they already stand in the light of life. 'In each and every man to whom it is directed it is concerned, not with an actual, but certainly with a virtual or potential Christian, with a *christianus designatus*, with a *christianus in spe*. It is concerned with a creature ordained to know and realise his membership of the body of Christ.'[47] Whether or not this amounts to a

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declaration of the name of Jesus Christ. And that is the sanctification of the Christian religion.' CDI.2, p. 359.

42. CDII.2, p. 123.

43. See, for example, John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), Book III, chapter 23, pp. 947 - 964.

44. CDII.2, p. 167.

45. CDI.2, p. 359.

46. CDIV.3, p. 575.

47. CDIV.3, p. 810.

Christocentric universalism, Barth is quite clear that humanity's unbelief is nullified by God's election.[48]

Consider finally Barth's view of extra-Christian revelation, or 'other words' of God. Once more, he opens the discussion with a question: 'Are there really true words, parables of the kingdom,... which are not spoken in the Bible or the Church, but which have to be regarded as true in relation to the one Word of God, and therefore heard like this Word, and together with it[?]'[49] His answer, quite simply, is yes: 'there are such words and... [the Church] must hear them too, notwithstanding its life by this one Word and its commission to preach it.'[50] Of course, these 'words' stand in harmony with the Word and it is by this agreement that they are recognised.

> We do not refer to words which might tempt [the Church] from its task or make it unwilling or incompetent to discharge it. We refer simply to those which make it apparent that the war in which it is engaged has already been fought to a finish by its Lord, that the world in which it has to work has not been abandoned by Him..., that [the world] is not wholly destitute of the Word which the community has been set among it to proclaim. We refer, then, to the words in which the community, when it hears them, can find itself lightened, gladdened, and encouraged in the execution of its own task.[51]

Jesus Christ, who has reconciled the world to God, can speak and has spoken 'parables of the Kingdom' not only through the Church, but through secularism and, by extrapolation, other religions.[52]

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48. Barth remained cryptic about the universal salvation implied by his doctrine of election, saying only 'I do not teach it, but I also do not not teach it.' Quoted by Eberhard Jüngel in Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy, trans. Garrett E. Paul, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), pp. 44 - 45. For Barth's direct statements on *apokastasis* and universalism, see CDII.2, pp. 417 - 418 and his The Humanity of God, trans. Thomas Wieser and John Thomas, (Richmond: John Knox, 1970), pp. 61 - 62. To this day, the question remains unsettled. For a universalist interpretation of Barth see Hans Urs von Balthasar, The Theology of Karl Barth, trans. John Drury, (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 163 and Michael Barnes, Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), pp. 29 - 34. For a non-universalist interpretation, see John Colwell, 'The Contemporaneity of the Divine Decision: Reflections on Barth's Denial of "Universalism",' in Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), pp. 139 - 160.

49. CDIV.3, p. 114.

50. CDIV.3, pp. 114 - 115.

51. CDIV.3, p. 115.

52. CDIV.3, p. 117.

This is not to smuggle natural theology into the <u>Dogmatics</u> for Barth is adamant that 'we have no need to appeal either for basis or content to the sorry hypothesis of a so-called "natural theology".... Even if this were theologically meaningful or practicable (which it is not), it could not provide us with what is required.'[53]   Uninterested in 'abstract impartations concerning God's existence... and man's responsibility towards Him,' which is at most all natural theology can accomplish, Barth remains established in 'the sure ground of Christology... and the Christian community established and living by the Gospel....'[54]   His thesis is

> simply that the capacity of Jesus Christ to create these human witnesses is not restricted to His working on and in prophets and what is thus made possible and actual in His community. His capacity transcends the limits of this sphere. We may thus expect, and count upon it, that even among those who are outside this sphere and its particular orders and conditions He will use His capacity to make of men, quite apart from and even in face of their own knowledge or volition, something which they could never be of themselves, namely, His witnesses, speaking words which can seriously be called true.[55]

Barth's version of exclusivism can now be summarised as follows: First, it is epistemologically exclusive. The 'truths' of Religion, as human creations, are contradicted by the Truth of God's revelation - Jesus Christ. Though there are true 'parables of the Kingdom' to be found in all spheres of life including religions, these can be recognised only by their harmony with the threefold Word of God. Second, it is soteriologically inclusive. All humanity is caught up into God's salvation which has been accomplished once and for all in Jesus Christ. Moreover, this salvation is realised *despite* any and all religion, including Christianity. As J.A. Veitch has written, 'In volume one the *negative* side of the dialectic (between Revelation and Religion) emerges as a dominant factor and in volume four the *positive* side emerges to redress the balance.'[56] Having completed the survey of Barth, let us now move to Rahner and inclusivism.

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53. <u>CD</u>IV.3, p. 117.

54. <u>CD</u>IV.3, p. 117.

55. <u>CD</u>IV.3, p. 118.

56. Veitch, 'Revelation and Religion,' p. 20.

1.2   Inclusivism: Karl Rahner

While inclusivism is by no means a solely Roman Catholic position in theology of religions;[57] since Vatican II, it has dominated other positions in Roman Catholic thought.[58] Therefore, I have chosen the 'chief engineer'[59] of the Council's position to represent inclusivism. In the following paragraphs, I consider Karl Rahner's 'Anonymous Christianity,' as developed

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57. It is also a theme in Protestant missiology. See, for instance, the classic exposition of mainstream Protestant inclusivism: John Farquhar, The Crown of Hinduism, (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1971, [London: Oxford University Press, 1913]). Yet, inclusivist approaches are not limited to mainstream Protestantism. Though evangelical Protestantism is often caricatured as the most exclusive of exclusivisms, inclusivism has been a recurring if minority position throughout its history. It can be found in one of its earliest forms: Methodism. See for example, John Wesley, 'On Living Without God,' in The Works of John Wesley, third edition, 14 volumes (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1986), volume 7, p. 353; 'Walking by Sight and By Faith,' volume 7, p. 258; 'The General Spread of the Gospel,' volume 6, p. 286; 'On Faith,' volume 7, pp.197 - 199. A mid-twentieth century advocate was C.S. Lewis. See his God In the Dock, ed. Walter Hooper, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 102, 111 - 112, 160; Mere Christianity, (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 54, 65, 176. Lewis' inclusivism is also found in his Chronicles of Narnia. See especially The Last Battle, (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 143 - 148, 152 - 153. A contemporary exponent of evangelical inclusivism is Canadian theologian, Clark Pinnock. See, for example, 'Why is Jesus the Only Way?' Eternity, in December, 1976, pp. 14 - 15, 34; 'The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions,' in Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World, ed. Mark Noll and David Wells, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 152 - 168; 'Inclusive Finality or Universally Accessible Salvation,' paper presented at the 1989 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society; 'Toward and Evangelical Theology of Religions,' in Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 33 (1990), pp. 359 - 368; 'Acts 4:12: No Other Name under Heaven,' in Through No Fault of their Own? The Fate of those who Never Heard. ed. William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), pp. 107 - 116; and A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

58. For example, some Roman Catholic theologians lean toward exclusivism: for example Jean Daniélou, 'Religion and Revelation,' in Prayer as a Political Problem, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967); Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 'Christianity and the World Religions,' in One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, ed. H. Vorgrimler, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), pp. 297 - 336; and Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Catholicism and the Religions,' in Communio, 5 (1978), pp. 6 - 14; while others advance a more pluralistic position: see Paul Knitter, No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), Part III, 'A More Authentic Dialogue,' pp. 169 - 232; 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), pp. 178 - 202; 'Hans Küng's Theological Rubicon,' in Toward a Universal Theology of Religion, ed. Leonard Swidler, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987); Leonard Swidler, 'Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue: The Matrix for all Systematic Reflection Today,' in Toward a Universal Theology of Religion, pp. 5 - 50; and Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Particularism and Universalism in the Search for Religious Truth,' in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, pp. 137 - 148

59. B.R. Brinkman, 'Theology Present to Itself: A Tribute to Karl Rahner,' in The Heythrop Journal, 25 (1984), p. 258.

throughout his Theological Investigations, following an outline based on 'Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,' and referring to other essays where appropriate.[60]

Before proceeding, however, I must unpack Rahner's notion of the 'supernatural existential,' a proper understanding of which is necessary for not only a correct interpretation of his theology of religions, but his entire theological project. Offered as a mediating position between extremes he calls 'extrinsicism' (which holds that divine self-communication imposes itself upon humans) and 'intrinsicism,' (which holds that it arises naturally within them),[61] the 'supernatural existential' argues that divine self-communication is both an act of free grace and a constitutive element in every person. Rahner thus affirms divine self-communication both as extrinsic (coming to humans from God and hence supernatural) and as intrinsic (a formative part of human nature and hence existential).[62] God's communication is a result of universal and prevenient grace.[63] It is extended to all persons at all times in all places prior to any human activity. Consequently,

> the religions which *de facto* do exist outside Christianity and the Old Testament are not merely the outcome of human speculation, human wickedness or a self-willed decision on man's part to devise a religion for himself instead of accepting it from God. Instead of this the "supernatural existential", the dynamic impulse present in man by the power of grace and impelling him towards the triune God, is at work in all these religions and plays a decisive part in determining the forms in which these religions are objectively expressed.[64]

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60. See, Karl Rahner, 'Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,' in Theological Investigations, Volume V, trans. Karl-H. Kruger, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966), pp. 115 - 134. Cited hereafter as TIV.

61. For his attack on extrinsicism, see Karl Rahner, 'Nature and Grace,' in Theological Investigations, Volume IV, trans. Kevin Smyth, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966), pp. 165 - 188. For his attack on intrinsicism, see Karl Rahner, Hearers of the Word, trans. Michael Richards, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), pp. 112 - 114.

62. For a full account of the 'supernatural existential,' see Karl Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity, trans. William V. Dych, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978), chapter IV, 'Man as the Event of God's Free and Forgiving Self-Communication,' pp. 116 - 137; and especially IV.3, 'The Offer of Self-Communication as "Supernatural Existential",' pp. 126 - 132.

63. See Karl Rahner, 'Church, Churches and Religions,' in Theological Investigations, Volume X, trans. David Bourke, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), p. 36 where Rahner writes, '"revelation history" is always and everywhere taking place because of God's act of supernatural self-bestowal considered as that which raises and re-orientates the transcendental dimension of the human spirit by the power of grace....' Cited hereafter as TIX.

64. TIX, p. 46.

With this in mind, let us now consider 'Anonymous Christianity.'

For Rahner, reflection on religious plurality is not only academic exercise; it is primarily a pastoral problem for four reasons. First, after two thousand years of Christian mission, different religions continue to exist.[65] Second, all religions today face the widespread and well-organised denial of religions in general. 'This denial, organised on the basis of a State, represents itself as *the religion* of the future - as the decided, absolute secularization of human existence excluding all mystery.'[66] Third, cultural interpenetration, by bringing people of diverse religions together, has made religious plurality an existential question not only for theologians, but for everyone.[67] The most provocative reason, however, lies in the very nature of Christianity. 'For no other religion - not even Islam - maintains so absolutely that it is *the* religion, the one and only valid revelation of the one living God as does the Christian religion.'[68]

While Rahner admits that such reflection could be undertaken in a variety of disciplines, from many different angles, he clearly sets forth a '*Catholic* dogmatic interpretation of the non-Christian religions,' and continues, 'we will pose our question not as empirical historians of religion but out of the self-understanding of Christianity itself, i.e. as dogmatic theologians.'[69] Having thus articulated his starting-point, he then outlines four theses wherein he argues that it is indeed possible to suppose that God is savingly present in the non-Christian religions.

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65. TIV, p. 116. See also 'Anonymous Christians,' in <u>Theological Investigations</u>, Volume VI, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1969), p. 390. Cited hereafter as TIVI.

66. TIV, p. 116.

67. TIV, pp. 116 - 117; see also TIX, p. 30.

68. TIV, p. 116.

69. TIV, pp. 117 - 118. See also 'Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions,' in <u>Theological Investigations</u>, Volume XVII, trans. Margaret Kohl, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981), p. 39; and also TIX, p. 32 where Rahner writes, 'what we are looking for, therefore, is an answer which we cannot, in any sense, attempt to find a basis for in the history or philosophy of religion, or from some position in which we remain uncommitted to the creed of a specific religion. On the contrary, we are seeking for an answer which the Catholic Christian must give on the basis of his own Christianity and according to the principles proper to this.'

The first thesis states that 'Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognise any other religion beside itself as of equal right.'[70] This is self-evident and basic to Christianity's self-understanding; it is to be asserted, not argued.

> Valid and lawful religion for Christianity is... God's action on men, God's free self-revelation by communicating himself to man. It is God's relationship to men, freely instituted by God himself and revealed by God in this institution. *This* relationship of God to man is basically the same for all men, because it rests on the Incarnation, death and resurrection of the one Word of God become flesh. Christianity is God's own interpretation in his Word of this relationship of God to man founded in Christ by God himself.[71]

This immediately raises the problem of history for Christianity 'has not always and everywhere been *the* way of salvation for men - at least not in its historically tangible ecclesio-sociological constitution and in the reflex fruition of God's saving activity in, and in view of, the Cross.'[72] From this it follows that Christianity must confront individuals in an historical way, facing them as the absolute and final religion. 'It is therefore a question of whether this moment when the existentially real demand is made by the absolute religion in its historically tangible form, takes place really at the same chronological moment for all men, or whether the occurrence of this moment has itself a history and thus is not chronologically simultaneous for all men, cultures and spaces of history.'[73] According to the former view, the validity of Judaism, and hence all religions, was abolished by the apostles' preaching after Pentecost, while the latter holds that Christianity abolishes a religion only when it becomes 'a real historical factor in an individual history and culture - a real historical moment in a particular culture.'[74] Though Rahner does not show the former to be inadequate, he believes the latter better 'corresponds to the real historicity of Christianity and salvation-history.'[75]

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70. TIV, p. 118. See also TIVI, p. 390; TIX, p. 31 and pp. 40 - 41 where Rahner writes, 'The Catholic Church cannot think of herself as one among many historical manifestations in which the *one and the same* God-man Jesus Christ is made present, which are offered by God to man for him to choose whatever he likes. On the contrary she must necessarily think of herself as the one total presence in history of the one God-man in his truth and grace, and as such as having a fundamental relationship to all men.'

71. TIV, p. 118.

72. TIV, p. 118.

73. TIV, p. 119.

74. TIV, p. 119.

75. TIV, p. 120; see also TIX, p. 48.

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This leads him to qualify the first thesis in the following way: 'we maintain positively only that, as regards destination, Christianity is the absolute and hence the only religion for all men. We leave it, however, an open question (at least in principle) at what exact point in time the absolute obligation of the Christian religion has in fact come into effect for every man and culture, even in the sense of the *objective* obligation of such a demand.'[76] In so doing, he introduces the second:

> Until the moment when the gospel really enters into the historical situation of an individual, a non-Christian religion... does not merely contain elements of a natural knowledge of God, elements, moreover, mixed up with human depravity which is the result of original sin and later aberrations. It contains also supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ. For this reason a non-Christian religion can be recognized as a *lawful* religion (although only in different degrees) without thereby denying the error and depravity contained in it.[77]

Thus, a non-Christian religion is valid only until Christianity becomes a real historical factor in an individual history or culture. Again, though the question of chronology remains open, this thesis points toward the view that Christianity becomes absolute only when it confronts specific histories, cultures, and peoples at specific times, in specific places.

In so arguing, Rahner implies 'that it is *a priori* quite possible to suppose that there are supernatural, grace-filled elements in non-Christian religions.'[78] This, however, is not to say, first of all, that the various conceptions of the Ultimate, ethics and metaphysics found in the religions 'may be treated as harmless either in theory or in practice.'[79] Moreover, because the implication is not concerned with an *a posteriori* history of religions, neither does it mean that one can discern between those aspects in the various religions which are willed by God and those which are not. 'We are here concerned with dogmatic theology and so can merely repeat the universal and unqualified verdict as to the unlawfulness of the non-Christian religions right from the moment

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76. TIV, p. 120. Still, 'It can and must be said that these non-Christian religions are in principle, and in themselves, overtaken and rendered obsolete by the coming of Christ and by his death and resurrection.... This means that the historical expansion of Christianity, which even today has not yet simply been concluded, coincides with a progressive abrogation of the legitimacy of these religions.' TIX, p. 47.

77. TIV, p. 121.

78. TIV, p. 121.

79. TIV, p. 122.

when' they came into real and historically powerful contact with Christianity.'[80] In this thesis, Rahner simply asserts that God's grace is active in the non-Christian religions.

His reasons for doing so rest 'ultimately on the fact that, if we wish to be Christians, we must profess belief in the *universal and serious salvific purpose of God* towards all men which is true even within the post-paradisean phase of salvation dominated by original sin.'[81] Yet this fact cannot stand alone for Christians must also affirm that 'this salvation willed by God is *the salvation won by Christ.*'[82] It is the dynamic tension created by these two *prima facie* opposing beliefs which leads Rahner to the above implication for 'these two aspects cannot be reconciled in any other way then [sic] by stating that every human being is really and truly exposed to the influence of divine, supernatural grace which offers an interior union with God and by means of which God communicates himself whether the individual takes up an attitude of acceptance or of refusal towards this grace.'[83]

Furthermore, it is both cruel to suppose that the millions of human beings living in extra-Christian history are so sinful that the offer of grace should be withheld from them and callous to think that grace is extended, but remains ineffective.[84] 'For as far as the gospel is concerned, we

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80. TIV, p. 122.

81. TIV, p. 122 (my emphasis); see also TIX, p. 33.

82. TIV, p. 122 (my emphasis); see also 'Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions,' and TIX, pp. 38 - 39 where Rahner writes, 'we do not intend to assert that the salvation history and revelation history of God is identical with that particular area in the religious history of mankind which is confined to the Old and the New Testaments or to those who have had an explicit faith in Jesus Christ.... [We intend to say] that the whole salvation history and revelation history of mankind is coexistent with the history of mankind as personal and spiritual and with all that is morally good in this. And inasmuch as it is coexistent in this sense with the history of the human spirit the whole of it is sustained in being by that transcendental self-bestowal of God which is grace-given and which finds its supreme and irreversible manifestation in history, and the same time its free acceptance on the part of humanity, in the God-man Jesus Christ.... The God-man, then, is the supreme and climactic point in God's bestowing of himself upon mankind, such that he supplies meaning to the whole of this divine self-bestowal right from its inception.... [To] postulate a salvation and revelation history of this kind is no sense to deny the absolute character of Christ himself, of Christianity as an explicit faith, or of the Church as the visible expression of the abiding presence of Christ.'

83. TIV, p. 123. See also TIVI, p. 391; TIX, p. 31.

84. TIVI, p. 391.

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have no really conclusive reason for thinking so pessimistically of men."[85] On the other hand, Christians have every reason to be optimistic about the salvific will of God:

> However little we can say with certitude about the final lot of an individual inside or outside the officially constituted Christian religion, we have every reason to think optimistically - i.e. truly hopefully and confidently in a Christian sense - of God who has certainly the last word and who has revealed to us that he has spoken his powerful word of reconciliation and forgiveness into the world.... Christ and his salvation are not simply one of two possibilities offering themselves to man's free choice; they are the deed of God which bursts open and redeems the false choice of man by overtaking it. In Christ God not only gives the *possibility* of salvation, which in that case would still have to be effected by man himself, but the actual salvation itself, however much this includes also the right decision of human freedom which is itself a gift from God. Where sin already existed, grace came in superabundance. And hence we have every right to suppose that grace has not only been offered even outside the Christian Church... but also that, in a great many cases at least, grace gains the victory in man's free acceptance of it.[86]

On this basis, Rahner concludes that grace is at work and is being accepted 'in the spiritual, personal life of the individual, no matter how primitive, unenlightened, apathetic and earth-bound such a life may at first sight appear to be.'[87] If Christians truly believe in the universal salvific will of God *and* that this salvation was won by Christ, 'it need not and cannot really be doubted that gratuitous influences of properly Christian supernatural grace are conceivable in the life of all men... and that these influences can be presumed to be accepted in spite of the sinful state of men and in spite of their apparent estrangement from God.'[88]

From here, Rahner's second thesis goes on to imply that 'the actual religions of "pre-Christian" humanity too must not be regarded as simply illegitimate from the very start, but must also be seen as quite capable of having a positive significance.'[89] In differing ways and to varying degrees, non-Christian religions are lawful religions: their use by people at certain points in time 'can be regarded on the whole as a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for attaining salvation, a means which is therefore positively included in God's plan of salvation.'[90]

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85. _TIV_, p. 123.

86. _TIV_, pp. 123 - 124.

87. _TIV_, p. 125.

88. _TIV_, p. 125.

89. _TIV_, p. 125.

90. _TIV_, p. 125.

The prime example of this implication for Rahner is the Old Covenant, which, despite its mixture of God-willed and corrupt elements, was 'willed by God, providential for the Israelites and indeed the lawful religion for them.'[91] Consequently, one can assume neither that a lawful religion must be free from corruption or all-too-human elements, nor that it contains criteria which would enable one to discern those elements which are God-willed from those which are not. 'We must therefore rid ourselves of the prejudice that we can face a non-Christian religion with the dilemma that it must either come from God in everything it contains and thus correspond to God's will and positive providence, or be simply a purely human construction.'[92] If God's grace is active in all aspects of his creation, if it is active in a supernaturally existential way in human life, then it will inevitably become a 'formative factor of life in the concrete, even where... this life turns the relationship to the absolute into an explicit theme, viz. in religion.'[93]

Furthermore, it must be possible for every individual in this life to partake in a saving relationship with God; otherwise, one cannot say that God's salvific will is universal in scope. And the social nature of humanity leads Rahner to conclude that human beings will rarely, if ever, enter into this relationship in an entirely interior and private manner. On the contrary people will do so through the religious environment in which they find themselves.

> If man had to be and could always and everywhere be a *homo religiosus* in order to save himself as such, then he was this *homo religiosus* in the concrete religion in which "people" lived and had to live at that time. He could not escape this religion, however much he may have and did take up a critical and selective attitude towards this religion on individual matters, and however much he may have and did put different stresses in practice on certain things which were at variance with the official theory of his religion.
> If, however, man can always have a positive, saving relationship to God, and if he always had to have it, then he has always had it within *that* religion which in practice was at his disposal by being a factor in his sphere of existence.[94]

In summary, the second thesis may be stated as follows: First, if grace is active in the world generally and in the lives of human beings specifically, then it will be present when these human beings turn their thoughts toward the absolute, i.e. in their religions. Accordingly, human

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91. TIV, p. 127.

92. TIV, p. 127.

93. TIV, p. 127.

94. TIV, p. 128.

beings who encounter and employ these gracious elements in their religions can and do enter into a saving relationship with God. This means neither that all elements of a religion are lawful nor that every religion is lawful. It especially does not mean that the Old Covenant is not somehow unique as the historical predecessor to the New, but that like all religions, it is a mixture of divine and human elements. The thesis states simply that 'by the fact that in practice man as he really is can live... [in] relationship to God only in society, man must have had the right and indeed the duty to live this relationship to God within the religious and social realities offered to him in his particular historical situation.'[95]

If this is correct, then Rahner's third thesis logically follows. He writes, 'Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an *anonymous Christian*.'[96] The non-Christian is not someone in whose life grace has not been active. On the contrary, grace, 'understood as the *a priori* horizon of all his spiritual acts, accompanies his consciousness subjectively, even though it is not known objectively.'[97] Therefore, when the Christian revelation comes through proclamation, it does not come as something absolutely unknown. Though this thesis cannot be formulated dogmatically, Rahner believes that

> if it is true that a person who becomes the object of the Church's missionary efforts is or may be already someone on the way towards his salvation, and someone who in certain

95. TIV, p. 131.

96. TIV, p. 131 (my emphasis). See also 'Observations on the Problem of Anonymous Christianity,' in Theological Investigations, Volume XIV, trans. David Bourke, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976), pp. 280 - 294 and TIVI, p. 391 where he writes, 'But this means in its turn that there must be degrees of membership of the Church, not only in ascending order from being baptised, through the acceptance of the fullness of the Christian faith and the recognition of the visible head of the Church, to the living community of the Eucharist, indeed to the realisation of holiness, but also in descending order from the explicitness of baptism into a non-official and anonymous Christianity which can and should be called Christianity in a meaningful sense, even though it cannot and would not describe itself as such.' It must also be noted that while Rahner did not particularly like the term 'anonymous Christianity,' because of its often and all-too-easy misinterpretation, he failed to find a better one. In an effort to avoid further misunderstanding, he offers this definition: 'anonymous Christianity' and 'anonymous Christians' 'signify nothing else than the fact that according to the doctrine of the Church herself an individual can already be in possession of sanctifying grace, can in other words be justified and sanctified, a child of God, an heir to heaven, positively orientated by grace towards his supernatural and eternal salvation even before he has explicitly embraced a credal statement of the Christian faith and been baptized,' in 'Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church,' in Theological Investigations, Volume XII, trans. David Bourke, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), p. 165. Cited hereafter as TIXII.

97. TIV, p. 131; see also TIVI, pp. 392 - 394.

circumstances finds it, without being reached by the proclamation of the Church's message - and if it is at the same time true that this salvation which reaches him in this way is Christ's salvation, since there is no other salvation - then it is possible to be not only an anonymous theist but also an anonymous Christian.[98]

In this way, the proclamation of the gospel may be seen as the vehicle which brings the anonymous Christian to explicit Christianity and into its socially constituted form, the Church. Hence, anonymous Christianity is part of Christian development, is thus willed by God, and does not render the proclamation of the gospel and the missionary work of the church superfluous.[99] It is simply a reminder that God's grace goes before all mission and evangelism.[100]

So, on the one hand religious plurality persists (and there is no reason to assume after two thousand years of Christian mission that it will not), and on the other, Christianity can and should continue seek converts through mission (as Rahner implies in his third thesis). The tension thus created gives rise to his fourth and final thesis: 'If both these statements are true, then the Church will not so much regard herself today as the exclusive community of those who have a claim to salvation but rather as the historically tangible vanguard and the historically and socially constituted explicit expression of what the Christian hopes is present as a hidden reality even

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98. TIV, p. 132; see also 'Anonymous and Explicit Faith,' in Theological Investigations, trans. David Morland, O.S.B., (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979), pp. 52 - 59. The title 'anonymous theist,' and even 'anonymous Christian,' may be extended not only to the religious person who has responded to God's grace as it is active in his or her religion, but also to the 'non-culpable atheist' who responds to God's grace by making moral decisions following the dictates of his or her conscience. See 'Atheism and Implicit Christianity,' in Theological Investigations, Volume IX, trans. Graham Harrison, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972), pp. 145 - 164; see also TIXII, p. 167.

99. See TIVI, p. 396 - 397, where Rahner writes, 'Knowledge about the anonymous Christian does not in any way dispense [a Christian] from caring and troubling about those who do not yet know the one necessary truth in its explicit affirmation in the gospel message. But this knowledge will keep him from panic and will give him the strength to practice that patience which - according to the Lord's saying - brings salvation to life, his own as much as that of his brother.... It would be quite foolish to think that this talk about "anonymous Christianity" must lessen the importance of mission, preaching, the Word of God, baptising and so on. Anyone who wants to interpret our remarks about anonymous Christianity in this way, has not merely fundamentally misunderstood them, but has not read our exposition of them with sufficient attention.'; and TIXII, p. 161 where he continues, 'In speaking of the universal missionary task of the Church as a right and a duty of the Church herself this is taken to include the basic duty of every man to become a Christian in an explicitly ecclesiastical form of Christianity, because it is quite impossible to separate these two entities from one another.' Indeed, 'we surely say that in order to be possible or to have any hope of success missionary preaching necessarily presupposes that which we may call by the name anonymous Christianity or some other name.' TIXII, p. 169.

100. TIVI, p. 395 - 397.

outside the Church."[101] In other words, Christians must work and pray to unite the human race in one Church while expecting plurality to continue.

This plurality entails that the Church must always expect and be prepared to face opposition. Though it may vary in degree from time to time and from place to place, there is every reason to believe that opposition to Christianity will persist until the eschaton.

> If this Christianity, thus always faced with opposition and unable to expect seriously that this will ever cease, nevertheless believes in God's universal salvific will - in other words, believes that God can be victorious by his secret grace even where the Church does not win the victory but is contradicted - then this Church cannot feel herself to be just *one* dialectic moment in the whole of history but has already overcome this opposition by her faith, hope and charity. In other words, the others who oppose her are merely those who have not yet recognized what they nevertheless really already are (or can be) even when, on the surface of existence, they really are in opposition; they are already anonymous Christians, and the Church is not the communion of those who possess God's grace as opposed to those who lack it, but the communion of those who can explicitly confess what they *and* the others hope to be. Non-Christians may think it presumption for the Christian to judge everything which is sound or restored (by being sanctified) to be the fruit in every man of the grace of his Christ, and to interpret it as anonymous Christianity; they may think it presumption for the Christian to regard the non-Christian as a Christian who has not yet come to himself reflectively. But the Christian cannot renounce this "presumption" which is really the source of the greatest humility both for himself and for the Church. For it is a profound admission of the fact that God is greater than man and the Church. The Church will go out to meet the non-Christian of tomorrow with the attitude expressed by St. Paul when he said: What therefore you do not know and yet worship (and yet *worship!*) that I proclaim to you (Ac 17.23). On such a basis one can be tolerant, humble and yet firm towards all non-Christian religions.[102]

In summary, Rahner's inclusivism *prima facie* resembles Barth's exclusivism in two important ways: they are both epistemologically exclusive and soteriologically inclusive. This is not to say, however, that they are identical; upon closer inspection, important epistemological and soteriological differences are revealed. Barth's epistemology is grounded (to use his terminology) in the revelation of the Word of God, Jesus Christ while Rahner's is rooted in dogmatic Roman Catholicism, which is to say Scripture as it has been interpreted by the Magisterium. So, while they are both confessional, their 'Confessions' differ. Also, Barth's soteriology rejects religions as playing any role in salvation; God through Christ saves apart from any and all human religion.

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101. TIV, p. 133.

102. TIV, p. 134. Rahner is also quite clear that the doctrine should not be seen as anything more than a peripheral one. See TIVI, pp. 396 - 397.

Rahner, on the other hand stresses that while salvation is indeed found only in God through Christ, it is mediated through socially constituted forms: explicitly in Christianity and anonymously through other religions. Whereas in Barth, God saves *despite* other religions, with Rahner, God saves *through* other religions. With our survey of inclusivism thus concluded, let us move finally to the pluralist hypothesis and its representative, John Hick.

1.3   Pluralism: John Hick

John Hick's contribution to the philosophy and theology of religions generally and to the question of religious pluralism specifically cannot be overestimated. Paul Knitter does not exaggerate when he writes that 'Hick is the most radical, the best known, and therefore the most controversial of the proponents of a theocentric model for Christian approaches to other religions.'[103] Yet, his contribution did not develop in a theological vacuum: though his most contemporary influence is Islamicist, Wilfred Cantwell Smith,[104] Hick's ideas are heirs of a liberal Protestant tradition descending from Smith, through Otto's and Hocking's concept of common mystical essence, Troeltsch's idea of historical relativity, to Schleiermacher's analysis of human subjectivity.[105] It is important also to note that Hick's preoccupation with pluralism is existential: personal experience is the motivation behind his academic interest.[106]   Unfortunately, space

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103. Paul F. Knitter, No Other Name?, p. 147.

104. Wilfred Cantwell Smith's enormous bibliography cannot be listed exhaustively here. His more important works include: The Meaning and End of Religion, (New York: Macmillan, 1964); The Faith of Other Men, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972); Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, ed., Willard G. Oxoby, (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); and Towards A World Theology, (London: Macmillan, 1980).

105. See Rudolph Otto, The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational, trans. John W. Harvey, (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959 [1917]); William Hocking, Living Religions and a World Faith, (New York: Macmillan, 1940), Re-thinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry after One Hundred Years, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), and The Meaning of God in Human Experience: A Philsophic Study of Religion, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912); Ernst Troeltsch, The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions, (Richmond: John Knox, 1971), esp. chapters 3 and 4, Christian Thought: Its History and Application, (London: University of London Press, 1923), 'The Place of Christianity among the World Religions,' in Christianity and Other Religions, John Hick and Brian Hebbelthwaite, eds., (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. 11 - 31; and Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Critics, trans. Terrence N. Tice, (Richmond: John Knox, 1969), The Christian Faith, second edition. trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1928).

106. Good summaries of Hick's existential encounter with pluralism can be found in biographical accounts in a number of his writings. See for example, John Hick, God Has Many Names, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) chapter 1, cited hereafter as GMN; Disputed Questions in Theology and the

prohibits further exploration of these interesting contextual avenues.[107] I must therefore limit my exposition to two areas: the philosophical foundation for his pluralist hypothesis and the hypothesis itself.[108]

Hick's philosophical foundation is threefold, comprising arguments for the 'post-axial' nature of religions, the 'religiously ambiguous' nature of the universe, and the rationality of religious belief. The first divides the religious history of humankind into 'pre-axial,' 'axial' and 'post-axial' ages.[109] Pre-axial religion was cyclical, its goal being to preserve order and prevent change.[110] This structure of human religious life altered during 'the axial age.' During the centuries between

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Philosophy of Religion, (London: Macmillan, 1993), chapter 8, cited hereafter as DO; and 'A Pluralist View,' in More Than One Way? Four Views on Salvation in A Pluralistic World, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). Hick's biography is summarised in chapter 2. Without a doubt, though, the most thorough correlation of Hick's personal background with his pluralist hypothesis is Gavin D'Costa's John Hick's Theology of Religions: A Critical Evaluation, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), chapter 1.

107. By placing Hick in his theological context, one understands that he is a very specific type of pluralist. His pluralism is, in the words of S. Mark Heim, 'a metatheory of religious reality and experience, an idea of what is behind all the conditional forms of particular traditions and individuals.' This pluralism is most unlike the approach of, for instance, Raimon Panikkar. His pluralism, if it can truly be called that, is rooted in an 'absolute human inability to form adequate concepts of the divine.... The difference between these two,' Heim argues, 'is the difference between those who know the religious object is equally well expressed in the various faiths and those who assert that the religious object is so utterly unknowable that we have no grounds for preferring one inadequate description to another.' Hick is also distinct from those pluralists who 'conclude that appropriate judgments about various forms of faith can be made only on the basis of their historical and social effects.' S. Mark Heim, 'Criscrossing the Rubicon: Reconsidering Religious Pluralism,' in The Christian Century, 108 (1991), pp. 688 - 689. See also Raimon Panikkar, 'The Jordan, The Tiber and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness,' in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluaralistic Theology of Religions, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), pp. 89 - 116; and his The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, second edition, (London: SCM, 1981); Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Feminism and Jewish Christian Dialogue: Particularism and Universalism in the Search for Religious Truth;' Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, 'In Search of Justice: Religious Pluralism from a Feminist Perspective;' Aloysius Pieris, S.J., 'The Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation;' and Paul F. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions.' All are found in Part III of The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, pp. 137 - 201.

108. In what follows, I shall parallel the structure of Hick's magnum opus, An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent, (London: Macmillan, 1988), cited hereafter as IOR.

109. IOR, pp. 21 - 69; GMN, pp. 40 - 59. This division is not unique, but draws explicitly from Karl Jaspers, The Origin and Goal of History, trans. Michael Bullock, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) and Trevor Ling, A History of Religion East and West: An Introduction and Interpretation, (London: Macmillan, 1968).

110. IOR, pp. 23 - 28.

800 and 200 BCE, 'significant human individuals appeared through whose insights - though always within the existing setting of their own culture - human awareness was immensely enlarged and developed, and a movement began from archaic religion to the religions of salvation or liberation.'[111] Following this era of intense innovation, the religious life of humanity settled into its present 'post-axial' form.

The post-axial religions - the great world religions of today - agree that something is fundamentally wrong with humanity and aim to correct it by offering 'salvation/liberation' to their adherents.[112] While the religions advance diverse models of 'salvation/liberation,' Hick maintains that they

> are variations within different conceptual schemes on a single fundamental theme: the sudden or gradual change of the individual from an absorbing self-concern to a new centring in the supposed unity-of-reality-and-value that is thought of as God, Brahman, the Dharma, Sunyata or the Tao... [or] the gradual transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness.[113]

The post-axial religions thus embody 'cosmic optimism' which 'affirms the ultimate goodness from our human point of view, or to-be-rejoiced-in character, of the universe.'[114] Though it expresses a

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111. IOR, p. 29. The obvious exceptions to this argument are Jesus and Muhammad (!). According to Hick, these exceptions stand in the tradition of the axial Semitic prophets who brought Judaism from its pre-axial existence into its post-axial present form, p. 31.

112. IOR, p. 32; 36 - 55.

113. IOR, p. 36. In Hindu religions, 'spiritual liberation requires a transcending of the ego either (in the dualist strands) in self-giving to the divine head, the Supreme Person, or (in the monist strand) in union with the ultimate transpersonal Absolute.' On the other hand, the Buddhist faiths express it through the doctrine of 'no-self,' wherein 'the salvific human transformation is understood as liberation from the powerful illusion of "me" or "self".' For Jews, 'salvation/liberation is a corporate historical hope finding expression in messianic expectation and Jewish apocalyptic. And for Muslims 'salvation/liberation' is equated with being in the state of islam - complete submission to God. In contrast, the *official* Christian view of salvation sees the transformation from self-centredness as 'a result of salvation rather than as itself constituting salvation.' Hick believes this results from the juridical theory of atonement advanced by St. Paul which is absent both from the teachings of Jesus and the practical life of Christians. He writes, 'Both in the teachings of Jesus... and in the practical consciousness of Christians the reality of salvation is the transition from ego-domination to a radically God-centred life. The function of the official theories of salvation according to which Jesus' death constituted an atonement for human sin, has been to provide a theoretical framework within which to understand this profound consciousness. But the reality of Christian salvation is no juridical abstraction but an actual concrete change from sinful self-centredness to self-giving love in response to the divine grace.' He argues that Christian mystics better articulate the Christian expression of salvation/liberation. IOR, pp. 37, 41, 47 - 48, 49 - 50, 44, 45 - 46.

114. IOR, p. 56.

'widespread sense of hollowness, transitoriness and unsatisfactoriness of ordinary human existence,'[115] cosmic optimism presents a limitlessly better alternative on the basis of experiential insights of the great religious figures and traces a path to its realisation. 'And so the cosmic optimism of the post-axial religions is a vision of the ultimately benign character of the universe as it affects human beings, and an anticipation in faith that the limitlessly good possibilities will be finally realised.'[116] Thus,

> whether conceived as a fulfilment or enlightenment attained through a long development, or as a sudden completion bestowed by divine grace or by final self-discovery, the religious traditions point to an ultimate state which is 'no longer a waiting for being' and which imparts to our present existence the positive character of movement towards a final fulfilment - whether in time or beyond time - which gives value and purpose to the hard pilgrimage of samsaric existence.[117]

In summary then, the great religions as they now exist are 'post-axial' in character. They present humanity as fundamentally flawed by self-centredness and offer 'salvation/liberation' that is, the move from self-centredness to Reality-centredness, to their adherents; this focus salvation embodies a cosmic optimism which affirms the ultimately benign nature of the universe.

Hick's second argument seeks to show that the universe may rationally be interpreted either religiously or naturalistically, theistically or atheistically, 'by showing the inconclusiveness of the various philosophical arguments' for and against the existence of God.[118] Both types of argument are indecisive for 'the special evidences to which they appeal are also capable of being understood in terms of the contrary worldview.'[119] After an extensive examination of various theistic and atheistic proposals,[120] Hick concludes

> It seems, then, that the universe maintains its inscrutable ambiguity. In some aspects it invites whilst in others it repels a religious response. It permits both a religious and naturalistic faith, but haunted in each case by a contrary possibility that can never be exorcised. Any realistic analysis of religious belief and experience, and realistic defence

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115. IOR, p. 57.

116. IOR, p. 57.

117. IOR, p. 61.

118. IOR, p. 12.

119. IOR, p. 12.

120. IOR, pp. 75 - 124.

of the rationality of religious conviction, must therefore start from this situation of systematic ambiguity.[121]

The ambiguous nature of the universe does not imply, however, that religious belief stems from an arbitrary choice between opposed interpretations; the decisive element is the phenomenon of religious experience. This introduces Hick's third argument: that it is rational to trust religious experience and to interpret the universe religiously on this basis.[122] Everyday activity presupposes trust in experience: while we cannot prove the existence of the external world, 'we cannot help believing and living in terms... [of its] objective reality....'[123] Hick offers a parallel account of religious experience which 'grants that it is no more possible to prove the existence of the material world but claims that theistic belief arises, like perceptual belief, from a natural response of the human mind to its experiences.'[124] Consequently, 'It is as reasonable for those who experience their lives as being lived in the presence of God, to believe in the reality of God, as for all of us to form beliefs about our environment on the basis of our experience of it.'[125]

While arguments and appeals to evidence will not settle the question of the nature of the universe, those who have religious experiences may rationally interpret the universe religiously. For instance, on the basis of his experience, Jesus rationally believed in God; indeed, he would have been irrational had he not. But very few have experiences as intense. Are they then prohibited from religious belief? Not at all, says Hick: the records of intense experiences in turn support the beliefs of those whose experiences are not as fervent. This is not justification for rationally believing anything; on the contrary, Hick insists 'that a rational person will only be open to accepting others' religious experience reports as veridical, and indeed will only trust his or her own

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121. IOR, p. 124.

122. IOR, p. 221; John Hick, 'Rational Theistic Belief Without Proofs,' in A John Hick Reader, ed. Paul Badham (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 49 - 67; 'Religious Pluralism and the Rationality of Religious Belief,' in Faith and Philosophy, 10 (1993), pp. 242 - 249.

123. IOR, p. 213.

124. IOR, p. 214.

125. IOR, p. 210. See also 'Religious Faith as Experiencing-as,' in A John Hick Reader, pp. 34 - 48; DQ, pp. 17 - 32; God and the Universe of Faiths, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1993 [1973]), pp. 37 - 52, cited hereafter as GUF.

religious experience, if the beliefs to which they point are such as one judges may be true."[126] Thus, it is rational for those who experience in a religious manner to believe and behave on the basis of this experience and this believing and behaviour will be corrected and enlarged by future experience. If only one religion or one type of religious experience existed, the argument could be thus concluded. However, there are many religions and diverse religious experiences and this raises the problem of religious pluralism.

In an early articulation of the pluralist hypothesis, <u>God and the Universe of Faiths</u>, Hick contended that any religious believer regardless of tradition,

> only has to stand back in thought from the arena of competing systems, surveying the scene as a whole, to see something that is hidden from the Ptolemaic believer. This is the fact that the particular standpoint of a Ptolemaic theology normally depends upon where the believer happens to have been born. And having seen this one can hardly help wondering whether it provides a sufficient basis for a conviction which involves an assessment of other men's convictions.[127]

Having 'stood back,' Hick concluded that 'the different encounters with the transcendent within different religious traditions may all be encounters with the one infinite reality, though with partially differing and overlapping aspects of that reality."[128] He then went on to call Protestants to abandon 'christocentrism' and Catholics to relinquish 'ecclesiocentrism' and to move with him to 'theocentrism' - the belief that God was at the centre of the universe of faiths.[129]

Seminal articles by Duncan Forrester and Julius Lipner, charging that the God at Hick's centre was recognisably Christian, forced Hick to enunciate more clearly his pluralist hypothesis.[130] The clarified hypothesis maintains that

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126. <u>IOR</u>, p. 219.

127. <u>GUF</u>, p. 132.

128. <u>GUF</u>, p. 139.

129. <u>GUF</u>, pp. 131 - 132; 133 - 147.

130. See Julius Lipner, 'Christians and the Uniqueness of Christ,' in <u>Scottish Journal of Theology</u>, 28 (1975), pp. 359 - 368; 'Truth Claims and Inter-Religious Dialogue,' in <u>Religious Studies</u>, 12 (1976), pp. 245 - 258; and Duncan Forrester, 'Professor Hick and the Universe of Faiths,' in <u>Scottish Journal of Theology</u>, 29 (1976), pp. 65 - 72. Hick's initial reformulation was published as <u>God Has Many Names</u>. Gavin D'Costa was the first to comment in any detail on this development in Hick's thought. See Gavin D'Costa, <u>John Hick's Theology of Religions: A Critical Evaluation</u>, pp. 153 - 187; 'The Pluralist Paradigm' in <u>Theology and Religious Pluralism</u>, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), chapter 2; and 'The Pluralist Paradigm in the Christian Theology of Religions,' in <u>Scottish Journal of Theology</u>, 39 (1985), pp. 211 - 224. Whether

the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the major variant ways of being human; that within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness is taking place. These traditions are accordingly to be regarded as alternative soteriological 'spaces' within which, or 'ways' along which, men and women can find salvation/liberation/ultimate fulfilment.[131]

Hick has thus moved from theocentrism to what Gavin D'Costa calls 'Realocentrism'.[132] By replacing 'God' with 'the Real' or 'Ultimate Reality,' Hick believes he evades charges similar to those of Forrester and Lipner because the titles are 'used within the major theistic and non-theistic traditions and yet [are] neutral as between their very different ways of conceiving, experiencing and responding to that which they affirm in diverse ways.'[133]

Hick bases this move on an extension of Kantian epistemology,[134] which contends that 'since the properties of something experienced "depend upon the mode of intuition of the subject, this object as appearance is to be distinguished from itself as an object in itself."'[135] This is expressed in Kant's distinction between the unknowable noumenon - a thing in itself (*ding an sich*) and a knowable phenomenon - a thing as experienced. By analogy, Hick argues that

the noumenal Real is experienced and thought by different human mentalities, forming and formed by different religious traditions, as the range of gods and absolutes which the phenomenology of religion reports. And these diverse *personae* and metaphysical *impersonae* ... are not illusory but are empirically, that is experientially, real as authentic manifestations of the Real.[136]

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this clarification involved another revolution - this time a Kantian one - or was simply a refining of the original hypothesis is a matter of debate. Compare, for example, Gavin D'Costa, 'John Hick and Religious Pluralism: Yet Another Revolution,' in Problems in the Philosophy of Religion, ed. Harold Hewitt, Jr., (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), pp. 3 - 18, with John Hick, 'Straightening the Record: Some Response to Critics,' in Modern Theology, 6 (1990), pp. 187 - 195.

131. IOR, p. 240.

132. Gavin D'Costa. 'John Hick and Religious Pluralism,' p. 5.

133. IOR, p. 11.

134. The Kantian epistemology which Hick employs should not be confused with Kant's religious epistemology, which would fall to Hick's critique of the various moral arguments for the existence of God. Hick writes, 'God for [Kant] was not a reality encountered in religious experience but an object postulated by reason on the basis of its own practical functioning in moral agency.' IOR, p. 242. See also Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, trans. L.W. Beck (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), II:2:5, p. 129; Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (London: Macmillan, 1958), pp. 559 - 560.

135. IOR, p. 241 citing Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 88.

136. IOR, p. 242.

His support, however, extends beyond Kant to include the religious traditions. For example, in classical Hindu philosophy, a distinction is made 'between *nirguna* Brahman, Brahman without attributes, exceeding the grasp of human language, and *saguna* Brahman, Brahman with attributes, known within human religious experience as Ishvara, the personal creator and governor of the universe.'[137] Similarly, Mahayana Buddhism speaks of the unknowable 'Dharmakaya' and the knowable 'Sambhogakaya' while Pure Land Buddhism distinguishes the '*dharmata dharmakaya*' from the '*upaya dhamakaya*.'[138] Even in Christianity, one finds the distinction 'between God *a se* in God's infinite self-existent being, beyond the grasp of the human mind, and God *pro nobis*, revealed in relation to humankind as creator and redeemer.'[139]

Thus, the Real *an sich* is posited as the ground of all legitimate religious experience, but this experience is indirectly mediated through 'the cognitive structure of our consciousness, with its capacity to respond to the meaning or character of our environment, including its religious meaning or character.'[140] Through these cognitive filters, the Real is 'experienced-as' both *personae* (God, Shiva, Allah...) and *impersonae* (Brahman, Nirvana, Sunyata...). Ultimate Reality is such that it can be authentically experienced as both. It is comparable to 'the two ways of conceiving and registering light, namely as waves and particles.'[141] Though the true nature of light is unknowable, under certain conditions, it behaves like a particle while under others, like a wave.

> Analogously, the divine reality is not directly known *an sich*. But when human beings relate themselves to it in the mode of I-Thou encounter they experience it as personal. Indeed in the context of that relationship it *is* personal, not It but He or She. When human beings relate themselves to the Real in the mode of non-personal awareness they experience it as non-personal, and in the context of this relationship it *is* non-personal.[142]

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137. IOR, p. 236.

138. IOR, p. 236.

139. IOR, p. 237.

140. IOR, p. 244.

141. IOR, p. 245.

142. IOR, p. 245.

Some may be tempted to conclude on this basis that Hick believes the Real to be ultimately impersonal, that the *impersonae* are qualitatively superior conceptions of the Real. Indeed, this seems to be the case in <u>God and the Universe of Faiths</u>, where he writes:

> The question can be perused both as a matter of pure theology and in relation to religious experience. Theologically, the Hindu distinction between Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman is important and should be adopted into western religious thought.... *[We] may say that Nirguna God is the eternal self-existent divine reality beyond the scope of all human categories, including personality; and Saguna God is God in relation to his creation and with the attributes which express this relationship, such as personality, omnipotence, goodness, love and omniscience.*[143]

Though Hick goes on in the same paragraph to write that 'the one ultimate reality is both Nirguna and non-personal and Saguna and personal, in a duality which is in principle acceptable to human understanding,'[144] his 'Nirguna God' clearly parallels the 'the Real *an sich*' of later writings. Therefore, it would appear that early on, Hick granted the *impersonae* (and denied the *personae*) a privileged access to Ultimate Reality.

This is certainly is not so in <u>An Interpretation of Religion</u>. Hick does not contend that the various impersonae are somehow ontologically superior to the personae, but that both groups represent equally limited human conceptions. While one cannot say the Real is personal, neither can one say that the Real is impersonal.[145] Rather, because the Real is always mediated through culturally conditioned religions, very little can be said about it - except perhaps St. Anselm's definition: the Real is 'that than which no greater can be conceived.'[146]

> It follows from this distinction between the Real as it is in itself and as it is thought and experienced through our religious concepts that we cannot apply to the Real *an sich* the characteristics encountered in its *personae* and *impersonae*. Thus it cannot be said to be one or many, person or thing, substance or process, good or evil, purposive or non-purposive. None of the concrete descriptions that apply within the realm of human experience can apply literally to the unexperienceable ground of that realm. We cannot even speak of this as a thing or an entity.[147]

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143. <u>GUF</u>, p. 144 (my emphasis).

144. <u>GUF</u>, p. 144.

145. <u>IOR</u>, pp. 252 - 295; <u>Disputed Questions</u>, pp. 164 - 179.

146. <u>IOR</u>, p. 246.

147. <u>IOR</u>, p. 246. remarks such as this have led Hick's opponents to change their accusation from 'covert theist' (as did Forrester and Lipner) to 'covert agnostic.' See D'Costa, 'John Hick and Religious Pluralism,' pp. 7 - 15, <u>John Hick's Theology of Religions</u>, pp. 17 - 183.

Still, Hick maintains that the Real an sich is the ground for the attributes ascribed to he/she/it by the many traditions: 'the Real is so rich in content that it can only be finitely experienced in the various partial and inadequate ways which the history of religions describes.'[148] Thus, divine attributes 'represent the Real as both reflected and refracted within human thought and experience. But nevertheless the Real is the ultimate ground or source of those qualities which characterise each *persona* and *impersona* in so far as these are authentic phenomenal manifestation of the Real.'[149]

Hick's pluralist hypothesis posits an Ultimate Reality or Real *an sich* which is the ground of all religious experience. Thus stated, the hypothesis begs criteriological questions, the first being, 'On what basis can one distinguish between authentic and inauthentic manifestations of the Real?' The basis, in Hick's view, is soteriology. Religions 'have greater or less value according as they promote or hinder the salvific transformation' from self-centredness to Reality-centredness.[150] This, however, only begs a second question: 'How do we know when such a transformation has taken place?' To this, Hick responds that the criteria lie in the spiritual and moral fruits found in the lives of exemplary believers within the respective traditions - 'saints.' Those who are truly centred in Reality exhibit certain qualities: compassion, joy, inner peace, strength of soul and serenity.[151]

> The production of saints, both contemplative and practical, individualistic and political, is thus one valid criterion by which to identify a religious tradition as a salvific human response to the Real. In the light of this criterion we can readily see that each of the great world faiths constitutes a context for salvation/liberation: for each has produced its own harvest of saints.[152]

And again,

> The salvation/liberation which it is the function of religion to facilitate is a human transformation which we see most conspicuously in the saints of all traditions. It consists, as one of its aspects, in moral goodness, a goodness which is latent in the solitary contemplative and active in the saint who lives in society, serving his or her fellows either in works of mercy or, more characteristically in our modern

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148. IOR, p. 247.

149. IOR, p. 247.

150. IOR, p. 300.

151. IOR, pp. 301 - 302.

152. IOR, p. 307.

sociologically-conscious age, in political activity as well, seeking to change the structures within which human life is lived.[153]

As has been seen, central to the pluralist hypothesis articulated above is that a religious interpretation of the universe can be, and often is, rational. Yet, Hick's hypothesis proper argues that several different and even *prima facie* opposing religious interpretations may be valid manifestations of, and responses to, the Real. Therefore, Hick must finally account for the epistemological status of religious truth-claims and point to a resolution of the problem brought about by their conflict. He begins his account by arguing not for 'a doctrine of religious knowledge but... a doctrine of religious ignorance.'[154] Drawing primarily from the Buddha's doctrine of the *avyakata*, the undetermined or unresolved questions,[155] and also from Thomas à Kempis and Julian of Norwich,[156] Hick argues that some religious questions are either unanswered or unanswerable. The unanswered questions 'are in themselves legitimate and admit of true answers.'[157] We do not know these answers, but we may hypothesise about them and at a future time, come to know them. Nevertheless, salvation/liberation 'does not depend upon such knowledge; and... for people holding different views to treat agreement about them as essential for salvation is a dangerous because soteriologically counter-productive error.'[158] The unanswerable questions, on the other hand, lie completely beyond the scope of human finitude. One should 'refer to their subject matter as mysteries, realities that are beyond human comprehension and expression.'[159] They point to realities which cannot be expressed in human terms. Whereas in response to the unanswered

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153. IOR, p. 309. For an account of criteriological difficulties inherent in Hick's thesis, see Paul Griffiths and Delmas Lewis, 'On Grading Religions, Seeking Truth, and Being Nice to People - A Reply to Professor Hick,' in Religious Studies, 19 (1983), pp. 75 - 80. Though written with Hick's early theory in mind, their argument can also apply to his later work. A criteriological critique written after IOR is Rebecca Pentz's article, 'Hick and Saints: Is Saint-Production a Valid Test?' in Faith and Philosophy, 8 (1991), pp. 96 - 103.

154. IOR, p. 343.

155. IOR, pp. 343 - 345; see also DQ, pp. 105 - 118.

156. IOR, p. 345.

157. IOR, p. 345.

158. IOR, p. 345.

159. IOR, p. 347.

questions, we may formulate theories, in response to the unanswerable ones, we develop myths. 'But neither are necessary for salvation/liberation.'[160]

Mythical propositions, therefore are not subject to theoretical verification or falsification, but can only be evaluated practically or existentially. 'For the conformity of myth to reality does not consist in a literal conformity of what is said to the facts but in the appropriateness to the myth's referent of the behavioural dispositions that it tends to evoke in the hearer.'[161] Of such propositions, there are two types; the first being 'expository myths. These say something that can also be said non-mythologically, though generally with markedly less impact.'[162] More importantly are those myths which arise in the face of the unanswerable questions. For instance, all descriptions of the Real - as *personae* or *impersonae* - fall into this category. Such language may be seen as true if it evokes in us an appropriate dispositional response. 'True religious myths are accordingly those that evoke in us attitudes and modes of behaviour which are appropriate to our situation *vis-à-vis* the Real.'[163]

Both the unanswered and unanswerable questions can result in 'conflicting trans-historical truth-claims.'[164] On one hand, unanswered questions lead to conflicting claims which can in principle be literally true or false, but which cannot be established by appeals to historical or

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160. IOR, p. 347.

161. IOR, p. 348.

162. 'For example, the Hebraic story of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden can be seen - and is today very commonly seen by Jews and Christians - as a mythic story which expresses, and thereby engraves in the imagination, the fact that ordinary human life is lived in alienation from God and hence from one's neighbours and from the natural environment. Again, the story of the Buddha's flight through the sky to Sri Lanka can be seen as a mythological way of affirming the authenticity of the ancient Buddhist tradition of that island. The belief that the suras of the Qur'an were dictated by the archangel Gabriel can be seen as a mythological way of affirming that the Qur'an constitutes an autoritative divine revelation. The idea of the transsubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ in the eucharist can be seen as a mythological way of making the communicant's reception of them an occasion of special openness to God as known through Christ. The doctrine of reincarnation is seen by some as a mythological way of making vivid the moral truth that our actions have inevitable future consequences for good and ill, this being brought home to the imagination by the thought that the agent will personally reap those consequences in a future earthly life.' IOR, p. 349.

163. IOR, p. 351.

164. IOR, p. 365.

empirical evidence. Examples here include disagreements over whether or not the universe has a temporal beginning or the fate of human individuals after death.[165] Concerning such issues, Hick suggests

> (a) that they should be fully and freely recognised as matters on which directly opposed views are often held; (b) that - although by no means everyone ranged on either side of these disagreements will be able to accept this - the questions are ones to which humanity does not at present know the answers; (c) that this ignorance does not hinder the process of salvation/liberation; and (d) that we should therefore learn to live with these differences, tolerating contrary convictions even when we suspect them to be mistaken.[166]

On the other, unanswerable questions lead to conflicting claims only in so far as the mythological nature of these claims is not recognised:

> Thus the dogma of the deity of Christ - in conjunction with the aggressive and predatory aspect of human nature - has contributed historically to the evils of colonialism, the destruction of indigenous civilisations, anti-Semitism, destructive wars of religion and the burnings of heretics and witches. But on the other hand it is also possible to understand the idea of incarnation in the life of Jesus Christ mythologically, as indicating an extraordinary openness to the divine presence in virtue of which Jesus' life and teachings have mediated the reality and love of God to millions of people in successive centuries. Thus, whereas understood literally the doctrine of a unique incarnation in Christ has divided humanity and has shrunk the image of God to that of the tribal deity of the West, understood mythologically it can continue to draw people to God through Christ without thereby sundering them from the rest of the human family.[167]

Finally, there are truth-claims which fall neither within the 'unanswered' nor 'unanswerable' categories which Hick calls 'conflicting historical truth-claims.'[168] These arise both within religious traditions (i.e. between Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians over the institution of the Papacy or between Sunni and Shia Muslims over the succession of Ali to Muhammad) and between them (i.e. between Jewish and Islamic accounts of Abraham's sacrifice on Mount Moriah). Such conflicts, says Hick, are theoretically capable of resolution through 'an unbiased assessment of the historical evidence.' Practically, however, such 'rational resolutions have generally proved

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165. IOR, pp. 366 - 368.

166. IOR, p. 370.

167. IOR, p. 372.

168. IOR, p. 363.

elusive."[169] Because of these practical difficulties, these differences 'should simply be acknowledged and tolerated."[170]

To summarise, Hick's pluralism may be seen as epistemologically exclusive and soteriologically inclusive. Hick, in his generous argument for the salvific validity of the great religions appears to have transcended empistemological exlcusiveness. But has he? He holds the Real *an sich* to be unknowable: a truth-claim which necessarily recasts all alternatives, as is shown by his reduction of classical Christology from metaphysics to mythology. His hypothesis is thus epistemologically exclusive. Also, because Hick grants himself a privileged insight into the nature of salvation/liberation which is at best obscured in the other religious traditions, he is a soteriological inclusivist. Salvation/liberation does not occur within each religion according to its own understanding, but only insofar as it conforms to his description of salvation/liberation as the transition from self-centredness to Reality-centredness.

Conclusion:

To conclude this chapter and in preparation for the next, two important insights may be drawn. First, epistemologically, all three representatives are exclusive: each reserves for himself a privileged vantage point from which he can assess the nature of religion. Of course in each case, the vantage point is different. In Barth's version religion, as a human creation, is contradicted by God's revelation. Though there are 'parables of the Kingdom' to be found in all spheres of life including religions, these can be recognised only by their harmony with the threefold Word of God. Rahner's inclusivism on the other hand, is rooted in dogmatic Roman Catholicism and in his 'supernatural existential.' Hick, finally, is grounded in transcendental agnosticism: his starting-point is the unknowable nature of the Real *an sich*. So, each position, or cluster of positions, is confessional but that which is confessed is different.

Second, all three are soteriologically inclusive. Barth sees all humanity caught up into God's salvation which has been accomplished once and for all in Jesus Christ. Moreover, this salvation is realised *despite* any and all religion, including Christianity. Barth's soteriology rejects

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169. IOR, p. 364.

170. IOR, p. 14.

religions as playing any role in salvation; God through Christ saves apart from any and all human religion. Rahner, on the other hand stresses that while salvation is indeed found only in God through Christ, it is mediated through socially constituted forms: explicitly in Christianity and anonymously through other religions. Finally, for Hick, salvation/liberation does not occur within each religion according to its own understanding, but only insofar as it conforms to his description of salvation/liberation as the transition from self-centredness to Reality-centredness.

This concludes the survey of the threefold typology. The reader has been introduced to the theologies of religion of Barth, Rahner and Hick specifically and to the exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist types generally. Now we must consider whether the paradigm is helpful beyond this very introductory point, or if it actually becomes a hindrance. This consideration will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Beyond the Threefold Typology

Introduction:

The previous chapter introduced readers to the problem of religion and religions in Christian theology through the familiar threefold typology. Yet, in conclusion, it wondered whether the typology became a hindrance when pressed beyond this preparatory level. This question is now addressed in three steps. The first offers a brief sketch of the typology's history and a quick summary of three previous criticisms. Its primary concern, however, is to consider whether the typology functions as more than an organisational framework. Through a suspicious analysis of its genealogy, it shows the typology to be a polemic against non-pluralist theologies of religion. If this contention is correct, it would follow that there are inaccuracies in the accounts of exclusivism and pluralism, more often than not the typological villain or hero. The second section, therefore, compares actual exclusivist and pluralist proposals to the definitions offered by John Hick as cited in the previous chapter in order to show that exclusivist accounts are more nuanced while pluralist ones are more problematic than the typology indicates. Finally, the third section asks whether the typology could be rescued by shifting the axis from questions of salvation to related but distinct questions of truth, from soteriology to epistemology. Through an examination of the confusion created by Alan Race's definitions. I will show that such a shift threatens the internal boundaries of the typology.

2.1   The Genealogy of the Typology

The exclusivist/inclusivist/pluralist arrangement is said to have been inaugurated in 1983 by Alan Race in the first edition of <u>Christians and Religious Pluralism</u>,[1] with these words: 'In this study I adopt the headings Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism as a broad typological framework within which most of the current Christian theologies of religions can

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1. S. Mark Heim, <u>Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion</u>, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), p. 4

be placed.'[2] Subsequent chapters, following an historical and analytical method, chose several theologians to represent each position in order to show their internal diversity. Thus, Hendrik Kraemer, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner epitomised exclusivism, that position which 'counts the revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole criterion by which all religions... can be understood and judged.'[3] Similarly, predominantly Roman Catholic theologians, notably Hans Küng, Karl Rahner, and the early Raimon Panikkar, represented inclusivism. 'To be inclusivist,' Race wrote, 'is to believe that all non-Christian religious truth belongs ultimately to Christ and the way of discipleship which springs from his way.'[4] Finally, Paul Tillich, John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith were summoned to champion pluralism which held that 'knowledge of God is partial in all faiths, including the Christian. Religions must acknowledge their need of each other if the full truth about God is to be available to mankind.'[5] As the ordering of the material suggests, Race defended a version of pluralism.

In 1986, Gavin D'Costa's Theology and Religious Pluralism used the typology again, contending 'that three dominant paradigms [exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism] emerge from the recent history of theological reflection, usefully providing a conceptual matrix within which the theological issues are highlighted.'[6] Like Race, D'Costa employed representatives to highlight key themes in each position; unlike Race, he centred on one theologian in each instance, namely Hick, Kraemer, and Rahner. D'Costa also deviated in his arrangement and definitions of the positions: whereas Race used the typology to describe a shift from exclusivism to pluralism, D'Costa offered an inclusivist navigation through the extremes of pluralism and exclusivism.[7] Also, as his definitions show, Race was concerned with religious epistemology, but D'Costa wondered 'whether salvation is possible outside Christianity.'[8] His definitions reflect this concern: pluralism 'maintains that other religions are equally salvific paths to the one God,' while for exclusivism, 'other religions are marked by humankind's fundamental sinfulness and are therefore erroneous,' and inclusivism 'affirms the salvific

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2. Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, p. 7.

3. Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, p. 11.

4. Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, p. 38.

5. Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, p. 72.

6. D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 6.

7. D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, pp. 117 - 139.

8. D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 4.

presence of God in other religions while still maintaining that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God.'[9]

In the subsequent decade, the threefold typology became the standard arrangement of Christian approaches to theology of religions.[10] It is found in a number of contemporary works seeking to defend and develop each position. For example, Indian theologian Ramesh Richard employs it in a recent defense of a version of exclusivism entitled The Population of Heaven.[11] Likewise, it is implemented in Jacques Dupuis' inclusivist proposal, Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions.[12] Finally, Race defends and expands his use of the typology in 'Ten Years Later: Surveying the Scene.'[13] There is no more certain sign, however, of the typology's popularity than its citation in several theological dictionaries and encyclopedias encompassing a variety of Christian traditions.[14]

None of this is to say that the typology has been without detractors who have criticised it for three reasons. First, several contend that their proposals do not fit the

9. D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, pp. 22, 52, 80.

10. This is not to say that it is the only arrangement on offer. Paul Knitter's early writing, for instance, prefers to distinguish four Christian attitudes toward religious pluralism: conservative evangelicalism, mainline protestantism, catholicism and theocentrism. See Paul F. Knitter, No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985). Peter Schniller has also advanced a unique fourfold typology: Ecclesiocentric universe, exclusive christology; Christocentric universe, inclusive christology; Theocentric universe, normative christology; and Theocentric universe, nonnormative christology. See Peter Schniller, 'Christ and the Church: A Spectrum of Views,' in Theological Studies, 37 (1976), pp. 545 - 566. While Schniller appears to avoid the confessionalism blatant in Knitter, his language continues to locate the discourse within Christian theology. Though the threefold typology has been used to distinguish different Christian positions, it is not necessarily bound to one religious tradition over others.

11. Ramesh P. Richard, The Population of Heaven: A Biblical Response to the Inclusivist Position on who will be Saved, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994). As the title implies, Richard sidesteps pluralists to dialogue with inclusivists in general. More specifically his apologetic is aimed at Clark Pinnock's inclusivist proposals as found in A Wideness in God's Mercy. Nevertheless, use of the typology is evident throughout the work.

12. Dupuis, Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions, see especially pp. 104 - 110. Dupuis, however, also acknowledges Schniller's arrangement (p. 104).

13. Alan Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, pp. 149 - 167.

14. See for example, Mariasusai Dhavamony, 'X. Theology of Religions,' in Dictionary of Fundamental Theology, ed. R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella, (Slough: St. Paul's, 1994), pp. 887 - 896, esp. pp. 888 - 889; D.A. Hu, 'Religions, Theology of,' in New Dictionary of Theology, ed. S.B. Ferguson and D.F. Wright, (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), pp. 576 - 577; and Gavin D'Costa, 'Other Faiths and Christianity,' in The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought, ed. Alister E. McGrath, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 411 - 419, esp. pp. 412 - 416.

threefold structure, among them Schubert Ogden, Ian Markham, and Michael Barnes.[15] In their view, the typology is artificial and restrictive and as the title of Markham's piece suggests, they seek to 'shatter' it with positions which they believe it cannot co-opt. The second, launched by Ken Surin, is wholly different. It sees the typology as a socio-political attempt by Western theologians, especially pluralists, to dominate and destroy the 'intractable otherness' of non-Western religions and cultures.[16] Thus, Surin wants not to shatter the typology, but to abandon it along with all modern, metacritical typologies. Finally, the most ironic attack comes from D'Costa who, after a decade of popularizing and defending the typology, has come to see it as redundant.[17] As I show in the remaining paragraphs, these criticisms can only be strengthened through a three-step unmasking of the typology's true aim. First, I show that its gestation parallels John Hick's spiritual pilgrimage from exclusivism to pluralism; hence second, that the typology was introduced not by Race in 1983, but by Hick in his first account of the pluralist hypothesis a decade earlier;[18] and third, that a suspicious analysis of Hick's language reveals the purpose of the typology. Thus I argue that the typology, far more than a simple organisational grid, is designed to be, as J.A. DiNoia has put it, 'a trajectory away from exclusivism.'[19] I turn first to Hick's autobiography as it is found in two recent essays.[20]

15. See Schubert Ogden, Is there One Religion or Are there Many?, (Dallas: SMU, 1992); Ian Markham, 'Creating Options: Shattering the "Exclusivist, Inclusivist, and Pluralist" Paradigm,' in New Blackfriars, January (1993), pp. 33 - 41; and Michael Barnes, Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

16. Kenneth Surin, 'Towards a "Materialist" Critique of "Religious Pluralism": A Polemical Examination of the Discourse of John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith,' in The Thomist, 53 (1989), 655 - 73. He writes, 'Traditional liberal intellectuals pride themselves on acknowledging heterogeneity and plurality, but this acknowledgement is always fatally compromised by a deployment of homogeneous logic - a logic which irons out the heterogeneous precisely by subsuming it under the categories of comprehensive and totalizing global and world theologies.' Kenneth Surin, 'A "Politics of Speech" Religious Pluralism in the Age of the McDonald's Hamburger,' in Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions, ed. Gavin D'Costa, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), p. 210.

17. Gavin D'Costa, 'The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions,' unpublished paper supplied by the author.

18. In 1972, Hick gave a series of public lectures at the Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham which eventually became chapters 8, 9 and 10 in GUF. See GUF, p. xvi.

19. J.A. DiNoia, The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), p. 50.

20. John Hick, 'A Personal Note,' in DQ, pp. 139 - 145 and John Hick, 'A Pluralist View,' in More than One Way?, pp. 29 - 55.

Hick came to Christian faith, and to 'Calvinist orthodoxy of an extremely conservative kind,' in 1941.[21] In two following decades, though he 'spent many months in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, and a short time in Palestine' he had virtually no contact with other religious traditions[22] and 'shared the general assumption that humanity was in fact slowly but surely becoming Christian.'[23] By his own admission then, Hick was an exclusivist. 'How, then,' he asks, 'have I come to adopt a "pluralist" understanding of the relation between Christianity and the other great world faiths? And what is this "pluralist" understanding? *I can only answer these questions by continuing the narrative.*'[24] The watershed came in 1967 with Hick's move to Birmingham, where he became involved in a variety of inter-faith organisations, most notably 'All Faiths for One Race.'[25] In the course of this activity, he attended synagogues, mosques, gurdwaras and temples and was impressed by the spirituality of his non-Christian colleagues. Later visits to India, Sri Lanka and Japan confirmed these experiences. 'Thus it was not so much new thoughts as new experiences that drew me [Hick] as a philosopher, into the issues of religious pluralism.'[26] It is important to note that Hick does not mention in either account a sudden conversion to pluralism. Rather, the impression is one of a gradual process through various inclusivist stages based on his inter-faith experiences. He hints at this when describing the appeal of inclusivism: 'The attraction... is that it negates the old missionary compulsion and yet is still Christocentric and still leaves Christianity in an uniquely central and normative position.'[27] Eventually, however, Hick 'rejected this inclusivism as an unsatisfactory compromise. [He] moved to a pluralism which sees the other great world faiths as authentic and valid contexts of salvation/liberation not secretly dependent on the cross of Christ.'[28] He thus links what we now know as the threefold typology to his own personal narrative.

Because of this deliberate linkage, when examining the typology's history and purpose, one needs to begin not with Race or D'Costa, but with Hick's 1972 essay, 'The

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21. DQ, p. 139.

22. DQ, p. 139.

23. Hick, 'A Pluralist View,' p. 37.

24. Hick, 'A Pluralist View,' p. 37 (emphasis mine).

25. DQ, p. 140.

26. DQ, p. 141.

27. DQ, p. 143.

28. DQ, p. 143.

Copernican Revolution in Theology.[29] Here the original typology, substantially if not nominally, is found. It opens by describing the 'Ptolemaic view' which centrally assumes 'that outside the church, or outside Christianity, there is no salvation.'[30] Again, notice Hick's personal language: 'Certainly this view, or rather this assumption, was present in my own mind for at least twenty-five years. I assumed it to be a central christian position that salvation is through Christ alone, and therefore that those who do not respond to God through Christ are not saved but, presumably, damned or lost.'[31] But this 'humanly repugnant conclusion'[32] denies both the universal love and salvific will of God: 'Can we then accept the conclusion that the God of love who seeks to save all mankind has nevertheless ordained that men must be saved in such a way that only a small minority can in fact receive this salvation? It is the weight of this moral contradiction that has driven christian thinkers in modern times to explore other ways of understanding the human religious situation.'[33] With these words, Hick introduces several theological 'epicycles' which seek to preserve the uniqueness of Christ or Christianity while extending the borders of salvation. They are, however, 'fundamentally weak arguments for the sake of an intuitively accepted conclusion until better arguments are found.'[34]

Hick uses astronomical language ('Ptolemaic,' 'epicycle') to label his theological survey because it is

> so powerfully reminiscent of the epicycles that were added to the old Ptolemaic picture of the universe, with the earth at the centre, to accommodate increasingly accurate knowledge of the planets. The stars, including the sun and the planets, were all supposed to move in concentric circles round the earth. This was at that time a feasible theory as regards the stars; but the planets moved in paths which did not fit such a scheme. But instead of abandoning the scheme, the ancient astronomers added a series of smaller supplementary circles, called epicycles, revolving with their centres on the original circles. If a planet was thought of as moving on one of these smaller circles whilst it was in turn moving round the great circles, the resulting path was more complex and nearer to what was actually observed; and this complication of the system made it possible to maintain the basic dogma that the earth is the hub of the universe. Looking back we can see that it was theoretically possible to stick indefinitely to the conviction that the earth is the centre, adding epicycle upon epicycle as required to reconcile the dogma with the facts. However, the whole thing became increasingly artificial and burdensome; and the time came when people's minds were ready for the new Copernican conception that it is the sun and not the earth that is at the centre.

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29. GUF, pp. 120 - 132.

30. GUF, p. 121.

31. GUF, p. 121.

32. GUF, p. 122.

33. GUF, p. 122 - 123.

34. GUF, p. 124.

> Then the old Ptolemaic system was thrown aside and appeared in retrospect utterly antiquated and implausible. And much the same, I cannot help thinking applies to what I shall call the Ptolemaic theology whose fixed point is the principle that outside the church, or outside Christianity, there is no salvation. When we find men of other faiths we add an epicycle of theory to the effect that although they are consciously adherents of a different faith, nevertheless they may unconsciously or implicitly be Christians. In theory, one can carry on such manoeuvres indefinitely. But anyone who is not firmly committed to the original dogma is likely to find the resulting picture artificial, implausible and unconvincing, and to be ready for a Copernican revolution in his theology of religions.[35]

As discussed in the previous chapter, Hick then initiates this 'Copernican revolution' by calling Christians to recognise that God (or after 1982, Ultimate Reality) is at the centre of the universe of faiths.

To disclose the purpose of this early version, it is important to consider first the historical context from which its language arises: the most infamous instance of the Church's scrutiny of natural science. On February 19, 1616, the Holy Office in Rome submitted the following propositions to theologians for evaluation:

> 1. The sun is the center [sic] of the world and hence immovable of local motion.
> 2. The earth is not the center [sic] of the world, nor immovable, but moves according to the whole of itself, also with a diurnal motion.[36]

The experts deemed both propositions philosophically absurd and theologically heretical and on March 5, the General Congregation of the Inquisition declared:

> It has... come to the knowledge of the said Congregation that the Pythagorean doctrine - which is false and altogether opposed to the Holy Scripture - of the motion of the Earth, and to the immobility of the Sun, which is also taught by Nicolaus Copernicus in De revolutionibus orbium coelestium, and by Diego de Zuniga (in the book) on Job, is now being spread abroad and accepted by many.... Therefore, in order that this opinion may not insinuate itself any further to the prejudice of the Catholic faith, the Holy Congregation has decreed that the said Nicolaus Copernicus' De revolutionibus orbium, and Diego Zuniga's On Job, be suspended until they be corrected.... In witness whereof the present decree has been signed and sealed with the hands and with the seal of the most eminent and Reverend Lord Cardinal of St. Cecilia, Bishop of Albano, on the fifth day of March, 1616.[37]

In accounts of the controversy surrounding Galileo, Christian theology and its defenders are often presented as the great inhibitors of natural human reason on its quest to unravel the secrets of the universe. Through his use of cosmological terms like 'Ptolemaic' and 'epicycle', Hick hints that the arguments of his opponents are as unenlightened as those of the

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35. GUF, pp. 124 - 125.

36. Nicholas Wolterstorff, Reason within the Bounds of Religion, second edition, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 15.

37. Wolterstorff, Reason within the Bounds of Religion, p. 16.

seventeenth century Cardinals. Once more, the conclusions of Christian theology must be set aside in order to discover truth.

Furthermore, it is also clear that the analogy suggests the inevitability of progress toward a Copernican theology of religions. This inevitability is mirrored in Hick's own journey which he characterises as a protracted attempt to intellectually appropriate Christian faith.[38] Thus, those who are willing to think theologically will abandon Ptolemaic theology and forsake its epicycles just a those who were willing to look through Galileo's telescope abandoned Ptolemaic cosmology. The only restraint on progress to a Copernican view is the firm but un-intellectual commitment to the uniqueness of Christ or Christianity. Particularly telling in this instance is Hick's unqualified use of 'fundamentalist' and its cognates to place his opponents.[39] Fundamentalism's noble theological heritage has in recent years been eclipsed by its constant linking by Western media to terrorist activity. Its indiscriminate use, therefore, portrays one's opponents as at best anti-intellectual and at worst, violently so. There is, therefore, no reason to regard Hick's initial articulation of the threefold paradigm as more than an attempt to deflate traditional positions as obscurantist.

The change from Ptolemaic/epicyclic/Copernican to the more familiar exclusivist/inclusivist/pluralist language only mutes this polemical purpose. Recall Hick's definitions cited in the previous chapter: exclusivism - salvation is confined to Christianity; inclusivism - salvation occurs throughout the world but is always the work of Christ; pluralism - the great world faiths are different and independently authentic contexts of salvation/liberation. The labels are different but the underlying soteriological axis is unchanged. The debate, as Ramesh Richard observes, continues to centre on the question, 'Are the masses of the world condemned to endless conscious punishment, even though they cannot be faulted for not having heard the gospel of Christ during their earthly life?'[40] Exclusivists, who believe this is in fact the case, are both immoral and anti-intellectual.

38. See Hick, 'A Pluralist View,' pp. 32 - 33 where he writes, 'I have recounted this piece of autobiography to help conservative readers to appreciate that I have some understanding of their position because it was once my own. My departure from it was gradual and was partly the result of further reflection prompted by a philosophical training, partly or reading the works of the New Testament scholars, and partly of trying to preach the gospel in a way that made sense to ordinary twentieth-century men and women, both young and old. My conversion experience, with its powerful awareness of a divine presence that was both profoundly challenging and at the same time profoundly creative and life-giving, remains basic; but the particular fundamentalist intellectual package that came with it has long since crumbled and disappeared.... It can in many cases be good to undergo a "fundamentalist" conversion, so long as one later sorts out the intellectually acceptable and unacceptable and is able to discard the latter.'

39. See, for example, DQ, pp. 139, 142; 'A Pluralist View,' pp. 29, 33.

40. Richard, The Population of Heaven, p. 9.

Inclusivists are willing to struggle with the moral crisis, but in so far as the salvation they proclaim is still Christian salvation, their reason remains fettered by dogma. Only the pluralist can morally and reasonably offer salvation/liberation to all. The polemic is preserved, the purpose hidden, but unchanged.

Thus, the intention of the threefold typology is exposed. Its history begins not with D'Costa or Race, but a decade previously with John Hick's 'Copernican Revolution.' An examination of this earlier work reveals that in addition to being an organisational framework, the typology is constructed in such a way as to blunt the edge of non-pluralist arguments and show the inevitability of the pluralist position. Let us now turn to actual exclusivist and pluralist proposals to see if the contention holds.

2.2   Whose Exclusivism? Which Pluralism?

As we have seen, exclusivism is defined by its limiting of salvation to those within the boundaries of the Christian community. In order for this definition to hold, it must embrace all who either situate themselves or have been situated within the exclusivist position. An examination of several prominent exclusivists reveals that this is not always the case. This is not to say that such a definition is wholly inaccurate for many do find it acceptable. Take, for example, three senior North American evangelicals. Carl Henry writes, 'no man who has never heard of Christ is condemned for rejecting Christ; all men are condemned for rejecting the light they have.... In a real sense, a man who has never heard the name of Christ rejects him every time he sins against whatever light he has.'[41] R.C. Sproul agrees: 'if a person in a remote area has never heard of Christ, he will not be punished for that. What he will be punished for is the rejection of the Father of whom he has heard and for the disobedience to the law that is written in his heart.'[42] Lorraine Boettner concurs but softens the pronouncement: 'this, of course, does not mean that all of the lost shall suffer the same degree of punishment.... While the heathens are lost, they shall suffer relatively less than those who have heard and rejected the Gospel.'[43]

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41. Carl F.H. Henry, Giving a Reason for Our Hope, (Boston: W.A. Wilde, 1949), pp. 40 - 42. See also Carl F.H. Henry, 'Is It Fair?' in Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard, ed. William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 245 - 255. In this essay, his argument proceeds as follows: 1) no one will be condemned for not responding to an unknown offer of grace; 2) Everyone will be judged according to 'available and accusing light,' (p. 248); 3) All have received and rebelled against this general knowledge of God; 4) God through Christ has made an offer of reconciliation; therefore 5) God is just in condemning all who have not trusted Christ, whether or not they have heard.

42. R.C. Sproul, Reason to Believe, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 56.

43. Lorraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 120.

Moreover, it is not only limited to evangelicalism's older generations: R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips have offered a lucid apology for traditional exclusivism in 'A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach.'[44] The thesis is simple: 'except perhaps in very special circumstances, people are not saved apart from explicit faith in Jesus Christ, which presupposes that they have heard about his salvific work on their behalf.'[45] So is the argument. Beginning with natural theology, they seek to show first that theism is a worldview superior to non-theism or atheism and second that Christianity is the superior form of theism and its claim to revelation, uniquely true. They then turn to the record of that revelation, the Bible, to assess the data concerning the nature and scope of salvation. 'Christianity is uniquely true,' they conclude, 'and explicit faith in Jesus Christ is a necessary condition for salvation.'[46] My complaint, therefore, is not that the definition does not apply - it clearly does. Rather, it is that the definition does not encompass many finding themselves placed in the exclusivist camp.

Though united in their desire to extend the boundaries of Christian salvation beyond explicit Christian practice, the proposals of this group are disparate. Nevertheless, the solutions can be grouped into one of two sorts. Some advance arguments for the likelihood of someone 'being saved by Christ apart from the knowledge of Christ,' tempered by the belief that eschatological destiny is 'known only to God.'[47] Typical of this approach is Lesslie Newbigin, an exclusivist according to Race and D'Costa,[48] and a label with which he is 'delighted.'[49] For him, the question, Can the good non-Christian be saved? is misleading because it 'is a question to which God alone has the right to give the answer'; because it abstracts the soul from the historical nature of human beings; and, fundamentally, because it 'starts with the individual and his or her need to be assured of ultimate happiness, and not with

44. R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, 'A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach,' in More Than One Way?, pp. 213 - 245.

45. Geivett and Phillips, 'A Particularist View,' p. 214.

46. Geivett and Phillips, 'A Particularist View,' p. 243.

47. Paul Helm, 'Are They Few That Be Saved?' in Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), p. 281.

48. Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, pp. 152 - 155; and D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 15.

49. Lesslie Newbigin, 'Mission in the World Today,' in A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions, ed. Eleanor Jackson, (Edinburgh and Grand Rapids: St Andrew Press and Eerdmans, 1994), p. 127.

God and his glory.'[50] He therefore concludes that 'it is arrogant presumption on the part of theologians to suppose that it is their business to answer it.'[51] It can be greeted only with reverent silence.[52]

It should also be noted that this eschatological agnosticism contains a spectrum of opinions. Newbigin, for instance, is hopeful about the destiny of much of humanity. 'The Bible, then,' he writes, 'is concerned with God's purpose of blessing for all the nations. It is concerned with the completion of God's purpose in the creation of the world and of man within the world. It is not - to put it crudely - concerned with offering a way of escape for the redeemed soul out of history, but with the action of God to bring history to its true end.'[53] He continues, 'we cannot rightly interpret the work of Christ as exclusively concerned with the destiny of individual souls after death and apart from God's purpose for history as a whole. Otherwise how could we account for the fact that Paul, who certainly affirms the absolute centrality and finality of the work of Christ also affirms that the Jews who have rejected Christ will be saved in the end?'[54] While refusing to debate individual destinies, he hopes for a renewed creation and within it a redeemed humanity. Others who follow Newbigin's agnosticism are decidedly less confident. Timothy R. Phillips is one of these. In an essay entitled 'Hell: A Christological Reflection,' he takes issue with 'revisionist eschatology,' (the relocation of heaven and hell to this life); 'universalism,' (the *extension* God's mercy and love

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50. Lesslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, (London: SPCK) pp. 177 - 180.

51. Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, p. 180.

52. This agnosticism has been harshly criticised. In On Being A Christian, trans. Edward Quinn, (London: Collins, 1977), p. 99, Hans Küng is particularly scathing: 'Here it is not enough to make assertions.... The problem [cannot]... be dismissed - as it is by other Protestant theologians - with a supercilious "we don't know," as if it were no concern of theirs. If Christian theologians have no answer to the question of the salvation of the greater part of mankind, they cannot be surprised when people react as they have done in the past.... It is all to easy to reverse the assertion of "dialectical theology," that the world religions are merely human projections, and declare that Christianity itself is a pure projection, the expression of absolutist-exclusive wishful thinking.' Similarly, Wesley Ariarajah excoriates such 'theology of neutrality,' insisting that it 'is becoming a very pragmatic question when people are called to pray together for peace, to work together.... Theological neutrality just will not do anymore.' Quoted in Jean Stromberg, 'Christian Witness in a Pluralistic World,' in The International Review of Mission, 78 (1988), p. 420. Newbigin responds: 'I find this way of thinking among Christians astonishing in view of the emphatic warnings of Jesus against these kinds of judgments which claim to preempt the final judgment of God.... Surely theologians at least should know that the judge on the last day is God and no one else.' Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, p. 177.

53. Lesslie Newbigin, The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission, revised edition, (London: SPCK, 1995), pp. 33 - 34.

54. Lesslie Newbigin, 'Mission in the World Today,' in A Word in Season, pp. 127 - 128.

necessarily and eternally to all); and 'annihilationism' (the equation of hell with the cessation of existence).[55] He prefers the classical view of hell as eternal conscious punishment, for the others minimise the saving work of Christ.[56] He then asks, What of those who have never heard? and answers not unlike Newbigin: 'The quandaries we sense must be left to Christ. He alone is the final Judge who determines the fate of the lost. In fact, it is only because we personally know God himself in Jesus Christ that we can trust him and totally commit this decision to him. For we know that no sentence will be pronounced except by God himself, who has endured our condition and suffered to save every person.'[57] Yet, where Newbigin is hopeful, Phillips is not: 'Consistent with the overwhelming data of Scripture,' he writes, 'we must be pessimistic about those who have never heard.'[58]

The second sort prefers to be more speculative. For instance, George Lindbeck (another of D'Costa's exclusivists[59]) envisions a post-mortem encounter with Christ. He argues that Christian language has been understood exclusively either as 'cognitive,' or 'experiential-expressivist;' the former focusing on its cognitive content, the latter on its symbolic expression of religious experience. Against both, he proposes a 'cultural-linguistic' model which regards such language as enabling people to religiously experience the world.[60] When applied to Christian doctrines of salvation, this results in an interesting dilemma for if Lindbeck is correct, one must be fluent in the Christian language in order to experience either salvation or judgment. Thus, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is balanced by *extra ecclesiam nulla damnatio*.[61] This is not to say, however, that those unacquainted with Christian language are confined to limbo, for all will be evangelized at death. 'The proposal is that dying itself be pictured as the point at which every human being is ultimately and expressly confronted by the gospel, by the crucified and risen Lord. It is only then that the final decision is made for or against Christ.... All previous decisions, whether for faith or against faith, are preliminary.'[62] Thus, 'It is only through explicit faith that men and women are

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55. Timothy R. Phillips, 'Hell: A Christological Reflection,' in Through No Fault of Their Own?, pp. 47 - 53.

56. Phillips, 'Hell: A Christological Reflection,' pp. 53 - 58.

57. Phillips, 'Hell: A Christological Reflection,' p. 59.

58. Phillips, 'Hell: A Christological Reflection,' p. 58.

59. Gavin D'Costa, 'Theology of Religions,' in The Modern Theologians, volume II, ed. David Ford, (London: Oxford, 1989), p. 277.

60. George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age, (London: SPCK, 1984).

61. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, p. 59.

redeemed; and if this does not happen during life, then the beginning of salvation must be thought of as occurring through an encounter with the risen Lord in or after death.'[63]

Still others hope for a universal yet distinctively Christian salvation, the most obvious representative being Karl Barth. In the previous chapter, it was shown that his doctrine of election seems to entail some kind of Christocentric universal salvation, even though he refused to spell out its logical implications. For him, God's judgment on humanity - rejection and death - has been transferred from all eternity to Jesus Christ. Likewise, in and through Jesus Christ, God has given salvation and life to all.[64] (Consequently, Paul Knitter is wrong to use him to speak for what he calls 'The Conservative Evangelical View,' which holds that 'without an encounter with Christ, eternal life is not possible.'[65]) Thus, the exclusivist concern that Christian salvation is found only in Christ, is preserved and at the same time, whether through agnosticism, post-mortem evangelization, or Christocentric universalism, salvation is extended to those outside Christianity. The popular definition of exclusivism clearly is inapplicable.

In the light of these nuances, one option might be simply to co-opt Newbigin, Lindbeck, Barth and others into inclusivism.[66] This, however, overlooks the key disagreement between those typically called exclusivists and inclusivists. To develop this point, I return to the distinctions drawn between Barth and Rahner at the close of the previous chapter. First, since both conceive of salvation in Christian terms, heartily affirming that any and all salvation is that salvation won by Christ, the quarrel is not over the nature of salvation. Second, since Barth and Rahner expressed hope in the universal salvific will of God, it is also clear that the difference is not over its scope. The dispute lies in their conceptions of the role

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62. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, p. 59.

63. George Lindbeck, 'Unbelievers and the Sola Christi,' in Dialog, 12 (1973), p. 182. See also his 'Fides ex auditu and the Salvation of Non-Christians,' in The Gospel and the Ambiguity of the Church, ed. Vilmos Vajta, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1974), pp. 92 - 123 and The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 46 - 72.

64. CDII.2, pp. 123, 167.

65. Paul Knitter, No Other Name?, pp. 79, 75 - 96.

66. Race tries to draw Barth into inclusivism as a result of David Lochhead's The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter, (London: SCM, 1988). Unlike many of Barth's critics, Lochhead balances the early Barthian critique of religion with the later Barthian expectation of 'secular parables of the Kingdom' (pp. 31 - 39). On this reassessment, Race writes, 'This is in interesting contradiction to the usual interpretation placed on Barth, but in the typology I have adopted, it just as easily draws him into the inclusivist band.' Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, p. 151.

of religion in salvation. Whereas Barth insisted that the Christian God saved despite religions, Rahner held that God did so through religions. In so far as Newbigin, Lindbeck, and others follow Barth in their reluctance to ascribe a saving role to religions they remain exclusivists.

Shifting the debate between exclusivism and inclusivism away from the number of the saved to the role of religion in salvation in this way threatens the exclusivist/inclusivist boundary as usually articulated by the threefold typology. According to Hick, inclusivists are driven away from the morally wicked notion that exclusivist approaches to other religions reserve redemption for a few and damnation for the rest. Yet the theologians mentioned above, by retaining their distinctly exclusivist flavour without limiting the scope of salvation, undermine this contention. Ironically, close scrutiny may uncover some exclusivists extending the scope of salvation beyond that of many inclusivists, thus rendering the labels non-sensical.[67] Thus, while it involves rhetorical flourish to denounce one's opponents for consigning most of humanity to hell, it is often untrue and always sensationalist. I therefore conclude that more often than not, the typology's account of exclusivism is deficient.

The polemical character of the typology is confirmed further by examining arguments for pluralist position. As we have seen, pluralism purports to offer the greatest possibility of salvation to the greatest number of people by arguing that the great religions are independently authentic avenues of salvation/liberation. The remaining paragraphs of this section explore one ethical and one philosophical argument for pluralism. In both cases, I will show that the position each advances is not pluralism but a version of (post-)Christian inclusivism.[68]

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67. William Lane Craig astutely observes that because 'salvation is available to more people under inclusivism.... does not imply that more people actually *avail* themselves of salvation.... It is perverse to call a view inclusivistic if it does not actually include any more people in salvation' than does exclusivism. William Lane Craig, 'Politically Incorrect Salvation,' in <u>Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World</u>, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis Okholm, (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), p. 84.

68. Criticising the pluralist position as implicitly exclusivist or inclusivist is not new. In addition to D'Costa's article cited above, see for example, John V. Apczynski, 'John Hick's Theocentrism: Revolutionary or Implicitly Exclusivist?' in <u>Modern Theology</u>, 8 (1992), pp. 39 - 52; Gavin D'Costa, 'The New Missionary: John Hick and Religious Plurality,' in <u>International Bulletin of Missionary Research</u>, 15 (1991), pp. 66 - 69; J.A. DiNoia, <u>The Diversity of Religions</u>, pp. 34 - 64; S. Mark Heim, 'Salvations: A More Pluralistic Hypothesis,' in <u>Modern Theology</u>, 10 (1994), pp. 341 - 360, <u>Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion</u>, 13 - 43, esp. pp. 23 - 43; Ted Peters, 'Pluralism as a Theological Problem,' in <u>The Christian Century</u>, 100 (1983), pp. 843 - 845; and Kathryn Tanner, 'Respect for Other Religions: A Christian Antidote to Colonialist Discourse,' in <u>Modern Theology</u>, 9 (1993), pp. 1 - 18.

An ethical argument for a pluralist position can be found in Paul Knitter's 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions' which begins with a familiar pluralist rallying cry:

> *only* through the vision, the motivation, the empowerment coming from the religious symbols and experience will human kind be able to overcome its innate, warring selfishness; only through the hope and self-sacrificing love born of religious experience will humans be able to "muster the energy, devotion, vision, resolution, capacity to survive disappointment that will be necessary - that *are* necessary - for the challenge" of building a better and more just world.[69]

In order to avoid the charge of relativism where '"many" means "any" and no one can make any evaluative judgments,'[70] Knitter proposes that such evaluations be made on the basis of liberation theology: 'both basic humanitarian concerns as well as the soteriologies of most religions would seem to dictate that a *preferential option for the poor* constitutes both the *necessity* and the *primary purpose* of interreligious dialogue.'[71]

Liberation theology enables pluralism without relativism in three ways. First, it brings the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' into theology of religions. 'Why, really, have Christians been so insistent on maintaining the doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*..., or the claim that Christ has to be the final norm for all other religions?' Knitter asks, 'Certainly it cannot be denied that in the past such doctrines and such christology have been used to justify the subordination and exploitation of other cultures and religions.'[72] Traditional positions supporting the economic oppression by 'Christendom' of others must be forsaken. Second, it provides a common context for dialogue. Noting the move away from positing a religious common ground or essence, he wonders how interreligious dialogue can occur. 'This is where a liberation theology of religions may be of great help. If there is no preestablished common ground or common essence that we can invoke before dialogue, perhaps there is a common *approach* or a common *context* with which we can begin dialogue...'[73] This common approach or context is *Soteria* - justice for the poor and oppressed.[74] Finally, it gives

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69. Paul F Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), p. 179, citing Wilfred Cantwell Smith, The Faith of Other Men, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 127.

70. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 181.

71. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 181.

72. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 182.

73. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 185.

74. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 187. He continues, 'For Christians, that which constituted the basis and goal for interreligious dialogue, that which makes mutual understanding and cooperation between the religions possible..., that which unites the religions in common discourse and praxis is *not* how they are related to Christ..., nor even how they respond to and conceive of God, but rather, to what extent they are promoting *Soteria*... - to what extent they

theology of religions a 'general criteria that a variety of religions could agree to work with as a basis for grading themselves.'[75] Such criteria would be rooted in a common 'feeling of obligation to stand on the side of the poor and oppressed against the rich and oppressor.'[76] They need not lead to a new 'ethical Archimedean point outside the praxis of liberation and dialogue.... The criteria - what elements contribute to authentic, full liberation - can be known only in the actual praxis of struggling to overcome suffering and oppression, and only in the praxis of dialogue.'[77]

Furthermore, liberation theology enables Christians to affirm Christ without accepting orthodox christology.[78] First, it holds that whether or not Christ is God's final revelation is unknowable. If 'praxis is both the *origin* and the *confirmation* of theory or *doctrine*,'[79] everything known about Jesus must originate in and be continually be confirmed, clarified and corrected by the praxis of his teachings. Thus his normativity will only be discovered in the 'praxis *of Christian dialogue* with other religions - following Christ, applying his message, within the dialogue with other believers....'[80] As such praxis is only beginning, it is now impossible to know if Jesus is God's final revelation. Second, it reveals that knowledge of Christ's uniqueness unnecessary. It is 'subordinate to carrying out the preferential option for the poor and nonpersons. Orthodoxy becomes a pressing concern only when it is necessary for orthopraxis - for carrying out the preferential option and promoting the kingdom.'[81] Nevertheless, Christ's 'message *is* a sure means for bringing about liberation from injustice and oppression, that it *is* an effective, hope-filled, universally meaningful way of realizing *Soteria* and promoting God's kingdom.'[82] This knowledge alone is sufficient. Third, it grades religions: 'from their ethical, soteriological fruits we shall know them - we

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are engaged in promoting human welfare and bringing about liberation with and for the poor and nonpersons.' p. 187.

75. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 189.

76. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 189.

77. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' pp. 189 - 190.

78. That the ontological baggage must be dropped is inevitable: 'In order to avoid preestablished absolutist positions that prevent a genuinely pluralistic dialogue, Christians must, it seems, revamp or even reject their traditional understanding of Jesus Christ as God's final, definitive, normative voice.' Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 191.

79. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 191.

80. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 192.

81. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 192.

82. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' pp. 192 - 193.

shall be able to judge whether and how much other religious paths *and* their mediators are salvific.'[83] By applying *Soteria*, Christians may one day find that Jesus is in fact unique, but we may otherwise discover that he is one among several mediators. And yet, 'whether such discernments about uniqueness and finality are eventually made or not is... not that important - as long as we, with all peoples and religions are seeking first the kingdom and its justice (Matt. 6:33).'[84] Finally, it can mediate non-absolutist christologies to the faithful by removing any perceived threat while bringing deeper commitment to Christ and by leading believers into a better understanding and practice of the language of the New Testament.[85]

Whether or not this position is actually 'pluralist' according to the accepted definition can be explored by asking the following question, Given the different religious and cultural conceptions of justice, which is absolute? According to the above argument, it is the justice which liberates the poor and oppressed. But this dismisses *a priori* rival conceptions of justice. Consider a 'justice' rooted in *karma*: it may argue that the poor and oppressed are being punished for sins perpetrated in previous incarnations and hence to liberate them would be to interfere with that just retribution.[86] The problem created by the confrontation of rival conceptions of justice, however, is often far more tangible than such philosophical speculations. Once again, Lesslie Newbigin eloquently summarises the dilemma when he writes 'We all long for justice, and it is these passionate struggles that tear the world to pieces. There is a tragic irony in... Aloysius Pieris's definition of true religion as a "revolutionary urge... to generate a new humanity" while his beloved Sri Lanka is being torn to pieces by rival claims to "justice".'[87] Newbigin thus reminds us that rival definitions inevitably translate into claims that some 'justices' are superior to others. Though admitting that there is

83. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 193.

84. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' p. 194.

85. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' pp. 195 - 196. In this way, the community will be assured that theologians 'who are exploring... a nonabsolutist christology are doing so not merely for the sake of novelty or for the sake of joining the excitement of a truly pluralist interreligious dialogue; rather they do so because "the love of Christ urges them" (2 Cor. 5:14). They want to be faithful to the original message of the Nazarean - that to which Jesus always subordinated himself: the kingdom of love, unity and justice.' pp. 196 - 197.

86. Karmic law is summarised by the *Chandogya Upanisad* (v. 7), which states '...those who are of pleasant conduct here - the prospect is indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a *brahmin*, or the womb of a *ksatriya*, or the womb of a *vaisya*. But those who are of stinking conduct here - the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcaste (*candala*).' Quoted in A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 66 - 67.

87. Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, p. 146.

no Archimedean arbitrator vindicating his conception of justice,[88] Knitter holds, albeit tentatively, that only those resonating with his are legitimate.

If this objection is correct, then Knitter's argument does not free Christian theology of religions from a restrictive christological absolute, but simply replaces an absolute christology with an equally absolute justice. He must therefore demonstrate why his 'justice', embedded as it is in a modern Western context, transcends and evaluates (however tentatively) all others. He is thereby committed to an argument for the uniqueness and supremacy of contemporary Western culture.[89] Thus, the charge of (post-)Christian inclusivism is established. The argument is (post-)Christian in that its conception of justice is rooted in, but not limited to a Christian understanding. It is inclusive in that it reserves for itself the ability to evaluate accurately other culturally embedded conceptions of justice. It is therefore inappropriate to designate this position 'pluralist' for it does not conform to the accepted definition. The great religions are not *independently authentic* ways of salvation/liberation, but are effective only insofar as they embody *Soteria*.

Now, let us return to Hick's philosophical argument for pluralism. By the nature of the case, his argument is meta-critical: it cannot be limited by Christianity, or any religion. Take for instance the following excerpt from An Interpretation of Religion:

> That there is not just one but a plurality of such historical channels is prominent among the facts for which an interpretation of religion must account. In doing so it will inevitably have to go beyond the dominant self-understanding of each tradition. For each has come over the centuries to regard itself as uniquely superior to the others, seeing them either as lying outside the sphere of salvation, or as earlier stages in an evolution of which it is the culmination, or as less full and authentic versions of itself. But this cannot be sustained on impartial grounds. A genuinely pluralistic hypothesis will thus inevitably call, at least by implication, for further development within each of the traditions. Change is in fact going on all the time by means of interpretation, exegesis, commentary, midrash, theological experiment; and insofar as each of the world religions comes, in today's global city, to see itself as one among many it will use these methods to deemphasise its won absolute and exclusive claim, allowing this to fall into the background and eventually to become absorbed into its past history.[90]

Hick's pluralism strives to be a metacritique of all religious experience and activity. It follows then that to be a pluralist, one must cultivate the ability to 'stand back' from one's tradition.[91] Only this departure enables one to see with W.C. Smith, Hick's most immediate influence, the

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88. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions,' pp. 187 - 188.

89. Heim, Salvations, p. 93; for an example of such an argument, see John Rawls, A Theory of Liberalism, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

90. IOR, pp. 2 - 3.

91. GUF, p. 132.

obvious. Smith writes, 'The unity of humankind's religious history is so obvious, once one sees it. We have, however, been assiduously trained not to see it. Even more strongly, we have been pressured not to think it; and not to feel it.'[92] Thus, the objective of philosophical pluralists such as Hick is to construct a theory unlimited by the confines of any religious tradition.

Nevertheless, the call to stand back is increasingly being answered by those from various philosophical and theological persuasions asking, 'stand where?' Lesslie Newbigin suggests that the standpoint is that of a consumer-oriented society. While pluralism 'owes much to the Hindu concept of the *ishta devata*, the god of one's choice, there is little doubt that it is attractive to contemporary inhabitants of the affluent North because it corresponds exactly to the ethos of the consumer society where the choice of the customer is free and sovereign.'[93] Similarly, J.A. DiNoia observes that pluralist hypotheses 'do not so much account for the diversely featured religious world they observe as suggest some important changes in it. They can be read as in effect inviting the Christian community and, by implication, other religious communities as well, to entertain and adopt certain revisions and their doctrines.'[94] Finally, John Milbank writes, 'The terms of discourse which provide both the favored categories for encounter with other religions - *dialogue, pluralism,* and the like - together with the criteria for the acceptable limits of the pluralist embrace - social justice, liberation, and so forth - are themselves embedded in a wider Western discourse become globally dominant.'[95]

Thus, Newbigin, DiNoia, and Milbank, from exclusivist, inclusivist, and postmodernist perspectives, make clear that when Hick and Smith ask Christians to 'stand back' from their Christianity, they are in effect calling for a shift to another tradition entirely, and that this tradition is not without its own absolute and potentially intolerant claims. (Though as Peter Donovan rightly notes, 'a cynic might well be intrigued to see the descendants of Calvin and of the Inquisition joining forces with the disciples of Nietzsche to

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92. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Towards a World Theology, p. 6.

93. Lesslie Newbigin, 'Religion for the Marketplace,' in Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered, p. 138. Similar criticisms can be found in his Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth, (London: SPCK, 1991); The Gospel in a Pluralist Society; and A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Mission, chapters 7 - 10, 14.

94. J.A. DiNoia, 'Pluralist Theology of Religions: Pluralistic or Non-Pluralistic?' in Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered, p. 121.

95. John Milbank, 'The End of Dialogue,' in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, p. 175.

give lessons on tolerance to the children of the Enlightenment!')[96] S. Mark Heim summarises this doubt:

> of the vast religious diversity in the world, the pluralists affirm as fully valid only that narrow segment where believers have approximated the authors' approach to their own tradition. The many faiths of the world - even in their exclusivist versions - may all save in some sense, but only according to a plan the pluralist understands and other believers do not. It is clearly stated that those without a pluralistic understanding of their faith stand urgently in need of fulfilment and enlightenment. Without such conversion they and their traditions are at least latent threats to world peace and justice, morally dangerous as well as theologically wrong. Oddly enough, then, these opponents of claims to superiority or normativeness see no hope, not only for the Christian tradition but for all other religions and the world itself, unless their own views prevail.[97]

On the basis of Hick's own aims as well as of some of the attacks launched against them, then, we can safely conclude that this philosophical argument for pluralism is in fact another variety of (post-)Christian inclusivism. It is (post-)Christian because its dominant exponents continue to be Christian theologians; it is inclusive because it retains the right to evaluate the soteriological efficacy of non-pluralist traditions according to its own criteria. Thus, when subjected to close scrutiny, actual arguments for pluralism looks less pluralistic than the definition suggests. Therefore, the typological account of pluralism is deceptive.

2.3   The Soteriological Axis

It is now clear that commonly accepted definitions of exclusivism and pluralism mask subtleties and ambiguities in each, thereby underscoring the original charge: that the typology is a polemical device which denies the validity of non-pluralist positions and supports the inevitability of pluralism. I now want to consider whether the typology could be rescued by shifting the axis from questions of salvation to related but distinct questions of truth, from soteriology to epistemology. Through an examination of the confusion created by Race's definitions, I will show that such a shift threatens the internal boundaries of the typology.

I begin with his definition of exclusivism which 'counts the revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole criterion by which all religions... can be understood and judged.'[98] This definition, unlike Hick's soteriological one, embraces all exclusivists. For example, the self-proclaimed soteriological exclusivist Harold Netland includes in his definition the following phrases: '... (c) the Bible is God's unique revelation, and thus is true and authoritative; and (d) where the claims of Scripture are incompatible with those of other faiths, the latter are to be rejected as

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96. Peter Donovan, 'The Intolerance of Religious Pluralism,' in Religious Studies, 29 (1993), p. 210.

97. S. Mark Heim, 'Crisscrossing the Rubicon: Reconsidering Religious Pluralism,' in The Christian Century, 108 (1991), p. 688.

98. Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, p. 11.

false."[99] Eschatological agnostic, Newbigin agrees: 'in Jesus, the absolute truth has been made present amid the relativities of human cultures....'[100] This exclusivism affirms not that other religions are false *in toto*, but only where their claims conflict with the claims of Scripture or the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. However, where Hick's definition too narrowly defines exclusivism, Race's too broadly embraces some inclusivists. For instance, Clark Pinnock - one of a growing number of inclusivist evangelicals- writes, 'Recognizing truth in other religions does not take any glory away from Jesus Christ. For if all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in him, the truth anyone possesses is a facet of the truth in Jesus....'[101] Moreover, most Roman Catholic inclusivists also affirm that a properly Christian evaluation of other religions is rooted in Jesus Christ. Jacques Dupuis is unequivocal: 'We traditionally affirm that Jesus is unique not only as any person whom God would choose as the vehicle of a divine self-revelation and self-manifestation would necessarily be unique... but in the sense that, by and in Jesus, God effected a self-manifestation in a manner that is decisive and can be neither surpassed or repeated.'[102]

His summary of inclusivism fares little better. He writes, 'To be inclusive is to believe that all non-Christian religious truth belongs ultimately to Christ and the way of discipleship which springs from his way.'[103] The inclusivists just mentioned, whether Roman Catholic or evangelical, would subscribe to this definition. However, so would exclusivists following Hendrik Kraemer who hold that while much in the religions is erroneous, 'God works and has worked in man outside the sphere of biblical revelation.'[104] He continues, 'Even in this fallen world God shines through in a broken troubled way: in reason, in nature and in history.'[105] Again, Newbigin writes of an 'awareness of God which seems to be part of human

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99. Harold Netland, Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 34.

100. Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, p. 163.

101. Clark Pinnock, A Wideness in God's Mercy, p. 139.

102. Jacques Dupuis, Jesus Christ at the Encounter of the World Religions, pp. 91 - 110, 178 - 206, esp. p. 92. See also Rahner, Foundations of the Christian Faith, chapter 10, 'Jesus Christ in Non-Christian Religions,' pp. 311 - 321, esp. pp. 312 - 313; and D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, pp. 70 - 75, 81 - 139, esp. pp. 135 - 137.

103. Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, p. 38

104. Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, (London: Edinburgh House, 1938), p. 136.

105. Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, (London: Lutterworth, 1956), p. 232.

nature wherever it appears."[106] The confusion is even more apparent when one sets these definitions together. If the revelation in Jesus Christ is the sole criterion of religious truth (exclusivism), does it not then follow that all religious truth belongs ultimately to Christ (inclusivism)? Likewise, if all religious truth belongs to Christ (inclusivism), then is not his revelation the sole criterion (exclusivism)? If the central issue is the standard of religious truth, then according to Race's definitions, exclusivists and inclusivists agree that it is Jesus Christ. The difference between them seems to be not one of substance but degree: both agree that truth exists in other religions, but how much may be debated. On the other hand, Race may mean by his definitions to say that exclusivists hold that there is no truth outside Christianity and that inclusivists are more open-minded. If this is his intention, then judging by the exclusivists cited above, he is wrong. I therefore conclude that on the distinction between exclusivism and inclusivism, Race's epistemological definitions are either incoherent or incorrect.

Finally, consider his definition of pluralism: 'knowledge of God is partial in all faiths, including the Christian. Religions must acknowledge their need of each other if the full truth about God is to be available to mankind.'[107] The first sentence, as far as I can tell, contains one proposition: Partial knowledge of God is found in all faiths; and the corollary: Christianity's knowledge of God is partial. Consider the former: perhaps only the most extreme Barthian would deny that this is in fact the case. As we have seen, the possibility of genuine religious knowledge outside Christianity is affirmed by theologians regardless of typological location. The latter is as uncontroversial for even the most fervent exclusivist holds that 'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror.... Now I know in part;' (1 Corinthians 13:12). Thus, the first half of this definition says nothing to distinguish pluralism from its typological interlocutors. The point of departure, then, lies in the second sentence: Religions must acknowledge their need of each other if the full truth about God is to be available to humanity.

There is an admirable humility about this sentence and it is certainly true that the truth is much greater than any one person or any one religious tradition can grasp.

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106. Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, p. 73. Similar views are expressed by Sir Norman Anderson in Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism, (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), pp. 112 - 136 and Stephen Neill, Christian Faith and Other Faiths: The Christian Dialogue with Other Religions, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). Revised and reprinted as Crises of Belief: The Christian Dialogue with Faith and No Faith, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984). This argument for natural revelation, in spite of Barth's denial, is a central part of classical Reformed theology. See Calvin, Institutes, Book I, 'The Knowledge of God the Creator,' esp. chapters I - V, pp. 33 - 68.

107. Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, p. 72.

Nevertheless, this humility is at best superficial. At worst, the definition deceptively makes a claim to privileged epistemic access. On this point, Lesslie Newbigin is particularly eloquent:

> In the famous story of the blind men and the elephant, so often quoted in the interest of religious agnosticism, the real point of the story is constantly overlooked. The story is told from the point of view of the king and his courtiers, who are not blind but can see that the blind men are unable to grasp the full reality of the elephant and are only able to get a hold of part of the truth. The story is constantly told in order to neutralize the affirmation of the great religions, to suggest that they learn humility and recognize that none of them can have more than one aspect of the truth. But, of course, the real point of the story is exactly the opposite. If the king were also blind there would be no story. The story is told by the king, and it is the immensely arrogant claim of one who sees the full truth which all the world's religions are only groping after. It embodies the claim to know the full reality which relativizes all the claims of the religions and philosophies.[108]

Newbigin's point is underscored when one considers the epistemological situation of pluralists who make specific claims about the nature of reality. Compare for example, John Hick's central thesis with a typically exclusivist one. Hick insists that the great religions embody independently authentic, saving responses to the one Ultimate Reality. Furthermore, he has written numerous books and articles in an attempt to convince the widest possible audience that this is the case. Likewise, an exclusivist holding that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ. In this chapter, I have cited a number of authors who, believing this to be the case, have written books and essays to convince others of its truth. It is crucial to note that the epistemological situations of both theses are identical: both make claims about reality; both marshall evidence and compose arguments in support of them; both hold people disagreeing with them to be mistaken.[109] Epistemologically speaking then, there is nothing pluralistic about the pluralist hypothesis.[110]

One pluralist openly acknowledging this epistemological exclusivism is Peter Byrne. Like Race, the focus of his attention is the epistemology of religious belief; unlike Race, he far

108. Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, pp. 9 - 10.

109. It is possible to reinterpret one claim in the light of the other. Hick does this through his argument for 'mythologising' the particularistic trans-historical truth claims of the religions - and in this case, those of orthodox christology. See especially MGI, MeGI and 'The Logic of God Incarnate,' in DQ. S. Mark Heim, while by no means a traditional exclusivist, has done just the opposite by recasting Hick's hypothesis as a non-realist affirmation of tolerance. In this way, the pluralist hypothesis is seen not to describe reality, but to describe an attitude which is wholly compatible with a Christian worldview. See S. Mark Heim, 'The Pluralistic Hypothesis, Realism and Post-Eschatology,' in Religious Studies, 28 (1992), and Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion, pp. 35 - 42. Such strategies, however, only end up affirming that both claims cannot be true in a realist sense.

110. For argument for this thesis from the perspective of analytic philosophy of religion, see Alvin Plantinga, 'Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism,' unpublished paper supplied by the author.

more accurately, if not exhaustively, typifies the various epistemological interpretations of religious plurality into naturalism, confessionalism, pluralism, relativism and varieties of what he calls neutralism. I do not want to enter into a discussion of the merits of Byrne's typological arrangement here. For my purposes, the following observations are important. First, Byrne regards exclusivism and inclusivism as soteriological variants within epistemological confessionalism which 'finds cognitive success in religion, but locates it solely or primarily in one confession.'[111] Secondly, and more crucially, he presents epistemological pluralism as a composition of three minimal elements: 'a fundamental realist commitment arising out of the faiths to the existence of a transcendent, sacred reality; a basic cognitive equality between faiths in putting human beings in contact with this reality and enabling them to be vehicles of salvation; and finally *agnosticism toward, and therefore disengagement from, the specifics of any confessional interpretation of religion.*'[112] In other words, pluralism is less about a pooling of religious resources to discover truth, as Race indicates, and more about the prescription of agnosticism in the face of religious plurality.

Thus, when the threefold typology is set out along an epistemological axis, one ends up not with three distinct approaches to religious truth, but with two muddled varieties of exclusivism. On the one hand, the search for religious truth is defined in exclusively Christian terms. To be sure their may be degrees of scepticism or hope as to whether or where extra-Christian truth may be found, but the criteria for discerning that truth are recognisably Christian. On the other, pluralists also make particular claims about the search for religious truth - claims which purport either to refute or reinterpret particular claims of other traditions. The labels are meaningless if exclusivism and inclusivism cannot be distinguished and pluralism is simply exclusivism of another type. Defined epistemologically, the typology is functionally incoherent. Therefore, such a move does not rescue it from the objections of previous sections.

Conclusion:

In summary, this chapter sought to show that the exclusivist/inclusivist/pluralist typology is designed to dull the edge of non-pluralist positions. This thesis was suggested by an inquiry into the introduction of the typology in the early pluralist hypothesis of John Hick. Furthermore, it was confirmed by examinations of both exclusivism and pluralism. Definitions of each were deemed to be misleading in the light of exclusivist attempts to broaden the scope of salvation and the restrictive nature of the ethical and philosophical

111. Peter Byrne, Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion, (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 3.

112. Byrne, Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism, p. 6 (emphasis mine).

arguments for pluralism offered by Paul Knitter and John Hick. Finally, I argued that the typology could not be delivered from these objections by shifting its axis from soteriology to epistemology. The epistemological definitions offered by Alan Race, if anything, lead to even more problems. Now, in conclusion, the final question must be faced.

Should the typology be retained at all? I believe it should at least until a superior one is introduced for the following reasons. First, when surveying the exploding amount of literature in Christian theology of religions, a grouping of certain authors or positions over against others will take place: some kind of typological arrangement is inevitable. Second, this typology has enjoyed a great deal of popularity across confessional boundaries and has, despite its polemical nature, been successfully adapted to suit the purposes of non-pluralists. Finally, this popularity and adaptability has, in turn, given a starting-point for much of the new work going on in Christian theology of religions. Nevertheless, its continued use must be qualified in two ways. First, it must be admitted that this typology, as any other, may in fact obscure important differences and commonalities while clarifying others. Second, its preliminary role must be acknowledged. It provides a starting-point which must be transcended if research is to be continued, and new proposals offered and debated. In my view, the threefold typology is not unlike Wittgenstein's ladder: anyone who understands it eventually recognises it as nonsensical, when one has used it - as steps - to climb beyond it. One must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after one has climbed up it.[113]

It is time to throw the ladder away. In Part III of this thesis, I will show that Hendrik Kraemer, once liberated from the straight-jacket of exclusivist definitions and the constraints of the typology in general, opens to Christians a way of being both faithfully Christian and radically open to other religions. I must first, however, set Kraemer in his historical context and summarise his major works. These are the tasks of Part II.

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113. Adapted from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 6.54, p. 74.

PART II
REDISCOVERING HENDRIK KRAEMER

Chapter 3

Reading Kraemer in Context

Introduction:

Part I, by introducing the reader to Christian theology of religions in general, provided the foundation for Part III. There, I will show that the Kraemer withstands common objections levelled against him and continues to contribute important insights to current theological debate. Yet, these apologetic and constructive proposals must be postponed until Kraemer has been properly situated in his historical context and his work, carefully exposited. These are the aims of Part II. This chapter will situate Kraemer historically while the one following will set out his theology of religions.

While Kraemer has rightly been employed by both D'Costa and Race as an exponent of the exclusivist position, this is not to say that he is the only one: the most obvious alternatives are Karl Barth and Lesslie Newbigin. Nevertheless, my choice of Kraemer is deliberate. Despite his gigantic stature within and without Reformed Theology, Barth never wrote outside the European context.[1] Kraemer did: 'As a theologian, Kraemer lacks Barth's profundity but, unlike Barth, he speaks from real experience: he spent years in the field.'[2] Like Kraemer, Lesslie Newbigin draws upon experiential resources and has the added advantage of being familiar with contemporary theological problems. Yet, he acknowledges in his indebtedness to Kraemer: 'I find myself...

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1 . Barth's famous reply to D.T. Niles typifies his lack of interest in other religions: When asked by Niles how he knew that Hinduism was unbelief when he had never known a Hindu, Barth replied, 'a priori,' after which Niles only smiled and shook his head. See D.T. Niles, 'Karl Barth - A Personal Memory,' in The South East Asian Journal of Theology, 11 (1969), pp. 10 - 11.

2 . Barnes Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism, p. 35.

bracketed with Kraemer, where I am delighted to be. I would want to be an exclusivist along with Kraemer in believing that God's work in Christ is (to use Kraemer's favorite phrase) *sui generis*; that there is nothing that can be put into the same category as the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Kraemer affirmed this with passion and I would wish to do so too.'[3] Because he thus combines missiological experience with theological creativity, I have chosen Hendrik Kraemer.

Indeed, for at least three decades one could not do theology of religions without reference to him,[4] as William Temple predicted: '[The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World] is a product of... knowledge, experience and vision. It is likely to remain for many years to come the classical treatment of its theme - perhaps the central theme for Christian thought in this age of multiform bewilderment.'[5] Yet, four decades after Temple penned these words, the situation had changed: 'Among the younger generation,' wrote Origen Jathanna in 1981, '... Kraemer seems to be a figure of the distant past, often hidden behind a smoke-screen of undiscriminating criticism in terms of over simplified position defining catch-words.'[6] Now, another fifteen years on, if Kraemer's work is mentioned at all, it is either badly distorted or summarily dismissed.[7]

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3 . Newbigin, 'Mission in the World Today,' p.127; see also Lesslie Newbigin, 'A Sermon Preached at the Thanksgiving Service for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Tambaram Conference of the International Missionary Council,' in International Review of Mission, 78 (1988), p. 328, where he writes, 'Please permit me another autobiographical note. Kraemer always recognized that the most penetrating critic of his position was A.G. Hogg, principal of Madras Christian College. Kraemer and Hogg were both, for me, revered and beloved friends. Both were great missionaries. In the past forty years I have over and over again read and reflected upon the debate both here at Tambaram and in the following years, during which both of them (as in proper dialogue) modified their positions. I find myself more and more compelled to stand with Kraemer.'

4 . Kraemer's The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, finally ceased printing in 1969. Compare The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, (London: Edinburgh House, 1938) with The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1969). All subsequent references to the original are cited hereafter as CM.

5 . William Temple, 'Foreword,' in CM, p. ix. A.R. Gaultieri has expressed a similar opinion: The Christian Message 'became the unavoidable standard against which to formulate one's own views of the relationships of Christian to non-Christian faith.' A.R. Gaultieri, 'Theological Evaluations by Christians of the Religious Faith of non-Christians,' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1969), p. 29.

6 . Origen V. Jathanna, The Decisiveness of the Christ Event and the Universality of Christianity in a World of Religious Plurality, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981), p. 47. Cited hereafter as DCE.

7 . For example, Kraemer's contribution is not mentioned at all in Hick's IOR while in Knitter's No Other Name?, he arises only three times and then only to be quickly dismissed again as a 'Barthian' (see pp. 82, 111, 138). Even the normally careful Keith Ward in Revelation and Religion: A Theology of Revelation in the World Religions, (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 16, caricatures Kraemer's position as advocating 'that God has spoken in the Bible and that's that.' Moreover, such abrupt ejections are true not

Consequently, a recovery of Kraemer must begin with a careful analysis of the historical context in which he lived and wrote. This investigation is conducted in three stages, beginning with a general introduction to his life and works. Having completed this introduction, I then sharpen my focus to Kraemer's role within the missionary thinking of the early ecumenical movement by critically examining the first three ecumenical missionary conferences: Edinburgh 1910, Jerusalem 1928, and Tambaram 1938. Finally, the third stage argues that to (dis)regard Kraemer as Barth's mouthpiece is too simplistic and that a far more important influence, albeit negatively, was William Hocking. This contention is established by outlining chronologically Kraemer's influences as a student, his experiences in Indonesia, his encounter with dialectical theology, and his confrontation with the antithesis of the Christian Message, W.E. Hocking's Re-Thinking Missions.[8]

3.1   Kraemer's Life and Works

Born in Amsterdam on May 17, 1888, Hendrik Kraemer saw the death of his father in 1894 and his mother only six years later. With his sister, he was then placed in a Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk orphanage, where he came to Christian faith.[9]   At sixteen, after hearing a

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only with those associated with pluralism. The inclusivist Jacques Dupuis, in Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions, grants Kraemer two paragraphs, but again summarily discards him after equating him with Barth (see pp. 105-106, 109).   Similarly, in A Wideness in God's Mercy, Clark Pinnock likens Kraemer to Barth (p. 108) and demonstrates a thorough misunderstanding of Kraemer's 'totalitarian' view of religions (p. 115). Even fellow exclusivist Harold Netland, recalls him only as a figure of the hoary past in Dissonant Voices, p. 18. There seem to be only two exceptions. First, Kraemer is remembered in the missiological and ecumenical publications of the World Council of Churches (See, for example, the International Review of Mission, 78 (1988) and the Ecumenical Review, 41 (1989) - both commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the International Missionary Council Conference at Tambaram, 1938). Second, Gavin D'Costa's Theology and Religious Pluralism is one contemporary theological work to offer an accurate summary and sensitive critique of Kraemer's work. Unfortunately, it is now nearly a decade since publication and it will not be reprinted.

8 . Of course, this discussion is not intended to be, and indeed cannot be, exhaustive. As W.A. Visser 't Hooft recalls, Kraemer's 'life has so many different aspects that anyone who desires to write about him must first select which of Kraemer's varied contributions he will discuss. There is the philologist; there is the expert on Islam; there is the leader of the spiritual resistance against National Socialism; there is the fighter for the renewal of the Netherlands Reformed Church; there is the professor of theology who is really a layman and there is the layman who asks theological questions about modern culture; there is the first director of the Ecumenical Institute who gave shape to that new adventure; and there is, of course, the missionary, or rather the missionary thinker, strategist and statesman.' Quoted in Ans J. van der Bent, 'Kraemer, Hendrik,' in Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, ed. Nicholas Lossky, et. al., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 574.

9 . Gunter Gloede, ed., Okumenishe Gesalten: Bruchenbauer der Einen Kirche, (Berlin: Evangelische Verlangenstalt, n.d.), p. 204. See also Wayne Isaac Nicholson, 'Toward a Theology of Comparative Religion: A Study in the Thought of Hendrik Kraemer and Wilfred Cantwell Smith,' unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978, p. 64; DCE, p. 62.

missionary speak of the need for workers in Papua, New Guinea,[10] Kraemer resolved to become a missionary himself, thereby embarking on a career which would affect ecumenical Protestantism greatly.

In the autumn of 1905, Kraemer took the first step toward his goal when he was enroled in the newly-opened Nederlandse Zendingshooge-school in Rotterdam. Although he had not completed his secondary education, he was admitted as a candidate for the Utrecht Missionary Union (UZV). His years at the school cannot be underestimated for he there became familiar with influential Dutch missiologists, among them J.H. Gunning (the school's principal), Nicolaus Adriani and A.C. Kruyt.[11] More importantly, Kraemer was initiated into international missiology by serving as J.H. Oldham's guide during Oldham's visit to the Netherlands in 1907 in preparation for the World Missionary Conference which was to take place in Edinburgh three years later.[12] Most notably though, because they lectured at the school periodically, Kraemer sat under two Leiden University professors who would later influence his theological ideas: W. Brede Kristensen and Pierre Chantepie de la Saussaye.[13] Kraemer failed his final examinations in 1909 because of an unsatisfactory result in systematic theology. While preparing to rewrite them, he began to study languages and displayed an uncanny ability (in six weeks he completed the normally year-long Latin course).[14] This impressive linguistic capacity caught the attention of Nicolaus Adriani, who encouraged Kraemer to specialise in Eastern languages. After passing his examinations with honours three months later, and another two years of intense study, Kraemer passed his State examinations. Because of his irregular pre-University education, passing these examinations was necessary for University admission. He left the UZV to join the Netherlands Bible Society (NBG) in June 1911. That autumn, he acted on Adriani's suggestion and enroled in Leiden University, thus taking his second step.

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10 . Nicholson, 'Toward a Theology of Comparative Religion,' p. 65.

11 . Carl F. Hallencreutz, <u>Kraemer Towards Tambaram: A Study in Hendrik Kraemer's Missionary Approach</u>, (Uppsala: Gleerup, 1966), pp. 47f. Cited hereafter as <u>KTT</u>.

12 . Oldham was a major figure at Edinburgh (he served as its secretary) and at the first International Missionary Council conference in Jerusalem in 1928. Because Kraemer was preparing for matriculation, he was not able to attend the Edinburgh conference. See <u>KTT</u>, p. 47 n. 2.

13 . Nicholson, 'Toward a Theology of Comparative Religion,' p. 65.

14 . Nicholson, 'Toward a Theology of Comparative Religion,' p. 66.

At the time, Leiden was the leading centre of Indology in the Netherlands,[15] and Kraemer's work in Arabic, Javanese, Malay and Oriental literature left him few free moments.[16] Though his primary field was linguistics under the Islamicist, Snouck Hurgronje,[17] Kraemer spent much of his limited spare time in W. Brede Kristensen's lectures on Comparative Religion and Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye's on Islam. The rest was spent working closely with Chantepie de la Saussaye in the missionary and administrative work of the Dutch Student Christian Movement (DSCM).[18] Through the DSCM, Kraemer also came into contact with the other student Christian organisations active in the University: 'De-Vrizinnig-Christelijke-Studenten-Bond' was a forum promoting liberal Christianity while 'de ethischen' was a vehicle for Christian humanism.[19] J.R. Mott, the key figure behind Edinburgh 1910 (and the entire ecumenical movement), addressed a Study Conference of the DSCM in November, 1913. When commenting on the mission efforts in the Dutch East Indes, he outlined the 'tremendous possibilities' for mission activity among Javanese students.[20] Kraemer's interest, sparked by Mott's presentation, grew through his friendship and continued work with Chantepie de la Saussaye until eventually, he relinquished his dream of going to New Guinea and focused instead on Indonesia. After completing his sixth term, Kraemer left Leiden for Hamburg to continue his linguistic work with Karl Meinhoff. In January, 1915, however, World War I forced him to return to Leiden where he continued his studies and assumed the chair of the Leiden DSCM.[21]

It was as chairman that Kraemer attended and delivered the opening address at the Nunspet Conference in July of that year. His former teacher, Nicolaus Adriani, contributed a paper entitled 'Geestelijke stroomingen onder de Bevolking up Java,'[22] in which he called for a

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15. KTT, p. 48.

16. Arend Theodoor van Leeuwen, Hendrik Kraemer: Pioneer Der Oekumene, trans. Hermann Witschi, (Basel: Basilea Verlag, 1962), p. 13. Cited hereafter as PDO.

17. PDO, p. 14.

18. KTT, p. 50.

19. KTT, p. 59.

20. KTT, p. 43.

21. KTT, p. 67f.

22. Nicolaus Adriani, 'Spiritual Currents among the Javanese,' in International Review of Mission. 6 (1917), pp. 113 - 125. See also KTT, pp. 69f.

reorientation of mission on Java by cultivating relationships with the emerging Javanese 'elite.'[23]
Those taking up the challenge would require extensive training in the field in order to become
familiar with ideological developments and the indigenous press. Kraemer contributed to the
discussion by expanding Adriani's themes and indicating his willingness to direct the operation.[24]
With encouragement of Adriani and Chantepie de la Saussaye, and the support of A.W.F. Idenburg
(former Governor General to Indonesia), Kraemer proposed a 'policy of association' to the NBG.[25]
In March, 1916, the Board of the society approved the proposal and finalised it the following
November: Kraemer was to be sent to Java 'for the communication of the Christian message to
Moslem intellectuals.'[26]

The third step in Kraemer's journey to Java was taken that same year when he passed his
'candidaats' examinations *cum laude*,[27] and began study for the Ph.D. in Languages, Science of
Religion and Ethnology.[28] During postgraduate study, Kraemer persisted in a variety of extra-
curricular activities, including memberships in several missionary societies, working closely with
the DSCM and contributing regularly to its journal, 'Ethileto.' In 1919, he married Hijke van
Gemeren and became national president of the DSCM.[29] Finally, on January 28, 1921, Kraemer
successfully defended his thesis on a rare Javanese Islamic mystical writing entitled, 'Een
Javannsche Primbon uit de zestiende eeuw.'

Nevertheless, the route to Indonesia continued to meander. The fourth step involved a
three month period of study in the history of religions at the Sorbonne with Louis Massignon and

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23. By 'elite,' Adriani meant those Javanese nationals who, having benefitted from a Western education,
took up important positions in the colonial civil service and later were among the leaders of the Indonesian
drive for independence.

24. KTT, pp. 70 - 71.

25. Nicholson, 'Toward a Theology of Comparative Religion,' p. 67.

26. KTT, p. 82.

27. PDO, p. 14.

28. P.D. Lathuihamallo, 'Church and World: A Critical Study About the Relation of the Church and
World in the writings of Hendrik Kraemer,' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Union Theological Seminary,
1959), p. 15.

29. PDO, pp. 17f.

Marcel Maus,[30] while the fifth took him only as far as the Middle East, where he studied for Islam for four months at El-Azhar, the Muslim University in Cairo.[31] His colleagues there soon dubbed him 'Sheikh Kraemer,' 'because of his perfect Arabic and his deep understanding of the Moslem faith.'[32] Finally in 1922, over a year after completing his Ph.D. and several months after leaving Holland, Kraemer arrived in Java. It must be emphasised here that just as Kraemer was not a theology student at Leiden, neither was he a 'missionary' in Indonesia. His role, in addition to Bible translation, was to report regularly to the NBG concerning the cultural and spiritual situation in the colony. The NBG, in turn, passed this information on to the many missionary societies operating in the islands. To accomplish this task, Kraemer travelled widely and immersed himself in the indigenous press and other writings.[33]

Throughout the twenties, as Indonesia edged towards independence, Dutch mission focus shifted from 'conversion of the natives,' to strengthening indigenous Christians and their responsibility for leading the dialogue with Islam.[34] M. Lindeborn led this shift on a colony-wide scale while Kraemer concerned himself with the implementation and expansion of Lindeborn's ideas on Java. In June, 1923, at the Conference of the Netherlands Missionary Union, Kraemer raised the indigenous issue and asked for a special conference to address it. The next year, when working with the East Java Mission, he called for contacts between the mission societies and major nationalist organisations, including the moderate Budi Utomo and the more extreme Sarekat Islam. At the conference of Javanese-speaking missionaries in Djokjakarta in August, 1924, Kraemer expressed particular concern for Christian nationalists who were being portrayed by their Muslim counterparts as colonialist collaborators. To counteract this, he argued for a thoroughly Indonesian expression of Christianity and unity among indigenous Christians.[35]

30 . Nicholson, 'Toward a Theology of Comparative Religion,' p. 69.

31 . PDO, pp. 22 - 25.

32 . Hans-Ruedi Weber, 'Hendrik Kraemer: A man who obeyed the vision he saw (An address given in the Chapel of the Ecumenical Centre, 15 November 1965),' in The Ecumenical Review, 18 (1966), p. 7.

33 . Nicholson, 'Toward a Theology of Comparative Religion,' p. 69.

34 . KTT, pp. 140 - 144.

35 . KTT, pp. 144f.

Kraemer's concern for the indigenous Christian population dominated his thought and work throughout his first term in Java. He envisaged an autonomous Indonesia where missions, independent of the Dutch government, could be both positive towards and critical of nationalistic elements and could prevent the isolation of indigenous Christians. Increasingly, this vision forced Kraemer to expose the growing Islamicisation and anti-missionary trends within nationalistic organisations.[36] In addition, this vision brought him under scrutiny at home where the NBG suggested he was becoming too politicised.[37] Yet, there were also some significant achievements: in 1925, the indigenous congregation at Djokjakarta welcomed their first Javanese minister and at Whitsuntide, 1928, Javanese ministers were first permitted to administer the sacraments.[38]

That year also marked an interlude in Kraemer's missionary activity when he left Indonesia to chair the session in Islam at the International Missionary Council Conference on the Mount of Olives, between 24 March and 8 April. After the conference, ill-health returned Kraemer to the Netherlands instead of Java. Persistent insomnia led him from there to Christian psychologist Alphonse Maeder in Switzerland for treatment. Though his contact with Maeder was brief, it was significant for Maeder introduced him to Emil Brunner.[39] It was also during this furlough that Kraemer first encountered the work of Karl Barth, whom he regarded with cautious optimism.[40] He spent most of 1928 and 1929 convalescing. However, November 11, 1929, saw Kraemer embark on a hectic schedule again, beginning with a four month tour of India during which he

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36 . <u>KTT</u>, pp. 144f; 161 - 164.

37 . <u>KTT</u>, pp. 144f.

38 . <u>KTT</u>, pp. 144f. Kraemer's concern for Indonesian Christians is well-illustrated in the following recollection: 'Some small Christian groups had been formed there [on Bali] and the Church of East Java had been requested by these Christians to send pastors. But then came a reaction. A number of anthropologists and artists were strongly opposed to any form of Christian work on the island.... Hendrik Kraemer had taken up this challenge with his customary energy. He had shown that no culture could live any longer in complete isolation. The invasion by Western tourists was a much more disturbing element than Christianity. And missions had learned their lesson. Nobody wanted to westernize the Balinese. What the Church of East Java and he himself had in mind was to help the small church in Bali to work out its own forms of life in the light of its own cultural background.' W.A. Visser 't Hooft, <u>Memoirs</u> (London: SCM, 1973)p. 54. See also Hans-Ruedi Weber, 'The Mission of the Church in East Java on Bali,' in <u>Asia and the Ecumenical Movement</u>, (London: SCM, 1966), pp. 170 - 179.

39 . Nicholson, 'Toward a Theology of Comparative Religion,' p. 73; <u>KTT</u>, pp. 211f; <u>PDO</u>, pp. 66f.

40 . <u>KTT</u>, p. 224; see also Theodorus Lambertus Haitjema, <u>Karl Barth's "Kritische" Theologie</u>, trans. Peter Schumacher (Wagenigan: F. Veenmehr & Zonen, 1926).

studied Islam for the Indian YMCA, followed by a return to Indonesia where he found the Church in a delicate situation.

As a result of the national elections of 1929, the right-wing majority in the Dutch parliament increased and in 1930 the Vaderlandsche Club, made up of Europeans in Indonesia, became the dominant party in the Indonesian People's Council. Moderate and radical nationalists reacted to these conservative developments by increasing opposition to the colonial government and the colonial government responded in turn by imprisoning or exiling nationalist leaders. Kraemer, along with many other missionaries, found himself in the middle of this potentially explosive situation, opposing both radical nationalist and conservative colonial elements while sympathising with moderate nationalists.[41] Kraemer expressed both his opposition and sympathy in regular contributions to the periodical 'De Stuw,' a Dutch periodical 'which stood for a policy of co-operation with the constructive forces in the nationalist movement.'[42] Also during this second stay, Kraemer was instrumental in establishing a theological school in Djakarta.[43] In 1935, however, ill-health again took Kraemer back to the Netherlands.

Shortly thereafter, W. Brede Kristensen retired from Leiden University and recommended Kraemer to succeed him in the Chair of History and Phenomenology of Religion. Kraemer accepted and on December 3, 1937, delivered his inaugural lecture. Entitled, 'De Worleten can het Syncretisme,' it foreshadowed much of The Christian Message in a Non-Christian world, which was published one year later.[44] Over Christmas, 1938, Kraemer was a centre of controversy at the International Missionary Council Conference, which was convened at Madras Christian College, Tambaram, India. Kraemer returned from Tambaram to a Dutch Reformed Church sharply divided along liberal and conservative lines. Hence, in addition to his University responsibilities, Kraemer also began to work in church renewal. Once again, though, his activities were hampered by a World War.

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41. KTT, pp. 230 - 236.

42. Visser 't Hooft, Memoirs, p. 54. Visser 't Hooft goes on to record that eventually, the journal was forced to cease publication 'because of the fierce opposition it aroused in government circles.'

43. Nicholson, 'Toward a Theology of Comparative Religion,' p. 74.

44. PDO, p. 160.

During the occupation of Holland, Kraemer actively opposed the Nazis by writing pamphlets and by resigning his University Chair in 1941.[45] Between 1942 and 1943, Kraemer was interred in the concentration camp at St. Michielgestel because of his resistance.[46] Yet, when the war ended, Kraemer's was an early voice calling for reconciliation between the German and Continental churches. In 1945, when delegates of the embryonic World Council of Churches met with the Council of the Evangelical Church of Germany, Kraemer represented Holland. W.A. Visser 't Hooft recalls that it was in this capacity that Kraemer

> said there was no hatred in the hearts of Christians in Holland. Those who had suffered much had learned to be merciful in their judgment. He hoped we could speak together as standing before God.... He understood this as a call to his own church also, that it could only live by the forgiveness of sins. It could not be a matter of bartering. In the light of what had been said the other churches could now say to the German church that they were also ready to accept their responsibility for what had happened in Germany.[47]

After the war, Kraemer returned to Leiden, but his post-war University career was short-lived. In 1947, he resigned in order to become, in cooperation with Suzanne de Dietrich, the first director of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Institute at Chateau de Bossey (near Geneva).[48] As director, Kraemer was the driving force behind the creation of the World Council of Churches' Regional Study Centres, in Willingen in 1952.[49] Also in 1952, the Institute had its first semester as the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies. Despite these successes, Kraemer's stay in Geneva was also brief: three years later, he returned to Dreibergen, in the Netherlands and devoted himself to lecturing, travelling and writing. The immediate result was Kraemer's classic restatement of his theology of religions, <u>Religion and the Christian Faith</u>. Over the next nine years, Kraemer travelled, lectured and wrote extensively.[50]

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45 . Both the pamphlets and the resignation were Kraemer's response to Jewish persecution. He resigned along with fifty-three other members of faculty when two Jewish colleagues were removed and in a pamphlet smuggled out of Holland, he stood against Nazi anti-semitism. See Hendrik Kraemer, 'The Riddle of History: Thoughts on Romans IX - XI,' in <u>The International Review of Mission</u>, 32 (1943), pp. 78 - 87.

46 . David Edwards, 'Signs of Radicalism in the Ecumenical Movement,' in <u>The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement</u>, Volume 2, ed. Harold E. Fey, (London: SPCK, 1970), p. 385.

47 . Visser 't Hooft, <u>Memoirs</u>, p. 192.

48 . W.A. Visser 't Hooft, 'The General Ecumenical Development Since 1948' and H. Kruger, 'The Life and Activities of the WCC,' both in <u>The Ecumenical Advance</u>, Volume 2, pp. 9, 50.

49 . Lesslie Newbigin, 'Mission to Six Continents,' in <u>The Ecumenical Advance</u>, Volume 2, p. 185.

50 . This resulted in the publication of several smaller works, including <u>The Communication of the Christian Faith</u>, (London: Lutterworth, 1957); <u>World Cultures and World Religions: The Coming</u>

On November 11, 1965 at his home in Dreibergen, Hendrik Kraemer died. Stephen Neill's tribute, written when Kraemer was still alive, stands as a fitting epitaph:

> Everything in the career of this outstanding man is paradoxical. He has never been a missionary; he went to Indonesia as an expert in languages and Bible translation on behalf of the Bible Society of the Netherlands. Yet no living man has exercised a deeper influence on missionary thinking. He is a layman. But no minister has had more to do with shaping the pattern of the life of the Dutch Reformed Church. He is not a theologian. Yet he has read more theology than many of those who make it their profession, and by his writings and his work as the Director of the Ecumenical Institute near Geneva he has influenced the theological thinking of many leaders of the younger generation.[51]

3.2   Kraemer and the International Missionary Council

Having completed this introduction to his life and works, I now sharpen my focus to Kraemer's role within the missionary thinking of the early ecumenical movement by critically examining the first three ecumenical missionary conferences: Edinburgh 1910, Jerusalem 1928, and Tambaram 1938. The World Missionary Conference convened in New College, Edinburgh 15 to 23 June 1910,[52] is rightly seen as the birth-place of ecumenical Protestantism, and more specifically, of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).[53] It is therefore important to observe first that Edinburgh 1910 itself is a climax of a succession of conferences beginning with New York and London, 1854, and continuing in London, 1878 and 1888 and New York, 1900.[54] Second, it should neither be forgotten that while it was ecumenical in intention, its 1356 attendants were mainly British and American, with European delegates a distant second at 175, and members of the 'younger churches' standing third at only

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Dialogue, (London: Lutterworth, 1958); and Why Christianity of All Religions?, (London: Lutterworth, 1962). Though these books are commonly recognised not to contribute anything of substance to Kraemer's mature position, I will cite them where appropriate in chapter 4.

51 . Stephen Neill, Men of Unity, (London: SCM, 1960), pp. 113 - 114.

52 . Hans-Ruedi Weber, Asia and the Ecumenical Movement, (London: SCM, 1966). p. 131.

53 . In fact, the site of the birth can be narrowed still further to the report of Commission VIII, which was ecumenical in intention, title and content. See Report of Commission VIII: Co-Operation and the Promotion of Unity, (London: Oliphaunt, Anderson and Ferrier, n.d.), esp. pp. 131 - 150.

54 . See George Robson, 'Part I: History of the Conference,' in Volume IX: The History and Records of the Conference together with Addresses Delivered at the Evening Meetings, (London: Oliphaunt, Anderson and Ferrier, n.d.), pp. 3 - 7. Cited hereafter as WMCIX.

14.[55] Third, it is also important to remember that Edinburgh 1910 delegates, were also predominantly Protestant and almost overwhelmingly evangelical.[56]

The Conference proper, its eight commissions overseen by J.R. Mott,[57] dealt with the following subjects: 1)carrying the gospel to the non-Christian world; 2) the church in the mission field; 3) education in relation to the Christianisation of national life; 4) the missionary message in relation to the non-Christian religions; 5) the preparation of missionaries; 6) the home base of missions; 7) missions and governments; and 8) co-operation and the promotion of unity.[58] These topics had been selected by an international committee, of which J.H. Oldham was Executive Secretary, in 1908. 'This procedure proved to be a precedent for later gatherings of the ecumenical

55. WMCIX, pp. 18 - 19; see also William Paton, 'The History of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council,' in Volume VIII: Addresses and Other Records, (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), pp. 3 - 4. Cited hereafter as IMCVIII. Yet, K.S. Latourette reminds us that this was an improvement over previous conferences. For instance, at the Liverpool conference, only one Indian attended while in London (1888), there were no non-Europeans at all and in New York (1900), there were only six. See K.S. Latourette, 'Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council,' in A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517 - 1948, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, (London: SPCK, 1954), pp. 359 - 360. According to Weber, 'Eight came from India: V.S. Azariah (invited by British Executive Committee), K.C. Chaterji (Presbyterian, USA), J.R. Chitambar (Methodist Episcopal, USA), S. Ghose (SPG [Society for the Propagation of the Gospel], England, Shivram Masoji (Presbyterian, USA), John Rangiah (American Baptist), R.K. Sorabji (CMS [Church Missionary Society], England), Thang Khan (American Baptist). One came from Burma: Ah Sou (American Baptist). Three from China: C.Y. Cheng (LMS [London Missionary Society], England, T.E. Tong (American Baptist), D.T. Tsang (Presbyterian, USA). One from Korea: T.H. Yun (invited by American Executive Committee). Four from Japan: Y. Chiba (American Baptist), T. Harada (American Board, Congregational), Y. Honda (invited by the American Executive Committee), K. Ibuka (Presbyterian, USA).' Asia and the Ecumenical Movement, p. 131, n. 1. Weber goes on to note that Asians who did not attend Edinburgh were nevertheless active in various preparatory commissions (pp. 131 - 132) and that they were highly active in the plenary sessions and delivered several key addresses (pp. 132 - 133).

56. While there were a small number of Anglo-Catholic representatives (see Latourette, 'Ecumenical Bearings,' p. 361), representatives of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches were not present and had not been invited. See Ans J. van der Bent, 'Ecumenical Conferences,' in Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, p. 325.

57. Mott, the father of modern ecumenism, presided at most of the sessions at Edinburgh, was also appointed chairman of the Continuation Committee and later became the first chairman of the International Missionary Council. See 'Part III: The Continuation Committee,' in WMCIX, p. 135. For an excellent account of Mott's contribution not only to Edinburgh, but to the Christian church, see C. Howard Hopkins, 20th Century Ecumenical Statesman John R. Mott, 1865 - 1955: A Biography, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).

58. Each commission produced a report, which in turn became a volume when the full records of the conference were published. Full bibliographic information on each volume is found in the bibliography.

movement, including the enlarged meetings of the IMC in 1928, 1938, and 1947, the Conference on Life and Work held at Oxford in 1937, and the first assembly of the [WCC] in 1948.'[59]

True to its evangelical heritage, Edinburgh 1910 was indeed a 'missionary conference,' as Commission I made clear when introducing their findings: 'This is a decisive hour for Christian missions. The call of providence to all our Lord's disciples, of whatever ecclesiastical connections, is direct and urgent to undertake without delay the task of carrying the gospel to all the non-Christian world.'[60] Nevertheless Commission IV, without sacrificing any of this missionary fervour, displayed unusual openness to other religions. Chaired by D.S. Cairns and Robert E. Speer, Commission IV sought an informed discussion by sending a questionnaire, reproduced below, to missionaries throughout the world.

> 1. Kindly give your name, station, and the Church or Society in connection with which you are working. Name the non-Christian religion or religions with which you have to deal in your missionary work, and say with what classes of the population you yourself come into contact.
> 2. Can you distinguish the doctrines and forms of religious observances current among these classes any which are mainly traditional and formal from others which are taken in earnest and are genuinely prized as a religious help and consolation?
> 3. What do you consider to be the chief moral, intellectual, and social hindrances in the way of a full acceptance of Christianity?
> 4. Have you found in individuals any dissatisfaction with their own faith on specific points? If so, give details.
> 5. What attitude should the Christian preacher take toward the religion of the people among whom he labours?
> 6. What are the elements in the said religion or religions which present points of contact with Christianity and may be regarded as a preparation for it?
> 7. Which elements in the Christian Gospel have you found to possess the greatest power and appeal and which have awakened the greatest opposition?
> 8. Have the people among whom you work a practical belief in a personal immortality and in the existence of a Supreme God?
> 9. To what extent do questions of "higher criticism" and other developments of modern Western thought exert an influence in your part of the mission field, and what effect do they have on your missionary work?
> 10. Has your experience in missionary labour altered either in form or substance your impression as to what constitute the most important and vital elements in the Christian Gospel? [This question was addressed to missionaries].
> 11. What was it in Christianity which made special appeal to you? Did the Western form in which Christianity was presented to you perplex you? What are the distinctively Western elements, as you see them, in the missionary message as now presented? Was it

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59 . Latourette, 'Ecumenical Bearings,' p. 358.

60 . Volume I: Report of Commission I: Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World, (London: Oliphaunt, Anderson and Ferrier, n.d.), p. 363.

the sense of sin which enabled you to go behind Western forms? If not, what was it? [This question was addressed to converts].[61]

The Commission, impressed by the quality of the 185 responses received, condensed and divided them into them into 5 categories: Animistic Religions, Chinese Religions, Japanese Religions, Islam, and Hinduism.[62]

Wesley Ariarajah comments that 'the work of Commission IV shows a remarkable degree of thinking that was in many ways, ahead of its time.'[63] This is especially evident in the first of two general conclusions drawn by the Commission. It stated that 'the practically universal testimony that the true attitude of the Christian missionary to the non-Christian religions should be one of true understanding and, as far as possible, of sympathy.'[64] While not denying 'that in some forms of religion the evil is appalling...' the 'missionary should seek for the nobler elements in the non-Christian religions and use them as steps to higher things....'[65] Yet, the second conclusion was equally clear: 'along with this generous recognition of all that is true and good in these religions, there goes also the universal and emphatic witness to the absoluteness of the Christian faith.'[66] Furthermore, the Commission believed the tension created by the juxtaposition of these conclusions was both good and necessary:

> All down through the history of Christian missions from the earliest days, there have been two types of thought on the question of the relation of the Gospel to existing religions - the types exemplified in Tertullian and Origen - the one dwelling most on the evils of religions and the newness of the Gospel; and the other seeking to show that all that was noblest in the old religions was fulfilled in Christ.... There is no reason whatever for Christian propaganda unless the missionary has something new to proclaim; but if is equally certain that there is no basis whatever for the missionary

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61. Volume IV: Report of Commission IV: The Missionary Message in relation to Non-Christian Religions, (London: Oliphaunt, Anderson and Ferrier, n.d.), p. 2. Cited hereafter as WMCIV.

62. WMCIV, pp. xi - xx, 3. Each of these, in turn, became a chapter in the volume.

63. Wesley Ariarajah, Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought, Currents of Encounter: Studies on the Contact between Christianity and Other Religions, Beliefs, and Cultures, Volume 5, gen. ed. Rein Fernhout, et. al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 28.

64. WMCIV, p. 267.

65. WMCIV, p. 267.

66. WMCIV, p. 268. Indeed, as far as the commissioners were concerned, the first conclusion was possible only in the light of the second: 'Deeper consideration of the facts leads us to the conviction that it is precisely because of the strength of their conviction of the absoluteness of Christianity that our correspondents find it possible to take this view of the non-Christian religions. They know that in Christ they have what meets the whole range of human need, and therefore they value all that reveals that need, however imperfect the revelation may be.'

appeal, unless the missionary can say, "whom therefore ye worship in ignorance, Him I declare unto you."[67]

On the whole, Edinburgh 1910 stressed the expansion of Christianity and the decline and death of other religions, yet Ariarajah mentions three points deserving attention. First, the Conference, and especially Commission IV sought to understand non-Christian religious experience and doctrine theologically rather than apologetically. It therefore displayed a remarkable lack of defensiveness.[68] Second, there was no attempt to judge these religions 'based on unacceptable manifestations of their religion in social life, even though such manifestations were taken seriously and criticized.'[69] Third, doctrines of other religions were not ruled out *a priori* as incompatible with the gospel.[70] A unifying theme in Ariarajah's three points is the Conference's belief that Christianity was the fulfilment of the world's religions.[71] Combined with this belief was the certainty that as Christianity progressed, other religions, cultures and peoples would be transformed, that 'national life' would become 'Christianised.'[72] By the time of the IMC Conference in Jerusalem eighteen years later, this certainty had evaporated under the combined pressure of the Great War, the rise of secularism and nationalism, and a world-wide religious renaissance expressing anti-missionary sentiment. The concept of fulfilment, however, remained.

The International Missionary Council, conceived at Edinburgh 1910, was formally constituted at a meeting of the Continuation Committee between October 9 and 16, 1921, in Lake Mohonk, New York.[73] Over subsequent meetings, including Canterbury 1922, Atlantic City 1925 and Rättvik 1926, the nascent IMC took shape. At the Atlantic City meeting, 'full consideration

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67 . WMCIV, p. 279.

68 . Ariarajah, Hindus and Christians, p. 29.

69 . Ariarajah, Hindus and Christians, p. 29.

70 . Ariarajah, Hindus and Christians, p. 29.

71 . Not surprisingly, one of the responses to the Commission IV questionnaire came from J.N. Farquhar (then a YMCA missionary in Calcutta) who went on to write the classic statement of Protestant fulfilment missionary theology, The Crown of Hinduism.

72 . See Volume III: Report of Commission III: Education in relation to the Christianisation of National Life, (London: Oliphaunt, Anderson and Ferrier, n.d.), esp. pp. 365 - 384.

73 . IMCVIII, p. 4.

was given to the subject of holding another world conference,' and preliminary plans were made.[74] These plans were fleshed out at Rättvik and Jerusalem was chosen to host the Meeting. In addition, seven themes were proposed for discussion: The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems of Life and Thought; Religious Education; The Relation of the Older and Younger Churches; The Christian Mission and Race Relationships; The Christian Mission and the Growth of Industrialism in the Mission Field; The Christian Mission and Rural Problems; and the Future of International Missionary Co-operation.[75]

The Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, which took place on the Mount of Olives between March 24 and April 8 1928, improved on Edinburgh 1910 in three ways. First, instead of Edinburgh's vast quantities of questionnaires and Commissions, preliminary papers were prepared by experts prior to the Meeting and these in turn served as springboards for a more focused discussion during the plenary sessions.[76] Second, as a comparison between the volume-titles of the two conferences clearly reveals, Jerusalem 1928 saw missions as touching on many areas of life including, but not limited to, evangelism.[77] Last, the number of delegates from the younger churches increased greatly and they made their presence known through significant contributions to the Meeting.[78] Still, Jerusalem 1928 is rarely remembered for these improvements. It is more often recalled because of the controversy surrounding the seven preparatory papers

74 . IMCVIII, pp. 5 - 7.

75 . As at Edinburgh 1910, these went on to become the volumes of the Jerusalem 1928 Report. Full bibliographic details can be found in the bibliography. It should also be noted that the first topic is listed here as 'The Christian Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems of Life and Thought.' This is the title used by Paton in IMCVIII, pp. 8 - 9. However, the actual title of the appropriate volume is slightly different. It reads, Volume I: The Christian Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems of Thought and Life, (London: Oxford University Press, 1928). Cited hereafter as IMCI.

76 . IMCVIII, p. 9.

77 . For example, the only Edinburgh volume not focused specifically on traditional missionary activity was Volume VII: Report of Commission VII: Missions and Governments, (London: Oliphaunt, Anderson and Ferrier, n.d.), see esp. 'Appendix D: Missionaries and their Assertion of Civil Rights: Note by the Rev Dr. Barbour,' pp. 137 - 139. On the other hand, four of the seven Jerusalem 1928 volumes (volumes 3 - 6) specifically moved beyond traditional missionary problems. One tackles a more ecclesiological problem (3) and the rest were concerned with relating missions to explicitly secular areas of life.

78 . Paton writes, 'The most important change made by the Rättvik Committee in the Atlantic Committee proposals was in the decision to make the Jerusalem meeting representative in approximately equal numbers of the missionary organizations of the "sending" countries, and of the Christian councils and missionary organizations on the mission field not less than two-thirds of the delegates from the latter regions being nationals of the countries they represented.' IMCVIII, pp. 7 - 8.

which make up Part I of The Christian Life and Message.[79] Prepared in advance of the Meeting and not submitted to the Council for approval,[80] the papers were under the direct supervision of J.H. Oldham. His desire to decrease the evangelistic fervour of Edinburgh 1910 and to focus instead on the positive values inherent in the religions is evident in this excerpt from a letter he wrote to Martin Schlunk a year prior to Jerusalem 1928:

> What we propose is to ask ourselves, not in terms of *theological formulation or definition*, but in terms of *the interpretation of spiritual experience*, is what men live by and rely upon for support in the non-Christian systems and secondly, what Christianity has to offer *in enrichment of and addition to the insights and help, which they attain from their own religious systems*. We are thus not raising a discussion as to what is and what is not important in Christianity, but are inviting the co-operation of Christians, whatever their individual views may be *in a common effort to discover what respect the Christian faith transcends the best that other religious systems can offer.*[81]

From the papers themselves, it seems that Oldham's ideas were not clearly communicated to the contributors. Nicol Macnicol's submission on Hinduism, for instance, remained firmly within the 'fulfilment theology' of Edinburgh 1910, as this excerpt demonstrates:

> The Christ whom we preach does not destroy any gracious and beautiful trait in the character of the Hindu, or deprive him of anything of which he is justly proud in his cultural inheritance.... If Hinduism will let Christ enter within its ancient walls, then it will be found that he is no stranger, but One who has sojourned there before, and who will find within it those who will recognise his Lordship and set Him upon its throne.[82]

J. Leighton Stuart's essay, however, pushed the limits of 'fulfilment':

> We welcome all the spiritual intuition or ethical enthusiasm that may come through any of the world's great seers or sages as part of the "light that lighteth every man coming into the world."... [we seek to] blend the experience with any such racial heritage, believing that the resultant gain to all will be greater.... We gladly if humbly anticipate that the specific emphases of Oriental culture will bring fresh understanding of Him and help us correct or supplement our one incomplete appreciation of His transcending greatness.[83]

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79 . See Nicol Macnicol, 'Christianity and Hinduism,' IMCI, pp. 3 - 52; J. Leighton Stuart, 'Christianity and Confucianism,' IMCI, pp. 53 - 82; D. Willard Lyon, 'Religious Values in Confucianism,' IMCI, pp. 83 - 118; K.J. Saunders, 'Christianity and Buddhism,' IMC, pp. 119 - 185; A.K. Reischauer, 'Christianity and Northern Buddhism,' IMCI, 186 - 234; W.H.T. Gairdner and W.A. Eddy, 'Christianity and Islam,' IMCI, pp. 235 - 283; and Rufus M. Jones, 'Secular Civilization and the Christian Task,' IMCI, p. 283 - 338.

80 . IMCVIII, p. 9.

81 . J.H. Oldham, letter to Martin Schlunk, February 19, 1927 (in WCC archives) quoted in KTT, p. 170 (my emphasis).

82 . Nicol Macnicol, 'Christianity and Hinduism,' in IMCI, pp. 11, 34.

83 . J. Leighton Stuart, 'Christianity and Confucianism,' in IMCI, pp. 62 - 63.

K.J. Saunders' paper on Buddhism, went further to hint at an ineffable mystical core common to all religions:

> Whatever our Christologies or our Buddhologies may be, the great fact remains that behind all religions there is Religion and the religious consciousness of man. The mystics are the experts who experience the truth by which the rest of us live. According to their upbringing and environment, they give the ineffable a local habitation and a name. But the missionary must get behind the names to realities; and there is a growing recognition among such Buddhist scholars as D.T. Suzuki and such Christian scholars as Rudolph Otto that what the German mystic calls *Das Nichts* and the Upanishad seer, *Neti*, the Buddhist calls *Sunyata*: it is "that from which the words turn back."[84]

Ironically, the most controversial paper dealt not with 'a religion,' but with secularism.[85] In 'Secular Civilization and the Christian Task,' Rufus Jones argued that while Christianity fulfilled the longings of secular culture, an interfaith alliance was necessary to oppose its creeping influence. He concluded the paper with this challenge:

> Go to Jerusalem, then, not as members of a Christian nation to convert other nations which are not Christian, but as Christians within a nation far too largely non-Christian, who face within their own borders the competition of a rival movement as powerful... as any of the great historic religions. We meet our fellow Christians in these other countries on terms of equality, as fellow workers engaged in a common task. More than this, we go as those who find in the other religions which secularism attacks, as it attacks Christianity, witnesses of man's need of God and allies in our quest for perfection.[86]

The strong reaction of the Continental delegation to what they perceived as the syncretistic flavour of the preparatory papers threatened to scuttle Jerusalem 1928 before it began.[87]

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84 . K.J. Saunders, 'Christianity and Buddhism,' in IMCI, p. 128.

85 . Because of the intensity of the feelings aroused by the paper, secularism is often recalled as the major, if not the only, theme at Jerusalem 1928. For instance, in Hindus and Christians, Ariarajah entitles his examination of the Meeting, 'In Search of Collaboration: Hindu-Christian Enrichment and Collaboration Against Secularism,' p. 32. It should therefore be noted first that Jones' paper was only one of seven papers discussed in one of seven plenary sessions and second, that it was a last minute addition to the Jerusalem 1928 agenda. On May 6, 1927, during an IMC Emergency Committee Meeting in London, Oldham urged that greater attention be paid to the religious confrontation with secular civilization, proposing that secularism be treated as another non-Christian religion akin, for instance, to Hinduism or Buddhism. The Committee agreed and assigned the preparatory paper to Charles Raven and Rufus Jones, though finally the paper was composed by Jones alone. See KTT, p. 173.

86 . Rufus M. Jones, 'Secular Civilization and the Christian Task,' in IMCI, p. 338.

87 . The Continental reaction must be understood in the light of theological developments in Europe: 'their protest ought to be understood more as an expression of neo-confessionalism on the continent, both in neo-Lutheran and neo-Calvinist forms. But nevertheless, behind this more general protest was at work that element which was to become more markedly dialectical theology.' Johannes Aagaard, 'Revelation and Religion,' in Studia Theologica, 14 (1960), p. 151.

Consequently, an emergency meeting in Cairo was convened in order to resolve the situation. William Paton, the IMC representative at the Cairo meeting, remembered it as giving 'the opportunity to those delegates, to some of whom lengthy discussions in English must needs be a heavy burden, to acquaint themselves intimately with the subjects to be discussed, and to express their mind upon them before joining in the larger meeting at Jerusalem.'[88] Kraemer, who acted both as secretary and interpreter for the meeting, assessed it differently.

> The debate was opened by the German delegates, who expressed frankly but candidly a feeling of uneasiness about the trend of the papers. They felt as if, generally speaking, the papers were drifting on the dangerous waters of syncretism and had insufficiently worked out the essential difference and absolute uniqueness of Christianity.... The delegates of other Continental countries formulated in a somewhat different manner the same feelings. There were amongst them some who avowed to have been troubled in reading the pamphlets and who desired to see stated, in a more unequivocal way than seemed to be done by the papers, the fact that Christianity is a religion *sui generis* in the most pregnant sense of the word.[89]

Finally, the Cairo meeting agreed on the following four points: first, that the concerns raised by the Continental delegates should be made known to the Committee of the IMC; second, that this uneasiness about the syncretistic tone of the papers be presented to the Council in written form; third, that the papers had not shed sufficient light on the essence of Christianity because this was not their purpose, because they confused the nature of Christianity and the problem of missionary contacts, and because the authors were themselves committed Christians; and fourth, that even the best elements in the non-Christians religions need to be 'converted and regenerated' through an encounter with Jesus Christ.[90]

At the opposite extreme, some of the American delegates were openly enthusiastic about Stuart's fulfilment, Saunders' mysticism and Jones' interfaith alliance. These found a voice in the philosopher and mystic, William Ernest Hocking. He proposed 'a form of hospitality to the experience and thought of other religions... which was demanded by the new situation in the world of thought to-day.'[91] This new situation, brought about by the spread of 'scientific materialism or

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88 . IMCVIII, pp. 9 - 10.

89 . Hendrik Kraemer, 'Report of the Cairo Meeting,' 16 March, 1928. Quoted by Robert E. Speer, 'What is the Value of the Religious Values of the Non-Christian Religions?' in IMCI, p. 418.

90 . Robert E. Speer, 'What is the Value of the Religious Values of the non-Christian Religions?' in IMCI, pp. 418 - 419.

91 . W.E. Hocking quoted in Robert E. Speer, 'The Discussion in Plenary Session of the Council,' in IMCI, p. 369.

naturalism' was 'opposed to all religion.... [and] required a new alignment of religious forces, a recognition of alliance with whatever was of the true substance of religion everywhere.'[92] Hocking went on to speak somewhat cryptically of 'a world religion,' into which the religions would merge 'in the universal human faith in the Divine Being.'[93] Finally, he suggested three reasons for Christian openness to other religions: first, Christianity must speak the language of other religions if it is to be understood; second, Christianity, like the other religions, is a product of particular historical events in specific cultures; and third, Christianity's conceptions of truth need to be enlarged.[94]

Somewhere in between these extremes fell members of the British and Asian delegations, and Kraemer himself. Representing the British, Edwyn Bevan emphasised not the uniqueness of Christianity but the uniqueness of Christ, calling for Hindus, Jews and Christians alike to 'bow to the Hebrew Jesus as the supreme Lord.'[95] The Indian delegation also struck a more Christocentric position, embodied in the words of Pandipeddi Chenchiah: 'The Hindu does not want a way of life, but life; not the preaching about Christ, but Christ. If you have Christ, pass Him on.'[96] The Chinese, on the other hand, saw Christianity fulfilling Confucianism and combatting secularism. According to Francis C. Wei, 'Christianity is to fulfil Confucianism, not to destroy it.'[97] While T.C. Chao insisted, 'the battlefield of Christianity in China is not the realm of the non-Christian religions, but in the realm of secularism.'[98] Kraemer took a different tack, trying to set out the points which both extremes had in common:

> 1. God was the Creator and Redeemer of the world. On one side man was the most wretched and damnable of creatures and on the other side, he had kinship with God.

92 . IMCI, p. 369.

93 . IMCI, p. 369.

94 . IMCI, p. 370. See also W.E. Hocking, 'Psychological Conditions for Growth in Religious Faith,' in IMCVIII, 138 - 161. For a full statement of Hocking's mystical philosophy of religion, see his Gifford Lectures, entitled The Meaning of God in Human Experience: A Philosophic Study of Religion, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912).

95 . Quoted in Robert E. Speer, 'What is the Value of the Religious Values of the Non-Christian Religions,' in IMCI, p. 436.

96 . IMCI, p. 361.

97 . IMCI, p. 358.

98 . IMCI, p. 358.

2. The world was a creation of God which had become wretched and damnable, but which must again become God's world.

3. Christianity was the most paradoxical religion and the most matter-of-fact religion in this world. Paradoxical because it combined in real communion of life two opposites, ethically and ontologically, i.e., the Holy Personal God and sinful man.... It was matter of fact because it took into account the stern facts of life: sin, pain, disappointment, and unrest.[99]

William Temple was presented with the daunting task of drafting the 'Statement by the Council' in a manner such that it would be supported by both extremes. In 'The Christian Message,' he offered a twofold missionary approach. First, missions should call the 'religious man' to fight secularism and to study Christ (not necessarily Christianity). Second, when approaching the 'secular man' missions should acknowledge the values of secular culture while remaining aware of its problems and joining with other religions in opposing it. Temple also recognised the value of other religions, but in a manner which did not threaten the *sui generis* nature of the Christian message, as this excerpt bears witness:

> we recognise as part of the one Truth that sense of the Majesty of God and the consequent reverence in worship, which are conspicuous in Islam; the deep sympathy for the world's sorrow and unselfish search for the way of escape, which are at the heart of Buddhism; the desire for contact with Ultimate Reality conceived as spiritual, which is promised in Hinduism, the belief in a moral order of the universe and consequent insistence on moral conduct, which are inculcated in Confucianism; and the disinterested pursuit of truth and human welfare which are often found in those who stand for secular civilization, but do not accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour.[100]

The 'Christian Message' was accepted unanimously, but Terry White astutely observes that this probably had more to do with Temple's political ability than a bridging of the American / Continental gulf. 'Acceptance of the statement was possible,' he writes, 'only because it neither denied some value in other religions nor the basis of missions in the uniqueness of the Gospel.'[101]

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99 . Quoted in Robert E. Speer, 'The Discussion in Plenary Sessions of the Council,' IMCI, p. 348.

100 . William Temple, 'Statement by the Council: The Christian Message,' in IMCI, pp. 479 - 495, esp. p. 491.

101 . Terry Louis White, 'Religion and Religions in the thought of W.E. Hocking and Hendrik Kraemer,' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1972), p. 51. Jerald D. Gort is far more frank in his assessment: 'In contrast to the acclaim it received in Jerusalem, the Message drew a good deal of criticism later on: it allowed itself to be too easily informed by certain trends of the day; there was a certain note of syncretism in it; it may have concealed serious differences and crowded out important emphases through clever wording and composition,' in The International Review of Mission, 67 (1978), p. 278. Cited by Ariarajah, Hindus and Christians, p. 84.

Thus, with regard to the world religions, Jerusalem 1928 attempted to accommodate almost opposing points of view. Though not all were prepared to go to Hocking's extreme, the American delegation was keen to speak of values, fulfilment, and collaborations against secularism. On the other hand, the Continental delegation eschewed the language of the preparatory papers, charging it with syncretism, and spoke instead of proclamation, conversion, and the *sui generis* character of the Gospel. Of the several mediating positions suggested, not even Temple's could reconcile the two positions. As we shall see, the distinction between the two became only more pronounced when the IMC met at Madras Christian College, Tambaram between December 12 and 29, 1938.[102]

Tambaram 1938 incorporated two significant differences over previous conferences. Both Edinburgh 1910 and Jerusalem 1928 were focused explicitly on Christian missions, the former attempting to articulate what missions were and the latter attempting to discern the relationship between missions and other areas. The first advance was evident in the planning stages at Herrnhut 1932, Salisbury 1933 and Northfield 1935 when the scope was broadened to consider the relationship between the Church and the world.[103] Again, the titles of the six discussion themes bear out this broadened focus: The Authority of the Faith; The Growing Church; Evangelism; The Life of the Church; The Economic Basis of the Church; and The Church and the State.[104] Carl Hallencreutz attributes this shift from missions to Church to three factors. Primary among these is Re-Thinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry After One Hundred Years,[105] a critical restatement of the American position expressed at Jerusalem 1928. This is followed closely by two others, namely the rise of nationalism especially in Germany and Italy and the growth of Barthian and Biblical Theologies.[106]

102 . Hans-Ruedi Weber, Asians and the Ecumenical Movement, p. 183.

103 . KTT, pp. 253f.

104 . Full publication details for each theme can be found in the bibliography.

105 . W.E. Hocking, ed. Re-Thinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry After One Hundred Years, (New York: Harper and Row, 1932). In addition to influencing the members of the Council generally, the Re-Thinking Missions had enormous impact on Kraemer specifically. This will be fully discussed in 3.3.

106 . KTT, pp. 257 - 260.

The second difference came later in the planning stages. In a memorandum dated 17 November, 1935, William Cash suggested to Oldham that experts be appointed to deal with proposed themes in a manner similar to Jerusalem 1928.[107] He proposed that Kraemer edit a volume of preparatory papers on the evangelistic approach to the adherents of non-Christian faiths.[108] Oldham agreed and presented Cash's suggestion at the Ad Interim Committee meeting of the IMC at the Old Jordan's Hostel in 1936. Though generally enthusiastic about the recommendation, William Paton preferred a more uniform approach: the work of one author on one specific issue. The Committee concurred and Mott, Oldham, Cash and Paton commissioned Kraemer to 'state the fundamental position of the Christian Church as a witness bearing body in the modern world,... and to deal in detail with the evangelistic approach to the great non-Christian faiths.'[109]

During the early stages, Mott and Paton were of particular importance in shaping what would become The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World. Mott, while completing the arrangements of Kraemer's appointment, suggested he go to the United States in order to become acquainted with American missiological thought. There, Kraemer experienced the aftermath of the Re-Thinking Missions first hand.[110] Paton, on the other hand, was a constant source of

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107. KTT, pp. 261 - 263.

108. KTT, p. 262.

109. CM, p. v. Quoting the Minutes of the Ad Interim Committee of the IMC, Old Jordan's, 1936. See also KTT, pp. 263 - 265.

110. KTT, p. 270f. Kraemer recalled this experience in CM, pp. 46 - 47, where he wrote: 'In America, which takes a large share in the world-wide missionary enterprise at home and abroad, the scene is much more confusing. The relativistic spirit of a Christianity which in the case of thousands of people is all too much assimilated to a humanistic conception of life undermines the missionary understanding of Christianity. If it were not for the fact that the American temperament, for natural and historical reasons, is youthfully aggressive and prone to a crusading type of idealism, the missionary temperament in the Churches of America would be still lower than it is. To be sure, there is to be observed a turning away from the roads of subjectivistic idealism and an expectant returning to the bed-rock verities of historic Christianity. The rank and file in the Churches, however, are wholly at sea about the Christian faith and the Christian obligation in the world. An all-pervading pragmatist attitude, which naively takes the practically-demonstrated value of a certain attitude in life as the standard of reference for truth, naturally causes a very diluted conception of what religion and Christianity really are. This is the more easily so because the religious and moral quality of life of many of those who think in this line is strikingly pure and novel and is still emotionally centred around the Personality of Jesus Christ. However, if there should not occur in the future a real re-discovery of Biblical Christianity, the next generation will lack this emotional connection with the realm of christian faith and worship, and become definitely unchristian and anti-christian.'

encouragement. 'This involved finding a salary for Kraemer while he wrote it and taking the decision to permit him to write double the amount commissioned, which meant that someone (Nicol Macnicol) had to be found to produce a summary of it, and to help Kraemer write readable English.'[111]   Although it was intended to be just one of several inputs at Tambaram 1938, Kraemer's work, because of its size and quality, became the centre of debate.

This is not to say that Kraemer's contribution was the sole source of controversy. In fact, tension had been increasing since Northfield, 1935. At that time, Japan and China had both applied to host the conference and the IMC at Northfield proposed Kowloon, in the Hong Kong new territories, as a compromise site. However strongly they had argued for their own sites, the Japanese and the Chinese were united in their opposition to holding the conference in a British colony. In November 1935, Hangchow, China was chosen. Two years later in November 1937, because of the Sino-Japanese conflict, this site was abandoned for the alternate, Madras Christian College, Madras, Tambaram, in India.[112]   As late as May 1938, the German delegates sought a postponement or cancellation because of the world crisis.[113]

Nevertheless, the controversy aroused by Kraemer seems to be the only one left unresolved at the conclusion of the conference. W.A. Visser 't Hooft recalls that 'Within the fellowship of the meeting, the very real tensions among the conference members - Chinese and Japanese, British and Indian, South African whites and South African blacks, Germans and other continental Europeans - were transcended by the common purpose [of emphasising the universality of the Church].'[114]   He continues, 'The conference was less successful in dealing with the basic theological conflict for which Hendrik Kraemer's book, written for the conference..., provided the focus.... In fact, that conflict was not resolved in Tambaram, but Kraemer had at least forced the whole missionary movement to reconsider its basic assumptions.'[115]   A full examination of the Tambaram

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111 . Eleanor Jackson, Red Tape and the Gospel: A study in the significance of the ecumenical missionary struggle of William Paton (1886 - 1943), (Birmingham: Phlogiston Publishing, 1980), p. 85. Kraemer acknowledges his debt to the IMC and to Macnicol specifically in CM, p. vii.

112 . Jackson, Red Tape and the Gospel, pp. 148 - 149.

113 . Jackson, Red Tape and the Gospel, p. 149.

114 . Visser't Hooft, Memoirs, p. 59.

115 . W.A. Visser't Hooft, Memoirs, p. 59. Likewise, Henry P. Van Dusen recalls that 'This proved to be the only theological issue upon which the conference did not achieve unanimity.' See Henry P. Van Dusen, World Christianity: Yesterday Today Tomorrow, (London: SCM, 1948), p. 193.

controversy, both Kraemer's position and various responses to it, awaits in 4.1 - 4.2. For now, I conclude with an excerpt of the statement endorsed by the entire Conference:

> There are many non-Christian religions that claim the allegiance of multitudes. We see and readily recognize that in them are to be found values of deep religious experience, and great moral achievements. Yet we are bold enough to call men out from them to the feet of Christ. We do so because we believe that in Him alone is the full salvation which man needs....
>
> Everywhere and at all times [God] has been seeking to disclose Himself to men. He has not left Himself without witness in the world. Furthermore, men have been seeking Him all through the ages. Often this seeking and longing has been misdirected, but there are evidences that His yearning after His children has not been without response.
>
> As to whether the non-Christian religions as total systems of thought and life may be regarded as in some sense or to some degree manifesting God's revelation Christians are not agreed. This is a matter urgently demanding thought and united study.[116]

Tambaram 1938 is rightly interpreted, writes Ariarajah, as attempting 'to put mission theology back on its rails,' after Jerusalem 1928.[117] The minutes of the Ad Interim Committee Meeting in 1936 show that this was the intention of the organisers. In the aftermath of the Continental / American division, Re-Thinking Missions, and the very intense political climate, a clear statement of the Christian faith and a convincing apologetic for missions and evangelism were necessary. This is what Kraemer was asked to, and did, provide. He 'was in a strong position to do this for no one could accuse him of failing to study. This had started at Cairo... [and had] continued in the same way in Central Java, in Bali, among the Bataks in Sumatra and in India.'[118] Indeed, none of Kraemer's opponents accused him of misrepresenting or misunderstanding non-Christian religions (although such accusations did come in later years). Rather, as will be seen in 4.2, the controversy revolved around the presuppositions upon which his argument was based.

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116 . 'The Witness of the Church in Relation to the Non-Christian Religions, the New Paganisms and the Cultural Heritage of the Nations,' in The World Missions of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the Meeting of the International Missionary Council, Tambaram, Madras, December 12 - 29, 1938, ed. William Paton, (London: International Missionary Council, 1939), Volume I: The Authority of the Faith, p. 194. Cited hereafter as AF.

117 . Ariarajah, Hindus and Christians, p. 85.

118 . W.A. Visser 't Hooft, Has the Ecumenical Movement a Future?, (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1974), pp. 58 - 59.

3.3   Kraemer's Theological Development

Before an examination of the Tambaram controversy can take place, however, I must situate Kraemer theologically. In introducing this chapter, I noted that Kraemer has often been appraised solely in the light of Barth's theology.[119]   I now argue that to (dis)regard Kraemer as Barth's mouthpiece is too simplistic and that a far more important influence, albeit negatively, was William Hocking.   I will establish this contention by outlining chronologically Kraemer's influences as a student, his experiences in Indonesia, his encounter with dialectical theology, and his confrontation with the antithesis of the Christian Message, W.E. Hocking's Re-Thinking Missions.

Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye and W. Brede Kristensen were major figures in Kraemer's early development.   Chantepie's phenomenology of religions resembled that of C.P. Tiele, the first professor of Comparative Religion at Leiden.   Though he was a member of the theological faculty, Tiele wanted to avoid a Christian theological interpretation of Religion. In his Gifford Lectures, Tiele proposed instead a two tier approach, the foundation of which was 'morphological': the comprehension of Religion in its cultural and historical manifestations.[120]   This evolutionary analysis posited the ethical consciousness, as opposed to theological categories, embodied in Christianity as the criterion by which other religions were to be judged.[121]   From there, he moved on to the 'ontological': a metaphysical, not theological, inquiry into the nature of Religion itself.[122]   Like Tiele, Chantepie sought to avoid theological interpretations of religious phenomena by arguing that theology had a different object in view. 'On the one hand, the a-theological trait is expressed in an acknowledgement that, as such, the inquiry does not and cannot meet the qualifications of a genuine theological inquiry. On the other hand, it is expressed in the effort to

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119 . See n. 7.

120 . He writes, 'All she [the Science of Religion] desires, and all she is entitled to do, is to subject religion, as a human and therefore historical and psychological phenomenon, to unprejudiced investigation, in order to ascertain how it arises and grows and what are its essentials, and in order thoroughly to understand it.' C.P. Tiele Elements of the Science of Religion: Part I. Morphological, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1897), p. 8.

121 . See Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion: Part I., 'Lecture III: Stages of Development - the Lowest Nature-Religions'; 'Lecture IV: Stages of Development - the Highest Nature Religions'; and 'Lecture V: Stages of Development - the Ethical Religions,' pp. 58 - 149.

122 . C.P. Tiele, Elements of the Science of Religion: Part II. Ontological, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1899).

preserve the integrity of the study of the object from the encroachment of a theological agenda.'[123] However, he broke sharply with Tiele regarding his evolutionary model. He resists any plotting of religious objects, beliefs, or practices along a developmental axis according to some essence of religion. 'He proceeds systematically from the religious object to the religious subject without reference to any inherent chronology or advancment among the phenomena.'[124]

In 1901, W. Brede Kristensen, then newly appointed Chair of History and Phenomenology of Religion, delivered his inaugural lecture. Therein he set out themes which set his approach to the study of religions apart from many of his contemporaries. Like them, he distinguished the 'Philosophy of Religion' from the 'History of Religions,' the former dealing with the ontological problem of religion and the latter seeking to understand the history and characteristics of different religions. Unlike them, Kristensen opposed an evolutionary grading of religions.[125] According to Hallencreutz, religious evolutionary 'theory presupposed differences between higher and lower stages, as well as the possibility of development from lower to higher. Different persons could apply different reverences when estimating what was higher and lower in such a development. And every evolutionist regarded himself as standing on the highest peak of development.'[126] Kristensen insisted that this rendered any kind of sympathetic understanding of a religion impossible and proposed instead a totalitarian approach which spoke not of Religion but religions as complex, indivisible unities. 'While theology inquires after the knowledge of God given by revelation, Kristensen inquires into the religious value the believers attach or have attached to their faith, what their religion meant for them.'[127] His interest lay in understanding a religion's specific beliefs and practices in their relationship to the organic whole.[128]

123 . George Alfred James, Interpreting Religion: The Phenomenological Approaches of Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye, W. Brede Kristensen, and Gerardus van der Leeuw, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), p. 57.

124 . James, Interpreting Religion, p. 81.

125 . KTT, pp. 113f.

126 . KTT, pp. 114 - 115.

127 . James, Interpreting Religion, p. 158.

128 . KTT, pp. 115f.

Kraemer follows his teachers in his phenomenological treatment of the religions of 'total' systems of thought and life. Any sympathetic understanding of a religious belief or practice explores its relationship to the religio-cultural matrix in which it arises rather than according to some evolutionary model which was itself historically and culturally situated. Though, Kraemer is not as sceptical about the value of a theological interpretation of religions as either Chantepie or Kristensen, he also follows them in refusing to confuse phenomenological and theological studies. These presuppositions - the totalitarian approach to religions and the distinct nature of theology of religions - underlie The Christian Message and became the sources of controversy at the Tambaram Conference. They are diametrically opposed to those who confuse phenomenological and theological studies by regarding the religions as stages culminating in Christianity or in some other essence of religion. Furthermore, these paragraphs show that they are rooted not in Barth, but in Dutch Phenomenology of Religion.

Now consider his cross-cultrual experiences. When he arrived in Indonesia, Kraemer retained an optimism inherited from the Dutch Ethical Theology of J.H. Gunning and Nicolaus Adriani. 'Before the first World War, Ethical Theology presupposed the disintegration of the Eastern societies, and conceived the task of Christianity in terms of a contribution towards the "renewal" of man and society especially in the East. "Divine Life" was their main category and the Incarnation, their model.'[129] Ethical Theology located the uniqueness of Christianity in conversion - humanity's experience of 'new divine life powers' given by God through Jesus Christ.[130] Kraemer followed his early mentors in emphasising conversion and predicting the demise of other religions.[131] Yet, Kraemer's mature position bore no resemblance to the optimistic appraisal of the early twenties. His emphasis on conversion remained, but instead of 'divine life powers,' Kraemer now spoke of it as a recognition of what God had done for humanity in Jesus Christ.[132] In addition, he relinquished any idea of the future disintegration of the religions; in his opinion, religious

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129. DCE, p. 64.

130. KTT, p. 81; DCE, p. 64.

131. Of course, neither Kraemer nor Dutch Ethical theologians were alone in this belief. It was a hallmark of the entire missionary enterprise at least until Jerusalem 1928.

132. For Kraemer, the necessity of conversion was the presupposition of all missionary activity: 'the presupposition of the Gospel is the necessity of conversion for everyone - even the finest and the noblest personality ....' CM, p. 45.

plurality would persist until the consummation of history.[133] In the light of both factors, Kraemer regarded indigenous expressions of Christianity as vital.[134] How does one account for this reversal?

The answer lies in his experience of the Islamic renaissance in Indonesia. Contrary to expectations, Kraemer did not find Islam disintegrating before advancing western technology and values. In fact, quite the opposite was taking place: Islam was growing rapidly and finding expression in such organisations as the radical nationalist party, Sarekat Islam, and the anti-missionary organisation, Muhammadijah.[135] Attendance at the pan-Islamic conferences at Cheribon in 1922 and Garaut two years later confirmed Kraemer's suspicions that while some nationalists may have been using Islam merely as a means to end colonialism, the religion was especially healthy.[136] He therefore began to stress the importance of indigenous expressions of Christianity as outlined in 3.1. Though the mission agencies were bound to educate and strengthen indigenous congregations, Kraemer held that the responsibility for the dialogue with Islam and the conversion of Indonesians lay not with them but with Indonesian Christians.[137]

Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of Kraemer's theological context is his relationship to dialectical theology, and specifically to Karl Barth. The criticism of Kraemer as a Barthian,[138] as I have shown above, disregards the fact that the skeleton of his mature position was in place prior to his first encounter with Barth in 1929. Carl Hallencreutz has countered that Kraemer should be

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133 . See, for example, RCF, pp. 366 - 376.

134 . CM, pp. 229f; RCF, pp. 409 - 411; Hendrik Kraemer, World Cultures and World Religions: The Coming Dialogue, (London: Lutterworth, 1960); From Missionfield to Independent Church: Report on a Decisive Decade in the Growth of Indigenous Churches in Indonesia, (London: SCM, 1958); and 'The Role and Responsibility of the Christian Mission,' in Philosophy, Religion, and the Coming World Civilization: Essays in Honor of William Ernest Hocking, ed. Leroy S. Rouner, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966).

135 . For a detailed analysis of these and other Islamic organisations in Indonesia in the early twentieth century, see KTT, pp. 21 - 121.

136 . KTT, pp. 130 - 136.

137 . KTT, pp. 144f.

138 . Some contemporary examples of this strategy were cited in n. 7. Nevertheless, it is not new. It was first employed immediately after Tambaram. See, for example A.G. Hogg, 'The Christian Attitude to Non-Christian Faith,' in AF, pp. 102 - 125.

understood against his own missionary background, thereby relegating Barth to a position of minimal influence.[139] This, it seems to me, runs to the other extreme. In what follows, I will examine Kraemer's writings and propose a mediating position.

In The Christian Message, Kraemer praises Barth's theology as 'an energetic endeavour to assert and lay bare the exclusive nature of Biblical religious truth as wholly *sui generis*. Its outstanding merit in the present deluge of relativist thinking is that it states the problem of revelation as a matter of life or death for Christianity and theology.'[140] It is a 'merciless war-cry against... persuasive and omnipresent relativism.'[141] However, he is not uncritical. For Kraemer, Barth's refusal to discuss how God works in other religions 'savours too much of theological and logical consistency and breathes not sufficiently the free atmosphere of Biblical realism. This self-willed refusal to move further,' declares Kraemer, 'will in the long run appear to be untenable.'[142] To Barth's declaration, 'There is no point of contact' between Christianity and other religions, Kraemer counters, that 'the fact that faith in God's revelation occurs pre-supposes that it can be communicated to man and apprehended by him as revelation coming from God.'[143]

This sympathetic criticism continues in Religion and the Christian Faith, where Kraemer distances himself from both Barth and Emil Brunner, whom he describes as *fiendliche Bruder*.[144] On the subject of 'Religion and Religions,' Kraemer is closer to Brunner's position, which, in his view, 'shows great discernment as to the religions *in concreto*, and is in this respect one of the best modern contributions to the subject.'[145] Nevertheless, he criticises Brunner for dwelling 'mainly in

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139 . KTT, pp. 11 - 250; esp. p. 99.

140 . CM, pp. 115 - 116.

141 . CM, p. 118.

142 . CM, p. 120.

143 . CM, p. 131.

144 . That is, 'feuding brothers,' RCF, p. 178.

145 . RCF, p. 185. This position is well-summarised in the following passage: 'Jesus Christ is both the Fulfillment of all religion and the Judgment on all Religion. As the Fulfiller, He is the Truth which these religions seek in vain. There is no phenomenon in the history of religion that does not point toward Him:... From the standpoint of Jesus Christ, the non-Christian religions seem like stammering words from some half-forgotten saying. None of them is without a breath of the Holy, and yet none of them is the Holy. None is without its impressive truth, and yet none of them is the Truth; for their Truth is Jesus Christ.... [As the] Judgment on all religion.... viewed in His light, all religious systems appear untrue,

the realm of theological principles,' and not incorporating a knowledge of other religions into his argument.[146]   Against Barth's position as it is found in <u>Church Dogmatics</u>, I.2,[147] he argues that while it 'bears the marks of the lion,' and is 'in the light of the *justificatio impii* in Christ, quite true,' it is nevertheless, 'too simplistic and obvious to be satisfying in dealing with this complicated and dialectic subject.   One does not feel that this is dialectical theology!'[148]   Barth's treatment fails because it establishes no contact with other religions. Yet, Kraemer is quick to point out that Barth, 'without yielding an inch,' offers a good corrective to I.2 in III.2.[149]

On the subject of 'Natural Theology,' Kraemer seems equally uncomfortable with both. On the one hand, Brunner realises better than Barth that this is a complex problem which is a 'life-and-death matter for the relation of Church and world.'[150]   Yet, notwithstanding his persuasive arguments and appeals to Scripture, Kraemer is 'uneasy about the fact that [Brunner] fought his battle as a defence of Natural Theology without making it sufficiently clear that if we go on using this term..., it must have an entirely different content from the usual one....'[151]   On the other hand, while Barth rightly rejects classical concepts of General Revelation and Natural Theology, Kraemer believes he goes too far, becoming both 'undialectical and rationalistic.'[152]   Moreover, his arbitrary

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unbelieving, and indeed godless.' Emil Brunner, <u>Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge</u>, trans. Olive Wyon, (London: SCM, 1947), pp. 270 - 271. See also Brunner, <u>The Philosophy of Religion from the standpoint of Protestant Theology</u>, trans A.J.D. Farrer and Bertram Lee Woolf, (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1937), chapters 6 and 7, pp. 99 - 149; <u>The Divine Imperative: A Study in Christian Ethics</u>, trans. Olive Wyon, (London: Lutterworth, 1937), pp. 29 - 33; and <u>The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics Volume I</u>, trans. Olive Wyon, (London: Lutterworth, 1949), pp. 101 - 102.

146 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 185.

147 . See above, 1.1.

148 . <u>RCF</u>, pp. 191, 193.

149 . <u>RCF</u>, pp. 193 - 196.

150 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 356.

151 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 356. For Brunner's defence of Natural Theology, see Emil Brunner, 'Nature and Grace,' in <u>Natural Theology</u>, pp. 15 - 64; <u>The Letter to the Romans: A Commentary</u>, (London: Lutterworth, 1959), pp. 16 - 28; <u>Revelation and Reason</u>, pp. 58 - 80, esp. p. 61; <u>God and Man: Four Essays on the Nature of Personality</u>, trans. David Cairns, (London: SCM, 1936), pp. 103 - 135; <u>The Theology of Crisis</u>, (New York: Charles Scriberner's Sons, 1929), pp. 23 - 44; <u>The Divine Imperative</u>, pp. 17 - 52; <u>The Philosophy of Religion</u>, pp. 22 - 30; 79 - 98; <u>The Christian Doctrine of God</u>, pp. 14 - 34.

152 . <u>RCF</u>. p. 356.

exegesis 'of the classical Bible passages which for centuries had served to underscore the notions of General revelation, confused the controversy in a very deplorable way.'[153] Specifically, he rejects Barth's contention that 'accepting the self-disclosure of God in the past, the present and the future, through nature, history and conscience, which is clearly taught by Paul in Rom. 1 and 2, must mean accepting the current concepts of General Revelation and Natural Theology.'[154] He concludes,

> *Christomonismus* is a horrible word, but one must judge discriminatingly what Barth does and does not say. If Barth says - and he does - that the Bible knows no other mode of revelation than Christ, he has the Bible against him. If he says that all modes of revelation find their source, their meaning and criterion in Jesus Christ, and that the revelation of God's righteousness in Christ is the final revelation in the light of which Jesus Christ is the Truth, the *only* Truth, without whom no man comes to the Father - then he is quite right and we ought all to be *Christomonists.*[155]

Two final examples provide a fitting summary. First, in a review written for Theology Today, Kraemer expresses his admiration for and distance from Barth: 'it ought to be an obligation on everyone who claims to be a theologian to seek an encounter with Barth's theology, not in order to become a "Barthian", but in order to learn in our twentieth century what it means to be a theologian.'[156] Second, on his own list of influences, Barth ranks only fifth: 'The only ones to whom I know myself to be deeply indebted as far as theological thinking is concerned are Paul, Pascal, Kierkegaard and also, although in a lesser way, Blumhardt and Barth.'[157] These examples clearly illustrate the simplistic nature of the solutions of those who would either equate or sunder Barth and Kraemer. The truth lies somewhere in between: Kraemer was both sympathetic to and critical of Karl Barth. They were 'feuding brothers' in the Reformed family. Kraemer was a theological ally who was neither a clone of nor completely independent of Barth.

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153 . RCF, p. 357.

154 . RCF, p. 357.

155 . RCF, p. 358 - 359.

156 . Hendrik Kraemer, 'A Manifold Appraisal of Barth: Review of Karl Barth's "Festschrift" Antwort,' in Theology Today, 2 (1956), p. 398.

157 . Hendrik Kraemer, 'Theologie en het kerkelijk vraagstuk,' in Onder eigen vaandel, 17 (1942), p. 17. Cited in Armand Garon, 'Hendrik Kraemer and the Mission to Islam,' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Ottawa University, 1979), p. 43, n. 61.

The above examination provides a general theological context within which Kraemer's ideas developed. Yet, the major influence remains for without W.E. Hocking's Re-Thinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry After One Hundred Years, Kraemer could not have written The Christian Message. To this influence I now turn. Much of the work is practical in nature and reflects the insights of a number of important American missionaries. Nevertheless, I want to focus on the transcendental idealism underpinning the report. It can be found in the opening four chapters of the book (drafted by Hocking alone) under the heading, 'General Principles.' In these chapters, Hocking outlines three factors which he believes all religions share; namely, a common mystical core, a common search for truth, and a common religious uniqueness.

According to Hocking's first factor, 'if there were not at the core of all creeds a nucleus of religious truth, neither Christianity nor any other faith would have anything to build on.'[158] He was convinced that 'within the piety of the common people of every land, encrusted with superstition as it usually is, and weighed down with vulgar self-seeking in their bargaining with the gods, there is this germ, the inalienable religious intuition of the human soul. The God of this intuition is the true God: to this extent, universal religion has not to be established, it exists.'[159] This common starting-point leads Hocking secondly to affirm belief in a common goal: 'The relation between the religions,' he writes, 'must take increasingly hereafter a common search for truth.' Accordingly, missionary activity should continue, but instead of seeking converts, the missionary should look for opportunities for interreligious inspiration and improvement. The missionary 'will look forward, not to the destruction of these religions, but to their continued co-existence with Christianity, each stimulating the other in growth toward the ultimate goal, unity in the completest religious truth.'[160]

These two factors logically require Hocking, thirdly, to present a new understanding of the uniqueness of Christianity. For him, Christianity is unique in its interpretation and expression of the 'inalienable religious intuition.' He writes,

> In respect to its theology and ethics, Christianity has many doctrines in common with other religions, yet no other religion has the same group of doctrines.... [What] is true belongs, in its nature, to the human mind everywhere.
>   From this treasury of thought, however, Christianity proffers a selection which is unique. The principle of selection is its own peculiar character: its individuality has

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158. Hocking, Re-Thinking Missions, p. 37.

159. Hocking, Re-Thinking Missions, p. 37.

160. Hocking, Re-Thinking Missions, p. 44.

in the way in which it assembles and proportions these truths, and leads them to clarity, certainty, exemplification and therefore power. Its features, like the features of a person, are unmistakably its own.[161]

This uniqueness extends from theology and ethics to embrace also symbolism and history: 'The uniqueness of Christianity does not consist solely in its interpretation of religious truth. It consists also, perhaps chiefly, in those things which make religion different from philosophy, - its symbolism, its observances, its historical fellowship, and especially the personal figure to whom it points not alone as founder and teacher, but as its highest expression of the religious life.'[162] Thus for Hocking, Christianity is unique just as every historically and culturally embedded expression of the essence of religion is unique.

For Kraemer, Hocking's transcendental idealism 'manifested a remarkable mixture of sincere devotion to the missionary cause as a Christian obligation with a very weak sense of apostolic consciousness.'[163] He regarded it as relativism masked by the language of tolerance,[164] which failed to take 'the apostolic obligation towards God and the world' seriously.[165] In Religion and the Christian Faith, Kraemer recalled his objection bluntly:

> The point of view advocated by Re-Thinking Missions and its chairman [Hocking] is devoid of real theological sense and is, though intended to be the contrary, a total distortion of the Christian message, its content and real meaning. Religion and Christianity are simply reduced to immanent cultural phenomena. Nowhere is that maintained. Nor is the case stated in this way, because none of the writers had that in mind. In fact, however, the whole argument amounts to that. Its consequence is a suicide of missions and an annulment of the Christian faith.[166]

Kraemer concluded this polemic as follows: 'With the bombshell of this Report in mind my book The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World was written, and acted, at least for a great part of the American missionary world, as another bombshell.'[167]

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161 . Hocking, Re-Thinking Missions, p. 49.

162 . Hocking, Re-Thinking Missions, p. 51.

163 . CM, p. 36.

164 . CM, pp. 45 - 46.

165 . CM, p. 49.

166 . RCF, pp. 223 - 224.

167 . RCF, p. 224.

On the basis of these words, Henry Van Dusen is quite right to characterise The Christian Message as Kraemer's attempt to exorcise Hocking's theological demons.[168] Likewise, Bishop Sabapathy Kulandran, though disagreeing with Kraemer on a fundamental level, writes that Hocking had 'posed with sardonic frankness the question whether [the Christian Church] had anything to preach.' In this light Kulandran considers Kraemer's work as both necessary and beneficial:

> What Kraemer did was to seize hold of the main idea of the book with both hands and throttle it to death. Its ghost still occasionally haunts the theological field here and there. But as a full-blooded and serious figure to be reckoned with it certainly died with the appearance of Kraemer's book and the Madras [Tambaram] conference of 1938. It is this punitive aspect of Kraemer's book that made the deepest impression on people. It was not that there was no constructive aspect, but once the chief item in the show was over, whether people stayed through the rest of the programme or not they paid little attention to it.[169]

Conclusion:

It is unfortunate that this 'punitive aspect of Kraemer's book' is most often the only aspect of his work that is remembered and it is to be regretted more that even these memories of his work are faulty. This chapter was a first step toward correcting this mnemonic imbalance. It sought to take this step by placing Kraemer in his historical context in three stages. It opened with a general introduction to his life and works. Thereafter, the focus was sharpened to Kraemer's role within the missionary thinking of the early ecumenical movement by critically examining the first three ecumenical missionary conferences: Edinburgh 1910, Jerusalem 1928, and Tambaram 1938. Finally, I argued that to (dis)regard Kraemer as Barth's mouthpiece is too simplistic and that a far more important influence, albeit negatively, was William Hocking. The second step - wrestling directly with Kraemer's work - awaits in the next chapter.

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168 . Henry P. Van Dusen, 'The Missionary Message Since Madras,' in Christendom, 9 (1944), p. 27.

169 . Sabapathy Kulandran, 'The Renaissance of Non-Christian Religions and a Definition of Approach to Non-Christians,' mimeographed paper presented to The Study on the Word of God and Men of Other Faiths (WCC Archives), Box 26.32.19, p. 26. Quoted in Ariarajah, Hindus and Christians, p. 86.

Chapter 4

Hendrik Kraemer's Theology of Religions

Introduction:

The previous chapter introduced Hendrik Kraemer by surveying the historical context of a career spanning four decades. In three sections, this chapter completes the recovery by acquainting the reader with Kraemer's theology of religions through an expository account of his major works: The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World, 'Continuity or Discontinuity,' and Religion and the Christian Faith.

4.1   The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World

Kraemer opens The Christian Message with a description of two interrelated crises. The first is a global crisis caused in the West by the collapse of the quest for certainty and culminating in both 'the complete... dominion of the spirit and attitude of relativism,'[1] and in the rise of the 'pseudo-absolutes': communism, fascism and National Socialism.[2] Triggered by colonialism in the East,[3] the same crisis has destroyed many political, social, economic, and cultural structures.

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1 . CM, p. 6. He continues, 'The quest for truth and certitude has driven him [man] to the conclusion that all systems are somehow projections of tendencies of the human mind. He is alone in a howling wilderness. All his efforts are to be compared with Baron von Munchausen's endeavour to draw himself by his own hair out of the swamp in which he is sunk.' p. 11.

2 . Pseudo-absolutes, Kraemer writes, are attempts 'to overcome relativism by *selfmade* absolutism. The absolute is a life necessity for man. Therefore, when he has annihilated God, man... makes himself god. However, just because the absolutism of these new "religions" is self-made, it is void and false.' CM, p. 16.

3 . CM, p. 17. For him, 'never before in the history of the world has there been a meeting between worlds so radically and irreconcilably different as East and West.' (p. 18). Likening the crisis to an earthquake, Kraemer locates the epicentre in the machine which enabled the technological West to dominate the agricultural East. 'In [the machine],' he writes, 'the creative urge and intelligence of the Westerners had shaped a marvelous but fateful tool to express and multiply their creativity infinitely, even to the degree

Kraemer suggests, however, that the accompanying religious renaissance may signal the birth of a new world power.[4] This global situation has provoked an identity-crisis in the Church: religious relativism and persistent religious plurality have combined to raise a troubling question: What is the Church's 'relation to the world and all its spheres of life....'?[5]

This question is especially acute where Church and world meet. In the arena of missions, the Church must forsake colonial conceptions and instead proclaim its message within an encounter with other faiths. 'The whole complex of religious and spiritual life in the large non-Christian world with all its possibilities will be no longer merely an object of study, curiosity or indifference; it will have its share in the shaping of the spiritual life of mankind, and its influence on the course of the history of the Christian Church.'[6] Moreover, the responsibility for this encounter from now on rests not with Western churches, but with Asian and African ones.[7] 'Church history *will* and *must*

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that the creator became the servant and victim of his own invention. The ensuing industrial revolution, which now found at its disposal tools more highly perfected than even before, and the liberation of life from its own fetters, made the conquest of the world inevitable.' pp. 17 - 18.

4 . Kraemer writes, 'The East... has become now a factor as influential as the West. Probably there is no fact more fraught with consequences for the shaping of the future of humanity than the passing of the European world hegemony. It not only fundamentally changes the political and economic outlook for the world but - more significant to those who are engaged in the great missionary cause - all prognosis about the future religious and spiritual development of mankind will have to adjust itself to the new fact that all great religions and conceptions of life may become world-wide in their effects and probabilities. Their latent dynamics, whether spiritual or political, may become world factors.' CM, p. 21. Three decades on, he repeated this observation: 'The lightning-like change of a great part of Asia from the status of being colonies of Western powers to the status of political independence and sovereignty is a fact of cataclysmic importance.... Until World War II.... It had no power, influence or voice in its own right.... Since the great landslide toward independence broke loose in 1947 with the independence of India, this has radically altered. Notwithstanding the central place of the U.S.A. in world-affairs, it is possible to defend the thesis that the world has not shifted from Europe-centredness to America-centredness but to Asia and Africa-centredness.' Hendrik Kraemer, 'The Role and Responsibility of the Christian Mission,' in Philosophy, Religion and the Coming World Civilization: Essays in Honor of William Ernest Hocking, ed. Leroy S. Rouner, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), p. 236.

5 . CM, p. 30. While no solution will apply to every situation, 'one demand universally emerges from the situation everywhere, that is, back to the recapturing of the vision of what God in Christ meant the Christian Community to be - a fellowship of believers, rooted in God and His divine redemptive order, and therefore committed to the service and the salvation of the world; going to the bottom in its criticism of and opposition to the evil of the world, but at the same time going to the bottom in its identification with the sufferings and needs of the world.'

6 . CM, p. 38.

7 . For not only 'through the Christian mission from the West, but through the face of the presence of the Christian church as part of the total indigenous life, and through their Christian mission, Christianity has now its own responsible place in the life of Asia and Africa.' Kraemer, 'The Role and Responsibility of the Christian Mission,' p. 242.

be written in the future in the life-books of Africa and Asia, and ... these new chapters will be of decisive importance for the life and development of the Christian Church in its older domains.'[8]

A satisfactory answer is founded not upon 'a connected series of religious and moral ideals,' but upon 'the revelation of a series of divine acts'[9] incapable of explanation by any means other than the Biblical narratives. 'Therefore, to the Bible we will turn, because there the witness of the prophets and the apostles is to be found on which the Church is built.'[10] For this basis, Kraemer is unapologetic: 'The Christian faith is indifferent to rational coherence... not because it is incoherent or necessarily irrational, but because, as the divine order of life revealed in Jesus Christ, it has a coherence and rationality of a quite different order....' Consequently, 'when formulated in the terms of a definite philosophy,' it is necessarily 'strangled or distorted.'[11] The 'series of religious and moral ideals,' the 'definite philosophy' which Kraemer rejects is Hocking's transcendental idealism.[12] Instead, he offers 'Biblical realism'[13] as the only adequate point of departure when discerning the relationship between Church and world.

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8 . CM, p. 39.

9 . CM, p. 61.

10 . CM, pp. 61 - 62. This is not to say that Kraemer advocates an uncritical reading of the Scriptures, for he goes on to write, 'It can confidently be asserted that never before in the history of mankind has a religion been exposed to such a relentless procedure of analysis, comparison and testing as Christianity has in the least centuries.... The Christian faith has been summoned before the tribunal of reason and history and has been tested severely.' For Kraemer, this severe testing, of which biblical criticism is one part, is really a 'blessing in disguise' for 'the same critical method of investigation and of disinterested understanding has developed the attitude that the only way to understand [religions] and to be just to them is to take them according to their peculiar fundamental motives and meaning. This rule applies also to the Christian faith, and naturally leads again to the Bible as the source of the most valued answer to the question, What is the Christian faith?' CM, pp. 62 - 63.

11 . CM, p. 64.

12 . See 3.3.

13 . Biblical realism, says Kraemer, radically recasts the great philosophical and theological mysteries. Take for instance, the enigma of transcendence and immanence. 'To Biblical realism, this problem is quite irrelevant.... The Bible and the Christian faith know in their own characteristic and realistic way about transcendence and immanence. God is the sovereign Creator of the world and or man; He is the Lord of history. This transcendence is not the derived transcendence of a divine essence..., but is absolute, primary transcendence, founded on the fact of God's Godhead. God works in history and in man.... This essentially religious immanence is radically different from the concept of immanence as current in religious philosophy with its ontological colouring. It is the immanence of personal fellowship with and active participation in the life of the world and of man; the fellowship of the Father, but the Father who is in *Heaven*. Hence an exposition of this Biblical realism is of greater advantage to the elucidation of the Christian faith than the inevitably abstract discussion of the relation of the immanence and transcendence

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'Biblical realism' is rooted in Kraemer's conception of revelation for while the Bible has 'no theory about revelation,' it 'is the presupposition on which the prophetic and apostolic witness of the Bible is built.'[14] Properly defined, revelation is 'what is by its nature inaccessible and *remains so, even when it is revealed*.'[15] It is primarily the Christ-event: 'Nowhere is the genuine meaning of revelation maintained so consistently.... God was truly revealed in Jesus Christ, but at the same time He hid and disguised Himself in the man Jesus Christ. The universal revulsion from and protest against the Incarnation at all times is a clear indication of how completely hidden God's revelation remains from the natural eye of man.'[16] Yet it is also the revelation of '[man] as a being who in his deepest instincts and desires wants to be god.'[17] It is never a series of revealed propositions,[18] but always 'a tale about "the wonderful things God has done" (Acts ii.11) which remain "wonderful" and incomprehensible despite their being told.'[19] It is not speculation about 'God's Essence,' but an announcement of 'the mystery of His *Will*....'[20]

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of God as commonly understood.' CM, pp. 66 - 67. This alone is his 'fundamental starting-point and criterion of all Christian and theological thinking.' CM, p. 66.

14 . CM, p. 69.

15 . CM, p. 69.

16 . CM, p. 70.

17 . CM, p. 70

18 . As far as Kraemer is concerned, this view of revelation mistakenly but inevitably defines faith as intellectual assent. 'The Roman Catholic Church,' he writes, 'has canonized this intellectualist and non-Christian conception in its doctrine about the natural order of religious facts which the human mind has acquired by its strenuous efforts, and the supernatural order of truths which have come down from heaven.' This, he concludes, 'is the besetting sin of all orthodoxy,' and 'one of the most disastrous misinterpretations of the Christian faith.' CM, pp. 71 - 72.

19 . CM, p. 30. Moreover, this tale demands to be told and retold: 'When... revelation means God's doing redemptive and saving acts to realize the restoration of mankind and the world, the only appropriate thing to do for those who have apprehended it by the eye of faith is to bear witness to it, to become apostles, ambassadors, messengers.' CM, p. 72.

20 . CM, pp. 72 - 73, italics his. 'Not the mystery of His being or Essence is revealed, because that remains God's exclusive domain, but His redemptive Will towards mankind. God's saving Will, become manifest in divine action, is what is revealed in the Christian faith.... The mystery of God's Essence, as is demonstrated in all ages and all religions, is to be concealed, to be hedged around by the shuddering awe of inaccessibility; the mystery of the divine Will, as lies in the nature of the case, has to be announced. The missionary command and urge in Christianity thus burst forth from the heart of God.' CM, p. 73.

'Biblical realism' may be portrayed in various ways 'because the richness of the Gospel is inexhaustible.'[21] In the Incarnation, it proclaims an unthinkable and mysterious act which declares God's love for humanity.[22] In justification by faith, it reveals 'why Christ must be called the crisis of all religions and philosophies,' by uncovering humanity's 'wilful maintenance of self in the face of God.... God Himself can only make possible the impossible by His sovereign, creative act of salvation in Jesus Christ.'[23] It declares that 'God by His creative act of reconciliation and atonement in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing men's trespasses unto them, opened a way of reconciliation where there was no way.'[24] As the proclamation of God's Kingdom, Biblical realism is a reminder that humanity 'cannot create an ideal society,' but that 'God has begun in Jesus Christ a new divine order of life, of which Christ is the centre and the head.'[25] Yet in each portrayal, God's initiative in salvation is stressed as the heart of '*the radical religious realism of the Bible*.'[26] Though Biblical authors display 'many varying, individual accents,' the 'Christ they proclaim is always the incarnate Son of God, whose life and work meant the execution of God's plan of salvation.... The Holy Spirit to whom they testify is always the creator and sustainer of the new life in Christ, and the guarantee of God's dealing with those who are new creatures in Christ.'[27]

This core calls Christians to 'expose the totality of [their] being to the claim of the Biblical revelation for absolute allegiance to it - half-hearted allegiance means no allegiance at all - and then

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21 . CM, p. 73.

22 . 'The Incarnation states that the decisive moment in world history is the moment in which God revealed Himself in Christ as the holy and loving Travailer for the redemption and restoration of the world. Therefore, in the Incarnation God is not only revealed, but in it is also implied that empirical man and the empirical world are realities of infinite worth and objects of such deep concern to God that He surrenders Himself in Christ to the Cross.' CM, p. 74.

23 . CM, p. 75.

24 . CM, p. 76.

25 . CM, p. 77. And it calls people to this new way of life, which Kraemer describes as 'the way of the Cross, of giving up all self-assertion and self-regard, the way of conflict with the world, of martyrdom and ruin; it is also the life of victory, of a new creation in Christ, of faith and hope and love, the way of absolute trust in the reality of God, His acts and promises in Christ.... It is the way of "obedience to the faith" and fellowship with Christ, of joy and of service, of living by divine forgiveness and therefore loving God and loving men....' CM, pp. 77 - 78.

26 . CM, p. 82.

27 . CM, pp. 84 - 85.

to take decisions.'[28] This 'is the only way to suggest sufficiently the incommensurableness of the religion of Biblical realism with all other specimens of life.'[29]

> Therefore in regard to the problem of the legitimate variety of expression and approach in the Christian faith, which in the Younger Churches and the mission field is a problem of fundamental importance, because it crops up inevitably through the natural fact of the different backgrounds, heritages and mentalities, we find our point of reference again in the indisputable and continuous confrontation with and orientation upon the radical realism of the Biblical revelation.[30]

Thus, Kraemer wants to solve 'the all-embracing problem of the Christian religion or the Christian Church in relation to the world,'[31] from the openly confessional perspective of 'Biblical realism.' In contemporary terms, Kraemer's theology of religions occurs not in the forum of fundamental theology but of ecclesiology. He thus hopes to safeguard the importance of Christian missions by stressing the apostolic nature of the Church,[32] while maintaining a positive attitude toward the non-Christian religions by stressing God's presence in all creation;[33] thereby revealing 'the dialectical relation in which Christianity, if true to its nature and mission, ought to stand to the world - the combination of a fierce "yes" and at the same time a fierce "no" to the world: the *human*

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28 . CM, p. 83.

29 . CM, p. 83.

30 . CM, p. 85.

31 . CM, p. 103.

32 . He writes, 'In the first place, Christianity, under all circumstances, must always be aware that it is built on the prophetic and apostolic witness to a divine, transcendental order of life that transcends and judges by virtue of its inherent authority the whole range of historical human life in every period.' CM, p. 104. And again, The Christian message 'is not a message about which the hearers have the right to decide whether it should be communicated or not,... It must be communicated because it issues from the prophetic consciousness that is the Word of the Lord of the Universe....' The Communication of the Christian Faith, p. 22.

33 . He writes, 'In the second place, whether the attitude is one of renunciation, of reserve or of intimate relation, it has to be essentially a *positive* attitude, because the world remains the domain of God who created it. After its rebellion against Him, He did not let it go but held it fast in His new initiative of reconciliation. It must be a positive attitude also because the Christian Church, as the witness to and representative of the new order of salvation and reconciliation, has been set by God *in* this world in order to be and work for the sake of this world. Jesus taught us to pray, "God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and this petition will always be the Magna Charta of the Church's obligation to occupy itself strenuously and positively with the world and its spheres of life, including the non-Christian religions.' CM, p. 104.

and *broken* reflection of the divine "no" and "yes" of the holy God of reconciliation who held the world under His absolute judgment and at the same time claimed it for His love.[34]

Furthermore, in so doing he hopes to avoid arguments attempting to prove the superior value of a religion.[35] Such proofs flounder for all religions can 'show up an impressive record of psychological, cultural and other values, and it is wholly dependent on one's fundamental axioms of life whether one considers these non-Christian achievements of higher value for mankind than the Christian.'[36] By framing theology of religions within ecclesiology, he bypasses the discussion entirely. Focusing instead on the relationship between the Church and the world, he orients his work around that which separates the Church from the world, that which is 'claimed to be the standard of reference for all truth and all religion,' namely, 'the faith that God has revealed *the* Way and *the* Life and *the* Truth in Jesus Christ and will this to be known to all the world.'[37]

The preceding discussion has clarified three foundational points. First, Kraemer's attitude toward non-Christian religions 'is to be seen in the context of the relation of Christianity to the world and its spheres of life.'[38] Second, in his view, 'for a Christian the only standard of reference,' enabling a legitimate evaluation of non-Christian religions and empirical Christianity is 'the revelation of Christ.'[39] And third, he eschews all feelings of superiority. 'A missionary or a Christian who harbours the tiniest spark of spiritual arrogance and boasts of "his" superiority by being a Christian and "having" the truth, grieves the Spirit of Christ and obscures his message,...'[40]

Having thus laid his foundation, Kraemer now attempts to answer the question, 'Does God - and if so, how and where does God - reveal Himself in the religious life as present in the non-

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34 . <u>CM</u>, p. 104, italics his.

35 . He notes that it was failure to maintain this distinction that led to the confusion at Jerusalem 1928. <u>CM</u>, p. 103.

36 . <u>CM</u>, p. 106.

37 . <u>CM</u>, pp. 106 - 107.

38 . <u>CM</u>, p. 110.

39 . <u>CM</u>, p. 110.

40 . <u>CM</u>, pp. 110 - 111.

Christian religions?'[41] Borrowing from Kristensen, he begins by asserting that 'all philosophies and world-views, are the various efforts of man to apprehend *the totality of existence*, often stirring in their sublimity and as often pathetic or revolting in their ineffectiveness.'[42] Every theology or atheology 'is an effort to reflect in a system of coherent thinking the religious apprehension of existence.'[43] Though these different systems sometimes share 'aspirations, ideas, institutions, symbols and intuitions,' from these cannot be distilled the essence of religion.[44] 'As scientific research and critical thinking both teach, there is no "natural" religion; there is only a universal religious consciousness in man, which produces many similarities. Besides that, there are concrete religions, each with its peculiar structure and character.'[45] He continues by interpreting this totalitarian view of religions theologically. Humans, he writes, are 'dual beings': of divine origin, but corrupted by sin.[46] This divine origin, the root of all religious creativity, is evident 'in the lofty religions and the ethical systems that [humans have] produced and tried to live by.'[47] At the same time however, even the most sublime religious achievements are corrupted through humanity's 'subjection to evil and to satanic forces....'[48] Against these rival apprehensions of the totality of existence stands the Christian revelation which 'asserts itself as the record of God's self-disclosing and re-creating revelation in Jesus Christ, as an apprehension of existence that revolves around the poles of divine judgment and divine salvation, giving the divine answer to this demonic and guilty disharmony of man and the world.'[49] Echoing the early Barth, Kraemer contends that revelation is

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41. CM, p. 111.

42. CM, p. 111 (emphasis mine).

43. CM, p. 111.

44. CM, p. 111. 'This endeavour,' he continues, 'although quite intelligible on account of the mentioned similarities, is false. It confuses concurrent but widely scattered, unevenly distributed, differently graded and differently motivated religions and ethical notions, with a supposedly coherent system, governed by some leading general ideas which the creators of this "natural" religion arbitrarily put upon it.' CM, p. 112.

45. CM, p. 112.

46. CM, p. 112.

47. CM, p. 113.

48. CM, p. 113. For instance, 'The mystic, who triumphantly realizes his essential one-ness with God or the Divine, knowing himself in serene equanimity the supreme master of the universe and of destiny, and who by his marvelous feats of moral self-restraint and spiritual self-discipline offers a fascinating example of splendid humanity, commits in this sublime way the root sin of mankind, "to be like God" (Gen. iii. 5).'

49. CM, pp. 113 - 114.

'an act of God, an act of divine grace for forlorn man and a forlorn world by which He condescends to reveal His Will and His Heart....'[50]   Hence, '"general revelation," in the sense of God revealing Himself with compelling lucidity in nature, history and reason, is a contradiction in terms, for what lies on the street has no need to be revealed. By its nature revelation is and must be special.'[51]

Yet, Kraemer is dissatisfied with Barth's refusal to take the issue further: 'The problem of the relation to the world and all its spheres of life and that of the attitude towards other religions and how God works in them cannot be constantly passed by in silence of left untouched.'[52]   Barth's silence surrenders Biblical realism to 'sterile intellectualism.'[53]   While the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is *sui generis*, Kraemer holds that 'the world is the creation of God "who does not abandon the works of His hands," but continues working in it.'[54]

> Even in this fallen world God shines through in a broken, troubled way: in reason, in nature and history. Otherwise the urge for truth, beauty, goodness and holiness, stirring in science, philosophy, art, religion are incomprehensible. The community of the believers in Christ belongs to this world and lives and works in it, and even for the sake of self-comprehension it needs light on the subject of this world as it is and its relation to God.[55]

Therefore, the 'universal religious consciousness of man and the results of his endeavour to obtain an apprehension of the totality of existence cannot be dismissed as outside discussion.'[56]   Calvin's '*sensus divnitatis*,'[57] and Brunner's 'critical and right kind of natural theology,'[58] provide the

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50 . CM, p. 118.

51 . CM, p. 119.

52 . CM, p. 120.

53 . CM, p. 120.

54 . CM, p. 120.

55 . CM, pp. 120 - 121.

56 . CM, p. 121.

57 . CM, p. 121; see John Calvin, The Institutes, Book I, Chapter 3, pp. 43 - 47, where he writes, 'There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity [*Divinitatis sensum*].... To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all man a certain understanding of his divine majesty.... Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a sense of divinity can never be effaced is engraved upon men's minds.' pp. 43, 45. In chapter 4, however, Calvin goes on to write that this 'seed of religion' has been corrupted by 'proud vanity and obstinacy,' and 'carnal stupidity.' People 'do not therefore apprehend God as he offers himself, but imagine him as they have fashioned him in their own presumptions.' p. 47.

58 . CM, p. 121; see also 3.3.

required corrective by affirming 'the unique and *sui generis* character of the realm of revelation and salvation,' while speaking 'about the realm of fallen creation... in a deeper, more realistic, freer way...' than Barth.[59] They enable one to rejoice 'over every evidence of divine working and revelation that may be found in the non-Christian world' but maintain that these 'pure and unmistakable evidences of divine revelation' are not 'of the same sort and quality as the revelation in Jesus Christ.'[60] Unlike Barth, Kraemer does not reject terms like 'general revelation' and 'natural theology,' but redefines them. Of the former, he writes, 'General revelation can henceforth only mean that God shines revealingly through the works of His creation (nature), through the thirst and quest for truth and beauty, through the conscience and the thirst and quest for goodness, which throbs in man even in his condition of forlorn sinfulness, because God is continuously occupying Himself and wrestling with man, in all ages and with all peoples.'[61] Thus recast, general revelation is seen only through the lenses of the revelation of God in Christ.[62] The latter is similarly re-characterised.

> The function of natural theology will henceforth be, not to construe preparatory stages and draw unbroken, continuous lines of religious development ending and reaching their surmount in Christ, but in the light of the Christian revelation to lay bare the dialectical condition not only of the non-Christian religions but of all the human attempts towards the apprehension of the totality of existence. Or, to put it differently, to uncover in the light of the revelation of Christ the different modes of God-, self- and world-consciousness of man in his religious life.[63]

Accordingly, Kraemer's answer to whether or not God is revealed in the non-Christian religions is both yes and no. From the human perspective, 'man's sublime faculties and accomplishments in the realm of intellect, culture, art, morals, religion, mastery of life,' are hampered by 'man's apparently constitutional blindness, even in his sublimest moments, to God as He is in Jesus Christ, and his perversion and corruption.'[64] From the divine perspective, while he never outlines the nature this revelation, Kraemer affirms that God is revealed in other religions. It

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59. CM, p. 121.

60. CM, p. 122.

61. CM, p. 125.

62. CM, p. 125.

63. CM, p. 125.

64. CM, p. 125.

is only in the light of the revelation in Christ, however, that this revelation is recognised. In summary,

> God works in man and shines through nature. The religious and moral life of man is man's achievement, but also God's wrestling with him; it manifests a receptivity to God, but at the same time an inexcusable disobedience and blindness to God. The world fails to know God even in its highest wisdom, although it strives to do so. Man seeks God and at the same time flees from Him in His seeking, because his self-assertive self-centredness of will, his root-sin, always breaks through. God's anger is revealed towards the iniquity of man as manifested in his religious and moral depravity; but nevertheless the entire creation is eagerly longing for the revelation of the "glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. viii). Such was and is the contradictory condition of the world, and of the religious and moral life of the world in its different forms, and the dialectical relation of God to it. To indicate systematically and concretely where God revealed Himself and wrestled and wrestles with man in the non-Christian religions is not feasible. Every effort to do so is hazardous. Personal concrete experiences, the meeting of spirit *with spirit* and illumined divination can alone lead on the right track.[65]

With the last three sentences of the quotation above, the problem of 'points of contact' is introduced. On the basis of previous discussion, it would seem that for Kraemer, there are none: if the biblically realistic world of the revelation in Christ is systematically incommensurate with the totalitarian worlds of non-Christian religions, then there is no common ground. At the same time, however, if 'the essential meaning of Christianity is to witness to the world of divine and human realities as revealed in Jesus Christ,'[66] there must be points of contact or common ground to which this witness can appeal in order to be grasped. Kraemer resolves the dilemma dialectically, saying on the one hand that between revelation and the non-Christian systems of thought, there are no points of contact while in the situational encounters between Christians and non-Christians, there may be many.

Taking first the negative side of the dialectic, Kraemer rejects any 'point of contact' which takes 'seemingly kindred elements of other religions... as fragments detached from [their] total reality,' as 'the starting-point of the road that leads to Christ and to Christian truth.'[67] In the first place, such an approach refuses to understand particular beliefs or practices within their totalitarian framework, thereby rejecting them *a priori* on their own terms. Although it 'honestly starts from the very laudable and (for a missionary) indispensable desire to show open-mindedness and genuine

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65 . CM, pp. 126 - 127.

66 . CM, p. 299

67 . CM, p. 299.

sympathy for the best in other religions, it starts from the assumption that Christianity is the crown of these religions, and so it evinces a hidden feeling of superiority, that is rightly sensed as condescension.'[68]   In the second, it ignores the fact that more often than not, such 'fictitious similarity acts more as a barrier than as a bridge,' to interreligious conversation.[69]   While such an approach may uncover elements of the Christian message that are common and therefore relatively unsurprising, its surprising, unique features are the focal points for conversation. 'When the world "approach" is taken in the sense of Christianity as a total religious system approaching the non-Christian religions as total religious systems, there is only difference and antithesis, and this must be so because they are radically different.'[70]

Moving to the positive, Kraemer is equally adamant that 'in practice the religious needs and aspirations that are embedded in these great religious systems often offer, of course, splendid opportunities for practical *human* contact.'[71]   Rather than searching for systematic points of contact, Kraemer prefers a situational approach which 'means to have constantly in mind that a missionary is a living human being among other living human beings, whose minds are soaked in the atmosphere of their own religions. This being so, it goes without saying that it is impossible and not permissible to approach them without a thorough knowledge of their religious and general human background.'[72]   Kraemer thus highlights the obligation to strive for the presentation of Christian truth in terms and modes which the audience will understand: the problem of adaptation. 'So it is obvious and legitimate that Christian truth must be at present expressed against the background of, and in conflict with, the moral and religious content of the non-Christian religions.'[73]

Once again, a dilemma is confronted: if biblical realism is incommensurate with other religious apprehensions of life, then no adaptation is possible; at the same time, however, if faithful

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68 . <u>CM</u>, pp. 301 - 302.

69 . <u>CM</u>, p. 300.

70 . <u>CM</u>, p. 300.

71 . <u>CM</u>, p. 300.

72 . <u>CM</u>, p. 303.

73 . <u>CM</u>, p. 308.

Christian witness is to take place, adaptation must occur. And once again, Kraemer's solution lies in the focus on situation over system: 'Adaptation... does not mean to assimilate the cardinal facts of the revelation in Christ as much as possible to fundamental religious ideas and tastes of the pre-Christian past, but to *express* these facts by wrestling with them concretely, and so to present the Christian truth and reveal at the same time the intrinsic inadequacy of man's religious efforts for the solution of his crucial religious and moral problems.'[74] The New Testament writers were bent neither on the assimilation nor the refutation of Judaism, Greek philosophy and mystery religions, but used them to present and formulate the revelation in Christ are paradigmatic for the strategy Kraemer pursues.

This situational approach, itself a reminder that the Christian message does not arise within a socio-cultural vacuum, first challenges missionary activity where 'Christianity is preached and transplanted in the historical, theological and institutional forms that have been developed in the West, and in the case of Protestant Missions, this is still further aggravated by the fact that the various and often separatist-minded denominational, theological and institutional expressions are the models on which various types of Christianity in Africa and Asia are moulded.'[75] At the same time, however, it equally confronts missionary activity which 'leads to the weakening of Christianity, for in practice it is not the endeavour to bring Christian truth to its most vigorous and clear expression by indigenous ways, but to recast [it] into an indigenous philosophy of life, in which the dominant elements are the pre-Christian apprehension of existence, coloured and sanctioned by supposedly kindred Christian elements.'[76]

The 'problem of adaptation is that of the genuine translation of Christianity into indigenous terms so that its relevancy to their concrete situations becomes evident.'[77] It is neither a simplistic antithesis, nor a naive synthesis, but a procedure dependent on concrete situations to determine whether one emphasises contrasts or commonalities. Thus, 'if a synthesis of Christianity and Indian or other elements will ever come about... such a synthesis will grow slowly out of the stress and

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74 . CM, p. 308.

75 . CM, pp. 315 - 316.

76 . CM, p. 317.

77 . CM, p. 323.

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need of life, but never can be the result of a premeditated effort, apart from living and continual contact with the actual situations.[78]

> In our description of the non-Christian religions, we have repeatedly stressed how rich and how varied are the ways in which man there has tried to give expression to his religious needs and aspirations, in theology, in worship, in art, in forms of organization, in different ways of presentation.... It is not at all important that they do not fit in with our Protestant traditions and natural reactions, but it is very important to ask in the light of Biblical realism how they can function so as to foster pure and vigorous Christian life.[79]

There is therefore no valid objection to using the philosophical terminology of the great religions. To avoid doing so is to despise both the New Testament and a natural means of communication.

To summarise, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World emphasised first of all that a Christian interpretation of the religious life of humanity took its starting-point within the Christian revelation. Secondly, it argued that a proper interpretation of this religious life depended on a proper understanding of beliefs and practices in relation to the complex religious totality in which they arise. Finally, it contended against the artificial and abstract comparison of religious systems that true points of contact and adaptation were uncovered only in the situational encounters between Christian and non-Christians. I turn now to the debate which erupted in the aftermath of this presentation.

4.2   The Authority of the Faith

Section 3.2 pointed out that Kraemer's position was the source of much controversy at Tambaram 1938. In the conference statement, it was admitted that on whether or how God reveals himself outside Christianity was not agreed, and a call for further study was issued.[80] This resulted in the publication of The Authority of the Faith, in which Kraemer restated his position in an essay entitled 'Continuity or Discontinuity,' and invited criticism. An examination of this essay and those of its critics follows presently.

While there is no change of mind between The Christian Message and 'Continuity or Discontinuity,' Kraemer introduces three important qualifications to the original presentation. First

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78 . CM, p. 324.

79 . CM, pp. 324 - 325.

80 . AF, p. 194; see also 3.2.

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he admits that 'Biblical realism' is a 'more or less clumsy' endeavour to express 'what can only be inadequately rendered by our human concepts.'[81] He intended it 'to express the idea that the Bible, the human and in many ways historically conditioned document of God's acts of revelation, consistently testifies to divine acts and plans in regard to the salvation of mankind and the world, and not to religious experience or ideas' and was troubled when it was criticised as 'vague and unnecessary.'[82]

> Therefore, I shall be grateful if anyone will offer a better term, provided it conveys more clearly and more adequately the idea that the Bible and its contents can only be understood when it is taken as the record of God's thoughts and acts in regard to mankind, and not as a tale about the pilgrimage of the human soul towards God, however moving a tale of that religious pilgrimage might by told by one who surveys the religious history of mankind.[83]

Second, while he underscores the *sui generis* and thus discontinuous nature of the Christian revelation, he qualifies this by noting that there are 'longings and apperceptions in the religious life of mankind outside the special sphere of the Christian revelation, of which Christ, what He is and has brought, may be termed *in a certain sense* the fulfilment.'[84] Kraemer mediates between one extreme which regarded 'the religious pilgrimage of mankind as a preparation of a leading up to a so-called fulfilment in Christ,' and its opposite which desires 'to minimise or despise the value and significance of much [in]... the religious quest of the various peoples.'[85] Though he thus admits a limited 'fulfilment,' he avoided the term at Tambaram first because his version of fulfilment, unlike that of Edinburgh and Jerusalem, 'never represents a perfecting of what has been before. In this fulfilment is contained a radical recasting of values, because these longings and apprehensions when exposed to the searching and revolutionary light of Christ, appear to be blind and misdirected.'[86] This does not detract from the fact that these elements are 'heart-stirring and noble,' but affirms 'the truth that in Christ all things become new, because He is the crisis of all religions.'[87] Also, he refrained lest it be seen as tacit approval of natural theology, 'conceived as an

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81 . Hendrik Kraemer, 'Continuity or Discontinuity,' in AF, p. 2.

82 . AF, p. 2

83 . AF, p. 2.

84 . AF, p. 3.

85 . AF, p. 3.

86 . AF, p. 3.

87 . AF, p. 4.

imperfect form of revelation, introductory to the world of divine grace in Christ.[88] He denies neither God's capacity to work outside the Christian revelation nor that there may therefore be 'acceptable men of faith' outside Christianity,[89] but will not affirm 'the religions of the world as *somehow*... a schoolmaster to Christ....' This is 'a misunderstanding of the Christian revelation.'[90] Third, he declined because an examination of the religions 'forbids us to construe a relation of preparation and fulfilment between these religions and the Christian revelation.... Everyone who investigates the documents and penetrates sympathetically into the spirit of these religions, can find this out without any difficulty.'[91] He speaks instead of 'contradictive or subversive fulfilment.'[92]

Finally, Kraemer clarifies the presuppositions behind The Christian Message.[93] First, it presupposed a Christian perspective: 'In all my reasoning and in all my efforts to formulate my opinion, I take my standpoint *within* the realm of the Christian revelation.... [It] is my authoritative guide and no other principle or standpoint.'[94] Though he neither requires nor expects non-Christian commentators to agree, he is perplexed by the controversy the adoption of such a standpoint

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88 . AF, p. 4.

89 . He writes, 'God forbid that we mortal men should be so irreverent as to dispose of how and where the Sovereign God of grace and love has to act.' AF, pp. 4 - 5.

90 . AF, p. 5.

91 . AF, pp. 5, 6 - 7. Citing Pandipeddi Chenchiah, Kraemer continues '"If we take the "revelation" claimed in different religions, we have to confess that they do not piece together or form an intelligible whole. The Vedas, the Koran, the Gospel do make a coherent scheme. They do not even answer the same questions." The claims of the various religions are clearly conflicting.... "The facile presumption that in Hinduism we have a search for salvation without satisfaction and that Christianity satisfied the longing, is untrue to fact." "The supreme longing of the Hindu, to escape from *samsara*, Christ does not satisfy, and the Lord's gift of rebirth does not appeal to the Hindu. Thus the correspondence of longing and satisfaction fails." "Jesus kindles new hopes not felt before and kills some of the deepest and persistent longings of man." These dicta of Mr Chenchiah... stress facts that are generally glossed over in the discussion, because the laudable desire not to overlook or minimise religious insights or aspirations which arrest by their depth and quality blinds the eyes to the real elements of the discussion. Appreciation thus leads towards entirely unwarranted and untenable identifications.' AF, pp. 5 - 6.

92 . AF, p. 5.

93 . He writes, 'The amount of agreement and mutual understanding... reached in Tambaram, has been so appallingly small that we in the first place stand in need of a patient endeavour to understand and probe each other's presuppositions and starting-points. The great danger that threatens our international discussions on Christian topics is not so much an undue and unchristian acerbity, as a generous politeness that, largely unwittingly, covers an indifference to or an impatience with each other's presuppositions.' AF, p. 7.

94 . AF, p. 7.

aroused among his Christian critics.[95]   Second, it presupposed 'that a persistent and attentive listening to the Bible is essential, if there is to be any possibility of a "Christian" view of our problem.'[96]   The discovery 'of the human and historically-conditioned trappings, in which the message of biblical realism is expressed,' has caused some to regard the Bible as 'an interesting and highly important piece of religious literature, but not... as containing the prophetic and apostolic witness to God's dealing with mankind, the Word of God.'[97]   While accepting biblical criticism, he stresses that the Bible must continue to be 'recognised as the central orientation-point for our theological thinking....'[98]   Last, it presupposed a 'sympathetic understanding' of the nature and function of the religions 'according to the *intention* that animates them and gives them their peculiar life and attitude.'[99]   Such an approach, based on 'the results of the so-called comparative study of religion,' can enable 'a more adequate - adequate *in bonam et in malam partem* - and intelligent judgment and evaluation about the meaning and function of religion in its many forms to the life of man.'[100]   While it can never become the 'authoritative guide' for the Christian, it should nonetheless remain an 'intelligent and much appreciated informant.'[101]

In the remainder of the essay, Kraemer sets out his position again, this time by comparing Clement of Alexandria's positive assessment of Greek philosophy with Barth's negative assessment of religion.[102]   For Clement, because 'Christ as the *Logos* [was] the author of the general revelation

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95 . AF, pp. 8 - 9. He writes, 'How can I, and how can you ignore the fact that our whole apprehension of religious life is moulded and coloured by our contact with and knowledge of Christ? How can we acknowledge Him as the ultimate authority and standard in all things religious, and then try to find a so-called wider and more inclusive standpoint from which to prove and determine the significance and meaning of the religious dream of mankind? This simply means that there is another ultimate standard than Christ, a so-called religious *a priori* by which even Christ, who upsets all human standards, is measured. At any rate for a Christian this standpoint leads to hopeless confusion.' AF, p. 9.

96 . AF, p. 9.

97 . AF, p. 10

98 . AF, p. 10.

99 . AF, p. 10.

100 . AF, p. 11.

101 . AF, p. 11.

102 . AF, pp. 14 - 23. In so doing, Kraemer recognises the modern separation of Greek philosophy from Greek religion to be fictitious. According to Dunn and Mackey, this disjunction is one of the 'commonest and most misleading conceits of the history of Christian theology. It is the insistence that the so-called pagan Greek theology with which these early erudite Christians had to deal was really philosophy as

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among the peoples of the earth,' philosophy is a schoolmaster to Christ, a 'covenant peculiar to the Greeks.'[103] Barth, on the other hand regards the revelation of God as the dissolution of religion.[104] Not surprisingly, Kraemer finds Barth's account more compelling not because of 'better and simpler logic,' but because of 'deeper and more consistent religious and theological thinking.'[105]

Though Kraemer's position was attacked from a variety of perspectives, the majority of the criticism centred on his concept of revelation. Two critics took issue with his separation of revelation from religion. H.H. Farmer argued that Kraemer, by sundering revelation and religion and regarding the latter as the result of human creativity alone, ignored 'that awareness of God as One who makes sacred absolute *demand* which can be discerned in varying form at the heart of the religious life of mankind.'[106] Walter Horton sought to overcome the disjunction by synthesising the best of Kraemer with the best of Hocking.[107] T.C. Chao took a more traditional approach which defended a version of general revelation, and rejected Kraemer's suggestion that salvation may occur without the witness of the Church.[108] D.G. Moses, finally, sought to link revelation with

distinct from theology, a product of autonomous human reason....' James D.G. Dunn and James P. Mackey, The New Testament in Theological Dialogue, (London: SPCK, 1987), pp. 32 - 38, esp. p. 33.

103 . AF, pp. 16, 17.

104 . AF, p. 18.

105 . AF, p. 21.

106 . H.H. Farmer, 'The Authority of the Faith,' in AF, pp. 163 - 180, esp. p. 172.

107 . Walter Marshall Horton, 'Between Hocking and Kraemer,' in AF, pp. 148 - 162. He writes, 'Is it possible for Hocking and Kraemer ever really to be at peace in one's soul? Can the Layman's Report [i.e. Re-Thinking Missions] be reconciled with the biblical realism and Continental theology without making words mean the opposite of what they plainly do mean? In their full extent, of course, these positions are really different and incompatible; but it is important to note that over a wide territory they practically coincide.' AF, p. 156. Later, he wrote 'Our survey of the years between Tambaram and now tends to confirm this reconciling judgment.' See his 'Tambaram Twenty-Five Years After,' in Philosophy, Religion, and the Coming World Civilization, p. 234.

108 . Chao writes, 'we can safely say that nature and man, in different but progressive orders, reveal God and His divine character.... Nature reveals His power and intelligence while humanity reveals, especially in the levels of sages and prophets, His love and righteousness. All the nations, with their various religions, have seen God more or less clearly, although the forms in which their visions have been clothed are incomplete, insufficient and unsatisfactory. In them and in Jesus Christ, God has been revealing Himself, the same Self, to mankind.' And continues, 'Now no man is saved apart from Christ, so in the like manner, no one is to be saved apart from the society, from the redeemed Body of Christ, the Word of God incarnate socially. Consequently, it is the truth to say that no one can be saved without the Church.' T.C. Chao, 'Revelation,' in AF, pp. 40, 58.

morality by proposing that the Christian revelation was the judge of religious truth not by virtue of its revelatory status, but because of any revelation, it best embodied 'universal moral values.'[109]

By Kraemer's own admission, however, the most penetrating evaluation of The Christian Message came from A.G. Hogg,[110] who argued that Kraemer failed to distinguish sufficiently 'non-Christian faith' from 'non-Christian faiths.'[111] By the former, Hogg meant 'a life which, although without Christ, is yet somehow a life "hid in God".'[112] In so doing, Kraemer tended 'to exclude the possibility of... non-Christian *faith* by suggesting that these religions are a purely human phenomenon, a seeking but not a finding, not an experience of Divine self-disclosure....'[113] For Hogg, this is wholly inadequate. By taking non-Christian faith as his clue, he concluded that all religions combine in varying degrees divine revelation and initiative with adequate and inadequate human responses.[114] Hence, the *sui generis* nature of the revelation of God in Christ lies in its portrayal of a loving and forgiving Father.[115] 'It is not here affirmed, as Dr Kraemer's line of discussion at least appears to suggest, that Christianity is unique because it is created by the *occurrence* of revelation.... Christianity is unique because of the unique *content* of the revelation of which it is the apprehension and product and to which it bears witness.'[116]

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109. D.G. Moses, 'The Problem of Truth in Religion,' in AF, pp. 63 - 89. According to Moses, a religious truth is shown to be true when 'is satisfies the fundamental religious demands or needs of man.' AF, p. 79. These needs are twofold: to possess more fully and perfectly moral values, and that these values be conserved in and guaranteed by cosmic reality. Thus, universal moral values are the criteria for discerning religious truth. He writes, 'all that one can do in the way of proving a religious truth to an unbeliever, is to educate him or introduce him into that state of moral preparedness, that attitude of inner receptivity, in the wake of which, or in response to which the intuition of the truth would follow.' AF, p. 83.

110. Kraemer writes, 'We have quoted Hogg so extensively because his formulations are of rare religious sensitivity, such as has been seldom occurred in the age-old discussions on our subject.' RCF, p. 226.

111. A.G. Hogg, 'The Christian Attitude to Non-Christian Faith,' in AF, pp. 102 - 125.

112. AF, p. 102. This distinction arose from Hogg's missionary activity in India: 'I have known and had fellowship with some for whom Christ was not absolute Lord and only Saviour, who held beliefs of the typically Hindu colour, and yet who manifestly were no strangers to the life "hid in God".' AF, p. 110.

113. AF, p. 103.

114. See esp. AF, p. 113.

115. AF, p. 114.

116. AF, p. 125.

Thus, most post-Tambaram analysis centred on Kraemer's doctrine of revelation and specifically his separation of revelation from religion. His qualifications - distinguishing 'empirical Christianity' from 'the Christian revelation,' and preferring Brunner to Barth in his discussion of natural theology - were purely cosmetic. Most of his opponents agreed despite them that Kraemer could not affirm genuine spiritual life outside Christianity and therefore, his intentions aside, elevated Christianity above all other religions.[117] Kraemer addressed these concerns in later writings, but his overall starting-point remained the same. 'Continuity or Discontinuity' concludes with these words:

> fundamentally speaking, we have in regard to this problem only to choose between two positions: to start, consciously or unconsciously, from a general idea about the essence of religion and take that as our standard of reference, or derive our idea of what religion is or really ought to be from the revelation in Christ, and consistently stick to this as the sole standard of reference. To my mind, the choice of the second of these our alternatives is inescapable.[118]

4.3   Religion and the Christian Faith

Religion and the Christian Faith begins where 'Continuity or Discontinuity' ends: aiming 'to vindicate, by a critical evaluation of the attempts of the Science of Religion and of the Philosophy of Religion to understand and explain religion and religions, the scientific and philosophic legitimacy of a Theology of Religion and Religions.'[119] This vindication takes place in four movements. First, Kraemer argues that a proper theology of religions is justified by appeals to the scientific study of religion; second, that it is found in Christian history; and third, that it is supported by Scripture. Then, to complete his defence, he outlines how his approach impinges upon discussions of general and special revelation, natural theology, and interreligious co-operation and tolerance.

First, Kraemer responds to those who charged that his starting-point was somehow arbitrary or prejudiced by outlining two important insights yielded by the scientific study of

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117. The exceptions were T.C. Chao (cited above) and Karl Hartenstein. His contribution to The Authority of the Faith, if anything, was more Barthian than Kraemer's was alleged to be. See his 'The Biblical View of Religion,' in AF, pp. 126 - 147.

118. AF, p. 23.

119. RCF, p. 32.

religions.[120] By 'scientific study,' he means that all those engaged in studying religion, whether anthropologists, philosophers or theologians, can and should use scientific methods to collect, arrange and present data. In other words, they are to strive for impartiality.[121] This 'studious attitude of avoiding judgments of value and truth, is the indispensable condition for having the right attitude, because the aim is to understand a religion or a religious phenomenon according to its own intention and structure. It must be done in such a way that a religion or realm of spiritual life can speak for itself.'[122] For Kraemer, then, impartiality, in so far as it is possible, is preserved through a totalitarian approach to religious beliefs and practices.

This approach enables the scholar to understand first that a universal 'Essence of Religion,' is fiction. In so arguing, Kraemer opposes first, the 'Naturalist' philosophers of religion including Durkheim, Freud and Feuerbach, who regard the religions as stages in human self-consciousness.[123] Secondly, he also challenges 'Transcendentalists,' such as Schleiermacher, Kant and Otto, who regard Religion as the realm where human consciousness meets the Absolute.[124] Although these groups advocate opposing theories about the nature of Religion, both posit a universal religious essence functioning either as an axiom from which they begin or the goal toward

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120. He writes, 'The fundamental difficulty in the [Tambaram] debates was that the "standing-place" of the writer (namely that the right theological criterion is not a universal Idea of religion at its highest, but God's self-disclosure in his revelation in Jesus Christ) was misunderstood by many, and misinterpreted as narrowness of mind, dogmatism, even fundamentalism....' RCF, p. 222.

121. Yet, as Kraemer later wrote, the 'objectivity' after which this scientific study strives should not be hampered by notions of neutrality. On the contrary, it rests on the undemonstrable assumption that it is worthwhile to investigate religion thereby recognising that it must have some meaning. Moreover the attempt to penetrate a religion in order to understand it 'is the opposite of neutrality, because it is an *evaluating* presentation of an alien or different spiritual world according to its own fundamental presuppositions and intentions. It is a congenial entering into a different universe of discourse, that has its own language.' RCF, p. 49.

122. RCF, p. 48.

123. Kraemer saw Durkheim as reducing all religions to 'totemism,' while he interpreted both Freud and Feuerbach as reducing them to wish-fulfilment personified in gods and demons. To these and other naturalists, he countered, 'Religion is conditioned by historical, psychological, and sociological causes. In all ages, common sense knew this, but the modern systematic study of religions has elevated this notion to the level of well-established irrefutable knowledge and acute relevance.... Their weakness appears when they pretend to *explain* religion in this way, whereas what they really do is uncover hidden aspects of partial truths.' RCF, pp. 56 - 57; see also pp. 54 - 71.

124. RCF, p. 57. For Schleiermacher, such an encounter took place in the 'feeling of oneness with the infinite;' for Kant, 'the conceiving of all duties as divine commands'; and for Otto, an encounter with 'the Ultimate, the Absolute... [which] transcends nature.' See also pp. 41 - 44.

which they strive. Moreover, both use it as a criterion to plot religions along an evolutionary scale.[125] A totalitarian, scientific study reveals this position to be incapable of justification: by affirming the peculiar nature of each religion, it undercuts all attempts to distil an 'Essence of Religion.'[126] Second, it also uncovers the ambivalence in all religions, including empirical Christianity. 'The merit of modern Science of Religion is not that it has discovered this ambivalent character, but that by its meticulous research into all the nooks and corners of religious experience and expression it has demonstrated in a compelling way the evident truth of this common notion, and so forces us to face the implications of the disturbing character of this fact....'[127] The implications to which he refers apply to the grading religions according to their 'value' and 'truth.' When examined carefully and honestly, no empirical religion can be shown to be better or worse than any other for there is no universally recognised standard by which to grade religions.

The conclusion drawn from these insights may be stated negatively and positively. Negatively, the problems associated with universal religious essence arguments coupled with the ambivalent nature of the religions show the objectivity demanded by Kraemer's Tambaram critics to be impossible. The claim to be scientific and objective, 'inspite of the great legitimate place it should have, is a purely rational and intellectualist ideal, and assumes too carelessly that *Reason* is the best and most adequate instrument of "understanding"... in every field of life, that of nature and that of man.'[128] Kraemer and his critics have rival starting-points, and while the rationality of either can be demonstrated, the superiority of one over the other cannot. Positively, understanding religion starts and ends with the taking of sides in the great questions: What do you think of God and humanity? Which God do you choose?

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125. 'The important concept by which they aimed at arranging and classifying the material in different grades is that of the essence of Religion (*das Wesen der Religion*), an all embracing and all-explaining formula. Either one hopes to discover it by persevering research, and formulates provisional working definitions, or more precise ones, of what religion is, or one starts from a philosophical concept of the Essence of Religion, making it the criterion of judgment and explanation. In either case it is considered to be derived from the religions which are either crude or sublime expressions of it.' RCF, p. 59.

126. 'There are and have been many concrete religions, each with its peculiar structure and character. All general definitions of religion either reduce them to such a kind of common denominator that little meaning is left.... The fact remains the ways in which the "unseen powers" and the ways of obedience to them are multitudinous and incompatible.... [They] cannot be equated. And if they are, they become an intangible, rather void *ens generalissimum* which has nothing to do with the *ens realissimum* which these cultural notions of the concrete religions pretend to be.' RCF, p. 76.

127. RCF, p. 38.

128. RCF, p. 49.

Therefore - and this is the real point we want to make - the theologian can and must [study and interpret Religion and Religions] with a good philosophical conscience, by being faithful to his theological conscience. That is to say, in being a faith interpreter of God's self disclosure in Christ, and thereby exercising that interpretation of religion which is implied in his primordial, undemonstrable starting-point. In doing so, and in doing it faithfully and methodically, open to all he can learn from the Science of Religion, and delight in the rules of the "scientific" game, he is not prejudiced, but humanly speaking in the same position as any other honest investigator of religion, whether the latter is conscious of his starting-point or not. We are, in saying this, not invoking the right of prejudice. On the contrary, by full recognition and avowal of one's bias one is comparatively speaking better armed against the temptations of partiality, to which every scholar without exception is constantly exposed.[129]

Thus, Kraemer begins his vindication by arguing that even on the best 'scientific' and 'objective' evidence a theological evaluation of religions is inevitable. His choice, therefore, of an explicitly Christian evaluation is not necessarily arbitrary or obscurantist.

He opens the second movement - an evaluation of five theological starting-points in Christian history - by taking this conclusion one step further: not only does a theological approach have 'the same right as the other approaches to religion to say its word,' it is preferred for it declares its biases from the beginning and remains aware of the temptation towards subjectivity. Kraemer maintains that

on scientific and philosophical grounds, theology is fully entitled to formulate the case and to say its personal word on the problem of religion and religions, on the basis of its peculiar presuppositions. Just when it is frank about its presuppositions, it can be free of a false make-believe of "scientific" objectivity. It is obliged to give a clear account of its estimate of the value and truth of all religions outside the sphere of Biblical revelation.[130]

The peculiar presupposition to which Kraemer alludes is then made plain: 'Under all conditions, in all kinds of work,... [the Christian] remains primarily a disciple, a captive of Jesus Christ in whom God disclosed Himself, full of grace and truth.'[131] For the Christian, then, the starting-point for a theological study of the religions can be none other than the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.[132]

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129 . RCF, p. 52.

130 . RCF, p. 143.

131 . RCF, p. 144.

132 . Later in RCF, Kraemer writes that for the Christian thinker, the basic assumption is 'that Jesus Christ is *the* Way, *the* Truth and *the* Life, by whom alone man comes to the Father, and by whose light alone all problems can be seen in their proper perspective.... Jesus Christ is the centre of history and therefore the religious history of man before and after him, till the end of history, can only rightly be understood in Him. He is God's decisive and final act of self-disclosure or revelation, and in Him all divine revelation, past, present and future, has its proper criterion.' p. 237.

To the non-Christian, Kraemer can say only that 'this theological starting-point is as valid as, for instance, that of the mystical philosophies of religion, which assume axiomatically the identity of God and man as self-evident.'[133] To the Christian, however, he says that this

> is revelation, which is basically different from religious intuition or divination, and which is not a product of the human religious consciousness because according to Biblical religion it enters history in the form of sovereign divine words and acts. Revelation of God, if taken in the real sense, is divine self-disclosure, issuing from divine initiative. This, by the nature of the case can only be motivated by itself. The sole possible response to it is, therefore, that of faith, not a justification by reason; although reason can render Christianity help in understanding it, without believing it. Without faith, the Biblical thesis of revelation will generally be considered a fiction, an illusion, a pretence, or a useful error.[134]

Having defined his starting-point, Kraemer then evaluates three historical and two contemporary Christian approaches to the theology of religions.[135] He begins with the *logos spermatikos* as set out by Justin, developed by the Fathers, and perfected by Clement and Origen.[136] Through their use of the Stoic notion of the *logos spermatikos* (seed of reason), they argued that all that was good in Greek philosophy was in fact a *praeparatio ethinca sive evangelica* and thus 'a basis for a positive attitude towards the spiritual heritage of their forefathers and non-Christian neighbours.'[137] Though 'fired by sincere conviction,' this presents 'Christianity as a philosophical religion, consisting of Greek (especially Stoic) ideas in a Biblical garb, and as a moralist religion, in which man by a moral decision works out his own salvation.' It obscures 'the central point of the Christian revelation, i.e. that it means entering in and through Christ into a new *life-relationship* with God. Instead of that the emphasis is shifted towards attaining fuller rational knowledge of God.'[138] For Kraemer, the *logos spermatikos* fails because its Stoic roots have not

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133 . RCF, p. 144.

134 . RCF, pp. 145 - 146.

135 . 'We have to do this work of survey and critical consideration,' he writes, 'because if we really want to drive towards a common ecumenical effort of Christian thinking on the non-Christian religions, we must scrutinize and sift first the great attempts of preceding generations of Christians.' RCF, 147.

136 . RCF, pp. 148 - 154; see also Justin Martyr, 'The First Apology of Justin, The Martyr,' in Early Christian Fathers, trans. Cyril C. Richardson et. al., (London: SCM, 1953), pp. 231 - 235; 247; 265; 272; Clement of Alexandria, 'On Spiritual Perfection,' in Alexandrian Christianity, trans. and ed. John Ernest Leonard Oulton and Henry Chadwick, (London: SCM, 1954), pp. 96 - 97; Origen, 'On Prayer,' in Alexandrian Christianity, pp. 433, 437f.

137 . RCF, p. 150.

138 . RCF, p. 153.

been sufficiently subverted by Biblical realism (unlike the Prologue of John's Gospel, where such a subversion successfully takes place).[139]

He then considers Thomas Aquinas,[140] who separated knowledge of God into Natural and Revealed categories. In the first lies knowledge of God's existence and certain Divine attributes, while in the second, the supernatural Christian dogmas are revealed to the faithful.[141] In a manner similar to the Fathers, Thomas regarded the former knowledge as the *'praeambula fidei* and *praeparatio evangelica.'*[142] Although Aquinas provides 'a feast for the intellectual connoisseur... [his] balance is artificial and falsifies the true perspective of the Biblical revelation, being obtained at the cost of distorting the Biblical Christian faith.'[143] While his system will always supply 'new discoveries of old truths,' he fails to present the Christian revelation as the crisis of religion.[144]

Indeed in Kraemer's view, Christianity's approach to pagan religion and philosophy was largely mistaken until the Reformation, the third historical period.

> The Apologists, the Fathers (with the sole exception of Tertullian), the mediaeval scholastics had all tried to formulate a Christian philosophy of religion. Incidentally they were theologians, but never did they dream of a theology of religion. They did not

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139. Similarly, Kraemer believes Augustine, 'the great genius who for the first time formulated evangelical Christianity with its emphasis on sin and grace,' whose *Civitas Dei* was the last 'great Apology for Christianity... indulges too much in luxuries of metaphysical thinking entirely alien to Biblical religion.' RCF, p. 157. He prefers the *Retractiones*, where 'greater reserve is expressed. He recognized more and more, notwithstanding similarities and affinities, the unbridgeable gulf between the non-Christian religions and the *vera religio*, yet felt that the religious consciousness of classical paganism had something to do with God.' p. 158. Kraemer is more sympathetic to Tertullian and the 'ruthless way he talked about the "stupidities of Philosophy".' Kraemer concludes, 'The merit of Tertullian is that he seized the dialectical condition of man: God-conscious, yet unfaithful, and therefore in his natural condition far from the truth.' p. 156; see also Tertullian, 'Prescriptions Against the Heretics,' in Early Latin Theology, trans. and ed. S.L. Greenslade, (London: SCM, 1956), pp. 25 - 77; esp. p. 36 where Tertullian writes, 'I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic or a dialectic Christianity. After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research.'

140. RCF, pp. 159 - 167.

141. RCF, p. 161; see also Saint Thomas Aquinas, On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Summa Contra Gentiles, trans. Antony C. Pegis, (New York: Doubleday, 1955), Book I, chapters 2 - 10, pp. 61, 62 - 64, 66 - 67, 74, 77 - 78.

142. RCF, p. 161; see also Saint Thomas Aquinas, Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas, trans. and ed. A.M. Fairweather, (London: SCM, 1954), Part I, Question 1, Article i, pp. 35 - 37.

143. RCF, p. 164.

144. RCF, pp. 164 - 165.

and could not delimit philosophy and theology sufficiently. They acted spontaneously or more reflectively on the assumption of their affinity and unity, and felt in their peculiar situation no need for defining their different character, in spite of he affinities. It needed the intense concentration of the Reformers on the Bible to achieve this complete overthrow.[145]

Calvin, for instance, 'recognizes that all religion presupposes rightly or wrongly a transcendent superhuman reality, and that one has to take that seriously in order to understand religion.'[146] Yet because of sin, 'man who could be a worshipper of the true God produces a great variety of fictitious religions.... Man's erring finds it origins in man's disoriented religious consciousness so that the light afforded by the *sensus divinitatis* is insufficient for the *vera notitia Dei* (real knowledge of God).'[147] Kraemer presents Luther as following similar lines, but where Calvin is 'dispassionate and balanced,' Luther is 'profoundly prophetic,' and evidences 'volcanic genius.'[148] Though he extols this first 'attempt [at] a fully theological interpretation of religion and religions,' he also remarks that the Reformers were nevertheless 'handicapped by the fact that the time had not yet come when a profound and concrete knowledge of the religions was possible.'[149]

This impairment is overcome, however, in Kraemer's first contemporary approach. While the Reformers' goal was lost during that which Kraemer calls 'The Liberal Period,'[150] and though a

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145. RCF, p. 168.

146. RCF, p. 170; see also Calvin, Institutes, Book I, chapter 3, pp. 39 - 42.

147. RCF, p. 170; see also Calvin, Institutes, Book I, chapter 4, pp. 43 - 47.

148. RCF, p. 174; for example, on the natural knowledge of God, Luther writes, 'This light and understanding is in the hearts of all men and can neither be suppressed nor put out.' Martin Luther, D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, (Weimar, 1883) volume 19, p. 205. Cited in Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 15. For a full account of Luther's perspective, see chapter 3, 'The General and the Proper Knowledge of God,' pp. 15 - 19. Zwingli unlike both Calvin and Luther, 'was not fixed on the dilemma of faith and works, but on God as the only Saviour.' (p. 174) His writings therefore display a greater optimism with regard to the salvation of non-Christians which is absent in those of his fellows (pp. 175 - 176); see Ulrich Zwingli, 'An Exposition of the Faith' in Zwingli and Bullinger, ed. G.W. Bromiley, (London: SCM, 1953), pp. 273 - 276; esp. pp. 275 - 276, where he writes that in heaven, 'You will see... Theseus, Socrates, Aristides, Antigonus, Numa, Camillus, the Catos and Scipios;... In short, there has not lived a single good man, there has not been a single pious heart or believing soul from the beginning of the world to the end, which you will not see there in the presence of God.'

149. RCF, p. 176.

150. RCF, pp. 177 - 178.

recovery was foreshadowed in the writings of J.G. Hamann,[151] Barth and Brunner were the first to reclaim the perspective of the Reformation. In their writings,

> The revelation in Christ stands apart from all religions - not as a unique individual case of a common species, but as a different genus. It is *sui generis*. There is no continuity between what becomes manifest in the data of the different religious structures and the Christian message with its view of the human condition, the character of God and His relation to man and the world. In the doctrine of the justification of the sinner all religion appears to lose its real basis, because from God alone comes salvation. The Christian revelation is the crisis of all religion.[152]

Kraemer regards the two as the 'outstanding representatives of a fully *theological* understanding of religion and religions.'[153] Nevertheless, even the dialectical pioneers do not escape criticism. In their desire to avoid the *logos spermatikos* error, they 'ignore entirely the Logos doctrine, whose sole interpretation is not necessarily that of the Fathers.'[154] Moreover, neither employ all the Biblical material available; they are excessively Pauline.

Finally, Kraemer considers contemporary Anglo-American and other European contributions. Though one may learn much from the philosophical assessments of E.S. Brightman, Nathan Söderblom, H.H. Farmer, and W.E. Hocking,[155] each falls 'back again in the fatal vicious circle of all philosophy of religion, which recognizes theoretically the transcendence in religion, and yet elevates the purely historical and psychological element... into the criterion of the transcendent, which practically means the personal religious taste of the philosopher.'[156] He is more sympathetic to missionaries because of their cross-cultural experience,[157] but even their best examples, J.N.

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151 . RCF, pp. 179 - 181; see also CM, p. 11.

152 . RCF, p. 182.

153 . RCF, p. 189.

154 . RCF, p. 189.

155 . For Kraemer's evaluation of Brightman, see RCF, pp. 205 - 208 and compare with E.S. Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1946). For Söderblom, contrast RCF, pp. 208 - 214 with Nathan Söderblom, The Living God: Basal Forms of Personal Religion, (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), and The Nature of Revelation, trans. Frederic E. Pamp, (London: Oxford University Press, 1933). For Farmer measure RCF, pp. 218 - 220 against H.H. Farmer, Revelation and Religion: Studies in the Theological Interpretation of Religious Types, (London: Nisbet and Company, 1954). And finally, on Hocking, compare RCF, p. 203 with the list of Hocking's works cited above.

156 . RCF, pp. 202 - 203.

157 . RCF, pp. 214 - 215.

Farquhar,[158] and Nicol Macnicol,[159] 'have either hardly any articulate theology or a weak one, focused on comparing "religious experience", and reducing the Christian message to some "general principles".[160] The desire to be generous 'seduces them into fatally blurring the true issues.'[161] From this summary, it is clear that Kraemer intends to follow the route proposed by the Reformers and blazed by Barth and Brunner. However, he is not content with recapitulating their arguments. He hopes to present a model which is both makes better use of Biblical material than either those of Barth or Brunner and is better acquainted with religions than that of the Reformers.

An examination of his theological interpretation of other religions follows presently; but first, I turn to his biblical exegesis,[162] which is arranged around three doctrines, the first being theological anthropology. Kraemer's theological anthropology is rooted in Genesis, and specifically based upon the Creation and Fall (Gen. 1:26-30; 3:1-24), Noahic Covenant (9:1-17), and Babel narratives (11:1-9). Regarding the first, Kraemer's chief concern is a proper interpretation of the *Imago Dei* (1:26). Where past exegetes distinguished 'image' from 'likeness' in which humanity was created, Kraemer counters that this results only in a misinterpretation of the text.[163] The 'image' and 'likeness' are not separate but represent Hebrew parallelism: both mean 'copy,' or 'figure.'[164] Humanity is a divine creation with a divine mandate to represent God's rule on earth. Hence, conjecture about what aspects of the *Imago Dei* have been lost or retained after the Fall fails to grasp the narrative's purpose: to describe the fragmentation resulting from sin. The

> breach of the communion with and obedience to God... has as its immediate implication
> the total disturbance and corruption of all human relations (man-woman, man-man...),
> of the relation to the world (animals, soil, work, etc.). The usurped autonomy of man,

158 . RCF, p. 215; see also J.N. Farquhar, The Crown of Hinduism, (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1971; originally Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913).

159 . RCF, p. 216; see also Nicol Macnicol, Indian Theism, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1915) and Is Christianity Unique? A Comparative Study of the Religions, (London: SCM, 1936).

160 . RCF, p. 216.

161 . RCF, p. 216.

162 . It is not my intention to evaluate Kraemer's exegesis in the light of contemporary biblical studies. Rather, I want simply to outline his interpretation of biblical texts as a basis for his theology of religions.

163 . He writes, 'Now if one looks at Gen.1:26-30 and tries to practice the art of reading the text, there is it seems, not one jot or tittle of all these constructions in it.' RCF, p. 248.

164 . RCF, p. 249.

through his repudiation of the theonomy, under which he began his career, turns out to the polynomy of his fancies, passions and self-fabricated gods.[165]

Creation and Fall together paint a dialectical picture. In all activities, including religious ones, humanity is God's creation capable of creativity and beauty, yet also a rebellious creation capable of destruction and ugliness.

This dialectical picture is reinforced in the Noahic Covenant and Babel narratives. Following the Flood, the Noahic Covenant recounts the divine dialectic of judgment on sin and mercy on humanity. Furthermore, 'It is striking and deeply significant that before God's special revelational experiment with Abraham and His Covenant with him... the "everlasting Covenant between God and every living creature" is stated as an established and irremovable fact, governing the spiritual destiny of mankind as a whole.'[166] Babel, on the other hand, expresses the dialectic in human terms:

> Its meaning is that man, who by his own means and to his own glory "makes a name", leaving God outside, tries to circumvent the cherubim and the flaming sword of the lost Paradise, and tries in his own power to force his way back to the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:24). In this story, the predicament of man in his cultural and religious achievements is admirably expressed. The cultural and religious creative urge is, in itself, grand. In the Biblical view, it is implanted by God in man. Man's accomplishments in history are great but appear always infected by corruption and pride, which has its root according to the Bible, in the forgetfulness of God, The deep meaning of the confusion of languages can only be fully appreciated in the light of Acts 2, the tale of Pentecost. God's Holy Spirit restores the God-willed, but destroyed, unity of mankind.[167]

Thus, Kraemer's account of the religions begins with his presentation of the dialectical nature of human beings. As the Genesis narratives describe it, human beings are designed to be God's representatives, but sin has corrupted representation into tyranny. So on the one hand, the religious life of human beings is affirmed and preserved through the Noachic Covenant, but restrained at Babel.

The second doctrine on which Kraemer centres is that of Logos. Before considering the Johannine Prologue directly, however, Kraemer turns to its forerunner - the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. After noting the 'pure delight' accorded to 'wisdom' in Job and Proverbs, he observes,

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165 . RCF, pp. 250 - 251.

166 . RCF, pp. 253 - 254.

167 . RCF p. 254.

> it is evident that alongside the broad stream of negative and condemnatory judgments of pagan religions,... there are also traces, slight, but undeniable, of a positive attitude toward human Wisdom,... esteemed as a great, universal human value, essentially a gift of God, and on a par with the God-given nature of man.... The attitude, implied in these passages, can be formulated in a simple sentence: God is at work in man's spiritual aspirations and achievements.[168]

Though the Johannine Prologue has been the victim of much theological speculation, Kraemer's exegesis of the passage is simple. 'To summarize the meaning of the passage: the Logos, from eternity with God and Himself God, is the fact Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth.'[169] If this is correct, Kraemer cautions, 'the age-long recourse to this classical passage as the scriptural basis or justification to interpret all non-Christian religion and philosophy as *preparatio evangelica*, to evaluate them accordingly and to take their so called "best and highest elements" as indications that they are well on the road to Christ needs drastic revision.'[170]

> The Prologue states in an uncompromising way that man's condition is such that he is unable to know God as He really is, or himself, by his own powers. It can only happen through faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, i.e. through revelation, through divine self-disclosure. The truth about God is not, either in the Prologue or in any other part of the Bible, a lofty conception about His being and nature, monotheistic, mystic or what not, but it is the incomprehensible fact that He became flesh in Jesus Christ, that God is self-giving, self-forgetting love, as was manifested in the scandal of the Cross.[171]

Thus, God is indeed at work in the religious life of humanity, but this work is not the result of a universal Logos, but of the Logos become incarnate in Jesus Christ. Therefore, if this work is to be discerned at all, it is only through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Kraemer saves his most extensive exegetical work for the third doctrine: the Pauline understanding of the righteousness and wrath of God. Beginning in Acts, with Paul's speech in Lystra (Acts 14:8-18), he draws three points: first, the goal of Paul's preaching is conversion (15); second God has abandoned people to their own ways (16); yet third, God continues to testify to them through creation whether or not they recognise it (17). These are underscored by three more points drawn from Paul's sermon in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). First, all have sinned in their religions (22-23,30); second, people nevertheless demonstrate a dim awareness of God (27-28); and last, God never completely abandons people, but redeems them by converting them (29-31).[172]

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168. RCF, p. 265.

169. RCF, p. 275.

170. RCF, p. 276.

171. RCF, p. 277.

172. RCF, pp. 281 - 285.

Kraemer then moves to Romans 1:18-2:16, arguing that the righteousness of God, an act of love and grace towards humanity, nevertheless manifests itself as wrath (18).

> God who is the God of righteous, holy love, is as such bent on saving sinners, and also, as such, the God of wrath on all the [unrighteousness] of men. His wrath is revealed as an act of righteousness, holiness, and love. It is really the wrath of God, which can be terrible, which is the intrinsic manifestation of his love. Therefore we have to take this theological concept of the wrath of God very seriously as a terrible... *yet* saving, gracious reality.[173]

He then elaborates: God has never been inactive with regard to humanity; his self-disclosure is so plain that no one has an excuse (19-20). The problem lies not with the adequacy or inadequacy of God's revelation, but with the human response to it.[174] Instead glorifying the true God, new gods are invented (21-23). Therefore, God expresses his wrath by giving people over to the consequences of their actions (24-32).[175] In these verses,

> Paul uncovers the appalling drama between God and man which underlies this perverted lust and anti-social destructivity. God's wrath is revealed in it in a double movement which can be defined by using the words of Heb. 10:31: "It is an awful thing to fall into the hands of the living God", and by saying at the same time that it is a terrible thing to fall out of the hands of the living God.... God did not leave [people] to themselves, but gave them up, so that the falling away of men from God into their self-willed autonomy draws them into a world of evil which is animated by its own severe logic of increasing self-destruction.[176]

Jews and Gentiles both find themselves in this predicament (2:1-16); no one is without excuse. The final four verses (13 - 16) are not intended as an argument for salvation by works, but a further indictment against those who believe that simply having the Law is proof of God's favour.[177]

On the basis of this exegesis, Kraemer draws several conclusions: first, humanity is God's creation intended for divine fellowship; second, God is present in other cultures and other religions; third, the religions nevertheless belong to unredeemed humanity and therefore no matter how marvellous in appearance, they stand under divine judgment.[178] Yet fourth, their attempts to deal with ultimate problems of existence cannot be ignored by those who live by God's revelation.[179]

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173 . RCF, p. 292.

174 . RCF, pp. 293 - 295.

175 . RCF, pp. 295 - 296.

176 . RCF, pp. 297.

177 . RCF, pp. 302 - 303.

178 . RCF, pp. 256 - 257.

179 . RCF, p. 271.

While one cannot belittle these 'best and highest elements' one must not forget that they are nonetheless marred by sin and take on their true significance only in the light of Christ. Finally, the religions are at the same time ignorant gropings for God and deliberate rebellion against God.

> Nowhere in the Bible are these pieces of evidence seen or defined as roads to God, as effecting the righteousness which is only wrought through God's sovereign act of righteousness consisting in the forgiveness of sins, and only apprehended by faith and not by any great cultural or spiritual achievement on the part of non-believers or of believers.... Everywhere in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, we find, alongside the recognition of this evidence, a strong emphasis on its precariousness, its constant tendency towards new perversion, so that man turns even his great human achievements into instruments for glorifying himself and forgetting, or rebelling against, God who alone is to be glorified and thanked.[180]

Thus far, Kraemer has maintained that a proper theology of religions is justified by the scientific study of religion, found in Christian history and supported by Scripture. Now, to complete his vindication of a proper theology of religions, he outlines how his dialectical approach shapes discussions of general and special revelation, natural theology, and interreligious co-operation and tolerance. His dialectical approach mediates between 'systasis (harmonizing, synthesis), [and]... diastasis (keeping a distance)...'[181] both of which exclude real dialogue and communication and are contrary to the dialectical character of the Christian faith.[182] In this way, 'the attitude of open, congenial understanding of other religions and alien spiritual worlds,' is combined with the 'theological understanding and interpretation on a Biblical basis.'[183]

When discussing general and special revelation from this perspective, two foci are introduced. 'The first is a strong, determined unequivocalness in regard to the truth, that is to say that the knowledge and honouring of God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the sole *religio vera*, and that all the other religions and religions, of whatever quality and value they may be, are... *religio falsa*.'[184] On its own, this focus may in fact fall to the criticism of obscurantism; however, this is to ignore the second: 'that, both

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180. RCF, p. 312.

181. RCF, p. 322.

182. RCF, p. 322. Yet he adds that 'in certain cultural situations, both systasis and diastasis may acquire a relative right and necessity.'

183. RCF, p. 338.

184. RCF, p. 340.

positively and negatively, there are manifestations in this religious and spiritual life and witness in the realm outside the revelation of Christ that are acknowledged as evidence of God's uninterrupted concern and of His travailing with man.'[185] Thus, religions must be regarded as 'idolatry, spiritual adultery, manifestation of the divine wrath,' and a 'response to God in various ways, but never in the sense of an autonomous faculty or achievement of man; always as evoked and wrought by God.'[186]

This perpetual dialectic rebuts the view that Christianity is the 'result of the Special Revelation in Christ; [while] the non-Christian religions are, at least in their highest and best elements, the result of General Revelation.'[187] This separation devalues the revelation in nature, history and conscience, for if revelation is 'a purely divine initiative and act,'[188] general revelation is not revelation at all. For Kraemer, revelation is 'objective divine action, decisively in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the "Word made Flesh".'[189] Therefore, the distinction between general and special revelation is a false one. Revelation is not a combination of natural and supernatural propositions, but 'God's judgment *on* man, ... God's active relationship *to* man, and His long-suffering dialogue *with* man. He, God, is taking the initiative in the dialogue, from which man spontaneously ties to escape.'[190] For Kraemer, then, 'general revelation' is a misleading term. 'The initial difficulty is that, when we take seriously the Biblical way of speaking of revelation as God's active self-disclosure out of direct personal concern for man, and directed towards the creative re-establishment of the relation of God with man, every kind of revelation is a "special" revelation.'[191] The revelation in nature, history and conscience is thus special revelation and the religions are positive and negative responses to this revelation. Nevertheless, 'it is impossible for Christian thinking to interpret God's revelation in nature, history and conscience as independent fields. They can be legitimately explained in the light of the revelation in Christ.'[192] For this reason, Kraemer

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185 . RCF, pp. 340 - 341.

186 . RCF, p. 341.

187 . RCF, pp. 342 - 343.

188 . RCF, p. 343.

189 . RCF, p. 345.

190 . RCF, p. 347.

191 . RCF, p. 353.

prefers instead the terms *Uroffenbarung* (original revelation) or *Grundoffenbarung* (fundamental revelation).[193]

When applied to natural theology the dialectical approach produces a similar outcome. On Kraemer's view, natural theology builds 'theories which function as preambles or stepping-stones or bridges... which lead gradually to what is then called, in the context of such constructions, the fullness of Christ.'[194] So described, natural theology justifies 'what the Bible considers one of the root-sins and fundamental blindness of man, i.e. that man is able to arrange his relation with God.'[195] Such an approach renders Christ, 'The Wisdom of *God*,' only the culmination of the 'religious and moral wisdom of man.'[196] Kraemer proposes not the rejection of natural theology, but a reversal in priority. Truly natural theology, he writes, is illuminated and judged solely by 'the central revelation in Christ.'[197]

Thus Kraemer says that between the Wisdom of God and the wisdom of humanity, 'there is no point of contact.... Only the Holy Spirit can open the eyes for God's world. Understanding and accepting the gospel means conversion, nobody excepted. This is unambiguous Biblical teaching. Therefore it is said that "the world by wisdom knew *not* God" (1 Cor. 1:21).'[198] And at the same time he says 'there are points of contact.' There is no systematic method of discerning these points; it rests in the concrete situation of communication between individuals. 'Different spiritual worlds in which the abortive positive responses, often in a deeply moving way, and also the negative responses to God's ongoing dialogue with man, are frequently crystallized in myths, aspirations, expectations, demonic distortions, etc.'[199] These responses will necessarily be used 'in

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192 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 354.

193 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 355.

194 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 360.

195 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 360.

196 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 360.

197 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 363.

198 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 363.

199 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 364.

the spirit of humble service' by 'the ordinary bearer of the gospel message... when encountering non-Christian fellow-beings or particular manifestations of spiritual reality.'[200]

All that has been said thus far leads directly into an application of the dialectical approach to tolerance and inter-religious co-operation. Kraemer argues strongly for both, but cautions against a tolerance rooted in the 'secret truth' that all religions are ultimately one.[201] He writes,

> If co-operation and co-existence... really mean to have a frank and openminded respect for each other as sincere men and women, behaving oneself as a sincere Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, etc., then it is a cause to be applauded and furthered. The danger is, however, that such groups come and work together on the basis of so-called agreements, and are systematically silent on the so-called disagreements, and thus are unintentionally insincere.[202]

True co-operation and tolerance should be approached by people who are at once 'sincerely religious' and ready 'to take a candidly self-critical view of the *empirical reality* of their *own* religion.'[203] Moreover, they should be conducted on a pragmatic basis which does not and should not include common worship. Co-operation and tolerance 'on a pragmatic basis and with a pragmatic goal in mind, out of a common feeling of responsibility and concern for man and his needs, is a very important thing to strive after. This can be done if one does not seek first for a common religious basis which transcends or presumably unites the religions.'[204]

> We are quite aware that this sounds extremely harsh and intolerant, but it is the only way to look matters in the face, to stop blurring the issues and to arrive at a really tolerant attitude, born from a real concern for the cause of the co-operation and mutual sincere esteem of adherents of different religions.... Why is [common worship] wrong, insincere... unclean, corruptive? For the simple reason that it is spiritual quackery to maintain that one is praying to the same God named alternatively God, Ram, Allah.... It is not allowable to experiment with God. This softheartedness leads to a corruption of truth and loss of identity and spiritual character unintentional though this may be. Christians should be the first to point out and keep to the rules of sound inter-religious co-operation. To accomplish common worship is overstepping the boundaries and creating (in sincerity and seriousness!) newly constructed gods, unwittingly used as toys.[205]

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200 . RCF, p. 364.

201 . This 'practically mans that, except for the tiny minority of philosophies and first class mystics, the overwhelming majority of mankind has had to live in all ages in a delusive fiction.' RCF, p. 375.

202 . RCF, p. 367.

203 . 'The Role and Responsibility of the Christian Mission,' pp. 244 - 245.

204 . 'The Role and Responsibility of the Christian Mission,' p. 249.

205 . RCF, p. 369 - 370.

For Kraemer, such practices have more to do with a yearning for human solidarity than one for common religious truth and experience.[206] For the Christian, any model of tolerance and co-operation cannot be built on anything other than the Christian faith itself.[207]

> The Christian Faith is only a right response to the revelation in Christ, if it is tolerant. It is against God's character and His whole way of dealing with men, it is against the life, work and death of Christ, to be intolerant. God's way, Jesus' way is not the fight for truth, either by power or violence, but by love. Therefore, Christian tolerance should have nothing to do with a smiling attitude towards the finiteness and relativity of human workings of truth, including the truth which is in Christ and which is Christ. This finiteness and relativity are facts - and not at all disturbing facts - for those who live by faith in God's righteousness in Christ, and not the theological doctrines or ecclesiastical prescriptions. The should make us humble, modest, patient and open with others.[208]

To summarise the exposition above, <u>Religion and the Christian Faith</u> is Kraemer's endeavour to rebut the charge that an openly Christian interpretation of the religious life of humanity was somehow arbitrary or unscientific. First, he insisted that a proper theology of religions is justified by appeals to the scientific study of religion and indeed is more legitimate than other 'neutral' approaches which simply mask or refuse to acknowledge their own theological biases. Second, he argued that theological assessments of religion are found throughout Christian history. Finally, he contended that such interpretations are supported by Scripture. To complete his defence, he outlines how his approach impinges upon discussions of general and special revelation, natural theology, and interreligious co-operation and tolerance. It is thus clear that this apologetic is designed to appeal to a Christian audience.

Conclusion:

In three sections, this chapter completed the rediscovery of Hendrik Kraemer begun in chapter 3 by acquainting the reader with his theology of religions. They were based on expositions of his major writings. <u>The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World</u> emphasised first of all that a Christian interpretation of the religions began within the Christian revelation; second, that it depended on a proper understanding of beliefs and practices in relation to the complex religious

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206 . <u>RCF</u>, pp. 370 - 372.

207 . He writes, 'The Christian mission, fully conscious of its role and responsibility in the serious matter of interreligious relationships, partakes or has, in my opinion, to partake in this matter, just because it is the embodiment of the most essential expression of the nature and calling of the Christian church, that is to say to proclaim by word and deed the universal Truth in Jesus Christ.' Kraemer, 'The Role and Responsibility of the Christian Mission,' p. 243.

208 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 372.

totality in which they arise; and that true points of contact and adaptation were uncovered only in the situational encounters between Christian and non-Christians. The qualifications introduced in 'Continuity or Discontinuity' (distinguishing 'empirical Christianity' from 'the Christian revelation,' and preferring Brunner to Barth in his discussion of natural theology), in the eyes of both his opponents and Kraemer himself, did not alter significantly these contentions. Finally, <u>Religion and the Christian Faith</u>, Kraemer's fourfold restatement and vindication of his position, maintained that theology of religions is justified by appeals to the scientific study of religion; that it is found in Christian history; that it is supported by Scripture; and finally that it called for a different understanding of revelation, natural theology, and interreligious co-operation and tolerance. Now we must consider whether or not Kraemer's position continues to offer insights to the contemporary debate.

PART III
RE-APPROPRIATING HENDRIK KRAEMER

Chapter 5

Theological Responses to the Postmodern Condition

Introduction:

To summarise the thesis thus far: Part I introduced the reader to Christian theology of religions and argued that the various positions available were not as easily defined as the threefold typology appeared to suggest. Part II then offered chronological and thematic surveys of Hendrik Kraemer's contribution to theology of religions, demonstrating thereby that he cannot be simply dismissed, either as a traditional exclusivist or as a Barthian, but deserves serious examination in his own right. If the argument is left here however, such an inquiry would remain confined to theological history, whether that of Christian missions or the growth of ecumenical Protestantism in the twentieth century. It is therefore the task of the remaining chapters to show that Kraemer's theology of religions, however worthy of historical study, continues to offer important insights to contemporary theology of religions.

The difficulties with such an undertaking were noted early in chapter 3.[1] In current debate, when remembered at all, Kraemer's position is often misunderstood and too-quickly dismissed as an historical artefact irrelevant to contemporary problems. This attitude is exemplified in the July, 1988, issue of The International Review of Mission. It celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Tambaram by publishing the proceedings of a small consultation on the 'relationship of dialogue and mission, as these impact on Christian understandings of relations to people of other faiths.'[2] Therein, Stanley Samartha argued that Kraemer could no longer contribute

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1 . See chapter 3, n. 7.

2 . Eugene Stockwell, 'Introduction,' in The International Review of Mission, 78 (1988), p. 309.

to discussion in a world threatened by nuclear and environmental annihilation,[3] while a more conciliatory Wilfred Cantwell Smith asserted that had Kraemer lived long enough, he would have adopted a more pluralist position.[4] Only Lesslie Newbigin presented Kraemer's position as a necessary theological response to Hocking's revisioning of the religions within the picture of global, liberal democratic capitalism.[5]

In spite of this seemingly pervasive attitude, chapters 6 and 7 will show that Kraemer's theology of religions not only stands up well to contemporary criticism, but goes beyond to suggest a position which is both philosophically and theologically sophisticated. Before these tasks can be undertaken though, a brief assessment of the current philosophical and theological climate is required. In two steps, this chapter offers such an analysis. The first is a brief outline of postmodernity and postmodernism, centring on the work of French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. It contends that while Lyotard's prescriptive response to the death of modernity is deeply problematic, there is no reversing the postmodern turn. The second section then considers theological responses to the postmodern turn. The a/theology of Mark C. Taylor and the theology

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3 . Stanley Samartha, ' Mission in a Religiously Plural World: Looking Beyond Tambaram, 1938,' in The International Review of Mission, 78 (1988), pp. 315 - 324.

4 . He wrote: 'An undiscerning reader might say that he was stubborn, clinging to inherited doctrine formulated in earlier, ignorant days, and deeming it important so to cling. Personally, I feel that Kraemer was not holding on so much as was being held; he never succeeded in bringing together what his heart felt, and half of his brilliant head knew, with what the other half had been taught, and from which he never managed constructively to struggle - as if God had revealed traditional Christian theology, rather than, as the best Christians as always known, that he revealed himself (to us and to others).... It was not only the majority of those attending the first Tambaram conference that Kraemer failed to convince of this stated thesis. He failed to convince himself. He spent the rest of his life writing further books, each of which in effect was an attempt to say that no, he had not quite meant what the last one seemed to be saying, for that was not quite right. He moved increasingly towards a more comprehensive vision. Yet he died, poor man, without ever managing to satisfy himself that he had formulated that vision adequately.' Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'Mission, Dialogue and God's Will for Us,' in The International Review of Mission, 78 (1988), p. 372. Though I am certain no ill-will was intended, as one sympathetic with Kraemer's position, it is difficult not to regard Smith's words as more condescending than conciliatory.

5 . He wrote: 'Kraemer did not claim uniqueness for Christianity, which is a changing, variegated and ambiguous human phenomenon; he claimed uniqueness for the events that form the substance of the gospel. In Kraemer's favourite phrase, these events are *sui generis*.... Therefore we have no business trying to domesticate it within our cultures, or rational projects and programmes, no business to confuse it with the so-called Christian civilization of the west. The gospel is unique, sovereign, unbound. Our business is to bear witness to it.' See Lesslie Newbigin, 'A Sermon Preached at the Thanksgiving Service for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Tambaram Conference of the International Missionary Council,' in The International Review of Mission, 78 (1988), p. 327.

of John Milbank are presented as extremes which can and should be avoided while the work of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck is proposed as a more fruitful mediating position which I call 'postmodern orthodoxy.' This section then concludes by responding to four objections to the theology of Frei and Lindbeck. Thus, this chapter sets the stage for the critical re-appropriation of Hendrik Kraemer's theology of religions.

5.1   The Postmodern Condition

Even though the term 'postmodern' was employed in the opening half of this century to describe western culture,[6] it has gained prominence only in the last 25 years, beginning as a description of specific movements in art, architecture, and literary theory. Postmodern art, epitomised by Andy Warhol's paintings, is not preoccupied with a representation of the natural world or the artistic imagination, but re-presents other works of art (often with an added element of parody), thus serving up 'images of images.'[7] In a similar way, postmodern architecture erects premodern facades (for example, pilasters and architraves) but using modern techniques (for instance, steel frameworks).[8] In both, the signifier (the painting or building) is defined by other signifiers (yet more paintings or buildings), not the signified (something 'behind' which the work of art or building is said to represent). The work of postmodern literary theorists such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida similarly locates meaning within language and refuses a premature extra-linguistic shift.[9] A mundane but accurate analogy is offered by the dictionary where the meaning of words is encapsulated in yet more words. In all three examples, 'postmodern' describes

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6 . According to Matei Calinescu, Arnold Toynbee employed the term in 1946 to designate that period of history following 'Western III (Modernism)' to be the postmodern era. See Matei Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 267.

7 . R. Detweiler, 'Postmodernism,' in Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought, ed. Ailtser E. McGrath, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 457; see also Brandon Taylor, Modernism, Postmodernism, Realism: A Critical Perspective on Art, (Winchester: Winchester School of Art Press, 1987), pp. 40, 65.

8 . Charles Jencks, The Language of Post-Modern Architecture, (New York: Rizzoli, 1977). In a later work, Jencks calls this combination of premodern conventions with modern techniques 'double-coding.' See Charles Jencks, Current Architecture, (London: Academy Editions, 1982), p. 111.

9 . See for instance Roland Barthes, Image-Music Text, trans. Stephen Heath, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977); and Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

a world 'conceived, in semiotic terms, as one in which the signifier has replaced the signified as the focus of orientation and value.'[10]

Nevertheless, postmodern art, architecture and literary theory are but responses to a larger shift in contemporary western culture - the transition from modernity to postmodernity. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between postmodernism and postmodernity. For some, postmodernity is that which comes after modernity; it is the beginning of a new stage in social evolution.[11] While it does not describe this new era explicitly as postmodern, an example of this interpretation is Francis Fukuyama's The End of History, which sees the climax and conclusion of history in Western capitalism and liberal democracy become globally dominant.[12] For others, however, postmodernity is simply modernity taken to its extreme; it is more accurately described not as 'post-' but 'hyper-' or 'ultra-' modern.[13] Whether taken as the beginning of a new era, or the end of them all, postmodernity 'is the economics of the consumer market applied to all areas of human life. There is nothing that cannot be bought and sold.... [it] is a fashioning of commodities - of films, food and clothes, and of people (who no longer have characters but life-styles).'[14] Postmodernity, in sum, is the culture of late capitalism and postmodernism whether in art, architecture, or literary theory, is both forming and formed by this culture.

With this general sketch in mind, let us critically consider the work of Jean-François Lyotard, whose The Postmodern Condition is widely considered to be a postmodern classic. Therein, Lyotard proposes to discern 'who decides what knowledge is, and who decides what needs to be decided', by comparing 'narrative' and 'scientific' knowledge.[15] The former broadly embraces

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10 . Detweiler, 'Postmodernism,' p. 457.

11 . Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner, Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations, (New York: Guildford, 1991), p. 171.

12 . Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).

13 . Thomas C. Oden, After Modernity... What? Agenda for Theology, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 77.

14 . Gerard Loughlin, Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 5 - 6.

15 . Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 9. While Lyotard is not the only

criteria of efficiency, justice, and beauty; it 'is what makes someone capable of forming "good" denotative utterances... "good" prescriptive utterances and "good" evaluative utterances'.[16] Such judgements are deemed 'good' in so far as they conform to criteria 'accepted in the social circle of the "knower's" interlocutors.... The consensus that permits such knowledge to be circumscribed and makes it possible to distinguish one who knows from one who doesn't (the foreigner, the child) is what constitutes the culture of the people.'[17] Narrative knowledge, then, defines criteria of competence and enables evaluation according to them by providing 'the set of pragmatic rules that [constitute] the social bond,' or, 'the community's relationship to itself and its environment.'[18] Scientific knowledge, on the other hand, uses only the language of denotation; it purports more or less accurately to describe reality through statements which are open to verification and/or falsification. 'In this context, then, one is "learned" if one can produce a true statement... one is a scientist if one can produce verifiable or falsifiable statements'.[19] A scientific statement must continually be open to the possibility of proof or disproof; it gains no validity simply by being reported. Because of this exclusive focus on denotation, scientific knowledge does not cohere with other types of language to form a social bond. Rather, it claims access to that which is true for all time and in all places. Thus, while narrative knowledge defines what may be said or done within a culture or community, and is legitimated by so doing, scientific knowledge describes reality and is legitimated by its correspondence to it.

Lyotard, however, is unhappy with this distinction. He counters that modern science has abandoned the search for a 'transcendental authority as a response to the question... "Who decides the conditions of truth?"'[20] On the contrary, scientific knowledge legitimates itself not by appealing to a sure foundation of universal and indubitable truth, but by enforcing rules accorded status through the consensus of experts within the arena of scientific debate. But in so doing, scientific

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postmodern theorist, I have chosen to focus on him because space prohibits an examination of several exponents and unlike many of his contemporaries, his writing is readily accessible.

16 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 18.

17 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 19.

18 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 21.

19 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 25.

20 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 29.

knowledge lapses back into narrative and its function as a social demarcator: it is defining what may or may not be said within the scientific community not according to correspondence with reality but to consensual authority. Moreover, this is not 'an involuntary lapse in the legitimation process. The explicit appeal to narrative in the problematic of knowledge is concomitant with the liberation of bourgeois culture from the traditional authorities.'[21] While they may appear to be two distinct types of knowledge, Lyotard contends that scientific knowledge is in fact a species of narrative knowledge.

Lyotard summarises the self-understanding of those subscribing to the modern narrative in the following way:

> the name of the hero is the people, the sign of legitimacy, the people's consensus, and their mode of creating norms is deliberation.... The people debate among themselves about what is just or unjust in the same way that the scientific community debates about what is true or false; they accumulate civil laws just as scientists accumulate scientific laws; they perfect their rules of consensus just as the scientists produce new "paradigms" to revise their rules in light of what they have learned.[22]

Like all narratives, this one prescribes the rules which govern the life of a community, in this case, 'the people.' It is concerned not only with denotative utterances which mirror reality, but also prescriptive utterances which mirror justice. Nevertheless, this particular narrative is set apart from others in its desire to legitimate knowledge which is true at all times, everywhere. Lyotard expresses this difference in his description of this story as a *grand récit*, a metanarrative. The narrator is not 'a people mired in the particular positivity of its traditional knowledge, nor even scientists taken as a whole, since they are sequestered in professional frameworks corresponding to their respective specialities' but is a 'metasubject in the process of formulating both the legitimacy of the discourses of empirical sciences and that of the direct institutions of popular cultures.'[23] This is the story of modernity, the metanarrative of the West.

In his <u>Reconstruction in Philosophy</u>, John Dewey tells the modern story as the story of human progress. The modern human, no longer focused on the supernatural nor shackled by ecclesiastical authority, now believes 'in the power of individual minds, guided by methods of

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21 . Lyotard, <u>The Postmodern Condition</u>, p. 30.

22 . Lyotard, <u>The Postmodern Condition</u>, p. 30.

23 . Lyotard, <u>The Postmodern Condition</u>, p. 34.

observation experience and reflection, to attain the truths needed for the guidance of life.' So re-oriented, the modern imagination is dominated by the future, rather than the past. 'The Golden Age lies ahead of us not behind us.' Indeed, 'Man is capable, if he will exercise the required courage, intelligence and effort, of shaping his own fate.' Progress, accordingly, is made by 'the patient and experimental study of nature, bearing fruit in inventions which control nature and subdue her forces to social use.'[24] What Lyotard describes, however, is not the peaceful liberation from superstitious, backward narrative knowledge to reasonable, progressive scientific knowledge, but the conquest of the one modern metanarrative over all other little narratives. 'It is therefore not at all surprising,' he writes, 'that the representatives of the new process of legitimation by "the people" should be at the same time actively involved in destroying the traditional knowledge of peoples, perceived from that point forward as minorities or potential separatist movements destined only to spread obscurantism.'[25]

The modern, scientific metanarrative not only denies to the other his or her own narrative, but authorises its violent suppression. What Lyotard claims to have found in the modern scientific metanarrative is not the legitimation of knowledge, but the legitimation of power. Yet, this is not an occasion for despair. By unmasking the metanarrative as a legitimation of power, he has broken its oppressive hold over little narratives. 'All that has been received,' he writes, 'if only yesterday, must be suspected.'[26] The systematic taking apart, or deconstruction, of the metanarrative, and indeed all claims to universal rationality and authority is a liberation from terror and a cause for celebration.[27] As 'incredulity toward metanarratives' which seek only to conquer and subsume others, postmodernism 'refines our sensibility to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the

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24 . John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), pp. 47 - 49; cited in J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be, (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), p. 14.

25 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 30.

26 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 79.

27 . Lyotard writes, 'The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high price for the nostalgia of the whole and of the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for a slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return to terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is "Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name".' Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, pp. 81 - 82.

incommensurable.'[28] In the ruins of the modern metanarrative, we have to tell our own little stories and play our own language-games. Instead of a legitimation of power, the postmodern encounter of little narratives is to be conceived as a game played 'for the sheer pleasure of its invention.... Great joy is had in the endless invention of turns of phrase, of words and meanings.'[29]

It is ironic that Lyotard's celebratory account of the death of the metanarrative is itself a narrative, and a rather grand one. In later writings, he admits that his postmodernism, in order to understand and establish itself, necessarily claims the ability to understand and place everything.[30] It is itself, in other words, a metanarrative. Serious criticism can be raised precisely at this point of circularity for in admitting postmodernism's own metanarratival nature, Lyotard places himself on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, by his own account there is no reason why a postmodern metanarrative cannot and should not be deconstructed as simply another legitimation of power; on the other, if the struggle between little narratives is all there is, Lyotard seems not to recognise the violence resulting from the encounter of little narratives and further, cannot stop it. Either way, the little narratives which postmodernism seeks to preserve from the violence of modernity continue to suffer.

According to the first charge Lyotard overthrows the modern metanarrative and its claim to universal authority only through the construction of yet another metanarrative. He excoriates modernity for constructing the metanarrative of scientific knowledge by which it seeks to legitimate its claim to a universal authority or rationality and purports to transcend the need for narratives altogether. He writes, 'the old poles of attraction represented by nation-states, parties, professions, institutions, and historical traditions are losing their attraction.... Identifying with the great names, the heroes of contemporary history is becoming more and more difficult.' The 'grand Narratives' are fragmenting.[31] Nevertheless, this loss should be celebrated as the recovery of difference, enabling the tolerance of the incommensurable. But is this not itself a metanarrative, a new universal authority? I allege that it is.

28 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, pp. xxiv - xxv.

29 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 10.

30 . Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Explained To Children: Correspondence 1982 - 1985, (London: Turnaround, 1992), pp. 40 - 41.

31 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 14.

Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh argue that the universal character of the postmodern turn becomes clear if it is likened metaphorically to a smorgasbord with a multiplicity of worldviews offered for consumption. 'If among the variety of offerings we find Western modernist soup, Marxist rice, Christian stew and Muslim bread (so to speak) is there not also a postmodern dish of some sort? Do postmodernists consider their worldview as one option among many?' Not at all for it is the table on which the other dishes are set.[32] Postmodernism has become the new metanarrative which universally and authoritatively relegates all other narratives to the status of human constructions. It does not herald the offering of a multiplicity of narratives from which one may pick and choose. Rather, it is *the* authority which permits no narrative to claim for itself any more than local, temporary status.

There is therefore no reason as far as I can tell why postmodernism as it has been articulated by Lyotard cannot and should not be deconstructed as yet another culturally limited legitimation of the suppression of the other. Consider for instance a Sunni Muslim: his narrative, as far as he is concerned, has been revealed by God to Muhammad and is recorded in the holy Qur'an. Even though it is told in different places and at different times, this is not a geographically and historically limited human construction. It is the universal tale of humanity as living either in submission to or rebellion against the will of God as proclaimed by the prophets he has sent, the last and greatest being Muhammad. It is a metanarrative and as such it reserves an authority for itself which it does not for others, not even those of 'the People of the Book', that is Jews and Christians.[33] According to Lyotard, however, these claims to revelation, universality, and finality

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32. Middleton and Walsh, Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be, p. 77.

33. On this point, the Islamicist Edward Hulmes writes, 'In the Islamic tradition, each of the three distinctive communities of faith [Islam, Judaism and Christianity]... shares not just the privilege of having been furnished with a 'Book' (that is to say, an authoritative corpus of instruction about the will of the Creator for his creatures), brought by a messenger expressly sent by God for the purpose, but also the responsibility for preserving the *same* inspired message delivered to each community in the first instance. The task of securing the unity of faith and action thus devolves on all those in receipt of such divinely instituted favour. Muslims believe that Musa (Moses) was sent with the *tawrah* (Torah) to regulate the life of the Jews; that Jesus ('Isa) was sent with the *injil* (Gospel) to direct the life of the Christians; that Muhammad was sent with the *Qur'an* to guide the Islamic community. To Muslims, the essential unity of all these manifestations of the will of God is a matter of logic as well as of faith, for although the message has been sent at different times and different places its essence cannot change. The tragedy... is that the unity of faith and action has been lost because the original vision has been ignored, became blurred, or even - as Muslims continue to aver - wilfully distorted by Jews and Christians.' Edward Hulmes, '"The People of the Book" and the Question of Jesus,' in Theology, 95 (1992), p. 335.

are fallacious. The Sunni's story like all others is but one option among many and nothing more. Thus, Lyotard claims to know the narrative of the other better than he or she knows it him- or herself. By so claiming, he subsumes the other into the postmodern metanarrative, only continuing the cycle of suppression against which he reacts.

Now consider the second charge, namely that Lyotard's proposal cannot recognise the violence inherent in the encounter of little narratives. The modern metanarrative's hero, 'the people,' claims a universal rationality which will eventually enlighten, subsume and/or replace all other rationalities. This story, however, has lost its lustre. Two world wars, the Holocaust, the threat of nuclear and environmental disasters have combined to create a widespread disenchantment with the story of scientific progress. Together, these crises have uncovered 'the nihilistic destiny of science, namely, the necessity for the discipline of truth-finding to admit that there are no truths, and therefore no objective goods.'[34] According to Lyotard, however, this is to be celebrated in the playful struggle of little narratives. This optimistic interpretation of the death of the modern metanarrative is underscored by Walter Truett Anderson: 'Lacking absolutes,' he declares, 'we will have to encounter one another as people with different information, different stories, different visions - and trust the outcome.'[35]

History gives little reason for such optimism. If Lyotard's postmodernism unmasks the modern metanarrative as simply the legitimation of violent power and yet is itself simply the end of modernity, why should one be optimistic about the outcome of encounter between narratives? Consider for instance the conflicts in Bosnia and Israel; both typical examples of Lyotardian little narratives encountering each other. None of the stories involved, whether Bosnian-Serb, Bosnian-Muslim and Bosnian-Croat, or Israeli and Palestinian, claim a universal scope; all tie themselves quite deliberately to limited geographies, to the Balkans and Palestine respectively. These encounters, however, have not been marked by Lyotard's playful struggle, but by the horrors of ethnic cleansing, terrorism, and even genocide. In the face of such tragedies, I counter, there is no

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34. John Milbank, Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 284.

35. Walter Truett Anderson, Reality Isn't What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), p. 183.

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reason for Lyotard's or Anderson's optimism. If anything they are occasions for despair. As John Milbank has put it, 'if violence is the result of the search for knowledge, then violence is what there is to be known.'[36]

Furthermore, even if it could recognise the continuing problem of violence, postmodernism, as simply the recognition of the violence underlying the modern metanarrative, cannot explain why violence should be avoided. Lyotard writes, 'to speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall within the domain of a general agonistics. *This does not mean that one plays in order to win.*'[37] The question, posed powerfully by Seyla Benhabib, is 'why not? Why isn't language simply a sphere through which the universal power game is carried out? Why isn't all conversation seduction? All consensus conquest?'[38] Lyotard may acclaim the nearly infinite diversity of little narratives in the postmodern world, 'but he cannot pass this off as liberal pluralism, because nothing, in his philosophy, in principle renders illegitimate the expansion of one language-game at the expense of others, nor the capture and manipulation of many language games by a single power.'[39] Once again, the little narrative is violently subsumed into the grand one and postmodernism cannot act as a bulwark against it.

Thus, postmodernism as articulated by Lyotard falls either to the Scylla of 'criteriological dogmatism,' that is, it rejects the authority of the modern metanarrative through the construction of a new one, or to the Charybdis of 'uncritical polytheism,' that is, it can neither account for the violence in the encounters of little narratives nor explain why violence is to be avoided.[40] In both instances, the powerless are violently suppressed by the powerful. Lyotard rightly points to the problem of violence, but at worst participates in it or at least, cannot stop it. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest a return to the modern metanarrative. Lyotard's description of the postmodern condition is in my view, accurate. He rightly brings to the forefront the problems of authority - that

36 . Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, p. 311.

37 . Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 10. Emphasis mine.

38 . Seyla Benhabib, 'Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-François Lyotard,' in Feminism/Postmodernism, ed. L. Nicholson, (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 115.

39 . Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, p. 317.

40 . Benhabib, 'Epistemologies of Postmodernism,' p. 113.

which legitimates knowledge - and the other - he or she whose authority and knowledge is different from mine. He correctly suggests that the real authority legitimating the modern metanarrative is not peacefully persuasive reason, but violently coercive power. So, while his optimistic prescription - the playful telling and re-telling of little narratives - may be deeply problematic, there is no reversing the postmodern turn.

5.2 Theological Responses

How does Christian theology respond to this new cultural situation? This question must now be addressed. Because I cannot account for all the different responses (ranging from the hostile, through the curious and fashionable, to the enthusiastically postmodern) here, I limit my focus to three very different, yet openly postmodern ones. At one extreme, Mark C. Taylor's a/theology rejects any claims to authority and ultimately succumbs to nihilism. At the other, John Milbank so magnificently reintroduces theology as the Queen of the sciences that he threatens to subsume the other into the new/old Christian metanarrative. Somewhere in between falls the postmodern orthodoxy of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. It is this mediating position which, I believe, comes closest to resolving the authority/other dilemma.

Taylor, noted originally for his work on Hegel and Kierkegaard,[41] invites his readers to celebrate the postmodern theological carnival in his book, Erring.[42] The opening analysis of the implications of postmodernism for four notions essential to traditional theology starts with an examination of the way in which the death of God has found expression in humanistic atheism. Though undertaken to transfer the Divine attributes to the human self, Taylor concludes that the death of God 'culminates in the disappearance of the self.'[43] The relation between western images of God and self are then further analysed. By showing selfhood to be an historical construction, Taylor moves from the death of God to the dispossession of the self.[44] He thirdly deconstructs history, or the attempt to unite disparate human activity into a meaningful totality by insisting that it

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41 . Mark C. Taylor, Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1980).

42 . Mark C. Taylor, Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

43 . Taylor, Erring, pp. 14, 19 - 33.

44 . Taylor, Erring, pp. 34 - 51.

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is indissolubly linked to notions of God and self. Accordingly, with their disappearance, history comes to an end.[45]. Finally, the book, as the re-presentation of personal and social history, completes the cycle of deconstruction. It strives to be a closed whole, a complete totality and in so doing, struggles to dominate, repress or exclude the other. The other, however, can never be completely dominated, repressed or excluded. Both its presence and its absence subvert the book, showing it to be always open and incomplete.[46] Having deconstructed God, self, history and book, Taylor insists that the web of traditional theology is thus unravelled. '*Our* problem,' he goes on to write, 'is how to count all of this not only as loss, but as gain.'[47]

The gain lies in the possibility deconstructive a/theology which Taylor describes as 'mazing grace' - 'a life of serpentine wandering,' embodying 'the ceaseless interplay of desire and delight.'[48] This description of deconstructive a/theology evokes the image of a linguistic maze lacking both centre and exit where meaning always playfully alludes one's attempts to entrap it in words. The carnivalesque nature of the wandering is summed up by Gerard Loughlin in this way: 'In the past, we thought that God wrote the story, but now we know that we ourselves have written God. Now the religious task is to keep up the fiction, and not with a heavy but with a light touch.'[49] Taylor writes, 'In the festive dance of the carnival, individual identities dissolve and social oppositions break down. Here the levity of comedy replaces the gravity of tragedy. In the absence of transcendence, interiority and depth give way to a labyrinthian play of surfaces. When nostalgia is gone and waiting is over, one can delight in the superficiality of appearances.'[50] It is the task of the postmodern a/theologian to join in the 'Bacchanalian revel' of endless erring.[51] There is

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45 . Taylor, Erring, pp. 52 - 73.

46 . Taylor, Erring, pp. 74 - 93.

47 . Taylor, Erring, p. 17.

48 . Taylor, Erring, pp. 13 - 15.

49 . Loughlin, Telling God's Story, p. 15.

50 . Taylor, Erring, pp. 15 - 16.

51 . Taylor, Erring, p. 182.

therefore no conclusion: the death of God is also the end of the End. 'Instead of a conclusion, we are left with an Interlude, which, it appears, is always already playing.'[52]

Taylor's deconstructive a/theology ultimately rejects any claims to theological authority by affirming that there is neither beginning nor end, for we begin and end 'wherever we are: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be.'[53] Knowledge of beginning and end authorises the route (not) taken and gives it meaning, but to claim this knowledge is to forget the linguistic labyrinth in which we find ourselves. 'As Taylor's image of language as a maze suggests, we are forever enclosed, wandering in the labyrinth. No matter how long our piece of thread, there is no way out and nowhere to go.'[54] Yet, the loss of beginning and end, of authorisation and meaning, for Gillian Rose is not an occasion for Bacchanalian revel, but one for despair:

> it is the beginning and the end which give authority to the way, and meaning to being lost - especially to any conceivable relishing of being lost. If the beginning and end are abolished, so that all is divine middle... joyful erring would not be achieved... [One] would be left helpless in the total domination of the maze, every point equally beginning and end. This is to encounter not pure freedom but pure power and to become its perfect victim.[55]

Taylor's language of play and carnival cannot cover the nihilism implied by his endless erring. This can and should be pushed further for the labyrinthine imagery central to deconstructive a/theology which Rose rightly deconstructs as nihilism points to an inconsistency in Taylor's position. As we have seen, with Taylor meaning is always one word away; 'it is always different and deferred. In language we can never have the thing itself; we can never stop the endless drift of meaning from one sign to the next, from one sign-string to another.'[56] Such a position is postmodern insofar as it affirms that there is only language, but it is insufficiently postmodern in its refusal to admit its own position is also only a linguistic construction. Taylor's maze is itself a story and a nihilist one at that.[57] By taking the violent postmodernist vision as primal, Taylor has forgotten that there is

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52 . Taylor, Erring, p. 183.

53 . Taylor, Erring, pp. 17, 183.

54 . Loughlin, Telling God's Story, p. 16.

55 . Gillian Rose, The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 286 - 287.

56 . Loughlin, Telling God's Story, p. 13.

57 . Loughlin, Telling God's Story, p. 17.

another story, the central theme of which is not a meaningless linguistic maze, but the love of God which is both beginning and end.

This is the story narrated in John Milbank's postmodern reconstructive theology as set out in Theology and Social Theory. In four 'sub-treatises,' he hopes to show that secular reason 'does not just "borrow" inherently inappropriate modes of expression from religion as the only discourse to hand... but is actually *constituted* in its secularity by "heresy" in relation to orthodox Christianity, or else a rejection of Christianity that is more "neo-pagan" than simply anti-religious.'[58] For him, '"scientific" social theories are themselves theologies or anti-theologies in disguise' and are rooted in an 'ontology of violence,' which must be tamed by reason.[59] The first two treatises deconstruct eighteenth century politics and political economy.[60] The third turns to Hegel and Marx: for them in their attempt to transcend the secular reason of the previous treatises, against them in their '"gnostic" plot about a historically [sic] necessary fall and reconstruction of being, with a gain achieved through violence undergone.'[61]

Throughout, Milbank writes in two 'voices': that of postmodern nihilism and that of Christian virtue. In the final treatise, he disentangles these voices and sets them against each other. From the perspective of the latter, modern thought and politics fundamentally assumes that there is only violence 'which cannot be tamed by an opposing transcendent principle, but can be immanently controlled by subjecting it to rules and giving irresistible power to those rules in the form of market economies and sovereign politics.'[62] The climax of the book comes in the final chapter when Milbank juxtaposes the secular ontology of violence over against Christianity's ontology of peace. Unlike secular reason, Christianity recognises no original violence, but a created order of harmonious difference.[63] Coupled with his nihilistic deconstruction of secular reason,

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58 . Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, p. 3

59 . Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, pp. 3, 5.

60 . Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, pp. 9 - 143.

61 . Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, pp. 4, 147 - 255.

62 . Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, pp. 5, 257 - 379.

63 . Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, pp. 380 - 438.

Milbank thus presents his reader with a stark choice: to live in the violent *Civitas Mundi* or the peaceful *Civitas Dei*.[64] He concludes, 'there can be no going back; only Christian theology now offers a discourse able to position and overcome nihilism itself. This is why it is so important to reassert theology as a master discourse; theology alone remains the discourse of non-mastery.'[65]

It is Milbank's Augustinian imagery of the two cities which provides the foundation for criticism. As Gillian Rose rightly observes, a city is marked off from other cities by boundaries, limits and different laws.[66] It is defined at least partially by that which is outside it. Yet, Milbank's description of Christian theology as 'Other City' is noticeably devoid of such definitions: he does not hold that there are two narratives, but one Christian metanarrative told heretically by 'secular reason.'[67] In his effort to out-narrate his opponents, he has left no room for ambiguity, no place for the other. To borrow from Rose again, Milbank has mended the broken middle,[68] and is thus dominated by a

> compulsive singularity: a sense that Christianity "*alone*" is the "*only*" truly good discourse and therefore will *a priori* approach its others through the task of "*out-narrating*". Alone. Only. It is one thing to admire and embrace the virtuosity of one's story. It is another out of hand to condemn all other stories - ultimately, insofar as they do not inadvertently contain the wisdom of the one true meta-narrative - to the bin of nihilism and subjugation.[69]

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64 . He writes 'Salvation from sin must mean "liberation" from political, economic and psychic *dominium*, and therefore from all structures belonging to the *saeculum*, or temporal interval between the fall and the final return of Christ. This salvation takes the form of a different inauguration of a different kind of community.' Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, pp. 391 - 392.

65 . Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, p. 6.

66 . Gillian Rose, 'Diremption of Spirit,' in Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion, ed. Phillipa Berry and Andrew Wernick, (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 48.

67 . This criticism is not new. It was originally made by Stanley Hauerwas in response to an essay contributed by Milbank to a Festschrift for Donald MacKinnon. Compare John Milbank, '"Between Purgation and illumination": a critique of the theology of right,' with Stanley Hauerwas, 'On being "placed" by John Milbank: a response,' both in Christ, Ethics and Tragedy: Essays in Honour of Donald MacKinnon, ed. Kenneth Surin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 161 - 196, 197 - 201.

68 . Rose, 'Diremption of Spirit,' pp. 45 - 56, esp. pp. 52 - 55.

69 . Roland Coles, 'Storied Others and Possibilities of *Caritas*: Milbank and Neo-Nietzchean Ethics,' in Modern Theology, 8 (1992), p. 332.

Furthermore, despite his proclamation of an ontology of peace rooted in the harmonious difference of the Trinity, it can be argued that Milbank's out-narration of the other is violent. Consider the rhetoric: 'The secular *episteme* is a post-Christian paganism, something in the last analysis defined, negatively, as a refusal of Christianity and the invention of an "Anti-Christianity".'[70] This thoroughly negative rhetorical construction, drained of any positive specificity, effectively reduces the other (specifically Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault) to nothing. If Taylor's rejection of authority falls to nihilism, Milbank's metanarrative negates the other.[71]

In my view, the goal of postmodern theology is to navigate between the extremes: to articulate a position which recognises Christian theology's inevitably authoritative claims, but refuses to allow this authority to legitimate the suppression of the other. My description of a possible third way, albeit one which is much closer to Milbank than to Taylor, begins with an examination of Hans Frei's hermeneutics. The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative is his case for a decisive break with modern hermeneutics, both liberal and conservative.[72] The former, beginning in the eighteenth century, located the meaning of the biblical story either in universal human experience or reason, or in a world behind the text accessible only through historical reconstruction. Though conservative hermeneutics rejected the first option, it shared the fundamental presuppositions of the second, differing only in the conclusions reached. In both, the

> real events of history constitute an autonomous temporal framework of their own under God's providential design. Instead of rendering them accessible, the narratives, heretofore indispensable as means of access to the events, now simply verify them, thus affirming their autonomy and the fact that they are in principle accessible through any kind of description that can manage to be accurate either predictively or after the event.[73]

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70 . Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, p. 280.

71 . In fairness, Milbank has addressed this criticism by arguing that his story is in fact an open-ended anti-metanarrative. See John Milbank, 'Enclaves, or Where is the Church?' in New Blackfriars, 73 (1992), pp. 341 - 352. Further, my summary and critique have been, for the sake of space, all-too-brief. A thinker as original and important as Milbank is widely recognised to be deserves more attention than can be given here.

72 . Hans Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

73 . Frei, Eclipse, p. 4.

Since the eighteenth century, liberal and conservative hermeneutics have posited a gap between the biblical narratives and the reality to which they refer and located the meaning in the latter.[74]

In contradistinction to both, Frei offers a postcritical hermeneutic which locates meaning neither in psychologically reconstructed authorial intentions nor historically reconstructed worlds, but in the biblical text itself. He therefore opposes both a critical separation of text and meaning and a precritical equation of intratextual meaning and extratextual reality.[75] While there are other kinds of literature in the biblical corpus, the advantages of such an approach are particularly evident when applied to biblical narratives, especially the Gospels, for here 'the meaning of the text remains the same no matter what the perspectives of succeeding generations of interpreters may be. In other words, the constancy of the meaning of the text is the text and not the similarity of its *effect* on the life perspectives of succeeding generations. No reference to the situation of the interpreter is necessary in understanding the text.'[76] He proposes to close the gap in critical hermeneutics, both liberal and conservative. For him, there is no interpretative breach between the texts and their meaning; rather the biblical narratives most resemble realistic novels 'where meaning is most nearly inseparable from the words - from the descriptive shape of the story as a pattern of enactment....' He continues, 'there is neither need for nor use in looking for meaning a more profound stratum underneath the structure (a separable "subject matter") or in separable author's "intention," or in a combination of such behind-the-scenes projections.'[77] Thus, the biblical

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74. Frei writes, 'the bond of continuity, the meaning of the narrative, has to be discovered at a level more remote than that of depiction or cumulative rendering through the interaction of character and incident. The meaning of the narrative is something other than the narrative shape itself. There is, for this whole point of view, simply no way of dealing with descriptive or narrative shape without shifting the meaning to a more profound stratum. The documents mean something other than what they say.' Eclipse, p. 318.

75. It is 'reading with that second naïveté which is done in correspondence with a hermeneutics of restoration... the kind of reading that might well wish to be of a "revised literal" sort. It distances the text from the author, from the original discourse's existential situation and from every other kind of reading that would go "behind" the text and "refer" it to any other world of meaning than its own, the world "in front of the text." And yet, this kind of reading has been through the mill of critically transcending that (first) naive literalism for which every statement on the printed page "means" either because it refers not only ostensively but also correctly, naming a true state of affairs each time, or else because it shapes part of a realm of discourse whose vocabulary one can finally understand by repeating it and in that sense (if sense it is) taking it at face value.' Hans Frei, 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will it Break?' in Hans Frei, Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays, ed. George Hunsinger and William Placher, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 130.

76. Hans Frei, 'Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,' in Theology and Narrative, p. 32.

77. Frei, Eclipse, p. 281.

narratives can, but need not, describe actual historical events in order to be meaningful for Christian theology.[78]

Interestingly, applied specifically to the Gospels, Frei's strategy uncovers 'what one might term a "high Christology"'.[79] Therein, the character and circumstances of Jesus are so closely united that one can know who Jesus is through their telling. There is, therefore, no need to search for an historical Jesus lying behind (and ultimately divorced from) the Christ of faith. The 'person of Jesus, and not only his message, is both indispensable to and known in the story.... Jesus is who he is by what he does and undergoes, and chiefly we must say that he is Jesus crucified and raised.... Here my [Frei's] claim that we have in these narratives a high Christology - not before, but after any "demythologization" or transfer of the "meaning" of the story to "our day" that may be necessary.'[80] Moreover, the development of the story is such that Jesus' particular identity is sharpest in the death-and-resurrection sequence. It is here, more than anywhere else in the narratives, that Jesus' identity can be known. The transition from crucifixion to resurrection 'is not one from a personal account of a man's death to its stylized mythical religious application... but rather that the one who died is the same one who is risen. *The identity of the crucified Jesus and that of the risen Lord are one and the same in the accounts.*'[81]

In the crucifixion-resurrection sequence, Jesus' human particularity is most sharply asserted and therefore allows, even forces the question, Did this actually take place? 'It is at this point that the transition from literary analysis to historical affirmation or denial as well as to theological truth claim should be made. And this point is the complex unity of the passion and

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78 . He writes, 'the Gospel stories as well as large portions of Old Testament narrative are indeed "realistic," but... the issue of their making or not making factual or, for that matter, other kinds of truth claims is not part of the scope of hermeneutical enquiry. "Meaning" in this view is logically distinct from "truth," even where the two bear so strong a family resemblance as the designations "history-like" and "historical" imply. The factuality or non-factuality of at least some of these narratives, important as it is no doubt in a larger religious or an even more general context, involves a separate argument from that concerning their meaning.' Frei, 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative,' pp. 139 - 140.

79 . Frei, 'Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,' p. 32.

80 . Frei, 'Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,' p. 37.

81 . Hans Frei, ' Theological Reflections on the Accounts of Jesus' Death and Resurrection,' in Theology and Narrative, p. 58.

resurrection account, not the account of his earlier ministry.[82]   This language is insufficiently strong, for Frei is arguing that the identity of Jesus is disclosed in the crucifixion-resurrection in such a way as to render his nonresurrection inconceivable. He writes,

> Our argument is that to grasp what *this* identity, Jesus of Nazareth, is, is to believe that, in fact, he has been raised from the dead. Someone may reply that in that case the most perfectly depicted character, the most nearly life-like fictional identity ought also in fact to live a factual historical life. We answer that the argument holds good only in this one and absolutely unique case where the described identity, (the 'WHAT' of him) is *totally* identical with his factual existence. He is the resurrection and the life; how can he be conceived as not resurrected?[83]

Thus, in the crucifixion-resurrection, where narrative and history join, Jesus' identity is fully disclosed, leading inevitably to a high Christology. This is the meaning of the Gospels.

This convergence of narrative, meaning and history in turn provides an authoritative starting-point for a Christian reading of the Scriptures. Frei asks,

> Shall we, as it were, radiate out from the Gospels with their firm meaning... to the earlier and later story (that of the Old Testament and that of human history since Jesus Christ)? Or shall we reverse the procedure and move from the wider or narrower context of history... to the Gospels for deeper insight on that wider context and the pre-understanding of it that we bring with us?[84]

The story of Jesus for postcritical (and precritical) readers forms the climax of the biblical metanarrative, thus rendering the Bible not a jumble of historically and culturally diverse documents, but one unified story. Furthermore, the biblical narrative provides the framework into which all other events must be placed and through which reality is encountered and known. It is therefore also the starting point of Christian theology. 'If there is a "narrative theology," the meaning of that term in the context of the self-description of the Christian community is that we are specified by relation to its peculiar narrative and by our conceptual redescription of it in belief and life, not by a quality of "narrativity" inherent in our picture of self, world, and transcendence at large.'[85]

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82 . Frei, 'Theological Reflections,' p. 83.

83 . Frei, 'Theological Reflections,' p. 83.

84 . Frei, 'Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,' p. 42.

85 . Frei, 'Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative: Some Hermeneutical Considerations,' in Theology and Narrative, p. 112.

This narrative focus for the starting-point of Christian theology in turn enables Frei to distinguish between two views of Christian theology. In the first, theology is primarily a theoretical discipline and is therefore to be subsumed under general criteria of intelligibility, coherence and truth that it shares with other scientific disciplines while in the second, it is critical reflection on the belief and practice of the Christian community. In the former, theology's cognate discipline is philosophy 'not only as transcendental analysis, but as positive procedure in epistemology, ontology, and so on.' While for the latter, 'the natural external affiliate for second-order Christian communal self-description is not so much philosophy but interpretive (rather than reductionist or causally explanatory) social science, especially anthropology and sociology.'[86] For those following postcritical hermeneutics, the second view is to be pursued: 'One will have to subordinate the philosophical relationship to the Christianly self-descriptive one, without eliminating the former.'[87] This position is summarised by George Lindbeck in The Nature of Doctrine.

His proposal, briefly mentioned in chapter 2, falls between 'cognitive propositional' and 'experiential-expressivist' understandings of theology. In the former, the classical understanding in Western theology, doctrines purport to describe the nature of reality while in the latter, they are understood as symbolic, noninformative expressions of human experience.[88] Lindbeck's 'cultural-linguistic' understanding of theology however, likens religions to languages and doctrines to grammar - the communally authoritative second-order rules for first-order speech.[89] On this view, the Nicene Creed is not so much articulating a metaphysical theory concerning the nature of God or Jesus, but an attempt to regulate the Church's language about both.[90] Whatever we say about one Person of the Trinity we must say about the other two, however, we cannot say that one is the same as the other two. Likewise, when speaking of Jesus, we can say neither that he was only human nor only divine nor some kind of demigod. The vocabulary of 'symbols, concepts, rites, injunctions and stories' forming this language is found in the Bible which is accordingly the primary text for

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86 . Hans Frei, Types of Christian Theology, ed. George Hunsinger and William Placher, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 2.

87 . Frei, 'Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,' p. 113.

88 . Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, p. 16.

89 . Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 32 - 45.

90 . Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 92 - 96.

theological reflection.[91] Lindbeck and Frei thus present Christian theology as a postcritical description of the way in which the Bible is normative for the language of the Christian community.[92]

From the point of view of one wishing to preserve the distinctive voice of Christian theology, it is clear that the positions associated with Milbank and Frei and Lindbeck are preferable to Taylor's nihilistic a/theology.[93] Moreover, that of Frei and Lindbeck recognises the distinctive nature of the Christian metanarrative without lapsing into coercion as Milbank seems to do. Indeed, Lindbeck devotes an entire chapter to the benefits a cultural-linguistic understanding of theology brings to 'nonproselytizing interreligious dialogue' and the thorny problem of the 'salvation of "other-believers".'[94] For Lindbeck, dialogue is freed from the necessity to postulate either a set of common criteria enabling value- and truth-judgement or a common core experience, and is reconceived as a variety of *ad-hoc* encounters. Furthermore, this approach eschews neither apologetics nor evangelism, but resists any programmatic approach to both claiming to have uncovered the process by which unbelievers become believers.[95] These advantages

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91 . Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, p. 81.

92 . While they are widely recognised authorities, they are not alone in this position. Common philosophical themes can be found both in the work of Paul Ricoeur and the later Alasdair MacIntyre. See Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 3 volumes, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984 - 1988); and Alasdair MacIntyre After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, second edition, (London: Duckworth, 1985); Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, (London: Duckworth, 1988); Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy and Tradition, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). In addition, their writings form the core of a recent American theological movement associated with the divinity schools of Yale and Duke universities. Dubbed 'postliberalism,' its key spokespersons include Stanley Hauerwas, William Placher, and Ronald Thiemann. See Stanley Hauerwas, Against the Nations, (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985); William C. Placher, Unapologetic Theology: Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); and Ronald Thiemann, Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1985). For a good introduction to and bibliography of postliberal theology, see Sheila Greeve Davaney and Delwin Brown, 'Postliberalism,' in The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought, ed. Alister E. McGrath, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 453 - 456.

93 . This is borne out in Taylor's shift away from theology to cultural studies evident in his books Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Nots, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) and with Esa Saarinen, Imagologies: Media Philosophy, (London: Routledge, 1994).

94 . Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 46 - 47; for an exposition of the second issue, see chapter 2.2.

95 . William Placher writes, 'The appropriate theological account of why a Christian believes in the resurrection would therefore take the form of describing how the world makes sense as seen from a

notwithstanding, postmodern orthodoxy is not without its problems. These will be addressed presently.

Because space prohibits a full development and response to all possible criticisms of postmodern orthodoxy, I will limit my apology to the four which variously charge that the intrasystematic approach is ultimately reductive. Paramount among these is the argument that postmodern orthodoxy abandons any possibility of extratextual truth. Gerard Loughlin puts it this way: 'How can there be true stories when it is said that there are only stories? For it is supposed that a true story is one that matches up to reality, to the way things are. But if the way things are can never be known, because all we can ever know are stories of one sort or another, we can never match stories against reality, but only against each other.'[96] This criticism arises as a result of Frei's location of meaning within the text and Lindbeck's critique of cognitive-propositionalist understandings of theology and is not wholly without merit. Nevertheless, it can be countered that this objection is more properly directed not against Frei and Lindbeck, but an extreme which neither advocates.

Postmodern orthodoxy contends that the precipitating or generative event of Christian theological reflection is the story of Jesus of Nazareth, and more precisely his death-and-resurrection as the point where story and history converge. Accordingly, the two primary functions of Christian theology are social demarcation (the distinguishing of the Christian community from other communities) and self-description (the internal interpretation of the Christian story). Both focus on the intrasystematic truth of Christian doctrine (i.e. its coherence within the body of beliefs and practices which help to shape the Christian community). Lindbeck writes, 'Utterances are intrasystematically true when they cohere with the total relevant context which, in the case of

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Christian perspective; how the biblical narratives, seen as a coherent whole, shape such a perspective: and how Christ's resurrection forms a central and necessary element of such an understanding of those narratives. Such a meditation on the structure of Christian faith may have its own kind of persuasive power.... but does not in any sense constitute too much on the processes by which unbelievers become believers. Such lines of thought lead to apologetic strategies that distort both the logic of faith and the meaning of the biblical texts, and they risk seeking to define and regulate the mysterious grace of God.' See William Placher, 'Introduction,' in Theology and Narrative, p. 4. See also David F. Ford, 'System, Story, Performance: A Proposal about the Role of Narrative in Christian Systematic Theology,' in Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 191 - 215.

96 . Loughlin, Telling God's Story, p. 23.

religion when viewed in cultural-linguistic terms, is not only other utterances, but also the correlative forms of life.'[97] This need not preclude the possibility of extrasystematic truth claims, but emphasises the importance of internal coherence as a necessary if insufficient condition for them. Far from denying the importance and inevitability of extrasystematic truth, Frei and Lindbeck simply affirm participation in the life of the Christian community as a prerequisite to a proper understanding of the ontological force and intention of Christian language.

The second criticism is but a variation of the first. Again Loughlin asks, 'is it possible to affirm the reality of God while allowing that such an affirmation can take place only within a story, albeit a master story which is said to go all the way down, without remainder?'[98] If the contention of the previous paragraph is correct, i.e. that Christian theology can and inevitably does make truth-claims, then the answer would appear to be yes. However, we must go further. The objection is founded on a misunderstanding of Derrida's famous phrase 'there is nothing outside the text.'[99] It is mistakenly taken to mean that there is only text.[100] As Kevin Hart has pointed out, a better interpretation 'is neither esoteric nor difficult: it is merely that there is no knowledge, of which we can speak, which is unmediated.'[101] Moreover, 'one of the things that we know *in* language is that there are things *outside* language.'[102] Thus, postmodern orthodoxy does not deny extratextual reality any more than it denies extrasystematic truth. It simply affirms that a Christian cannot speak about the reality of God without reference to the Christian community and its foundational narrative - the story of Jesus.

Now consider the third: postmodern orthodoxy is said to render the Church sectarian. On this view, theology's focus on the vocabulary of the biblical narrative and the grammar of the

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97 . Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, p. 64.

98 . Loughlin, Telling God's Story, p. 22.

99 . Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 158.

100 . This misunderstanding seems to me to be foundational in Don Cupitt's What is a Story?, (London: SCM, 1991).

101 . Kevin Hart, The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 26.

102 . Loughlin, Telling God's Story, p. 23.

Christian community prevents the justification or indeed the translation of any theological claim in a manner satisfactory to an 'other-believer.' Once again, the force of this criticism is substantially weakened by the recognition that postmodern orthodoxy denies neither extrasystematic truth nor extratextual reality. Still, more can be said. In the ad hoc encounters envisioned by Frei and Lindbeck, justification of a theological claim does not require a criterion shared by all rational people everywhere. Rather, it requires only those common to all participants in the conversation. Similarly, translation from one language to another takes place without recourse to a common tongue. Just so, postmodern orthodoxy does not deny the possibility of justification and translation of Christian claims, but holds that a universal set of criteria is not necessary for such activity to take place. It therefore does not render the Church sectarian.

Finally, it can be argued that postmodern orthodoxy is violent 'in thinking the Christian story a master narrative that positions all other stories. It is the violence of having the last word.'[103] Middleton and Walsh have countered that this criticism fundamentally misunderstands the open-ended character of the Christian metanarrative. For anyone founded upon the biblical story, passages such as the banishment of Hagar (Genesis 16 and 21), the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13), Jephthath's sacrifice of his daughter to fulfil a vow to God (Judges 11), and the rape, murder and dismemberment of an anonymous concubine (Judges 19) are beyond assimilation into the metanarrative.[104] Rather than passing over such stories in silence, thereby allowing criticism 'from the outside,' they suggest that readers continue to ask 'from the inside' why these stories were included in the Bible. Drawing on Walter Brueggeman, they propose that such stories be interpreted 'as an inner-biblical critique of any totalizing or triumphalistic reading of the metanarrative.'[105] These 'minority voices of resistance and dissent' thus 'have the potential to call into question violent and abusive uses of the biblical story. In their angularity, with their difference

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103 . Loughlin, Telling God's Story, p. 24.

104 . They write, 'It is not just that the acts of violence are perpetrated against women, but that this violence is either explicitly or tacitly approved of by other characters in the story, by the story's narrator or the editor of the biblical book in which the story occurs, or by later commentators on the story.' Middleton and Walsh, Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be, pp. 186 - 179, esp. p. 177. The allusion to Phyllis Trible's 'texts of terror' is deliberate. See Phyllis Trible, Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

105 . Middleton and Walsh, Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be, p. 179. See also Walter Brueggeman, Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity and the Making of History, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), p. 50.

and heterogeneity, these voices.... serve to keep the story open.'[106]   In the light of these brief responses, it appears that postmodern orthodoxy could be a fruitful way forward for contemporary theology.

Conclusion:

In order to set the stage for remaining chapters, this chapter briefly explored theological responses to the postmodern condition in two steps. The first briefly introduced postmodernity and postmodernism, centring on the work of French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, contending that while his prescriptive response to the death of modernity is deeply problematic, there is no reversing the postmodern turn.   The second section then considered three theological responses to the postmodern turn.   The a/theology of Mark C. Taylor and the theology of John Milbank were presented as extremes which can and should be avoided while the work of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, albeit much closer to Milbank than Taylor, offered more fruitful mediating position - 'postmodern orthodoxy'. It concluded by responding to four objections to postmodern orthodoxy. The critical re-appropriation of Hendrik Kraemer's theology of religions may now begin in earnest.

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106 . Middleton and Walsh, <u>Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be</u>, p. 180.

Chapter 6

Key Themes and Criticisms of Kraemer's Theology of Religions

Introduction:

Having set the stage in the previous chapter, the two remaining show that Kraemer's theology of religions continues to suggest ways of faithful theological creativity for Christians wrestling with the problem of other religions in a postmodern world. This chapter begins with a three-step apology. In the first, four key themes are set out to summarise the position. After expositions of biblical realism, the totalitarian approach, adaptation and the point of contact, the second then considers five theological criticisms. The first of these, attacking Kraemer's view of Scripture, both misunderstands that view and is deeply problematic itself. Though the remaining four are more or less accurate, they fail to consider Kraemer's historical context, his habit of rhetorical over-emphasis, and the more subtle articulation of later work and therefore attack an extreme which he avoids. As such, they are important boundaries, but do not seriously undermine Kraemer's position. The final section considers two phenomenological criticisms: that Kraemer can account neither for intrareligious nor interreligious development. Though the validity of these objections is uncontested, I argue that they lead to a slight but not inconsequential modification in Kraemer's phenomenology rather than a wholesale rejection. All this prepares the way for Kraemer's critical re-appropriation.

6.1   Key Themes

The first of four organisational themes, biblical realism, is Kraemer's reply to a perceived theological confusion regarding the nature of the Church and its mission. Rooted firstly in the fact that the Church 'has become a segment and reflection of modern society with all its respectabilities,

entrenched interests, prejudices and hypocrisies, only in a somewhat more antiquated manner, and often also in a vulgar bourgeois way,[1] theology has 'nearly lost the consciousness that the object of Christian faith and thought, the Gospel, is primarily announcement, proclamation of salvation and victory in the name of God and not in the name of cultural purposes or ideals.'[2] The target is Hocking's reinterpretation of Christian mission as the fostering of interreligious cooperation against secularism. For Kraemer, this so radically recasts mission that it ceases to be recognisably Christian. Second, even when a more traditional understanding of mission is preserved, the confusion remains because 'the clue of the situation [is found] in adjustment to the dominant philosophies and demands of the hour.'[3] Opposed here are those who see Christianity fulfilling the values inherent in the great world religions. As far as Kraemer is concerned, both confuse the Christian Church with western culture and Christian mission with the spiritual expression of its advancement.

Instead of this cultural idealism, he founds Christian mission, and accordingly the relationship of Christianity to other religions, on a realism of a far deeper quality. Rather than universal truth, religious or moral philosophy, even theology, Kraemer opts for 'the tale of God's self-disclosure and of the disclosure of the genuine condition of man and the world in the light of the divine Self-disclosure....'[4] The Bible is not simply classic literature and even less 'a tale about the pilgrimage of the human soul towards God,' but the record of God's self-disclosing activity.[5] Why choose this text? 'It is a simple fact that this book is the only real source we have for that peculiar type of religious life, that has its historic centre in the appearance of Jesus Christ on the stage of the world.'[6] Of the two issues here to be unpacked, the first is the institution of a final authority in matters of doctrine, a point of orientation for the Church's faith and practice: the problem of

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1 . CM, p. 32.

2 . CM, p. 32.

3 . CM, p. 32.

4 . CM, p. 299.

5 . AF, p. 2.

6 . RCF, pp. 237 - 238.

canon.[7] From a strictly historical perspective, it may be objected that this was both arbitrary and accidental. This is precisely all an historian can say, replies Kraemer, except that while arbitrary, it was of enormous significance. Nevertheless, 'A member of the Christian Church cannot and ought not to be satisfied with this external judgment. Standing in the stream of the fellowship of believers, he sees in this act not only a right intuition, but the guidance of the Holy Spirit.'[8] Kraemer does not see the Bible's authority deriving from its recognition by the Church, but argues that in it, the Church has recognised the testimony to God's self-disclosing acts culminating in Jesus Christ. Thus, the second issue is the centrality of christology for theological reflection.[9] The revelation of God in Christ is *sui generis*. Without denying revelation outside Christ, Kraemer affirms that for the Christian, the revelation in Christ is the criterion by which all claims to revelation are to be judged.[10] The Bible is normative because its authority, recognised by the Church, derives from its recording of God's revelation, the climax of which is Jesus Christ.[11]

In order to discern the nature of the Church and its mission to the world, one must be founded on the only authority to which the Church can be held accountable: the revelation of God in Christ as recorded in the Bible. This is biblical realism. Still, this might suggest that an individual alone stands on this foundation. For Kraemer however, proper discernment also requires

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7 . Kraemer writes, 'The Church, in establishing the Canon of the Bible, acted out of the right intuition that it needed, in the welter of interpretation and definitions of the various aspects of the Faith which accompanied her growth and expansion, a norm above itself and the developing diversities of doctrinal definitions. The apostolic *kerygma* about the history of salvation, its meaning and purpose, being the real basis of the Church, in forming the Biblical Canon it declared the Apostolic Tradition to be her norm for the present and the future, the standard of reference and of spiritual orientation for her faith and life.' RCF, p. 266.

8 . RCF, pp. 276 - 277.

9 . Christology is central 'from the point of view of the Christian thinker, who works on what for him is the basic assumption, i.e. that Jesus Christ is *the* Way, *the* Truth and *the* Life, by whom alone man comes to the Father, and by whose light alone all problems can be seen in their proper perspective.... Jesus Christ is the centre of history, and... therefore the religious history of man before and after Him, till the end of history, can only be rightly understood in Him. He is God's decisive and final act of self-disclosure or revelation, and in Him all divine revelation past, present, and future, has its proper criterion.' RCF, p. 237.

10 . CM, pp. 126 - 127.

11 . CM, p. 70.

situation within the Church - the structure which has been erected on the biblical foundation.[12] The Church is essentially a divine-human society: founded on the revelation of God and erected by humans in history. From the divine perspective, it is unique in the world and among the religions because it is 'a fellowship rooted in God and His divine redemptive order, and therefore committed to the service and salvation of the world....'[13] Uniqueness derives from its commission to be 'a bearer of witness to God and his decisive acts and purposes.'[14] Regardless of its position in history, the Church is an apostolic body called to testify to what God has done in Christ. Yet, 'it cannot be defined only in terms of its essential nature. It does not exist in a vacuum but is also a part of this world, operating through our limited human instrumentality and tormented by our sins. It lives and functions in definite times and places, and is composed of human beings with their peculiar temperament and cultural predispositions.'[15] From the human perspective, the Church has also 'to be viewed largely as a specimen of human effort in the field of religion, and therefore to be brought into line with the other expressions of human spiritual life.'[16] This divine-human dialectic is inevitable for 'it is impossible to keep the essence of our religion alive unless it works through some human institution.'[17]

To summarise: biblical realism holds that the relationship of the Church to the world, and accordingly to its religions, is properly discerned only when the inquirer is deliberately and

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12 . He writes, 'religion and Church in the essentially Christian sense of the words are no affirmations or apprehensions of absolute values, but express an act of trust and self-committal to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church has in God its origin and its centre.... the *sui generis* character of the Church... consists in the fact that Jesus Christ is its primal and ultimate King and Lord, whose authority transcends and conditions all other authority and loyalty. The fact of being governed by such a Head and of being obliged to obey Him above all other authorities, determines the unique character of the Church. From this fact is derived its priestly and prophetic character as being at the same time the servant and the critic of the world and all its spheres of life.' CM, p. 417.

13 . CM, p. 30.

14 . CM, p. 2.

15 . CM, p. 419.

16 . CM, p. 285.

17 . CM, p. 290. Moreover its acknowledgement can be a source of renewal: 'The empirical Church has to confront itself constantly with this mystery of its divinely-willed fellowship, and be cleansed and inspired by it in order to realize a kind of fellowship in the world that has its roots in eternity, and thereby manifests a deeper quality than any form of fellowship can.' CM, p. 418.

explicitly situated within 'the realm of the Christian revelation.'[18] The foundation is the Bible, and its climax, the narrative of Jesus Christ. The Christian Church is built upon this foundation, testifies to it and stands under its judgment. It this foundation is rejected for another, 'hopeless confusion' is the only result.[19] Thus, biblical realism attempts to situate the theologian explicitly within the tradition through which he or she comes to the problem of other religions. 'The seriousness of true religion,' Kraemer concludes, 'demands that one shall be one's true religious self.'[20]

The second theme, the totalitarian approach, responds to essentialist phenomenologies of religion. The Christian Message and 'Continuity or Discontinuity,' centre on two positions with which the reader is already familiar. In one, Christianity fulfils the religions while the other locates a transcendental source behind them including Christianity.[21] To these, Religion and the Christian Faith adds naturalist phenomenologies which find 'the generating factors of religions in some region of man's consciousness, a certain psychological attitude or social necessity, a lack of adequate knowledge of the world.'[22] *Prima facie*, the positions are very different. For the first, Christianity perfects the highest and best of the rest; for the second it is one among equals; and for the third, Christianity is the highest and last of many mistakes. Nevertheless, all three posit an essence behind religions which grades them. For Kraemer, essentialism in any form is an artificial abstraction which fails to take seriously the plurality and diversity of religious beliefs and practices. He writes, 'concretely there is no such thing as religion in the singular. There is only a multitude of religions.'[23] Essentialism says either too little or too much about the actual religions it seeks to place. Either it so reduces particular beliefs and practices to fit the universal essence that little worth investigation is left (it is precisely the particularities which interest him in the first place) or it so stresses one feature common to many religions that it ignores others where it is marginal or

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18 . AF, p. 7.

19 . AF, p. 9.

20 . Hendrik Kraemer, World Cultures and World Religions: The Coming Dialogue, (London: Lutterworth, 1960), p. 356.

21 . See CM, pp. 111 - 113, and AF, pp. 1 - 7.

22 . RCF, p. 54.

23 . RCF, p. 73.

absent.[24] 'All religions,' Kraemer insists, 'if taken seriously according to their true soul and body, are distorted and misrepresented when stretched on the Procrustean bed of some general Idea of Religion.'[25]

This assessment is confirmed by the constant disagreement over what comprises this religious essence.[26] Consider 'Comparative Religion' which 'constructs for the religions a hierarchical scale, according to their content and truth-value, from "lower" to "higher" and even "highest"... religions.'[27] Grading religions not according to revelation, but philosophical thinking, it 'claimed to develop the right doctrine of the Essence of Religions which is present in all religions. These religions can then be demonstrated as more or less imperfect embodiments of it.... The concept of the Essence of Religion, as its secret and ultimate standard of reference was often consciously opposed to revelation.'[28] Now, however, the discipline has bifurcated into opposing transcendental and naturalist approaches which not only disagree with each other, but also fail to speak with one voice. Members of the former follow the different positions of, for example, Schleiermacher, Kant and Otto while those of the latter embrace the arguments of, for instance, Durkheim, Freud, and Feuerbach.[29] Kraemer argues that the disagreement is rooted in fundamentally incommensurable starting-points: if the premises differ, it is no wonder that the

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24. He writes, 'All general definitions of religion either reduce them to such a kind of common denominator that little is left, as, for instance, recognition of one or more higher powers entitled to obedience and worship, or they reflect some aspect of the religious quality in human life, which is undeniable but not necessarily central or even peripheral in many of the religions.... The more one penetrates different religions and tries to understand them in their total peculiar entity, the more one sees that they are worlds in themselves, with their own centres, axes, and structures, not reducible to each other or to a common denominator which expresses their inner core and makes them all translucent.' RCF, p. 76.

25. RCF, p. 77.

26. 'The patent fact,' Kraemer declares, '... is that there is no unanimity as to what the Essence of Religion is.... [There] can be none because every philosophical approach rests ultimately on an attitude and a decision as to what to think about man and his attitude in relation to the Beyond, *which cannot be cogently and universally demonstrated.* Hence a universally and compellingly valid concept of the "Essence of Religion" is not to be expected. Here again we have to accept our human condition, which requires that the search for scientific and metaphysical truth will go on as a spiritual contest - full of risks and precious results, to be sure - and not as a march towards intellectual unanimity.' RCF, p. 60.

27. RCF, p. 58.

28. RCF, p. 59.

29. RCF, pp. 41 - 71.

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conclusions do also.[30] Consequently, he follows his teacher, W. Brede Kristensen, in proclaiming that, 'the only way to understand these religions and to be just to them is to take them according to their peculiar fundamental motives and meaning.'[31] Thus, the totalitarian approach takes seriously the particularity of religious beliefs and practices as they arise in concrete situations. Rejecting the separation of secular from sacred,[32] it contends that a sympathetic understanding of non-Christian or non-Western religious beliefs and practices rests on perceiving both great and so-called 'primitive' religions not as philosophical speculations, but as *totalities* encompassing epistemology, ethics and aesthetics, extending to include community and culture.[33] This argument has been generally supported by third world theologians, both Christian and other.[34]

As totalities encompassing knowledge, morals, and art, religions offer complete and coherent ways of interpreting humanity's place within the cosmos. While many areas may overlap (in organisational details, theological and philosophical pronouncements, ethical practices, etc.), at

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30 . This is not an endorsement of relativism or subjectivism, but an assessment of the human condition which Kraemer believes will guard against just such extremes. He writes, 'Every philosophy, every way of thinking, every way of research, starts with a fundamental assumption and attitude about God, man and the world. One may also call it a faith, a decision. At any rate, there is a starting-point of which no account is given. This belongs to our human condition, happily preventing man from becoming, in the absolute sense of the word, a mere onlooker, a mere observing intellect outside.

'In saying this, we are far from recommending, or defending, an unbridled subjectivity or putting all degrees of subjectivity on the same level. On the contrary, what we need is the clear recognition of the fact that, as scientific investigators also, we are always partly conditioned by the world in which we have our roots, and in the selecting and marshalling of facts we are partly led by our "subjectivity". To recognize this is and to guard against it is the best way to reduce it to the smallest possible proportions.' RCF, pp. 46 - 47.

31 . CM, pp. 62 - 63.

32 . RCF, p. 38.

33 . He writes, 'the non-Christian religions are not merely sets of speculative ideas about the eternal destiny of man.... [They are] all-inclusive systems and theories of life, rooted in a religious basis, and therefore at the same time embrace a system of culture and civilization and a definite structure of society and state. To pronounce from the stand-point of the Christian faith upon our attitude towards the non-Christian religions necessarily means to pronounce upon the relation of the Christian faith to culture, state, society - in short, to the world and its spheres of life.' CM, p. 102.

34 . Eleanor Jackson, Letter to the author, 19 February, 1996. For example, in a note to Lesslie Newbigin on this issue, Brahmin scholar Chaturvedi Badrinath wrote, 'If I had been at Tambaram, I would have been on the side of Kraemer.' Lesslie Newbigin, Letter to the author, February 9, 1996. See also, Chaturvedi Badrinath, 'The Labyrinth: A history of the Western encounter with India,' (unpublished manuscript, 1981, in the hands of Dr Eleanor Jackson) pp. 441 - 535. I am grateful both to Bishop Newbigin and to Dr Jackson for this reference.

bottom religions are marked by different experiences, emphases, and most importantly, starting-points. Also, just as talk of religious 'values' is rejected on the theological ground of biblical realism, it is again on phenomenological grounds here. To speak of 'values' is to speak in terms according to which, all religions exhibit tendencies toward the sublime and the aberrant.[35] All can point to significant cultural achievements, rich philosophical traditions, and satisfying spiritual experiences. Talk of resemblances and values cannot conceal the 'incommensurable peculiarity of the many religions.'[36]

As totalities which do not respect the secular/sacred distinction, religions are fundamentally incommensurable and complete apprehensions of the totality of existence. When questions interpretation arise, it is accordingly unsurprising to find Kraemer insisting that one cannot abstract a particular doctrine or practice from its religio-cultural matrix to treat it in isolation and expect accuracy. It is both inappropriate and inaccurate simply to equate surface similarities,[37] for 'every religion is an indivisible... unity of existential apprehension. It is not a series tenets, dogmas, prescriptions, institutions, practices, that can be taken one by one as independent items of religious life, conception or organization, and that can arbitrarily be compared with, and somehow related to, and grafted upon the similar item of another religion.'[38] In response to the position of a universal essence to grade particular religions, Kraemer insists that they

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35 . Thus of Hinduism, he can say, 'it is indeed a fact that in Hinduism, many people have found salvation and satisfaction.' RCF, p. 84.

36 . RCF, p. 78.

37 . He writes, 'Buddhism and Christianity are both, in a very emphatic way, religions of salvation.... Yet, however sublime these conceptions may be, both cannot be true. The Buddhist salvation means salvation from existence as such, because existence is suffering, which is necessarily evil. In Christianity it means salvation from sin. Another example: It is impossible to equate as one and the same Reality the God and father of Jesus Christ and the unconditioned and pure essence of the Vedanta. Sublime and profound of conception they are both, but either one of them is true, or neither. Therefore the claim of adherents of non-Christian religions, which impresses certain Christian theologians and missionaries very much, namely that these religions lead people often into a deep and satisfying religious experience, may be wholly justified; but yet this undeniable fact does not guarantee that there is Truth or the same Truth in them. It is philosophically superficial to equate the psychic experience of satisfaction with the certainty that it is therefore true, or is related to realities which are true.' RCF, p. 85.

38 . CM, p. 135. He continues, 'Every religion is a living, indivisible unity. Every part of it - a dogma, a rite, a myth, an institution, a cult - is so vitally related to the whole that it can never be understood in its real function, significance and tendency, as these occur in the reality of life, without keeping constantly in mind the vast and living unity of existential apprehension in which this part moves and has its being.'

encompass all areas of life and are internally complete and coherent. They therefore cannot be analysed as collections of doctrines, symbols, or practices; rather, these must be interpreted in relation to the organic whole.

Biblical realism and the totalitarian approach together address the problem of passing judgment on the religions. For Kraemer, to search for a common core or set of universal and neutral criteria providing a vantage-point for 'legitimate' evaluation is futile theologically because this submits the Christian faith to a foreign criterion, subjugating the 'Wisdom of God' to the 'foolishness of humanity.'[39] It is therefore irrelevant whether or not biblical realism is accepted as a legitimate authority by those outside the Christian faith.[40] Phenomenologically, as apprehensions of the totality of existence, religions are founded upon their own ultimate, unprovable presuppositions; there is no universal foundation, only rival claims to finality.[41] Inevitably, 'Christian revelation places itself over against the many efforts to apprehend the totality of existence. It asserts itself as the record of God's self-disclosing and recreating revelation in Jesus Christ, as an apprehension of existence that revolves around the poles of divine judgment and divine salvation....'[42]

The third theme, 'adaptation,' seems to introduce an element of discontinuity with previous themes for it articulates the possibility of translating the gospel into the terms of another religious totality. As was shown in Chapter 3, Kraemer's years of cross-cultural experience engendered concern that members of 'younger Churches' be able to express faithfully their Christian beliefs in their own language and culture rather than regurgitating the vocabulary of Western missionaries.

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39 . CM, pp. 326 - 327.

40 . He writes, 'The theological starting-point therefore is revelation, which is basically different from religious intuition or divination, and which is not a product of the human religious consciousness, because according to Biblical religion, it enters history in the form of divine words and acts. Revelation of God, if taken in the real sense, is divine self-disclosure, issuing from divine initiative. This, by the nature of the case, can only be motivated by itself. The sole possible response to it is, therefore, that of faith, not a justification of reason; although reason can render Christianity help in understanding it, without believing it. Without faith, the Biblical thesis of revelation will generally be considered a fiction, an illusion, a pretence, or a useful error.' RCF, pp. 145 - 146.

41 . AF, p. 8.

42 . CM, pp. 113 - 114.

On one hand, adaptation opposes a simplistic assimilation of the Christian message with religious ideas of one's non-Christian past by presupposing 'a revolution, a total rupture with one's religious past... [a] conversion in the deepest sense of the word.'[43] Similarly, it rejects an equally naive rejection of former religious life. Rather, adaptation requires Christian belief to be expressed both in terms of and in conflict with non-Christian religions.[44] Models of such adaptation abound in the Bible and Christian history. The New Testament, the 'expression of the revelation in its concrete conflict and intermingling with the Jewish and Hellenistic world of religion and civilization,... [confirms] that the religion of revelation stands in revolutionary contrast to this concrete Jewish and Hellenistic world, but at the same time freely uses its ideas and thought-forms to express itself, and so Christian truth experiences its first incarnation.'[45] Further, the Christian message has taken on various incarnations throughout history, whether in Augustine's philosophy of history, or medieval scholasticism, or contemporary Protestantism.[46] This is not to say that such incarnations are (ever) infallible, but that

> in principle and for reasons of history, new incarnations and adaptations of Christianity in the concrete Asiatic and African settings are natural and legitimate. Christianity never fell and never can fall into a religious, cultural and social vacuum, and therefore must find in its various environments an intellectual, emotional and institutional expression that in its psychological and social aspects can reasonably be called an expression and not an impediment or inhibition.[47]

Thus, adaptation attempts to overcome the 'foreignness of Christianity' without recasting it as yet another indigenous philosophy of life.

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43 . CM, p. 308.

44 . Thus, Kraemer writes, 'Adaptation in the deepest sense does not mean to assimilate the cardinal facts of the revelation in Christ as much as possible to fundamental religious ideas and tastes of the pre-Christian past, but to *express* these facts by wrestling with them concretely, and so to present the Christian truth and reveal at the same time the intrinsic inadequacy of man's religious efforts for the solution of his crucial religious and moral problems.' CM, p. 308.

45 . CM, p. 312.

46 . Kraemer writes, 'In the course of its history, Christian theology has always freely employed the different thought-patterns that were available, such as Platonic and Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic-coloured Aristotelian philosophy. This was natural, because all speaking to man must be done in his language and in the terminologies and thought-patters he understands.... There is, hence, no valid objection to the deliberate use of the rich religious and philosophical terminology of the great non-Christian religious civilizations, whether the Hindu, the Buddhist, or the Confucian. The real problem is not their use,... but *how* to use them.' CM, pp. 325 - 326.

47 . CM, p. 313.

At least as it was being preached in Asia and Africa in the first half of this century, the Christian message was coloured by the theological and personal histories of the Western missionaries proclaiming it. Such colouring, albeit inevitable, was often miscast as part of the unique and final character of the gospel.[48] In Kraemer's view, this only serves to make Christianity more foreign to adherents of other religions. Nevertheless, the opposite extreme, epitomised by Hocking and the fulfilment theologians, is also to be avoided. The gospel is neither a species of the essence of Religion nor the fulfilment of pre-Christian longings and cannot, therefore, be presented as such. To do so is to rob the message of its uniqueness. In content and form Christianity is inevitably foreign. 'If one adequately realizes this foreignness, which attaches inevitably to Christianity for all these reasons, independently of the will or the working of modern missions, one becomes vividly aware of the vital importance of the problem of adaptation.'[49]

It is not an academic exercise, but 'the genuine translation of Christianity into indigenous terms so that its relevance to... concrete situations becomes evident.'[50] Institutional experiments in cultural, intellectual and theological synthesis between the Christian message and non-Christian systems are necessarily artificial and therefore, rarely lasting. Likewise, an *a priori*, ahistorical, and acritical emphasis on the contrast between the gospel and indigenous cultures denies its universality. Kraemer mediates between these extremes, writing, 'It is not a matter of partisanship in bridge-building or contrast-making, but, by concentration on the living Christian truth of Biblical realism, and on its living expression, of finding out where to build bridges and where to emphasize contrasts.'[51] True adaptation, a biblical realistic, fully indigenous expression of Christian belief, will arise only slowly and always within actual cross-cultural and/or interreligious encounters.[52] He concludes,

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48 . CM, pp. 316 - 317.

49 . CM, p. 314.

50 . CM, p. 323.

51 . CM, p. 323.

52 . Kraemer writes, 'we have repeatedly stressed how rich and varied are the ways in which man... has tried to give expression to his religious needs and aspirations, in theology, in worship, in art, in forms of organization, in different ways of presentation.... It is not at all important that they do not fit in with our Protestant traditions and natural reactions, but it is very important to ask in the light of Biblical realism how they can function so as to foster pure and vigorous Christian life.' CM, pp. 324 - 325.

The great need... is to be constantly alive to the necessity that the religious and philosophical heritage should be used to "tell" what Christian truth really is, and not to amalgamate elements of it as harmoniously as possible with this heritage. The tendency to do the latter is very strong. The real programme is not to *relate* the thought of Christianity to the thought of Indian or China or another civilization, but to *express* it through these different heritages, and then see whether this in various cases may be called relating or not. This attitude alone guarantees a virtual contact and wrestling both with Christian truth and also with the religious and philosophical heritage.[53]

Left here, adaptation appears to introduce a fundamental inconsistency in Kraemer's position. The totalitarian approach regards religious totalities as fundamentally complete and coherent apprehensions of existence, and, coupled with biblical realism, affirms internal criteria authorising judgments about the beliefs and practices of other communities. Consequently, it would appear that between religious totalities rational debate on basic issues is impossible;[54] and, given that each totality shapes its own standpoint according to its own criteria, it would further seem that translation from the language of one to that of another is also impossible.[55] On one hand, the first two themes seem to require the incommensurability of religious communities. On the other, by arguing that the Christian message can be translated into the terminology of another religious totality in a manner which is both faithful to the message and understandable (this is not to say agreeable) to the adherents of the other religion, adaptation presumes the opposite. Is Kraemer's position finally inconsistent?

With this question in mind, let us consider the final theme: 'the point of contact' between Christian revelation and non-Christian religions. Like Barth, Kraemer rejects traditional distinctions between general and special revelation for risking 'the danger of making human religious experience and effort a preamble of faith, which would imply making the realm of

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53 . CM, p. 328.

54 . In Alasdair MacIntyre's words, 'The adherents of conflicting tendencies within a tradition may still share enough in the way of fundamental belief to conduct such debate, but the protagonists of rival traditions will be precluded at any fundamental level, not only from justifying their views to the members of any rival tradition, but even from learning from them how to modify their own tradition in a radical way.' MacIntyre, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, p. 348.

55 . Again, MacIntyre writes: 'A social universe composed exclusively of rival traditions, so it may seem, will be one in which there are a number of contending, incompatible, but only partially and inadequately communicating, overall views of that universe, each tradition within which is unable to justify its claims over against those of its rivals except to those who already accept them.' MacIntyre, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, p. 348.

revelation and grace continuous to the realm of human religious effort.'[56] Yet, he also suspects that Barth's own rejection suffers the 'dreary fate of sterile intellectualism.'[57] For Kraemer, both to affirm and to deny that all people shared a limited knowledge of God as the basis for revelation treats it as a static object rather than the dynamic movement of God toward humanity.[58] By refusing to define how or where it may or may not occur, Kraemer presents revelation not as a thing to be apprehended, but an event which is always and everywhere taking place.

This does not affirm all 'general' revelatory claims,[59] for '"general revelation" can only be effectually discovered in the light of the "special revelation."'[60] He thus reintroduces the *sui generis* nature of the revelation in Christ,[61] writing, 'Whosoever by God's grace has some moderate understanding of the all inclusive comparison of God and of Christ rejoices over every evidence of divine working and revelation that may be found in the non-Christian world. No man, and certainly no Christian, can claim the power or the right to limit God's revelatory working.'[62] Revelation is not a matter of *a priori* judgments and descriptions, but an event discerned *a posteriori* in the light of the revelation in Christ. Hence both traditional concepts of general revelation and Barth's denial are but different ways prejudging the question. To 'indicate systematically and concretely where God revealed Himself and wrestled and wrestles with man in the non-Christian religions is not feasible. Every effort to do so is hazardous. Personal concrete experience, the meeting of spirit *with spirit* and illumined divination can alone lead on the right track.'[63]

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56 . CM, p. 120.

57 . CM, p. 120.

58 . CM, p. 119.

59 . He writes, 'The wholesale talking about all religions being the product of revelation results, in fact, either in theological myopia or in a practical relativism or in an indifferentism in regard to truth.' RCF, p. 349.

60 . CM, p. 125.

61 . He writes, 'there are manifestations in this religious and spiritual life and witness in the realm outside the revelation of Christ that are acknowledged as evidence of God's uninterrupted concern and of His travailing with man.... Therefore, all religion is meaningful in some sense, as a dim response or as a refusal towards God's working.' RCF, pp. 340 - 341.

62 . CM, p. 122.

63 . CM, p. 127.

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It is therefore legitimate and necessary to expect points of contact first because humans, irrespective of their religion and in spite of their sin, are God's creatures. 'This tragic contradictory position is [man's] deepest problem and testifies to his indestructible relatedness to God. The quest for God, even when man tries to kill it in himself, is the perennially disturbing and central problem of man. Therefore, there is here undeniably a point of contact for the Message of the Gospel.'[64] Second, they are further affirmed in the Incarnation. 'If there is any meaning in it, it means that God wants, even passionately wants, contact with man, and thus through the act of His revelation shows His belief in the possibility of contact.'[65] Finally, points of contact are presumed by cross-cultural missions; without them, the gospel is beyond comprehension and communication. 'The apostolic nature of God's revelation in Christ pre-supposes it. No human reasoning can wipe this out, unless it wants to make the Gospel void and meaningless.'[66]

Still, Kraemer is reluctant to speak of them for fear of leading to 'the delusion of building too great hopes on our methods; that of expecting success surely to come from our psychological and theological approaches or our dogmatic correctness or liberalism; that of taking the term "point of contact" in the sense of an idea or disposition in the religious consciousness from which faith and conversion to Christ and His gifts and demands can be developed.'[67] This mistakenly assumes that a better understanding of 'points of contact' results in more successful missionary activity and misunderstands them as the agents of conversions to Christianity. For Kraemer, this resembles soteriological synergism - the cooperation of grace and works in salvation - and as a Reformed theologian, he reacts against it. For him, 'The sole *agent* of real faith in Christ is the Holy Spirit'.[68]

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64 . CM, p. 130.

65 . CM, p. 131.

66 . CM, p. 131.

67 . CM, p. 132.

68 . CM, p. 132. This reluctance in turn renders him sympathetic to the strong denial of points of contact as found in the early Barth. And yet, as was noted in Chapter 4, Kraemer concludes that on this point, Barth is too extreme. Siding with Brunner, Kraemer writes 'Out of exclusive zeal for the right contention that God and not man himself in any sense whatever is Saviour of the world, [Barth] disregards what really is at stake in the problem of the "point of contact"; that is to say, the fact that man can respond to the call of God and consequently is held responsible for his doing so or not.' CM, p. 133.

Combining recognition and reluctance culminates in a dialectical understanding. In response to the question, Where are points of contact to be found?, Kraemer replies both nowhere and everywhere. Consider first the negative pole. 'Somehow the conviction is alive that it is possible and feasible to produce for every religions a sort of catalogue of points of contact.... based on the similarities between Christianity and the non-Christian religions'.[69] This compilation is impossible first because 'religion is nowhere in the world an assortment of spiritual commodities, that can be compared as shoes or neck-ties.'[70] To approach religions in such a manner is to forget that every doctrine, symbol and rite is vitally related to the totality of concrete beliefs and practices and cannot be understood in abstraction from it. While this may be necessary to gain an intellectual command of the material, as 'a guide for the adequate apprehension of religion as a living and thriving reality, it is less than useless.'[71] Because discerning points of contact takes place in living cultures with thriving religious lives, the 'many attempts... to build up various points of contact with different religions [which] proceed on this intellectualist and analytical line of approach,' which in itself has a legitimate purpose, disregards 'the all decisive point in the whole matter' entirely.[72] One cannot know the real force, value and function of a religious claim or ritual without considering its relationship to the 'fundamental existential apprehension of the totality of life which dominates this whole religion.'[73] For these reasons, Kraemer can say with Barth, there is no point of contact.

Nevertheless, this implies 'the measuring of these religions with the rod of current Christian dogmatism and dogma. That would be one of the worst forms of intellectualism.'[74] Consider now the positive pole: 'there is only one point of contact, and if that one point really exists, then there are many points of contact. This one point of contact is the disposition and attitude of the missionary.'[75] The missionary - as the person engaged in cross-cultural communication of the

69 . CM, p. 134.

70 . CM, pp. 134 - 135.

71 . CM, p. 135.

72 . CM, p. 136.

73 . CM, p. 136.

74 . CM, p. 139.

75 . CM, p. 140.

gospel - needs 'an untiring and genuine interest in the religion, the ideas, the sentiments, the institution, in the whole range of life of the people among whom one works, *for Christ's sake and for the sake of those people*.'[76] Points of contact between the Christian revelation and the religions will be found in concrete situations, as people endeavour to adapt the Gospel to their cultures. On this more ad hoc, pragmatic approach, there are many points of contact.

Points of contact do not arise within the encounter of conflicting religious systems,[77] but in the everyday encounters between people.[78] On one hand, there 'is no point of contact. There is theologically speaking, no point of contact between the world of God's Righteousness and Wisdom in Christ, and man's [*adikia*], righteousness, and wisdom, whatever it may be. Only the Holy Spirit can open the eyes of God's world. Understanding and accepting the gospel means conversion....' While on the other, there 'are points of contact. In saying this, no deviation whatever from the first thesis is implied. We are simply in a different dimension, namely that of communication, which entails two capital things in the reality of life understood as intercourse with fellow beings of different spiritual worlds - fellow beings for whom we are responsible and for whom we know that Christ came also.'[79] When so articulated, it becomes clear that the dialectical point of contact parallels and resolves the alleged inconsistency between the incommensurability implied by biblical realism and the totalitarian approach and commensurability presumed by adaptation. Kraemer's position, therefore, is not finally inconsistent.

6.2 Theological Criticisms

The criticisms launched against Kraemer's position as summarised above can be separated into theological and phenomenological ones. This section addresses the former. Of the five considered, the first misunderstands his position entirely while the remaining four are more or less

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76 . CM, p. 140.

77 . Kraemer writes 'When the word approach is taken in the sense of Christianity as a total religious system approaching the non-Christian religions as total religious systems, there is only difference and antithesis, and this must be so because they are radically different.' CM, p. 300.

78 . He continues, 'Yet although fundamentally speaking there is no point of contact, in practice the religious needs and aspirations that are embedded in these great religious systems often offer, of course, splendid opportunities of practical *human* contact.' CM, p. 300.

79 . RCF, pp. 363 - 364.

accurate. Nevertheless, I counter that these consistently fail to take into account one or more of the following: Kraemer's historical context, his habit of rhetorical over-emphasis, and the more subtle articulation of later work and accordingly end up attacking an extreme which he avoids.

The first criticism takes issue with Kraemer's use of the Bible: 'Historical studies have made us so aware of the nature of the biblical material and how it has come to us that Kraemer's reliance on the Bible, in his particular form, now seems over-simple and naive.'[80] The unsophisticated and even stubborn nature of biblical realism is particularly evident in its orthodox affirmation of Incarnation. Bluntly put, 'the argument of those who apply the historical-critical method rigorously to the New Testament is that it may reveal the interpretation of the figure of Jesus as the unique Incarnation of God as a belief which was appropriate to the early centuries of Christianity but nor necessarily binding in the modern world.'[81] Consider for example, the questions posed by Paul Knitter concerning Incarnational language: Is it 'part of the *essential message* of the New Testament or does it belong to the *medium* used to get that message across? Further, is it *philosophical* language about the structures of the relationship between the infinite and the finite, meant to *negate* all relationships to the divine apart from Christ? Or is it *confessional* language meant to affirm the importance of what God had done in Jesus?'[82] Kraemer cannot account for the historically conditioned nature of the Bible for he 'depends too heavily upon a literal reading of the biblical texts.... [He] interprets God as operating in the world in a limited historical, geographical and cultural context.'[83] Dependent on a precritical and naive hermeneutic, he cannot withstand biblical criticism; the historically, geographically and contextually bound biblical documents cannot provide the foundation his position requires.

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80 . Race, <u>Christians and Religious Pluralism</u>, p. 30.

81 . Race, <u>Christians and Religious Pluralism</u>, p. 33.

82 . Knitter, <u>No Other Name?</u>, pp. 92 - 93.

83 . Chester Gillis, <u>Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology</u>, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), p. 168. Earlier, he wrote, 'critical exegesis of New Testament texts that properly situates them within their social and historical context will not support an exclusivist disposition. Jesus' words are not the literal speech of Jesus, and the text from Acts in which an exclusive claim is a legitimate tool for the primitive Church's evangelization cannot be supported outside its original missionary context.... The primitive Church was attempting to establish itself and attract converts. What more definitive claim could the Church make than to claim its central figure was the exclusive conduit to God? This exclusivity gave impetus to the missionary thrust of the early Church.' pp. 19 - 20.

This criticism is easily dismissed first of all because it is marked by a fundamental ignorance of Kraemer's understanding of Scripture. Even a cursory glance at his writings indicates that he welcomes the findings of critical biblical scholarship. Consider these words:

> Thanks to the remarkable results of modern Biblical research our possibilities of faithful interpretation (of various elements of the Biblical literature as well as of these elements in the context of the whole of the Bible) have enormously increased. These results of modern Biblical research have set us freer on the one hand, and on the other hand have taught us that we should be very serious in accepting the fact that the Bible speaks the Word of God in definite historical situations and wholly by means and in terms which were the products of this situation.[84]

He does not found biblical realism upon rigidly literalist reading of Scripture, but refers to the 'human and in many ways historically conditioned' nature of the Bible.[85] As the preceding quotation indicates, Kraemer's view of Scripture is far closer to Frei's postcritical hermeneutic than any precritical one and therefore sidesteps the criticism. Still, more can be said for biblical realism and critical hermeneutics cannot conflict for they wrestle with two distinct types of questions. Knitter's questions cited above for instance, imply that biblical criticism discloses the pre-textual essential message by abstracting the kernel of meaning from the husk of human accretions in the medium.[86] In my exposition of Frei, such an approach to the Bible was shown to be deeply problematic and it is not necessary to recapitulate his argument here.[87] It is enough to say that it relocates the meaning and authority of the text from its received form to 'what actually happened.' Just so, 'What is authoritative is not the text, but the "facts" behind the text as reconstructed by the

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84 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 267.

85 . <u>AF</u>, p. 2.

86 . Hick's critique of orthodox christology provides a good example of this procedure. For him, phrases such as 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30) and 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:6) 'are not the pronouncements of the historical Jesus but words put into his mouth some sixty or seventy years later by a Christian writer expressing the theology that had developed in his part of the expanding Church.' Also, by freeing the love-language of the disciples from the shackles of Greek metaphysics, Hick reveals that the words do not claim ontological divinity for Jesus, but express that in and through him, the disciples had experienced the love of God. These facts uncovered behind the biblical texts undercut traditional Christological, Trinitarian and Atonement doctrines and with them, 'Ptolemaic' approaches to non-Christian religions. See Hick, 'A Pluralist View,' p. 53; 'Jesus and the World Religions,' in <u>MGI</u>, pp. 167 - 185; 'The Logic of God Incarnate,' in <u>DQ</u>, pp. 58 - 76, <u>GUF</u>, pp. 165 - 179, <u>GMN</u>, pp. 72 - 75; and <u>MeGI</u>.

87 . See 5.2.

historian.[88]   The meaning of the Bible is sundered from its literary form for the 'facts' are set within 'a new interpretative framework provided by the biblical scholar.   Thus, the historicist approach allows the Bible to speak only within the limits of the assumptions about the nature of history brought by the interpreter of the text.[89]   Worse, by so shifting the locus of authority, historical criticism is forced to answer questions it cannot address.   Properly employed, it discerns how the biblical texts have come to their present form, addressing (among others) issues of authorship, redaction, and historical context.   It cannot account for basic theological problems of authority, canonicity and revelation because it is not designed so to do.

Biblical realism, on the other hand, wrestles precisely with these dilemmas.   The question which concerns Kraemer, *Why* has *this text* come to be?, is theologically prior to the historian's *How* have *these texts* come to be?   Consequently, he can accept on the one hand the findings of biblical criticism and affirm on the other the authority of Scripture as the revelation of the word of God.   He writes,

> The Bible is a book which, being composed of many writings produced over a range of more than a thousand years, and stemming from authors who were mostly ignorant of each other, reflects various historical, cultural and religious situations.   Only when the collections gathered under the names Old and New Testament gradually became canonized, and constituted one book did it begin its career as a solid authoritative unity. It did not originate as one book, but as a collection of independent productions which in part were never intended to become parts of a "Sacred Book".   The remarkable thing about it is that, from the time it was made into one book, it not only functioned as one book, because the Church's canonization made it so, but that, independently of this canonization, it proved to have on the whole an intrinsic unity, because, in spite of its multiform composition, it was held together by its great theme: God, the Creator, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the God of the Covenant with Israel, His chosen people; God, the Creator and Redeemer through His Son Jesus Christ, who entrusts His "people", the *ekklesia*, to the guidance of His Holy Spirit; God the Consummatory, who leads His world towards His end, which is the full manifestation of His Kingdom.   Both this intrinsic unity, which witnesses consistently to a wholly transcendental conditioning of the book in all its aspects, and the multiform historical conditioning of the book in its many parts, must be seriously kept in mind if the material is to be used in the right way.[90]

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88 .   Daniel Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 44.

89 .   Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, p. 45.

90 .   RCF, pp. 238 - 239.

By pointing to the thematic unity of the diverse scriptural documents, Kraemer locates authority (rightly in my view) not within historically reconstructed, pretextual facts, but within the text itself, within the larger pattern of the biblical narrative and its climax, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Biblical realism is an attempt to articulate the authority and indispensability of the Bible not only for a Christian interpretation of religions, but for all Christian faith and life. It thus recognises the limits of biblical criticism overlooked by its opponents.

The remaining criticisms centre on Kraemer's persistent description of the revelation of Christ as *sui generis*. The first, directed against a perceived weakness in his ecclesiology, contends that Kraemer's focus on the primacy of the revelation in Christ as the evaluative criterion creates a disjunction not between Christianity and other religions, but between Christ and all religions. Hence, the *sui generis* revelation in Christ provides an equally damning judgment on what Kraemer calls 'empirical Christianity.' He writes, 'Christianity as a historical [sic] religion has to be distinguished very sharply from the Christian revelation because Christianity, as the well-known historical phenomenon which belongs to world history and church history, has in very many respects to be put on the same plane as the other religions of mankind.[91] To divorce the Christian revelation from Christianity in so sharp a way is criticised by Lesslie Newbigin who observes that the Christian revelation cannot be abstracted from the communities which receive, remember, protect and proclaim it. 'The claim that... Christ is decisive for all human life is a meaningless claim except as it is interpreted in the life of the community which lives by the tradition of the apostolic testimony. There cannot, therefore, be a *total* disjunction between the Gospel and "Christianity".[92]

It cannot be denied that Kraemer's writings, both early and later, distinguish sharply between Christianity and revelation.[93] Still, the objection fails to consider the context of Tambaram and the ecclesiological framework of Kraemer's argument. When taken into account, these factors show that the distinction was not to disparage the Christian Church, but to preserve and better articulate its mission. First, it must be remembered that Kraemer separates empirical

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91 . AF, p. 13.

92 . Lesslie Newbigin, The Finality of Christ, (London: SCM, 1969), p. 77.

93 . See for example, CM, pp. 108 - 109 and RCF, p. 82

Christianity from the Christian revelation in the aftermath of Jerusalem 1928, and its preoccupation with the 'values' of non-Christian religion. This discussion distracted participants from the central issue: the mission of the Church in the world. On one hand, those standing in the fulfilment school spoke of Christianity as the completion of the highest and best of the religions. Such an attitude, however well-intentioned, was both condescending and mistaken for the 'non-Christian religions can just as well as Christianity show up an impressive record of psychological, cultural and other values, and it is wholly dependent on one's fundamental axioms of life whether one considers these non-Christian achievements of higher value for mankind than the Christian.'[94] On the other hand, those following Hocking took the values argument to its logical conclusion and spoke of an interreligious alliance aimed at enriching an increasingly secular world. This strategy ignored the nature of the Church as an apostolic body witnessing to the revelation of God in the world.[95] Each case presupposed that Christianity was one species in the genus of Religion. By distinguishing between Christianity and Revelation, Kraemer countered that the Church's uniqueness derives not from its ability to complete non-Christian belief and experience, but from the message it has been commissioned to proclaim. His Christianity/Revelation distinction, far from detracting from the uniqueness of the Church was a means to underscore it against those who misunderstood it.

Furthermore, the criticism overlooks the overtly ecclesiological model within which Kraemer works and about which he is explicit. 'The Church and all Christians, if they have ears to hear and eyes to see, are confronted with this question: What is its essential nature, and what is its obligation to the world?'[96] This is the question which The Christian Message proposes to answer. Moreover, it is also the central problem tackled in Religion and the Christian Faith:

> Independent of any circumstances or historical situations, the problem of the relation of the Christian faith to the many other religions is inherent in the nature of the Christian Church.... As an apostolic body, the Church is commissioned to proclaim - by its *kerygma* of God's acts of salvation in Christ, by its *koinonia* as a new community, living

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94. CM, p. 106.

95. Kraemer writes, 'The essential nature of the Church is that it is an *apostolic* body. It is this not because its authority is derived from the apostles, for the apostles belong to the Church, but because in all its words and actions it ought to be a bearer of witness to God and His decisive, creative and redeeming acts and purposes.... And this... has to be the object before us when we are thinking about the Christian Message in a non-Christian World or the fundamental position of the Christian Church as a witness bearing body in the modern world.' CM, p. 2.

96. CM, p. 1.

in the bonds of peace and charity - the message of God's dealings with, and purpose for, the world and mankind.[97]

Any theology of religions which strictly limits the discussion to problems of general revelation, or natural theology without addressing ecclesiology neglects that the conversation 'is embedded in the all-embracing problem of the Christian religion or the Christian Church in its relation to the world.'[98] The position both preserves and is set within a strong doctrine of the Church. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the closing chapter of The Christian Message where he writes, 'Just as the prophetic religion of Biblical realism is a religion *sui generis*, so the Christian Church, according to the conception of the New Testament is a community *sui generis*.... It is... not a voluntary society but God's act through Jesus Christ, called into being by His redemptive purpose.'[99] In this light, it is clear that Kraemer does not so much sharply separate Christianity from revelation, as emphasise that the Church's uniqueness lies not in any inherent 'value' but in the message it proclaims and by which it is judged.

The second criticism challenges his dual affirmation of the revelation in God in nature, history, conscience and the universal religious consciousness and that all religious life is misdirected in the light of the *sui generis* Christian revelation. In 'what sense,' asks Gavin D'Costa, 'can Kraemer claim a *sui generis* status for the *event* of God's revelation in Christ, in the light of his own admission that God works outside this revelation?'[100] He pursues this question further with Israel as a test case.

> Israel's understanding, acceptance and faith in Yahweh, although faltering, provides a test case for examining the coherence of Kraemer's... assertions that salvation is only possible through explicit confession and surrender to the revelation of God in Christ. If this exclusivist contention is taken seriously, then it must imply that the revelation of God in Israel's history was with (a) not revelation after all, or (b) a revelation, but somehow inadequate for salvation.[101]

According to D'Costa, Kraemer opts for (b) thus contradicting his own position in three ways. First, if there is revelation outside Jesus Christ, 'then it cannot be claimed that Jesus is the only or

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97 . RCF, pp. 17 - 18.

98 . CM, p. 103.

99 . CM, pp. 415 - 416.

100 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 65.

101 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 66.

sui generis event of revelation.'[102] While the contents of the Christian revelation may have normative status, it is self-contradictory to admit on the one hand other revelatory events and on the other assert that the Christ event is *sui generis*. More perplexing however, is the second apparent contradiction: 'How can it be maintained that the only way to salvation is explicit confession and surrender to God in Christ, if God has truly revealed Himself in Israel's history before the coming of Jesus Christ?'[103] If a study of Israel shows that God's revelatory activity is not limited to Jesus Christ, then the same is true for God's saving activity. The third contradiction is merely an expansion of the second:

> What of the many pious Jews before the time of Jesus; those who did submit entirely to God's self-disclosure within Israel's history? What of Abraham and Moses and the many holy men and women of Israel listed so eloquently in the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11? Relatedly, we may ask what of the countless millions of non-Christians who lived before the time of Jesus who have never heard the gospel, often through no fault of their own?... Can we really accept that the God revealed in Christ, a loving father of "generous unlimited Divine love" has denied so many millions the means to salvation - through no fault of their own?[104]

The success of the criticism depends on what Kraemer means by the phrase *sui generis* when applying it to the Christ event. In the citations above, D'Costa contends that Kraemer's phrase means both that the revelation of Christ is the only revelation and that salvation is possible only by responding in faith to this revelation. If this interpretation is correct, then the charge of self-contradiction is justified. It can be shown however, that in his use of *sui generis*, Kraemer intends neither. Rather, he uses the phrase to emphasise that a properly Christian evaluation of other religions takes as its criterion the revelation in Christ. In this way, he sets himself against the fulfilment theology predominant at Jerusalem and Tambaram and Hocking's nascent pluralism. 'Natural theology of that sort,' he writes, 'which conceives the Gospel as essentially the fulfilment, the highest development and budding forth of the religious forces and seeds in mankind overlooks - we repeat - the *sui generis* character of the revelation of Christ.'[105] To do otherwise subjects the

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102 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 66.

103 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 67.

104 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 68.

105 . CM, p. 123.

revelation in Christ to yet another, higher standard.[106] The *sui generis* nature of the Christian revelation does not deny the working of God outside it, but posits it as the standard by which such divine activity is measured.

To leave the matter here, however, begs the question of self-contradiction for it can yet be argued that Kraemer's affirmation of extra-Christian revelation contradicts his evaluation of the 'world which is manifested in the whole range of religious striving' as discontinuous with the revelation in Christ.[107] Here, his notion of 'contradictive or subversive fulfilment'[108] must be further explored. In Kraemer's view, to represent 'the religions of the world as *somehow*, however imperfect and crude it may be... a schoolmaster to Christ,' fails to account for the 'essential "otherness"' both of the religions and of the Christian revelation.[109] If the religions are indivisible totalities, each with their own distinctive doctrines, practices and ultimate aims, then to regard them as 'preparation or a leading up to a so-called consummation or fulfilment in Christ,' is to fail to take them seriously.[110] In the light of Christ, they are 'blind and misdirected' because they do not share the goal of the Christian revelation in the first place.[111] He continues, 'Only an attentive study of the Bible can open the eyes to the fact that Christ "the power of God" and "the wisdom of God" stands in contradiction to the power and the wisdom of man. Perhaps in some respects it were proper to speak of contradictive or subversive fulfilment.'[112] Thus, the dual affirmation of the Christian revelation as *sui generis* and the revelation of God outside it is not necessarily self-

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106 . He asks, 'Is Christ the measure of true religion, or is it some general religious *a priori* by which Christ has to be measures? Christians cannot behave as if there is an ultimate religious *a priori*, under which Christ is to be subsumed. For them Christ is the religious *a priori*. Non-Christians... naturally will disavow this, but we have to keep in mind that this decision for their religious *a priori* is just as much an act of faith as the Christian's choice for Christ.' RCF, p. 145.

107 . AF, p. 2; see also Antonio Gualtieri, 'The Failure of Dialectic in Hendrik Kraemer's Evaluation of Non-Christian Faith,' in Journal of Ecumenical Studies, (1978), pp. 274 - 290.

108 . AF, p. 5.

109 . AF, p. 5.

110 . AF, p. 3.

111 . AF, p. 3: Thus, of the missionary experience in Africa he writes that 'not the consciousness of sin brings men to Christ, but the continued contact with Christ brings them to consciousness of sin.' CM, p. 112.

112 . AF, p. 5.

contradictory. By *sui generis*, Kraemer does not mean to say that the revelation in Christ is the only revelation, but that it is the criterion by which Christians are to judge all religious activity. Nevertheless, this is but the first half of D'Costa's interpretation.

Recall the second: by *sui generis* Kraemer means salvation is possible only by responding in faith to the revelation in Christ. This, quite simply, is not true. By rejecting the fulfilment theology of many of his contemporaries, Kraemer does not withhold salvation from those who have not responded to the gospel.[113] Like Newbigin, Kraemer refuses to pronounce on the eternal fate of non-Christians. He never asserts that salvation is possible only through explicit faith in Christ. D'Costa, however, is unhappy with Kraemer's agnosticism: 'this answer seems painfully inadequate... and it is not clear, if we use our test case of Israel, where there are supposedly inadequate grounds for attempting to probe the issue further.'[114] With these words, D'Costa implies that God's covenant with Israel is a limit-case for all non-Christian or pre-Christian religion. For Kraemer, however, Israel and the Old Testament are unique for the latter records the revelation of God to the former - the revelation which finds it fullest expression in Jesus Christ.[115] This neither demeans the 'religious quality' of non-Christian sacred texts nor means that the Old Testament is 'immaculate.' 'The crucial point is that religiously speaking, the Jewish Old Testament is not primarily the document of Jewish religious experience, but of God's revelational dealings with the people of Israel and through them with the world, as an introduction to His decisive and revelational dealing with Israel and the world in Jesus Christ of which the New Testament is the

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113 . He writes, 'This rejection of a *theologia naturalis* as affording the basic religious truths on which the realm of the Christian revelation rises as the fitting superstructure does not, however, *include* denying that God has been working in the minds of men outside the sphere of the Christian revelation and that there have been, and may be now, acceptable men of faith who live under the sway of the non-Christian religions - products, however, not of these non-Christian religions but of the mysterious workings of God's spirit. God forbid that we mortal men should be so irreverent as to dispose of how and where the Sovereign God of grace and love has to act.' AF, pp. 4 - 5.

114 .: D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 68.

115 . He writes, 'Christianity is a child of the religion of Israel, the religion of Moses and the prophets. Jesus stood deeply rooted in this ancestral heritage and breathed in this atmosphere of God's revelation through His dealing with, and His spiritual gifts to, the people of Israel. The religion of Israel is an important part of the world of Biblical realism, and Jesus Christ, in whom God revealed Himself decisively, is in His human thinking and feeling altogether a child of Israel.' CM, p. 237; se also pp. 328 - 335.

document."[116]   Of course the uniqueness of the revelation of God to Israel is not peculiar to Kraemer, but a postulate central to orthodox Christian doctrines of revelation.

If Israel is a unique case in the history of God's dealings with humanity, then D'Costa's use of Israel and the Old Testament as a salvific test case can be questioned.   Can he legitimately argue that remaining agnostic on the fate of those who have never heard of Jesus Christ through no fault of their own is tantamount to being sceptical about the eternal fate of 'the many holy men and women of Israel listed so eloquently in the Letter to the Hebrews'?[117]   I think not.   On the other hand, if as J.A. DiNoia has persuasively argued, religions offer 'distinctive teachings about the true aim of life, the reasons for pursuing it and the means of attaining and enjoying it'[118] must we not be cautious about affirming the final salvation of members of other religious communities?   At the same time however, given the eschatological hope for the renewal of all creation comprising a redeemed Israel and a restored humanity (e.g. Romans 8:18 - 11:36), must we not also refrain from denying it?   Kraemer's avoidance of *a priori* judgments, in this light, appears justified.   D'Costa rightly admits that when debating 'the salvation of non-Christians, or Christians for that matter, we cannot confidently assert that this or that person is saved or not - ultimately all rests within the "mysterious workings of God's Spirit."'[119]   Just as Kraemer's emphasis on the *sui generis* nature of Christian revelation does not necessarily contradict his affirmation of extra-Christian revelation, neither does it necessarily withhold salvation from those who are not incorporated into the Christian Church.

This soteriological debate leads directly to the third criticism.   D'Costa writes 'Kraemer's stark emphasis on the *sui generis* nature of Christ's revelation assumes a deep and unbridgeable gulf between God's grace and fallen humanity.... That is, salvation is constituted and brought about by Christ who is the sole bridge across the gaping abyss between God's grace and fallen humankind's sinfulness.'   In so doing, Kraemer risks reducing all events other than the revelation in

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116 . CM, pp. 329 - 330.

117 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 68.

118 . DiNoia, The Diversity of Religions, pp. 34 - 64, esp. p. 35.

119 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 68.

Christ to 'human achievements and failures, despite his protestations to the contrary.'[120] It is also the source of his opposition to all natural theology: 'according to Biblical realism,' Kraemer insists, 'the opposite of grace is not nature or reason, but sin.'[121] Finally, assuming such a gulf seems to contradict his belief in a universal religious consciousness which 'God has laid... in man.'[122] D'Costa counters, 'If a person's ability to respond to revelation is not by means of reason or through any faculty possessed by that person, but by the initiative of God, however misused and misdirected, is not this basic orientation towards God a gift of grace? What else can it be called? And if it is, can such an absolute rift between grace and sinful nature be maintained?'[123]

This criticism makes three charges, the first being that Kraemer risks reducing all religious activity to human achievements and failures. While I have shown that his emphasis on the Christian revelation does not deny extra-Christian revelation, there is some justification to this criticism. 'Surveying *human endeavour* towards spiritual expression over the whole range of life,' he writes, 'the obvious statement to be made is that all religions... are the various *efforts of man* to apprehend the totality of existence....'[124] Not only does he stress the human element in religions in The Christian Message, but also, while criticising Barth for a similar short-coming, Kraemer remains vague on the working of God outside Christ.[125] This can be attributed to his desire to 'throttle' (in the words of Bishop Kulandran) Hocking's naive endorsement of religious activity. He sought to right the balance by (over)emphasising that 'The most sincere representative of the most impressive forms of piety or quality of life may happen to be the farthest from the kingdom of God. There is, at least, no guarantee whatever that sincerity, or, humanly speaking, superb expressions of spiritual calibre, mean necessarily openness or nearness to the understanding of God's "foolishness in Christ".'[126] In this light, his overemphasis on the human nature of religious activity, while perhaps unjustifiable, is understandable.

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120 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 69.

121 . CM, p. 115.

122 . RCF, p. 171.

123 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, pp. 69 - 70.

124 . CM, p. 111, my emphasis.

125 . CM, p. 120.

126 . RCF, p. 365.

A more balanced approach is found in <u>Religion and the Christian Faith</u>, where, rooted in the 'dialectic character of the Biblical revelation,' Kraemer says 'in one breath "yes" and "no" to the world in all its spheres of life, which precludes in principle the programme of synthesis, and yet impels toward true "communication".'[127]   For instance, a myth central to the religious life of a tribe in Ceram 'conveys the idea that the life of the world is established in the death and sacrifice of a god, and that it has to be re-established constantly therein by re-enacting this primordial event in the ritual actions of the whole tribe.'[128]   Kraemer discerns a deep *Ahung* (intuition): 'It is striking that this dramatisation of myth contains an apprehension akin to the Biblical one that all life and existence rests in the activity of God.'[129]   This positive analysis, however, is but the first half. 'The dialectical condition manifests itself in the fact that this re-enactment of myth is perverted into a magical human act. With all his sacral awe, man behaves as a usurper of God's domain, which is exactly what is meant by "Original Sin".'[130]   Thus, while D'Costa is right to point to a possible extreme in Kraemer's work, the force of the charge is blunted by a contextual understanding of his early thought coupled with a careful reading of his later thought.

Consider the second charge: that the assumption of an unbridgeable gulf between God and humanity prohibits any and all natural theology. The gravity of this charge and whether or not Kraemer avoids (or would want to avoid) it depends on what is meant by natural theology. If the term designates 'the process where by persons can, by their own natural rational powers arrive at belief in God,'[131] then Kraemer, as a Reformed theologian, is quite willingly guilty. He opposes any natural theology conceived as a universal foundation for revelation because it rests on 'a fundamental religious mistake.... [Its] starting-point is the ontological conception of Greek philosophy about God, that God is Pure Essence and the Unity of all Being - and not the prophetic voluntaristic conception of the Bible.'[132]   In this system, revelation and its content becomes,

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127 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 322.

128 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 333.

129 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 324.

130 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 324.

131 . D'Costa, <u>Theology and Religious Pluralism</u>, p. 58.

132 . <u>CM</u>, p. 115.

logically speaking, a much-needed supplement to the insufficiency of reason in the realm of supernatural truth, and not the crisis of all religions and all human reasoning, which it is in the sphere of Biblical realism.'[133] Moreover, that which Kraemer seeks is not a rejection of natural theology, but its redefinition and reappropriation. In Religion and the Christian Faith, his opposition to natural theology remains undiminished for it makes 'the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "the only true God" according to John 17:3, a subordinate idea which can fit in with a philosophy of religion but not with theology which understands its real function, i.e. faithful interpretation of the Biblical teaching.'[134] Rather than repudiate it altogether, Kraemer subverts the traditional relationship between the natural and the revealed where 'a Biblically based doctrine of God's revelation in nature, history and conscience,' are treated as 'modes within the one central revelation in Christ, which illuminates the real meaning and is the criterion of these modes.'[135]

This leads to the final charge, for if by their own rational powers, i.e. through some kind of natural theology, people cannot respond to revelation then they must do so by the gracious intervention of God. If the source of this response is Kraemer's universal religious consciousness, then it is necessarily a gift of grace. If it is a universal gift of grace, however, then the rift between God and humanity, grace and nature, does not seem as severe as the *sui generis* seems to indicate. The impact of this charge is dissipated when one remembers that Kraemer does not require the explicit confession of and surrender to Christ as a precondition to the enjoyment of salvation. He is not an Arminian; he does not believe (as much evangelical thought does) that people are saved by their explicit faith in Christ. To his ears, such a proposition would sound like soteriological synergism, a denial of the *sola gratia*. On the contrary, he is a Reformed theologian who refuses to limit either the prevenient or the saving grace of God. The *sui generis* does not deny that God saves outside Christianity, but affirms that any salvation willed by God is always the salvation won by Christ.[136]

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133 . CM, p. 115.

134 . RCF, p. 361.

135 . RCF, p. 363.

136 . On this point, Kraemer is in agreement with Rahner. See 1.2; Rahner, TIV, p. 122; TIX, pp. 38 - 39.

The final criticism presents Kraemer's christology as reductive insofar as it 'tends to absolutize only one aspect of Christ's revelation of God (concerning humankind's sinfulness), which is excessively Pauline.... Time and time again, Kraemer dismisses the value of non-Christian insights because they lack the consciousness of sin and the need for forgiveness.'[137] In so doing, he denies *a priori* the possibility of learning what M.M. Thomas calls 'new truths in Christ' which stand outside the categories of sin and salvation and indeed orthodox christology completely, yet which do not contradict them.[138] Thus, despite professing openness to learning from other religions, it is difficult to see how he can given his christological criterion. In rejecting Hocking's 'both-and' religious epistemology, Kraemer has gone to the opposite extreme, adopting an equally simplistic 'either-or' model. 'Clearly what is needed is a judicious use of both the either-or and the both-and models, whenever appropriate, rather than the *a priori* adoption of one rather than the other. In this way, it seems possible to remain committed, while truly open to whatever riches are discovered in the lives and religions of non-Christians, both past, present and to come.'[139]

Again, this criticism is not without foundation. Though he does speak of the plurality of approaches within biblical realism,[140] Kraemer goes on to focus explicitly on 'this inexplicable but patent fact... that man wanted to be "like God". Man, whose natural relation to God, his Lord and Maker, is obedience and love, has become a rebel.'[141] The great religious and philosophical systems, even in their most sublime and beautiful expressions, are attempts at self-justification.[142] This overstatement is rightly interpreted as Kraemer's attempt to right the balance of missiological thought after Hocking. The attitude to be overcome was an unsophisticated reductionism positing an Ultimate Reality as the common goal of the religions. Kraemer counters that even a cursory

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137 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 72.

138 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 72; M.M. Thomas, The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance, (London: SCM, 1969), pp. 304 - 305.

139 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 73.

140 . CM, p. 84.

141 . CM, pp. 75 - 76; see also RCF, 235 - 318.

142 . It is the aim of CM to show that the religions including empirical Christianity are theologically (i.e. when approached through the revelation in Christ) and phenomenologically (i.e. when approached as totalities) attempts at self-justification. See CM, pp. 142 - 283.

examination of religions revealed a plurality of distinct and sometimes opposing ultimate goals and aims. Therefore, to ascribe to them the aim of the Christian revelation - justification by grace and renewed fellowship with God - was once again to fail to take their own claims seriously. Moreover, there are resources within Kraemer which can counter without repudiation what is in context another necessary overemphasis. For example, his admission of a plurality of biblically realistic themes and motifs which can be legitimately used in evaluation, his belief that God's revelation extends past the borders of Christianity (albeit in a broken and troubled way), and his refusal to pronounce on the eternal fate non-Christians because of God's constant work in (not through) the religious life of humanity, each provide avenues of openness to Thomas' new truths in Christ without compromising Kraemer's central belief that the revelation in Christ was for Christians the only legitimate evaluative criterion.

This section summarised and attempted to counter five criticisms directed against Kraemer's theology. Aside from the first which misunderstands his view of Scripture completely and is itself deeply problematic, they were found to be more or less accurate. Nevertheless, they consistently failed to take into account one or more of the following: Kraemer's historical context, his habit of rhetorical over-emphasis, and the subtlety of later work. Therefore, although these criticisms provide important protocols against an extreme interpretation, they do not seriously undermine Kraemer's position.

6.3   Phenomenological Criticisms

The final section considers two phenomenological criticisms and argues that their validity leads to a slight modification to, rather than a wholesale rejection of, Kraemer's totalitarian approach. Again, Gavin D'Costa asks, 'although his emphasis on the totalitarian nature of religion provides a salutary check against surface similarities and comparisons, does he not neglect the dynamic nature of religion as well as the creative interaction between beliefs and practice which result in the development of traditions?'[143] and continues, 'A recognition of these latter features would in principle preclude any *final* judgement upon the religious life of humankind, and require a more nuanced analysis than Kraemer provides.'[144] Thus, Kraemer fails to account sufficiently for intrareligious and interreligious development.

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143 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 61.

144 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 61.

Beginning with the problem of intrareligious development, D'Costa insists that 'Kraemer underestimates the dynamic and changing nature of religions because of his emphasis on their totalitarian nature.'[145] Specifically, he fails to comprehend that the term 'Hinduism' is at best an umbrella term which ought to be abandoned in favour of the more precise delineation of Indian religious life offered by such terms as 'Advaita Vedanta, Visistadvaita or Samkhya Yoga and so on.'[146] All too often neglecting this complexity, especially in his analysis of *bhakti* traditions in Indian religions,[147] Kraemer draws an unnecessarily negative conclusion: because these movements are a part of Hinduism, 'they are fundamentally anthropocentric, as all good monistic, mystic Hindu religions is'.[148] For D'Costa, this evaluation is 'historically and phenomenologically reductive and limiting.'[149] Likewise, in his account of Japanese Buddhism, Kraemer's dismissal of the 'almost Lutheran insights of Shinran's Japanese Shin-Shu Amida, where the principle of faith in grace alone, as against effecting salvation by works, is strongly emphasized',[150] is insensitive. 'Kraemer discards this phenomenon on the questionable grounds that Shin-Shu must be viewed in the light of the "naturalistic monism [of] Mahayana Buddhism".'[151] Therefore, D'Costa concludes, potentially many points of contact are obscured by Kraemer's reductive hermeneutic.

It is not my intention to debate the specifics of Kraemer's analyses of Indian religions or Japanese Buddhism; rather we must consider whether interpretative errors warrant the rejection or modification of Kraemer's totalitarian phenomenology. Before forming any final judgment, we must first consider the context. Above, I contended that Kraemer's phenomenology is his corrective to the equally reductive hermeneutics advocated by fulfilment theologians and the Transcendentalist and Naturalist phenomenologists. His foremost concern is to preserve the particularities of

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145 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 62.

146 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 62.

147 . This analysis can be found in CM, pp. 168 - 171.

148 . CM, p. 171.

149 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 62.

150 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 63.

151 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 63; citing CM, p. 181.

religious belief and practice by refusing to grade them according to an allegedly universal 'Idea of Religion.' Rather, Kraemer maintains that in order to preserve their uniqueness, religious beliefs and practices must be interpreted within their religio-cultural matrix. As an attempt to preserve the particularity of the religions, I doubt whether D'Costa would disagree with Kraemer's totalitarianism.

One must also keep in mind secondly Kraemer's penchant to overstate his case. We have seen already how <u>The Christian Message</u>, whether for good or ill, deliberately overemphasises the human nature of religious activity as a response both to Hocking and fulfilment theology while more moderate statements are found in later writings. The intense, even extreme, way in which Kraemer sometimes outlines the totalitarian approach is yet another instance of rhetorical overemphasis. This is borne out by his portrayal of Ramanuja as an agent of change within the Hinduism. The 'great *bhakti*-theologian' is regarded by Kraemer as 'passionate in his protest against the absolute monism of Shankara'.[152] Ramanuja's belief in the reality of a personal Lord, proclamation of divine grace, focus on the necessity of faith for salvation, and struggle over the relation of faith and works all indicate that 'Ramanuja, just as Pascal, was not satisfied with the God of the philosophers; with passionate religiousness he vindicated a really living God, not merely a theistic conception of God.'[153] He breaks 'in a radical way with the classic Hindu ideas about God, the soul and the world. The world is real, not *maya* [illusory]; the soul and human consciousness are so also. The eternal, personal God... is the sole and personal God and Saviour, not merely a god-representation necessary for man in a certain stage in his quest for the *summmum bonum*.'[154] Clearly, Kraemer does allow that religious totalities can and do change, that they are dynamic not static entities.

His chief concern, reflected in the conclusion about Ramanuja which D'Costa rejects, is that Christians upon seeing words such as 'grace', 'faith', and 'Lord', etc. in the *Bhagavad Gita*, would immediately interpret them according to Christian categories, or as manifestations of an ethereal universal essence of religion. In either instance, Ramanuja is not taken seriously in his own

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152 . <u>CM</u>, pp. 168 - 169.

153 . <u>CM</u>, p. 169.

154 . <u>CM</u>, p. 169.

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terms. Furthermore, in the light of the preceding IMC conferences and Hocking's Re-Thinking Missions, his concern is justified.[155] He counters that Ramanuja is not the 'Indian Luther,' but a deeply religious man reacting against Vedantic philosophy and must be interpreted as such. This denies neither the reality nor the significance of the changes wrought by the *bhakti* schools and Ramanuja in particular, but resists any easy equation between them and Protestant pietism. To do so 'makes the religious mistake of overlooking the radical difference between the Christian revelation and other religions.' While 'it starts from the very laudable and... indispensable desire to show open-mindedness and genuine sympathy for the best in the other religions, it starts from the assumption that Christianity *is* the crown of these religions, and so it evinces a hidden feeling of superiority, that is rightly sensed as condescension.'[156] Thus, in the light of D'Costa's first criticism and of both Kraemer's context and overemphasis, what is needed is not the rejection of the totalitarian approach, but a modification which would preserve religious particularity without treating religions as static, unchanging bodies of belief and practice.

Before setting out this modification, let us consider the second objection. When confronted by interreligious development, D'Costa contends that 'Kraemer does not pay enough attention to the way in which a religion's "classical" doctrines and axioms change in the light of practice. Again, the continual movement of history and the possible surprises it may bring cannot be minimized.'[157] Once again, he has in mind Kraemer's exposition of Hinduism and specifically, the evaluation of the doctrine of *ahimsa*, that is, the abstaining from giving pain to living beings (human and non-human) in thought, word and deed. This doctrine, writes Kraemer, must be seen in the light of Hindu soteriology: 'The goal of individual deliverance from the suffering of existence engendered the meticulous desire to lessen the chances of re-birth by avoiding the infliction of suffering, but in the long run it became, psychologically speaking, positive benevolence towards all beings.'[158] Accordingly, *ahimsa* is properly interpreted not as benevolence toward others for their own sake, but for the self-centred reason of personal liberation from the karmic cycle of birth, death and rebirth. D'Costa counters that this reading of *ahimsa* neglects 'the way in which the psychological

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155 . See 3.2 and 3.3.

156 . CM, pp. 301 - 302.

157 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 63.

158 . CM, p. 165.

component here can lead to a deeper rethinking and understanding, as is reflected in some strands of modern Hinduism.'[159] Thus, in this second instance Kraemer's totalitarian approach has lead to an 'abstract and over-textual analysis of religions'.[160]

Once again, D'Costa validly criticises an extreme, but in so doing fails to give sufficient weight to the problems Kraemer opposed when writing The Christian Message. He concludes that Kraemer is abstract and over-textual when I have shown that he was reacting against similarly abstract and over-textual analyses. In the immediately preceding paragraphs, I argued that totalitarianism did not preclude the possibility of genuine internal change. I now show that it neither precludes the possibility of change arising from external influences. Consider his remarks concerning the permeation of the 'moral and social outlook in the non-Christian world' with '"Christian" ideas, ideals and standards'.[161]

> The great non-Christian religions have utilized the permeation of Christian ideas and ideals for their own internal and external strengthening.... Men like Gandhi, Tagore and Radhakrishnan, who evince each in his own peculiar way a strong permeation with ideals and ideas deriving from Christianity, are no "unbaptized Christians,".... but rather have become invigorated Hindus by the process, with an unmistakable element of irritation in their attitude toward Christianity.... As a matter of fact, in the case of Gandhi and Tagore, however drastically their activist attitude towards life may differ from Hinduism as we know it, and however emancipated many of their leading ideas may be from dominant Hindu conceptions, the crucial fact is that the consciously keep to Hinduism as their recognised spiritual home, and even announce their new interpretation as being *for the sake of Hinduism.*[162]

Kraemer recognises that ideas imported from outside by influential individuals remaining inside can in fact lead to change within a religious totality. What he resists is the argument that such change entitles one to view that body of belief and practice as slowly becoming Christianised.

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159 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 63.

160 . D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism, p. 63.

161 . CM, p. 288.

162 . CM, pp. 291 - 292. Likewise, he writes, 'Everyone who is familiar with conditions in the East knows that many non-Christian peoples have no objection whatever to recognizing Christ as one of the highest religious figures humanity has produced. To give Him an honourable place in the different pantheons does not meet with serious opposition. But to recognise Him and what He represents as the Lord of life, to whom supreme loyalty is due, is resolutely refused and rejected even by those who revere Him.' pp. 289 - 290.

To review, Kraemer's phenomenology does not necessarily preclude the possibility of genuine change within a religious tradition through the influence of internal factors (e.g. the theological thought of Ramanuja) or external factors (e.g. Christianity's impact upon Gandhi, Tagore, and Radhakrishnan). Therefore, I see no need to reject outright the totalitarian approach. Nevertheless, D'Costa's observations suggest that some modification is necessary in order to avoid treating the religions as static, monolithic entities. The problem is how to take particularity seriously without thereby denying the possibility of change over time. In The Christian Message, Kraemer's analysis of the 'living non-Christian religions' begins not by describing actual religious totalities, but with the highly theoretical division of 'prophetic religions of revelation' from 'naturalist religions of trans-empirical realization'.[163] The former, comprising Christianity, Judaism and Islam, is rooted in the self-revelation of God to humanity, and is therefore ultimately dualistic. God is separate and distinct from creation. Those comprising the latter, on the other hand, 'are all mystical in their core, revelation consists of what are in some sense supreme religious experience.'[164] Including the great religions of India, China and Japan, it is ultimately monistic, starting 'from the fundamental assumption, regarded as self-evident, that man and nature are essentially one.'[165] This *a priori* division and the lumping of all non-Semitic religion into the latter necessarily affects Kraemer's conclusions. Take for instance his account of Ramanuja once again. Though Kraemer recognises that the Indian theologian 'radically' reacts against Vedantic philosophy, because all Indian religious and philosophical thinking is monistic, his changes must be purely cosmetic. Kraemer, in a manner not dissimilar to the transcendentalist and naturalist philosophers he criticises, refuses to take Ramanuja on his own terms, but according to the essence of all Eastern religious life and thought - monism.

I believe that the totalitarian approach can be preserved if one takes a more pragmatic, local approach than Kraemer does above. In other words, instead of beginning with an *a priori* account of the fundamental starting-point of 'the naturalist religions of trans-empirical realization,' one should begin with actual encounters with religious totalities in concrete situations. Here, we can learn from Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who, despite his talk of a global theology, takes the

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163 . CM, p. 142.

164 . CM, p. 143.

165 . CM, p. 155.

diversity of religious beliefs seriously.[166] In his view, appropriate observations are prefaced by phrases like 'most Muslims will agree' or 'this group of Vaisnavites accept,' rather than 'Islam teaches,' or 'Hinduism holds.'[167] His operational principle is simply stated: 'No observer's statement about a group of persons is valid that cannot be appropriated by those persons.'[168] Though, this principle is highly problematic, it nonetheless remains a valid goal toward which to aim.

Following Smith, I contend that in order to take particularity as seriously as Kraemer desires, one must begin at the level of the local religious community. In describing beliefs and practices one cannot speak in general, but only in specific terms. This does not subvert the totalitarian approach for there are elements within the local religious communities which render them recognisably Christian, Islamic, Buddhist. In the words of Paul Griffiths, these communities 'bear a [sic] historical relationship that they take to be of salvific significance to one or another of those streams of events called "world religions".'[169] Neither these communities nor their representatives can be used to speak for 'Christianity,' 'Islam' or 'Buddhism', but they can be recognised as belonging broadly within one or another of these semi-fictional, amorphous entities. Thus, a totalitarian interpretation of a specific belief or practice of a rural Reformed church would involve a description of how it relates to the beliefs or practices of other Reformed communities, to the official documents of their denomination and the various Reformed Confessions, and from there to other recognisably Christian bodies. In this way, particularity is preserved but the possibility of development, and/or change is not denied.

Conclusion:

Having set the stage in the previous chapter, this chapter offered a three-step apology for Kraemer's theology of religions. In the first, four key themes were set out as a framework for

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166 . Smith preserves the diversity of religious belief with the ultimate unity of religions by separating 'belief' from 'faith'. He writes, 'One's faith is given by God, one's belief's by one's century.' W.C. Smith, Faith and Belief, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 96. Beliefs, for Smith, are intellectual appropriations of faith and vary not only between religions (a word Smith dislikes) but between any two individuals within a religion. Faith, however, is a quality of religious life - the essence of religion.

167 . W.C. Smith, Towards a World Theology, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981), p. 97.

168 . Smith, Towards a World Theology, p. 97.

169 . Paul J. Griffiths, An Apology for Apologetics, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), p. 6.

Kraemer's position. After a careful summary of biblical realism, the totalitarian approach, adaptation and the point of contact, the second then addressed five theological criticisms. The first of these was deemed both to misunderstand Kraemer's position and to be deeply problematic itself. The remaining four, however, were judged to be more or less accurate. Nevertheless, because they fail to consider Kraemer's historical context, his habit of rhetorical over-emphasis, and the more subtle articulation of later work they ended up attacking an extreme which he avoided. As such, they are important boundaries, but do not seriously undermine Kraemer's position. The final section considered two phenomenological criticisms: that Kraemer can account neither for intrareligious nor interreligious development. Though their validity was uncontested, I countered that they lead to a modification of the totalitarian approach rather than its wholesale rejection. In so doing, it began to demonstrate that Kraemer's theology of religions continues to suggest ways of faithful theological creativity for Christians wrestling with the problem of other religions in a postmodern world. The final chapter completes the rehabilitation by attempting a critical re-appropriation of his position.

Chapter 7

A Critical Re-Appropriation of
Hendrik Kraemer's Theology of Religions

Introduction:

Kraemer was set in the background as chapter 5 defined and briefly outlined central questions in postmodernist philosophy and presented the postmodern orthodoxy of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck as a viable but not uncritical response to them. In chapter 6, he was returned to respond to his critics demonstrating thereby that his position can and does stand up to serious analysis. In three sections, this final chapter now draws together Kraemer and postmodern orthodoxy in order to show that his theology of religions continues to suggest ways of faithful theological creativity for Christians wrestling with the problem of religions in a postmodern world. The first shows that for postmodern theology of religions, biblical realism entails both that it recognise the explicitly Christian nature of theology of religions and that it appreciate religious diversity as part of the Christian metanarrative. The second contends that the totalitarian approach brings to postmodern theology of religions a suspicion of universal and neutral evaluative criteria, a resistance to the metacritical quest for a core common to the religions, and an allowance that they may be successful in bringing 'salvation' to their adherents. Finally, the third shows how adaptation resists a strict incommensurability thesis by underscoring the need for both comparative theology and apologetics and how, through Kraemer's dialectical point of contact, legitimate but incomplete communication between traditions is possible:

7.1   Biblical Realism and Authority

Lyotard, as was shown in chapter 5, rejects the modern metanarratival claim to universal authority and/or rationality because it thereby subsumes or suppresses the other's little narratives.

In so doing, he believes he has created a discursive space for their telling and re-telling, where violent coercive power is replaced non-violent, playful struggle, or *agonistics*. While accepting the critique of modernity, I countered that this postmodernist proposal was itself a metanarrative which either could not recognise the violence inherent in the *agon* or could not articulate why the coercive subsuming of all narratives into one is ethically reprehensible. Although his thought thus seems deeply problematic, Lyotard nevertheless directs the attention of Christian theologians to the problem of authority, namely its tendency toward violence. Contra both Taylor's deconstruction and Milbank's reconstruction, I presented the postmodern orthodoxy of Frei and Lindbeck as one addressing this problem by recognising the metanarratival claims of Christian theology without thereby legitimating violence against the other. I argued that this was accomplished through its re-articulation of theology as primarily (though not exclusively) self-description and social demarcation, as the grammar of Christian language about God.

In chapter 6, the problem of authority surfaced again with explicit reference to Christian evaluations of the beliefs and practices of other religious communities. There, it was shown that Kraemer opposed both the IMC's fulfilment theology and Hocking's nascent pluralism because in his opinion, they confused the mission of the Church with the advancement of western culture. For both, interreligious evaluation was authorised by the allegedly universal vantage-point occupied by western intellectuals. Against this cultural idealism, Kraemer insisted that Christian assessments of other religions were authorised by the revelation of God in Christ as recorded in Scripture and proclaimed by the Church. Rather than being allegedly universal, then, Kraemer's authority is internal to Christian faith. This is encapsulated in the phrase, biblical realism. Significantly, Frei and Lindbeck parallel Kraemer insofar as they agree that Christian theology generally and theology of religions specifically are rooted in the internal logic of the Christian language. By so articulating an internal authority for Christian judgements on other religions, they entail both that a postmodern theology of religions recognise the explicitly Christian nature of theology of religions and that it appreciate religious diversity as part of the Christian metanarrative. In the remaining paragraphs of this section, each entailment is briefly explored.

First, because the Bible is not classic literature or *a* sacred text, but *the* sacred record of the revelation of God to humanity, biblical realism 'redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to

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speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.'[1] It is chiefly through appeals to the Bible and through the history of its interpretation, that the Christian community tests, restates, and reforms its totality of beliefs and practices. It is therefore unsurprising that a postmodern theology of religions begins with explicitly biblical language and its various interpretations throughout history in order to make sense of other faiths. In this sense it is as much an exercise in self-understanding and self-description as it is one of understanding and describing the other. To the degree that this strategy is undertaken, Scripture is 'not simply a source of precepts and truths, but the interpretive framework for all reality.'[2]

As we saw in chapter 5, such language, focused as it is on social demarcation and self-description, evokes charges of sectarianism. Postmodern theology of religions, however, avoids these charges through a Kraemerian reinterpretation of natural theology. At first glance, such an assertion seems ironic if not inconsistent with what has previously been argued. After all, Reformed theology and philosophy have always been suspicious of the project[3] and Kraemer, as a Reformed theologian, shares in this suspicion.[4] Hence, two types of natural theology must be distinguished. That which Reformed and postmodern theology rejects purports to describe a universally available

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1. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, p. 118; see also Bruce D. Marshall, 'Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths,' in Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck, ed. Bruce Marshall, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 69 - 102.

2. George Lindbeck, 'Scripture, Consensus and Community,' in Biblical Interpretation in Crisis, ed. Richard John Neuhaus, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 75.

3. In contemporary philosophy of religion, this suspicion is found in those commonly associated with 'Reformed Epistemology.' See, for example, Alvin Plantinga, 'The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology,' in Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 54 (1980), pp. 49 - 62; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?' in Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1983), pp. 135 - 186.

4. He writes, 'any theology which claims the right to call itself Christian can only mean one thing when using the word God: i.e. the Triune God, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. All other "ideas" of God, though they may be lofty and theistic, are, Biblically speaking, non-existent "gods", functioning as idols.... Natural Theology in its current sense, consciously or unconsciously, works with an idea of Deity common to everybody who believes in God and transcending all "special" ideas of God. To maintain this means making the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "the only true God" according to John 17:3, a subordinate idea, which can fit in with a philosophy of religion but not with theology which understands its real function, i.e. faithful interpretation of Biblical teaching.' RCF, p. 361.

set of reasons or evidences which ground particular Christian beliefs and practices.[5] Consider for example the defence of exclusivism offered by Geivett and Phillips, to which chapter 2 alluded. It holds that the universal religious impulse, 'characterized by a singular desire to make sense of human existence within the larger framework of reality,'[6] has driven humans to ask 'Why is there anything at all, rather than nothing?' and responds with a version of the cosmological argument: 'Our lives are set within a context whose initial conditions were established by the Cause of the beginning of the universe.'[7] By appraising the limits and conditions of human existence, it then purports to show that humans are dependent upon and estranged from God and in need of a 'particular revelation, answering to the specific needs of the human condition, [which] might be provided by God.'[8] Finally, in order to distinguish genuine from spurious revelation claims, it offers these criteria: compatibility with knowledge of God lying outside the revelation; suitability to universal human needs; and corroboration by external signs such as miracles.[9] Thus, in this first strategy, natural theology moves from universal evidences to the particular revelation.

Kraemerian natural theology, on the other hand, starts not with allegedly universal grounds, but with particular beliefs and practices as they are embodied in particular religious communities. It then moves from the particular to the universal by seeking to locate particular beliefs and practices upon as large a conceptual map as possible. Such a move necessarily takes place only at specific times and places as the adherents of Christian communities become familiar with the beliefs and practices of those of other communities and *vice versa*. Consider the following hypothetical account.[10] A Buddhist monk participating in a monastic exchange with Dominican monastery in the United States, sharing in its life and worship, hears the word 'God' mentioned. As

5 . Laura Garcia has summed it up as follows: 'Natural theology is the attempt to demonstrate certain truths concerning God's existence and nature, operating from premises that are knowable by any rational person independently of divine revelation.' Laura L. Garcia, 'Natural Theology and the Reformed Objection,' in Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge, ed. C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 112 - 133.

6 . Geivett and Phillips, 'A Particularist View,' p. 219.

7 . Geivett and Phillips, 'A Particularist View,' pp. 220 - 222.

8 . Geivett and Phillips, 'A Particularist View,' p. 225.

9 . Geivett and Phillips, 'A Particularist View,' p. 226.

10 . Adapted from DiNoia, The Diversity of Religions, pp. 127 - 141.

time passes, he understands that 'God' signifies the person whom his Dominican hosts worship, love, and to whom they pray. Moreover, in these prayers, God is named Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This experience of particular beliefs embodied in the particular practices of a particular Christian community, may lead him to ask, Who is this God whom you worship and to whom you pray? to which a brother well-versed in Aquinas, might reply, God is the Cause of all that is. The move from the particular to the universal is clear.

Reconceived in this manner, the language of natural theology, including the classical theistic arguments, demonstrates the universal scope of particular Christian claims. It does not and cannot provide universal grounds for ways of life embodying the Christian metanarrative, but presupposes its indwelling as 'canonically and narrationally unified and internally glossed... centered on Jesus Christ, and telling the story of the dealings of the Triune God with his people and his world in ways that are... applicable to the present.'[11] It sustains 'the broadest possible context for Christian affirmation,'[12] and in so doing, enables Christian theologians to render these affirmations understandable to those outside the Christian community. As Kraemer puts it, 'The function of natural theology will henceforth be not to construe preparatory stages and draw unbroken, continuous lines of religious development ending and reaching their summitt in Christ, but.... to uncover in the light of the revelation of Christ the different modes of God-, self- and world-consciousness of man in his religious life.'[13] By fundamentally reorienting natural theology, postmodern orthodox theology of religions recognises its explicitly Christian nature without becoming sectarian.

Second, Postmodern theology of religions appreciates religious diversity as an integral part of the Christian metanarrative. It resists any final evaluation of the other's religious beliefs and practices for the sake of the open-endedness of the Christian story itself. We have already seen how Middleton and Walsh appeal to texts of terror for an internal critique and anti-totalising element within the Christian metanrrative. Kraemer employs the story of the Noahic Covenant in a similar way with regard to religions. For him, God's Covenant with Noah (Genesis 8:8-17) 'is a Covenant

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11 . George A. Lindbeck, 'Scripture, Consensus and Community,' p. 75.

12 . DiNoia, The Diversity of Religions, p. 131.

13 . CM, p. 125.

with mankind as a whole and with every living creature. The rainbow, as a symbol of peace and harmony after the storm is the token of the everlasting (!) Covenant between God and "every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth".[14] He continues:

> It is striking and deeply significant that before God's special revelational experiment with Israel begins in Chapter 12, in the story of God's election of Abraham and His Covenant with him (which is a Covenant between with the people of Abraham, with a universal perspective - 12:1-3), the "everlasting Covenant between God and every living creature" is stated as an established and irremovable fact, governing the spiritual destiny of mankind as a whole. This is of the greatest of significance for a Biblically-based theology of religion.[15]

For postmodern theology of religions, the Noahic Covenant is a reminder that evaluations of the religious life of humanity are not final, for it reveals God's concern not for one nation or religion, but for the entire human race. Thus the Bible itself prohibits any final declaration about how God must act toward humankind and accordingly, any final judgement on religions.

The religions, according to this perspective, remain part of God's providential plan for the human race in such a manner which does not threaten central Christian doctrines or detract from the uniqueness of the Christian community. On the contrary, 'The notion that other religions play some part in the divine plan accords with traditional Christian doctrines about other religions, in which it has been affirmed that they... may be the instruments of some divine purpose.'[16] Still, it must be clear that the religions are valued neither because they are anonymous channels of Christian salvation nor because of the independently authentic ways of relating to Ultimate Reality they offer. Rather, according to the Christian Scriptures, their value lies in their real if as yet unspecifiable role in the one 'divine plan to which the Christian community bears witness.'[17] To say more than this, either *a priori* affirmations or negations, is to presume for one's self a God's-eye-view of history: a presumption rooted in Original Sin - the desire to usurp the place of God.

In this context, questions of salvation arise for if other-believers are part of God's plan to which the Church testifies, it would seem to follow that they share in the salvation it proclaims.

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14 . RCF, p. 253.

15 . RCF, pp. 253 - 254.

16 . DiNoia, The Diversity of Religions, p. 90.

17 . DiNoia, The Diversity of Religions, p. 91.

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This conclusion, however, is rendered suspect by its failure to give sufficient weight to the intratextuality of Christian theology. If, as Lindbeck contends, one must be fluent in the Christian language in order to experience either Christian salvation or damnation, it would follow that very little can be said about the eschatological destiny of those outside the linguistic community. This suggests an odd inconsistency between the general thrust of his articulation of theology as grammar and his understanding of a postmortem encounter with Christ.[18] He seems to assume that while there are many premortem religions, each with their own language and grammar, in postmortem encounters, the Christian language will prevail. This assumption is highly problematic, as Ken Surin points out:

> How, in this "post-mortem" state, will someone who had in "this life" been a Hindu, be able to "interiorize the language about Christ"? Are we justified in hoping that there will be only one such "post-mortem" language? If there is, which one will it be? Will our Hindu speak "about Christ" in the idiom of John Paul II or Oral Roberts? Or will she speak in the accents of St Augustine or Jonathan Edwards? Or will there just be one language, albeit an entirely new and pure language, an *Ursprache*, which all, Oral Roberts and Hindu alike, will speak? What are we hoping *for* when we are persuaded to think along the lines prescribed by the "prospective *fides ex auditu*" theory? We cannot even begin to contemplate what the appropriate answers to these questions would be like, and this should be sufficient indication that we have this difficulty because we cease to be faithful to the Judaeo-Christian *Bilderverbot* when we start to think about the "after-life" in such positive terms.[19]

Rather, it seems that Kraemer's hopeful agnosticism dovetails better with Lindbeck's understanding of theological language. While there are biblical grounds for locating the religions within the realm of God's providence, like all final judgements regarding them, eschatological destiny is left to God.

To summarise, I argued above that a postmodern orthodox theology of religions, following Kraemer, Frei and Lindbeck, takes the Bible as its authority for interreligious evaluation. I then contended that this entails recognising the openly Christian nature of theology of religions and that the religions are an integral part of the Christian story. I thereby sought to show that the Christian metanarrative need not necessarily resort to violence in its assessment of those who stand outside it. This contention is underscored when one turns to Kraemer's second theme, the totalitarian approach.

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18 . See chapter 2.2.

19 . Ken Surin, '"Many Religions and the One True Faith": An Examination of Lindbeck's Chapter 3,' in The Turnings of Darkness and Light, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 175 - 176.

7.2 The Totalitarian Approach and the Other

The preceding section observed that the Christian metanarrative contains resources which recognise and affirm the other. This section argues further that Kraemer's totalitarian approach preserves 'essential "otherness"'[20] by recognising that any attempt to understand the other is limited by one's own cultural and historical situation and is therefore never total. This requires explanation. In chapter 6, Kraemer was shown to argue that the interpretation of a religious belief or practice necessarily occurs from a standpoint entailing the interpreter's own religio-cultural beliefs and practices. Further, to acknowledge this is not to affirm the validity of all interpretations, but to admit that the interpreter does not occupy a universally accessible standpoint. On the contrary, he or she remains as culturally and historically bound as that which he or she seeks to understand. 'To "understand" or to "comprehend" religion or a religion, we conclude, means to interpret it. Interpretation is not solely, nor even mainly, an intellectual but an existential activity.'[21] For this reason, any interpretation of the other is just that - an interpretation. Although genuine understanding of the other is possible, it is never complete.

The otherness of the other, then, is preserved because the totalitarian approach remains aware of its unavoidable bias. It frankly acknowledges the difficulties encountered when an adherent of one religious totality attempts to make sense of another. 'In saying this, we are far from recommending or defending an unbridled subjectivity or putting all degrees of subjectivity on the same level. On the contrary, what we need is the clear recognition of the fact that... we are always partly conditioned by the world in which we have our roots, and in the selecting of facts we are partly led by our "subjectivity".'[22] To recognise this prejudice is the best way to guard against it. To reduce it to the smallest possible proportions requires not an intellectual act of *epoche*, 'but a moral act of respect for what is alien to us.' The totalitarian approach preserves the other 'because it is an *evaluating* presentation of an alien or different spiritual world according to its own fundamental presuppositions and intentions. It is a congenial entering into a different universe of discourse, that has its own language.'[23] When so understood, the totalitarian approach brings to a

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20 . <u>AF</u>, p. 5.

21 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 51.

22 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 47.

23 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 49.

postmodern theology of religions a suspicion of universal and neutral evaluative criteria, a resistance to the metacritical quest for a core common to the religions, and an allowance that other religions may be successful in bringing 'salvation' to their adherents. The remaining paragraphs further develop each claim.

First, in postmodern theology of religions, claims to universal and neutral evaluative criteria conceived either to vindicate one religion over others or to affirm several are to be met with suspicion. The latter view is Keith Ward's who writes, 'a set of fundamental values which are given by the very nature of human being itself, and which are not merely conventional or matters of arbitrary and wholly subjective preference' confirm the major religions.[24] Harold Netland, who insists that 'some nonarbitrary criteria exist to evaluate various religious traditions and that it is indeed legitimate for a Christian to conclude that other religions which embrace basic beliefs incompatible with central tenets of the Christian faith are false,'[25] exemplifies the former. Despite their opposing aims, one might expect to find in their contributions, common criteria or at least an acknowledgement of overlapping aims. However, one finds neither. Rather, when subjected to a suspicious analysis, both Ward and Netland are shown to disguise bias (albeit unintended) behind language of universality and neutrality.[26]

To abandon the search for universal and neutral evaluative criteria, however, need not culminate in a distinctly postmodernist form of relativism because it does not necessarily empty religious claims of their cognitive content. *Prima facie*, religions make claims about the nature of reality which are capable of being true or false and these claims must be taken seriously. Rather, by recognising that knowledge of the world in the broadest possible sense is mediated by the tradition of the knower,[27] postmodern theology of religions regards suspiciously any claim to

24 . Keith Ward, A Vision to Pursue. Beyond the Crisis in Christianity, (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 152

25 . Netland, Dissonant Voices, p. 152.

26 . For a comparison and critique of both approaches, see Gavin D'Costa, 'Whose Objectivity? Which Neutrality? The Doomed Quest for a Neutral Vantage Point from Which to Judge Religions,' in Religious Studies, 29 (1993), pp. 79 - 95. For a critique of Netland, see T.S. Perry, 'A Critique of Harold Netland's Universal and Neutral Defense of Exclusivism,' forthcoming in Calvin Theological Journal.

27 . Though there are obvious parallels here to the work of Thomas Kuhn in the philosophy of science and to Michael Polanyi in epistemology, it has been a central tenet of the Dutch Reformed philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd. See Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, second edition,

universal and neutral criteria as an attempt to prejudice discussion in favour of one tradition over against others. Here, the postmodern criticism of modernity is judged to be essentially correct: claims to privileged epistemic access has led and can lead to the destruction of other rationalities. To reveal such claims to be historically and culturally situated is to deprive them of their universal and powerful status. This is not to embrace a radical relativism, but to acknowledge in the wake of modernity, a situation of radical relativity where many different and divergent, yet potentially 'rational' claims are being advanced. Where Ward's and Netland's claims to neutrality mask their bias, Kraemer declares his at the outset. His is a postmodern recognition of relativity without an adoption of postmodernist relativism.

Second, postmodern theology of religions resists the metacritical quest for a core common to the religions, an example of which is provided by Paul Knitter below.

> If an explicit recognition of "sin" and divine "justice and wrath" are defined as prerequisites for admission into the circle of the elect, then admittedly few Hindus and Buddhists would qualify. But are Althaus and Brunner themselves limiting God by laying down such prerequisites? It appears that the reality behind the symbol of sin is caught by the Hindu symbol of *avidya* ("ignorance") or the Buddhist experience of *tanha* ("selfish craving"). Even though the Buddha did not speak about an infinite offense against divine justice, he perhaps has another angle on what is wrong with the human condition when he announced that *dukkha* ("suffering") is universal and is caused by craving.[28]

In this excerpt, Knitter seems to assume a privileged vantage point from which he can 'see' that sin, avidya and tanha are all more or less partial descriptions of the one human predicament. In other words, he assumes that a more accurate insight into the true nature of reality is his, while that of the other (in the quotation above, either 'Mainline Protestants,' Hindu, or Buddhists) is only partial. While this is not his intention, such an assumption unavoidably leads to the implicit claim to understand the other's narrative better than he or she does. This being the case, it falls upon him to enlighten the Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists he has described above whose knowledge is incomplete.

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Michael Polanyi, <u>Personal Knowledge</u>, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957); and Herman Dooyeweerd, <u>A New Critique of Theoretical Thought</u>, 2 volumes, trans. David H. Freeman and William S. Young, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953), esp. vol. 1, chapter 2.

28 . Knitter, <u>No Other Name?</u>, p. 118.

Given the *prima facie* difference between these various explanations, Knitter's attempt at enlightenment must be grounded in a theory which purports to uncover the one human predicament behind them. As was shown in Chapter 1, this is precisely what John Hick attempts with his pluralistic hypothesis. He argues that the post-axial religions 'exhibit in their different ways a soteriological structure which identifies the misery, unreality, triviality, and perversity of ordinary human life, affirms an ultimate unity of reality and value in which or in relation to which a limitlessly better quality of existence is possible, and shows the way to realise that radically better possibility.[29] Thus, the religions variously and partially describe the one human predicament, one Ultimate Reality and the one way to move from one to the other and these in turn make up the core common to all the great religions. Hick's ambitious undertaking, then, is no less than to construct a theory which would make sense of all religious beliefs and practices, in other words, a metacritical quest for a common religious core.

From a postmodern perspective, this strategy while admirably attempting to preserve the diversity of religions by granting to each a measure of truth, ultimately fails to take seriously the very beliefs and practices which distinguish religious communities from each other. Hick, for instance, is right to argue that in order for Christians to participate in his pluralistic theory, they must first relinquish or radically reinterpret traditional Chalcedonian christology. The Islamic belief in the *Qu'ran* as the one infallible Word of God, the Orthodox Jewish doctrine of election of Israel, Vedantic belief in Brahman/Atman and Zen belief in Nirvana must all be recast as at best partial and at worst mistaken apprehensions of reality in order to be adopted into Hick's theory. Peter Byrne takes seriously this necessary reinterpretation when he writes,

> someone who affirms doctrinal statements after going through the reflective process which leads to embracing pluralism as a philosophical thesis cannot affirm doctrinal statements to be unequivocally, categorically true. "I believe" cannot man the same for such a person in "I believe Jesus is the Son of God" as it means in "I believe that grass is green".... This much must be conceded by the pluralist. It must be granted that, despite all the cognitive point pluralist gives to doctrinal affirmations, it does not leave everything as it is. The doctrinal stance is altered by pluralism.[30]

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29 . <u>IOR</u>, p. 36.

30 . Byrne, <u>Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism</u>, p. 202.

The question Knitter, Hick and even Byrne fail to answer, however, is whether or not the radical reinterpretation of such beliefs does not end up denying the religious diversity and particularity various pluralist hypotheses seek to preserve. S. Mark Heim writes, 'To accept the affirmation of their faith given by the pluralistic theologies, those of other religions need to agree first that it is actually still their faith which is affirmed when it is in the translated form these theologies give it. Second, they need to be willing for their religious life to be cast in the mould pluralistic theology has set for it.'[31] Pluralist theories, in other words, hold either explicitly (as in the case of Byrne) or implicitly (as in the cases of Knitter and Hick) that the central beliefs which distinguish religious communities from each other are as they stand indefensible. Here Heim is blunt: 'Only as demythologised, adapted to the categories or critical historical thought, put in the context of Western understandings of epistemology, and measured against modern conceptions of equality and justice can these religions be pronounced valid.'[32] It thus seems that the metacritical approach results in the preservation of a veneer of diversity and particularity which fails to take either seriously.

Postmodern theology of religions counters that these very beliefs, precisely because they distinguish religions from each other, make them interesting objects of study in the first place and therefore ought to be preserved. That differences, and sometimes ones of enormous significance, exist between religions cannot be denied. Most Hindus and Buddhists believe in the karmic cycle of reincarnation, orthodox Christians, Jews and Muslims do not; though they would differ about its significance, Christians and Jews are likely to agree that Jesus was crucified, whereas most Muslims would argue that he was not and others, e.g. Ahmadi Muslims, would argue further that he moved to Kashmir, where he lived out his days. The question is whether it is more realistic to

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31 . S. Mark Heim, Salvations, pp. 108 - 109. Heim then goes on to recount the following anecdote. 'At one conference a well-known pluralist theologian said, in good humour, to a decidedly non-pluralist Jewish theologian, the veteran of long years of interfaith discussions, "With your views, you shouldn't be involved in dialogue." "Nevertheless, I am," he replied; and suggested that it was perhaps the pluralist theory that ought to be adjusted and not the reality he represented. In any event, the Jewish theologian continued, when liberal Christians and liberals of other traditions get together to talk about their liberalism, he did not call that dialogue. This affable exchange was capped by another pluralist voice in the audience who allowed that though his Jewish compatriot might be able to dialogue "after a fashion," he would be unable to participate in authentic dialogue until he had adopted a thoroughly pluralistic outlook. Here it would seem that the old lamented triumphalist attitudes of Christians remain in vigorous health, if in different forms.' p. 109.

32 . Heim, Salvations, p. 109.

suppose that these differences are but minor historical and cultural variations on the one soteriological structure pointing to one Ultimate Reality or that they are both *prima facie* and *ultima facie* different and sometimes opposing interpretations of reality. Against the equation of surface similarities and metacritical theories, I argue that given the available evidence, the latter is the more accurate answer.

If left here, in spite of the previous qualifications, the argument would again be left open to charges of relativism. More must be said. Hick, Knitter, Byrne, and one might add Netland, have developed theories on the assumption that religions are different ways of relating to the same reality. (Netland differs by arguing that only the Christian tradition offers its adherents the proper relationship). Postmodern theology, by taking the different descriptions of their various 'Ultimates' at face value, refuses to equate them as partial descriptions of the one Ultimate Reality.[33] The available evidence, whether it is assessed in terms of 'values,' or 'satisfactory religious experience,' or 'truth claims' is at the very best, ambiguous. A legitimate, conclusive analysis on these bases would require a God's-eye-view which denies human cultural and historical finitude. With Heim, my position 'insists [that] there is only one reality and we are trying to know it. It is not committed to regarding other substantive views as equally valid, only as tenable from different perspectives. What is fragmented is not truth but justification or warranted assertability.'[34] It is a description of relativity not a prescription of relativism.

By applying Kraemer's totalitarian approach in this way, postmodern theology of religions better preserves religious plurality and diversity and nowhere is this more evident than when looking specifically at their diverse soteriologies. If the preceding argument is tenable, then in soteriological contexts, it requires that one speaks no longer of salvation, but of 'salvations.' As Kraemer has written, 'it is indeed a fact that in Hinduism, many people have found salvation, with deep satisfaction.'[35] The problem at which this quotation hints lies with the word 'salvation.' Most theologies of religions accross the typological spectrum have until now described it monolithically.

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33 . Patrick Shaw, 'On Worshipping the Same God,' in <u>Religious Studies</u>, 28 (1992), pp. 511 - 532.

34 . Heim, <u>Salvations</u>, p. 137; see also Nicholas Rescher, <u>The Strife of Systems</u>, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), p. 190.

35 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 84.

In both inclusivist and exclusivist versions, salvation always means salvation in and through Christ; they diverge over whether other religions are anonymous vehicles of God in Christ's grace (Rahner) or ordinary ways of salvation (Küng) or simply varieties of unbelief (Barth). Likewise, for pluralist proposals, despite 'all the speculation and professed radicalism, "salvation" remains a comfortable and unitary reference point.'[36] For them, salvation is the transition of religious believers from self-centredness to Reality-centredness (Hick) or the liberation of the poor and oppressed (Knitter). For the former, other traditions may or may not participate in the Christian soteriological scheme, while for the latter all are partial expressions of a common end. In both, this end is singularly termed salvation or salvation/liberation which is to say 'a state of being that transcends the limitations of present human existence and that is attainable through the form of life prescribed in [a] community's teachings.'[37]

From a Kraemerian perspective, this monolithic description of salvation is highly problematic for it fails to take seriously the internal significance of the soteriological claims of other traditions. If the religions do not proffer different descriptions of one human predicatment, one Ultimate Reality, but describe different predicaments and Realities, then it logically follows that their soteriologies cannot be described exclusively in Christian or in pluralist terms, but in those which give full weight to the internal significance of the structures by which the religions seek to overcome the predicament and relate to the Reality. One must speak, in other words, not of salvation, but of salvations. Grace Jantzen writes that '"Salvation", it turns out, is a slippery notion. It implies that there is something to be saved from; *what this is varies according to context.*[38] One traditionally Christian description of salvation may be the fellowship of a community of believers with the Triune God culminating in the perfection of Heaven. As such, it assumes the reality of a personal God distinct from the believing individual. Theravadin salvation, however,

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36 . Heim, Salvations, p. 129. The exception to this observation is Raimon Panikkar, who writes, 'The center is neither the earth (our particular religion), nor the sun (God, transcendence, the Absolute...). Rather, each solar system has its own center and every galaxy turns reciprocally around the other. There is no absolute center. Reality itself is concentric inasmuch as each being (each tradition) is the center of the universe - of its own universe to begin with.' Raimon Panikkar, 'The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges,' in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, p. 109. See also Raimon Panikkar, The Cosmotheandric Experience: emerging religious consciousness, ed. Scott Eastham, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993).

37 . DiNoia, The Diversity of Religions, p. 39.

38 . Grace M. Jantzen, 'Human Diversity and Salvation in Christ,' in Religious Studies, 20 (1984), p. 579. My emphasis.

sees the existence of God as irrelevant and culminates in the realisation that there is no substantial individual. In the absence of convincing arguments to the contrary, it is unlikely that these 'salvations' are in some way partial descriptions of the same event.[39] 'It is therefore important, when we turn to a religious context, that we do not assume without investigation a monolithic concept of salvation, either in terms of its antecedent condition (from what we are saved), or its goal (to what we are saved). This is especially true in the face of the diversity of religions.'[40]

This does not pursue the issue far enough: postmodern theology of religions not only acknowledges a plurality of salvations, but also allows that the various religions may in fact be more or less successful in bringing their concept of salvation to their adherents. Because it regards religions as complex systems of doctrines and practices that encompass complete ways of life, 'salvation' is interpreted in terms of this comprehensive pattern. Therefore, there is no reason not to assume that someone pursuing diligently the soteriological scheme of a religious tradition may be regarded as experiencing the salvation offered by that tradition.[41] Accordingly, one pursuing the Noble Eightfold Path may experience in this life something that can only be termed 'Enlightenment' and therefore enjoy 'salvation' in a Buddhist context. Because the soteriological schemes differ markedly, such an experience cannot be described either as an acceptance or a rejection of Christian salvation or as a transition from self-centredness to Reality-centredness. The Christian belief that 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12), then does not necessarily preclude the possibility of other religions being independently authentic ways of salvation. There are, in other words, many religions and each is the only way of salvation.[42] A postmodern theology of religions informed by the totalitarian approach gives a more accurate account of the variations in soteriologies by retaining what DiNoia calls the 'internal significance' of these doctrines and practices while

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39 . DiNoia, The Diversity of Religions, p. 47.

40 . Jantzen, 'Human Diversity and Salvation in Christ,' p. 580.

41 . In the words of Mark Heim, 'Any particular religious tradition would regard someone as "saved" whose life had been most fully shaped by the distinctive pattern it fosters.' Heim, Salvations, p. 162.

42 . Thus, Pendipeddi Chenchiah can say, 'The supreme longing of the Hindu after escape from *samsara* is not satisfied by Christ. The gift of Rebirth as offered by Christ does not appeal to the Hindu. On the contrary, Jesus kindles new hopes not felt before and kills some of the deepest and most persistent longings of man'. Cited in RCF, pp. 215 - 216.

deliberately and openly transposing them to Christian contexts of discussion. In so doing, it gives a more accurate account of the *prima facie* 'otherness' of other religions.

Finally, I want to address two potential defeaters of this argument. Consider first of all Hick's soteriological criterion. If one can grade the salvific efficacy of a religions according to its production of saints, then a universal, empirically verifiable means of equating salvations exists. Recall that for Hick, the transition from self-centredness to Reality-centredness can occur within any number of post-axial religions. It follows, then, that salvific efficacy of a religion can be tested according to the lives of its adherents. To be fair, however, one must not focus on just any adherent, but those a given religious community recognises as 'much further advanced' in the transformation to Reality-centredness - saints.[43] These remarkable individuals can be tested both spiritually and ethically, according to their centredness on Ultimate Reality and their embodiment of the universal ideal of compassionate goodwill for others, or 'Agape/Karuna.'[44] In as much as these tests can be accurately applied, Hick concludes that no religion can claim superiority. Here, then, is a simple test which avoids metaphysical language and, if it succeeds, undercuts my argument completely.

Upon closer inspection, however, Hick's criterion of saintliness is deeply problematic because it *assumes* that the religions focus on one Reality. I have already shown that this assumption cannot be established. Indeed, if we take their *prima facie* descriptions seriously, the religions focus on different Ultimate Realities.[45] How does this impact upon Hick's criterion? Rebecca Pentz, in her critique of Hick, answers with the more mundane comparison between an American football training camp and a Sunday School. Both indirectly build character in individuals even though they are directly focused on the incommensurate goals of creating better football players or enthusiastic worshippers. Nevertheless, to test them according to them the common, if indirect goal of building character is unfair. Here, it is worth quoting her at length.

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43 . John Hick, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity,' in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, p. 23.

44 . IOR, pp. 299 - 342.

45 . Rebecca Pentz, 'Hick and Saints: Is Saint-Production a Valid Test?' in Faith and Philosophy, 8 (1991), p. 98; see also Gerard Loughlin, 'Nounmenon and Phenomena,' in Religious Studies, 23 (1987), pp. 493 - 508 and John B. Cobb, 'Christian Witness in a Pluralistic World,' in The Experience of Religious Diversity, eds. John Hick and Hasan Askari, (Aldershot: Gower Publishing, 1985), p. 156.

> Though I can't document this, I bet there is a much closer connection between regular worship and character building than there is between football training and character building. Because of this, even if we ascertain that our young worshippers have better characters than the... football players, we cannot conclude that there is more transforming power in our Sunday school that in the... training camp. The camp may very well have much more power to achieve its goal of producing better football players than our Sunday school has to achieve its goal of producing sincere worshippers.[46]

Therefore, the football camp would unjustly fail the test. When one compares religions, the same problem arises. It may be that a religion is very good at achieving its goal, but at the same time, places little emphasis on agape/karuna. Or conversely, it may be that a religion produces many compassionate people, but fails with respect to its goal. If we compare these two according to the saint-production test, the former religion would fail despite its salvific efficacy. Hick's test works 'only if the same degree of positive correlation holds between salvation and saint-production in the various religions to be tested.'[47] He has not shown this to be the case and until he does, saint-production does not defeat the totalitarian approach.

Second, it may be objected by traditional Christian theologians that the recognition of 'salvations' appears to undermine the universality and ultimacy of Christian salvation. It must therefore be made clear that in no way am I denegrating the salvation which comes in and through Jesus Christ. I am saying simply that to reinscribe a non-Christian soteriology in Christian terms denies *a priori* the possibility that this 'salvation' is radically different, that it is beyond inscription in a Christian vocabulary. Here an important distinction must be made. I am not arguing for an eschatological plurality as Tom Driver appears to do when he writes,

> If there is a "salvation history" delineated and forecast in Christian scripture, there are other "salvation histories" outside it; and in them God has different names, different identities, and moves in different ways. Inasmuch has different histories, then God has different "natures." In pluralist perspective, it is not simply that God has one nature variously and inadequately expressed by different religious traditions. It is that there are real and genuine differences within the Godhead itself, owing to the manifold involvements that God has undertaken with the great variety of human communities.[48]

On this point, I stand in complete agreement with Newbigin: 'All belief in the ultimate coherence of things has been abandoned. Chaos has come again and there will be nothing left except the will to

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46 . Pentz, 'Hick and Saints,' p. 100.

47 . Pentz, 'Hick and Saints,' p. 103.

48 . Tom F. Driver, 'The Case for Pluralism,' in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, p. 212.

power of the competing human projects."[49] Thus, this objection appears to confuse Driver's prescriptive, eschatological account with my descriptive, historical account. To argue for the possibility of salvations, is to counter on the one hand claims that beliefs and practices of different religious communities are somehow indefensible as they stand. On the contrary, when interpreted as within an entire religio-cultural framework, they are defensible. On the other hand, it likewise opposes those who argue that those outside one's tradition have because of this an imperfect experience or revelation. The religious belief and experience of those who are other is not an imperfect version of ours, it is different. On pragmatic terms, their beliefs make sense and the experiences they offer may be deeply satisfying. Neither contention challenges the final universality and ultimacy of Christian claims. It simply acknowledges that these claims are being made in a religiously plural world where the evidence is inconclusive. In so doing, it underscores the wisdom of Kraemer and those who follow him in refusing to pronounce on the eschatological destiny of the other.

In summary, this section argued the totalitarian approach brings to a postmodern theology of religions a suspicion of universal and neutral evaluative criteria; a resistance to any equation of surface similarities between religions and the metacritical theories giving rise to them; and an allowance that other religions are successful in bringing salvation to their adherents. That none of this affirms a strict incommensurability thesis which denies the justification and translation of religious beliefs and practices is taken up in the final section.

7.3   Adaptation, the Point of Contact and Incommensurability

A strict incommensurability thesis, denying the possibility of the external justification and genuine translation of religious beliefs and practices is contradicted by Kraemer's understanding of adaptation. Drawing on the Bible, Christian history and his own cross-cultural experience, Kraemer argues that the Christian message can be expressed both in terms of and in conflict with non-Christian religions. He thereby strives to demonstrate the universality of the Christian language without lapsing into *a priori* emphases on the continuity or discontinuity of the Christian message with the culture in which it is being communicated. Against both, he insists that true adaptation, a biblically realistic, fully indigenous expression of Christian faith will arise only slowly

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49 . Lesslie Newbigin, 'Religion for the Marketplace,' in <u>Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered</u>, p. 147.

and always in concrete interreligious encounters. When applied to a postmodern context, this understanding of adaptation resists incommensurability by underscoring the need for both comparative theology and apologetics.

Consider the former. Earlier, I argued that postmodern theology of religions employs the language of natural theology to demonstrate the universal nature of Christian claims. To leave the matter here, however, might imply these claims can be translated into a philosophical language comprehensible to all regardless of specific religious affiliations. This is not quite correct. It is not that the language of natural theology is somehow religiously neutral and can therefore be employed and understood by anyone. Rather, it is that particular claims, as they are advanced in confrontation and conversation with other traditions, will sometimes occupy the same logical space as some of the claims of that community. Return to the example given in 7.1. Theories of causation 'play a crucial role in the Buddhist account of the conditions of human existence that need to be transcended if the round of re-births is to be escaped and Nirvana attained.'[50] Further, they are equally significant for the Christian tradition when describing and providing rationality for theistic belief. It is in the logical overlap, in this instance between Christian and Buddhist theories of causation, that natural theology would take place.

To recognise this logical overlap requires more than a passing knowledge of the particular claims of the other with whom one is engaged: it demands both an intellectual and an existential familiarity with the beliefs and practices of a given community. Therefore, a postmodern theology of religions also incorporates comparative theology. According to Francis Clooney, comparative theology is marked by 'its commitment to the detailed consideration of religious traditions other than one's own.'[51] If this commitment is to avoid charges of reductionism, it must be predicated upon a totalitarian and local understanding of religious beliefs and practices: it must consider beliefs and practices within their religio-cultural matrix as it is embodied in actual religious communities. In Kraemer's words, comparative theology in the first instance 'is a congenial entering into a different universe of discourse that has its own language.'[52]

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50 . DiNoia, The Diversity of Religions, p. 132.

51 . Francis X. Clooney, 'Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books (1989-1995),' in Theological Studies, 56 (1995), p. 521.

52 . RCF, p. 49

Comparative theology then attempts to adapt the Christian message into this language and in so doing, navigate between the Scylla of incomprehensibility and the Charybdss of assimilation. Adaptation is neither the simplistic transliteration of Christian claims, nor the co-option of such claims into the life and practice of the other. In the example, the Dominican's goal is not so to 'adapt' the classical Thomistic argument from causation such that it harmonises with the Theravadin understanding (which is likely impossible), but to articulate this classical argument for the existence of God in such a way that his Theravadin partner will understand, though not necessarily accept. A postmodern theology of religions, thus, will be done in critical dialogue with adherents of other religious traditions where these traditions are shown to overlap in their interpretations of reality in order to be understood.

Finally, consider the purpose of this conversation. It is not done in search of a 'global theology' as envisaged by Alan Race and Wilfred Cantwell Smith,[53] by which they appear to mean 'a theological "Esperanto", to enhance communication and translate [the religions'] discourse into mutually acceptable language and symbols.'[54] Natural theology, as I have reinterpreted it, is an attempt to secure the universal scope of Christian claims. Comparative theology is the further endeavour to render such claims understandable to those outside the Christian community. In undertaking both of these tasks, one is arguing for the truth of these claims not only for Christians, but for all people, everywhere. Therefore, a postmodern theology of religions involves apologetics.

Apologetics can be divided into both negative and positive poles, with the former defined as a defence of beliefs and practices from external attack while the latter, as an attempt to show the superiority of these to those of another community. Postmodern theology of religions involves both. Return to the example above. The Theravadin most likely holds to the following belief: 'the claim that there exists an eternal, uncaused, omniscient, omnipotent being who desires the welfare of the entire human race is both internally incoherent and produces undesirable effects in those who assent to it.'[55] In so believing, he is at odds with the Dominican who believes precisely the opposite:

53 . See Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism; Smith, Towards a World Theology.

54 . Gavin D'Costa, 'The End of Systematic Theology,' in Theology, 95 (1992), p. 330.

55 . Griffiths, An Apology for Apologetics, pp. 60 - 61.

namely, that this belief is coherent and desirable. By invoking St Thomas' argument from causation he has engaged himself in both negative and positive apologetics. Negatively speaking, he is attempting to show that this belief is not necessarily incoherent or producing undesirable effects. Positively, he is going further to show that Theravadin theories of causation are, in this respect, incorrect.

In a postmodern context, both forms are necessarily evidentialist: both appeal to commonly recognised evidence for support. Evidentialist apologetics, especially of the positive variety, have been dominated by three unfortunate assumptions. 'First, much of the discussion has taken it for granted that a good theistic argument would have to meet extremely high standards of cogency and indeed be *demonstrative*.... Such an argument would start from what is self-evident and proceed majestically by way of self-evidently valid argument forms to its conclusion.'[56] Second, it also assumes that such an 'argument must have premises accepted by nearly everyone, or nearly everyone who thinks about the topic, or nearly everyone who has a view on the topic.'[57] Finally it assumes that evidence by definition is unviersally recognisable and available. In a postmodern context, these assumptions can be seriously questioned. An argument need not be demonstrative in order to be good or convincing and premises and evidence need only be acceptable to all in the conversation. Nevertheless, to question them is not necessarily to reject the need for apologetics entirely.

In the absence of demonstrative arguments with universal premises and evidences, postmodern theology of religions will be marked be the effort to persuade others of the truth of the Gospel. Hence, not only will negative and positive apologetics be evidentialist, they will also be rhetorical. As David Cunningham writes, 'all we can do is to desire that our most successful moments of persuasion will be moments of *faithful* persuasion - moments for the sake of the God of Jesus Christ, in whom we live and move and have our being.'[58] Kraemer sums up the apologetic nature of theology of religions in the following way:

56 . Alvin Plantinga, 'Augustinian Christian Philosophy,' in The Monist, 75 (1992), p. 293.

57 . Plantinga, 'Augustinian Christian Philosophy,' p. 294.

58 . David S. Cunningham, Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 257.

> The encounter between Christian faith and religions, even when deliberately sought on the highest level of spiritual intercourse, always preserves traits of an *apologia*, of a defence, and of an attack or combat.... This is more than dialogue. It is the spontaneous manifestation of... the dialectic character of the Biblical revelation, which means saying "yes" and "no" to the world and all its spheres of life, which precludes in principle the programme of synthesis, and yet impels toward true "communication".[59]

As was shown in chapter 6, the tensions between the implication of biblical realism and the totalitarian approach (the incommensurability of religious traditions) and the presumption of adaptation (the commensurability of religious traditions) was resolved through an appeal to dialectic. Resulting from the juxtaposition of biblical realism and the totalitarian approach over against adaptation, it was expressed in Kraemer's understanding of the point of contact: among the great religious systems, because of their incommensurable presuppositions, there is no point of contact. Nevertheless, in the concrete encounters between the adherents of these systems, there may in fact be many. . The remaining paragraphs return to the problems of justification and translation associated with the incommensurability thesis to show that Kraemer's dialectical point of contact allows for genuine but always incomplete understanding of the beliefs and practices of the other.

Recall first of all the justification conclusion: there are no external criteria capable of evaluating the beliefs and practices of a religious community according to standards of such acceptability or verity that extend beyond the boundaries of particular communities. This so emphasises the negative side of Kraemer's dialectic, as expressed in biblical realism and the totalitarian approach, as to lapse into inconsistency. When held together in tension with the positive pole, however, it is an important reminder of two caveats for any postmodern theology of religions. First, it compels the realisation that there is no set of universal and neutral criteria entitling judgements which has been agreed upon by philosophers and theologians across religious boundaries and that such a set is unnecessary for such activity to take place. Such judgements, according to Kraemer, can and should take place in practical engagement with adherents of other religious communities. During such conversations, one need not appeal to universal criteria, the adherence to which defines rationality, but ones which the interlocutors share. This is not to neglect or reject the importance of theory, but to accept the inevitability of being condemned to history. As

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59 . <u>RCF</u>, p. 322.

William Placher puts it, 'We cannot find an Archimedean point, a universal standard of rationality. On the other hand, we are not utterly imprisoned within our own current horizons.'[60]

Second, the justification conclusion is a reminder that the justification of beliefs and practices does not entail agreement. This does not deny the importance of evidence and argument, be they historic or scientific, for the justification of a specific belief or practice, but does reject the notion that evidential arguments can and sometimes do constitute conclusive proof for one belief or even one entire tradition over against others. Speaking historically, that the 'evidence' appears to support a number of traditions is borne out by their continued existence and even flourishing throughout millennia in increasingly diverse cultural situations. Those traditions which cannot in some way adapt to or make sense of these situations eventually become historical artefacts. Thus, Kraemer's dialectic reminds postmodern theology of religions that in practical situations, Christian beliefs and practices can be rendered *rational* and *justifiable* to the other, but denies that he or she is therefore necessarily *irrational* or somehow *unjustified* in rejecting them.

Recall secondly the translation conclusion: no member of any particular religious community can effectively communicate the meaning of a belief or practice to a member of another religious community. Once more, this so emphasises the negative pole of Kraemer's dialectic as to lapse into inconsistency. Nevertheless, when held in creative tension with the positive pole, it is reminds a postmodern theology of religions of two further caveats the first being the indeterminacy of meaning in the act of translation. In practical situations, when transposing a doctrine or practice central to the life of one religious community into the language of another, 'the "correct" translation will always be underdetermined by the available data.'[61] There will always be a range of translations apparently and equally reflective of an understanding of the meaning of the original. This is not to say that all translations are equally valid, but once again, that the evidence will possibly support several. The safeguard against incorrect translations is the emphasis on attempting to understand a given doctrine or practice as it is concretely embodied in a specific religious community. Second, the translation conclusion forces postmodern theology of religions to recognise the limits of its understanding. Quite simply, understanding is not a thing which one

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60 . Placher, <u>Unapologetic Theology</u>, p. 112.

61 . Griffiths, <u>An Apology for Apologetics</u>, p. 24.

simply does or does not have, but is a matter of degrees. In this way, in order for an outsider to understand as much as is possible the nuances of a belief or practice of a given religion, he or she must interpret it as it arises within the life and practice of a specific community. Some interpretations may in fact be shown to be incorrect while others may be affirmed.[62]

To summarise, none of the four caveats, the lack of universal criteria, the plurality of justifiable positions, the indeterminacy of meaning, and the limits of understanding, demand a strict (and inconsistent) incommensurability thesis, but affirm the importance intrasystematic truth as a component in any extrasystematic truth claim. Such truth, according to Kraemer's dialectic, cannot be discerned in isolation from actual religious communities, but only in practical, concrete confrontation and engagement with them.

Conclusion:

The goal of this chapter was to show how Kraemer's key themes, as set out and defended in chapter 6, can contribute to a specifically postmodern theology of religions. The first argued that biblical realism entails a recognition of the explicitly Christian nature of theology of religions and an affirmation of religious diversity as part of the Christian metanarrative. The second contended that the totalitarian approach brings to a postmodern theology of religions a suspicion of universal and neutral evaluative criteria, a resistance to any metacritical quest for a common religious core, and an allowance that other religions may be successful in bringing 'salvation' to their adherents. Finally, the third maintained that adaptation resists a strict incommensurability thesis by underscoring the need for both comparative theology and apologetics and that affirmed, through Kraemer's dialectical point of contact, legitimate but incomplete communication between traditions. It is thus clear that when critically re-appropriated, Kraemer's theology of religions continues to offer insights to Christians wrestling with the problem of religions in a postmodern context.

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62. These and similar themes are currently being taken up by Lamin Sanneh in works such as Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: the African Dimension, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993); Religion and the Variety of Culture, (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1996); and Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989).

Conclusion

This study argued for the critical re-appropriation of Hendrik Kraemer by contemporary Christian theology of religions. First, it sought to reintroduce Kraemer into contemporary theological debate. Remembering his contribution is more often than not restricted to the missiological wing of the World Council of Churches, where his pioneering spirit, if not his theology, is honoured. Gavin D'Costa is perhaps his only serious contemporary critic. This study assessed and responded to the major criticisms in order to show that his contribution is not as easily dismissed as some might think. Second, the study sought also to re-appropriate critically Kraemer's theology of religions by presenting a defensible position aware of contemporary philosophical and theological difficulties and how they impinge upon the theology of religions. Of the two questions remaining, the first is whether or not these aims have been met.

In order properly to respond, let us briefly survey the thesis. Through an application and suspicious analysis of the conventional threefold typology, Part I liberated exclusivist and inclusivist theologies of religions from the highly emotive, negatively charged baggage attributed to them in part through the typology. It cannot and should not be used, therefore, to prohibit reflection on and further development of openly traditional positions, an example of which is provided Hendrik Kraemer. Part II, through both chronological and thematic surveys, then 'rediscovered' Kraemer's theology of religions. All of this introduced Part III, where I attempted to re-appropriate critically Kraemer's position by first defending it from and modifying it in the light of criticism and then developing it in the light of postmodern philosophy and theology.

Chapter 5 briefly sketched current philosophical and theological themes, beginning with postmodernism and postmodernity, and specifically the work of Jean-François Lyotard. This first

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section concluded that while his prescriptive response to the end of modernity is deeply problematic, there is no reversing the postmodern turn. Second, it assessed the theological responses of Mark C. Taylor, John Milbank, and Hans Frei and George Lindbeck to the postmodern turn. It argued that Taylor's deconstructive a/theology and Milbank's reconstructive theology were avoidable extremes while the postmodern orthodoxy of Frei and Lindbeck offered a more fruitful mediating position (albeit one much closer to Milbank than to Taylor). After condensing Kraemer's position into four key themes, Chapter 6 considered both theological and phenomenological criticisms. Only the first was dismissed outright; the rest were shown to set important limits against extreme readings, with the final two resulting in a slight but not inconsequential modification in Kraemer's totalitarian phenomenology.

In three sections, chapter 7 drew together the postmodern orthodoxy of chapter 5 and the key themes of chapter 6 in order to show that Kraemer's theology of religions continued to suggest ways of faithful theological creativity for Christians wrestling with the problem of religions in a postmodern world. The first showed that for postmodern theology of religions, biblical realism entails both the recognition of the explicitly Christian nature of theology of religions and the appreciation of religious diversity as part of the Christian metanarrative. The second contended that the totalitarian approach brings to a postmodern theology of religions a suspicion of universal and neutral evaluative criteria, a resistance to the metacritical quest for a common religious core, and an allowance that other religions may be successful in bringing 'salvation' to their adherents. Finally, the third demonstrated how the theme of adaptation rules out a strict (and inconsistent) incommensurability thesis by underscoring the need for both comparative theology and apologetics and how, through Kraemer's dialectical point of contact, legitimate but incomplete understanding between traditions is possible.

On the basis of this summary I conclude first that Kraemer's theology of religions continues to merit serious analysis by theologians interested in the problem posed by religious plurality. This is not to say that it is immune from criticism, but that the position is deserving of further investigation even if only to formulate an opposing position. Kraemer cannot simply be dismissed. Second, and more importantly, because his position is defensible, resonates with themes in current philosophical and theological thinking, and is capable of further development, I conclude that it also merits critical re-appropriation. Thus the aims set out in the Introduction have been met.

Hendrik Kraemer's theology of religions successfully offers to theologians interested in the problem of religious plurality a way of faithful theological creativity in a postmodern world. Now let us consider the second question: What prospects does Kraemer's re-appropriated position hold for future exploration?

I believe it holds out interesting possibilities for three areas. First of all, it creates a discursive space for theological or religious phenomenologies of religions. If the quest for a universal and neutral evaluative vantage point is in fact doomed, there is no reason to prohibit the Christian (or other) theologian from investigating religious phenomena on the grounds that his or her religious beliefs will somehow contaminate the 'scientific' nature of the research. On the contrary, it would seem that those phenomenologists who are openly religious are in a position superior to their unbelieving counterparts for they will be able to recognise and therefore minimise the negative influence of their theological or religious assumptions rather than remaining ignorant of them. This need not necessarily promote sectarianism, that is, the view that the home tradition has nothing of value to gain from protracted contact with and study of another. Rather, it would seem to indicate precisely the opposite: that it is only through such interaction that the home tradition would continue to develop and to avoid stagnation.

Second, Kraemer's views on adaptation (that the Christian story can be adapted into the terms of another religious totality) and the point of contact (that there are many personal, as opposed to systematic, points of contact) further underscore the importance and inevitability of contextual, comparative theology. As the Christian story is told and re-told throughout the planet, it is vital that such narration take place in terms the listeners will understand though not necessarily accept. It must therefore be told in terms of, and in confrontation with, the dominant culture in which it is found. Comparative theology in this sense opposes both those holding that the Christian story always stands over against religions and cultures and those attempting artificial experiments in religious and cultural accommodation. The need to emphasise contrasts or common areas will be determined only through slow, painstaking contact with the dominant culture.

Finally, Kraemer's position also re-emphasises the need for both positive and negative apologetics undertaken in interreligious contexts. Being convinced of the truth and universality of the Christian story requires that one attempt to bring others to similar convictions. To do so is not

necessarily intolerant, but to refrain from it may in fact be a failure of *caritas,* of love and concern for the other. Such activity does not require a universally accessible vantage point from which to determine and assess evidence or construct arguments. Rather, it presupposes an understanding of the other sufficient to determine what 'evidence' and arguments will be recognised by all parties in the conversation. Moreover, it will focus not on demonstrative arguments or evidence, but on the rhetorical, persuasive nature of both. These very brief remarks indicate that far from ending the Christian conversation with other religions, Kraemer opens new and expands existing avenues where it can and should take place.

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