

Christian Witness in Interreligious Context

Approaches to Interreligious Dialogue

Inauguraldissertation

Zur Erlangung der Würde eines Doktors

Der Katholisch-Theologischen Fakultät

Der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

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München 2006

Preface

Jesus speaks of God the Father in terms of His love for all, “for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mt.5:45). It is His saving love that brings the whole human race into one universe. The universal salvific will of God, in 1 Tim 2:4-6, bases on the universal mediation of salvation by Jesus: “God...desires all humans to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time.” Christian witness in interreligious context: Approaches to interreligious dialogue highlights the relationship of Christians to other believers. It is our belief that God of love has recourse to all differently and saves all. Through love and service a Christian ought to dialogue with other believers. Living with people of other faiths in India has inspired me to study the relationship of Christians to other believers and the Christian witness in interreligious context. I am deeply grateful to Prof. Dr. Ludwig Mödl who encouraged me to explore this possibility. It is because of his guidance and timely suggestions that I have been able to complete my work. I express my gratitude and appreciation to Prof. Dr. Armin Kreiner for his helpful suggestions. On 20th November 2006 I successfully completed the doctor-exam conducted by Prof. Dr. Ludwig Mödl – Pastoral Theology, Prof. Dr. Armin Kreiner – Fundamental Theology and Prof. Dr. Josef Wehrle – Old Testament. I am grateful to the professors for their contribution to my doctoral studies. My gratitude extends to my Dominican Brethren of both Indian and South-German Province. My family and friends have given to me their continuous encouragement, guidance and spiritual support. May God protect and bless them always. And as to my doctoral theme I wish and pray that all believers – Christians and others – may find goodness and peace in one another and serve One God of love.

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München, November 2006

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General Introduction

The study on the theology of religions has in recent years taken a most significant role in the Christian understanding of other religions. The theology of religions will almost certainly dominate the theological agenda in the decades to come. The precise nature of this discipline is itself a subject of theological discussion.¹ The Christian theology of religions might be described as that branch of theology which considers the nature and function of non-Christian traditions in the light of the salvific character of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, the Christian theology of religions begins its reflection on the non-Christian religious traditions in the conviction that God has acted to save humankind in Christ. One could say, therefore, that the Christian theology of religions focuses on the question of salvation and its mediation to those outside the Christian dispensation.

In the Christian theology of religions it has become commonplace among theologians to distinguish three approaches – exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Other divisions have been proposed, but these threefold approach continues to be dominant.² To look into these Christian approaches to other religions, it was H.R.Niebuhr who proposed certain categories for the relationship between Christ and culture, which are later borrowed by Paul Knitter and distinguished as: 1.Christ against religions; 2.Christ within religions; 3.Christ above religions; 4.Christ together with religions.³ But already in 1976 summing up the debate over the theology of religions J.P.Schineller distributed the theological opinions under four major categories as follows: 1.Ecclesiocentric universe - exclusive Christology; 2.Christocentric universe - inclusive Christology; 3.Theocentric universe - normative Christology; and 4.Theocentric universe - non-normative Christology.⁴ Besides these above categories there are also further models

¹ For a discussion of the nature of the theology of religions, see J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001 edition, pp.1-13.

² See T. Merrigan, "For Us and for Our Salvation': The Notion of Salvation History in the Contemporary Theology of Religions," in *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64, 1999, pp.339-340.

³ See H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951; Paul Knitter, "Catholic Theology of Religions at a Crossroads," in H. Küng and J. Moltmann, (eds.), *Concilium: Christianity Among World Religions*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986, pp. 99-104.

⁴ See J. P. Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," in *Theological Studies* 37, 1976, pp.545-66.

such as regnocentrism and soteriocentrism, logocentrism and pneumatocentrism.⁵ Soteriocentrism is referred even to move beyond theocentrism, so that the primary concern of a theology of religions should not be the “rightful belief” about the uniqueness of Christ, but the “rightful practice” with other religions, for the promotion of “the Kingdom and its *soteria*.”⁶ However the dominant approaches in the theology of religions are known as ecclesiocentrism, christocentrism, theocentrism. But the typology – ‘exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism’ – first appears in Alan Race, who himself ascribes it to John Hick.⁷

Analysing this typology we begin our research. Our work aims at relationship of Christians to other believers. It aims at dialogue between Christians and other believers. We promote Christian witness through interreligious dialogue. And so we ask: How are Christians related to other believers and Christianity to other religions? How does Christianity promote dialogue with other religions? What are the theological and practical problems we face in interreligious dialogue? In what manner does Christian exclusivism treat the above questions or how does Christian inclusivism look into the matter and what is the answer given by religious pluralists? What way the official teaching of the Catholic Church treat the relationship and dialogue of Christianity to other religions? The basic difficulty in a pluralistic context for a practical Christian living arises if one does not confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God, as the Messiah, as the Saviour of the world. Christian living has to begin from confessing that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, that in Him divine incarnation is manifested, that in Him there is the fullness of truth. Accepting this Christian faith in what way does religious pluralism bring difficulties for a Christian living, Christian mission and also Christian dialogue with other religions? In the context of the affirmation of the necessity of the Church for salvation, the question is raised that if there is salvation for people of other faiths, without being visible members of the Church, what is the role of the Church as the mediator of salvation? How, those who attain salvation outside the visible boundaries of the Church are related to it? How do these people, who find themselves being outside the Church, can be seen as being saved in Christ through the mediation of the

⁵ For more details on regnocentrism, soteriocentrism, logocentrism and pneumatocentrism, see J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001, p.185-198.

⁶ P. Knitter, “Catholic Theology of Religions at a Crossroads,” in H. Küng and J. Moltmann, (eds.), *Concilium: Christianity Among World Religions*, 1986, p.105.

⁷ See A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983.

Church? These and many other questions have posed a challenge in the theology of religions. In our work we look into these above questions and try to establish criteria for dialogue between Christians and other believers.

The thought about religion⁸ is one of most pleasing and enriching. Religion has brought enormous changes in the lives of people. It has created wonderful men and women, exemplary and holy people in the world. But religion also has created unpleasant situations, conflicts and rivalries. All in the name of religion, in the name of God and in one's zeal for religion or perhaps in one's total but closed conviction of one's own faith have created enough history. Speaking on the burden of painful history, Thomas Michel in his article, "Creating a culture of dialogue," says:

we must be aware that the followers of other religions such as Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, have their own lists of wrongs perpetrated against them by Christians. Whether they be the medieval Crusades, European pogroms culminating in the Holocaust, the social indignities, land grabbing and theft of resources that occurred in the Colonial period, the history of missionary activity that too often sought to spread the Gospel by distorting and denigrating other religions. None of this has been forgotten by the followers of other religions. I believe that the burden of history is not only the most difficult obstacle to overcome in building dialogue, but moving beyond that burden is one of the most valuable hoped-for fruits of dialogue.⁹

In the same article he says further, that we have to be convinced ourselves and to convince our partners that we are not prisoners of the past, that we can live together and work together better than we have done previously, that individuals and communities can change their attitudes and above all, that God desires love and mutual acceptance and respect among those who come before the Divine in obedience and worship.

The Vatican document, *Nostra Aetate* referring to many quarrels and dissensions that have arisen between Christians and Muslims over the centuries, pleads with all to

⁸ Of course, the word "religion" is itself controverted. One may describe as "religious" all those practices, traditions, worldviews, etc. which are more or less directly related to whatever people regard as their "ultimate concern." For this understanding of "religion" I am indebted here to J. Hick's *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989, pp.3-5. Hick, of course, makes use of P. Tillich's notion of "ultimate concern." Clearly the theology of religions tends to focus on the recognized or established forms of organized religious life.

⁹ T. Michel, S.J., "Creating a culture of dialogue: Methodology of Inter-religious dialogue," at www.puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/dialogue/documents/articles/michel_creating_culture, (access 14.04.2004).

forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding, for the benefit of all, in order to preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.¹⁰ We also see in this regard a sincere effort on the part of the Holy Father John Paul II, who often in his address to different faiths, asked to forgive the history. It was at a solemn service of penance in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Pope John Paul II made history on March 12th 2000 by begging pardon of God for the sins committed by members of his Church over the past 2000 years. In his Homily he said: "We cannot not recognize the betrayal of the Gospel committed by some of our brothers, especially in the second millennium. We beg forgiveness for our guilt as Christians for the sins of the present. Faced with atheism, religious apathy, secularism, relativism, violations of the right to life, indifference towards poverty endured by many nations, we can only ask what are our responsibilities."¹¹ And from this forgiveness people of different faiths make efforts to come in dialogue, to forgive the past and to rebuild the present society in a new way. We are convinced that through interreligious dialogue one can open his eyes to the present religious and social problems. We aim in interreligious dialogue a cherishing relationship with God and with fellow human beings. We aim through interreligious dialogue love and peace between religions. It is our pastoral concern to go out to other believers to care and share in love and service.

A word about methodology: "Faith seeking understanding" is an Anselmian definition of theology, which is valid even today for the theological research. This axiom, however has given rise to different interpretations and thus to theological methods such as deductive, or inductive or the combination of both.¹² Even though

¹⁰ F. Gioia (ed), *Interreligious Dialogue – The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*, Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997, p.39

¹¹ Christianity Today, Week of March 13, at www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/111/23.0.html, (access 17.02.2005); See also "Day of Pardon, 12 March, 2000," on the Vatican web site: at www.vatican.va, (17.02.2005).

¹² The deductive method starts from the general principles to the concrete applications of the problems today. It progresses from basic assertions to conclusions, or from the better known to the less known, or from a priori to a posteriori principles. This so called dogmatic method has prevailed in theology, but has always been criticised for its abstract character, i.e. the more deductions are drawn from abstract principles, the more real is the risk of being cut off from reality. In inductive method, it is not a question of going from principles to concrete applications but, in the opposite direction, from a posteriori to a priori. It takes as the starting point the reality as experienced today with the problems it raises, to search for – in the light of the revealed message and through theological reflection – a Christian solution to these problems. It has often been remarked that, compared to the other conciliar documents, the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II inaugurated a new method. The novelty consisted in passing from a deductive method to an inductive one: the constitution listens to the world of today and to its problems, learns to read the 'signs of

the classical Christian method in theology is deductive, to which is later introduced inductive, combination of both seems to be a balanced method. But even in the combination of both deductive and inductive, at the end deductive method has always remained on the top in Christian theology. In this combination, the question may be asked, is it not possible to give equal place to both deductive and inductive method? The question, at the end, is – what comes first? And the natural answer has been Revelation, or to say deductive method plays foremost role in Christian theology. In our research, the method we apply is a combination of deductive and inductive method, seen basically from Christian faith to other religions and from experience of other religions in themselves and in their relation to Christianity. In addition to the combination of the deductive and inductive method, we also analyse from a method basically used in pastoral theology – “*Voir-Juger-Agir*” or “see-judge-act.”¹³ We see Christianity in relation to other religions - other believers, their religiosity; secondly we shall avoid condemning other religions, but try to reflect positively other believers from Christian point of view. Thirdly we act upon our positive judgement i.e. enhance the positive relationship, a dialogical relationship, which leads to a mission of dialogue. Pastoral care in interreligious context requires a collective ‘seeing, judging and acting’ upon today’s religious experiences. Based

times’ in the aspirations of humanity, and then responds to these aspirations in the light of Gospel message. See J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001, pp.13-19

¹³ The three steps method, See-Judge-Act, was originally coined by the Belgian Cardinal J. Cardijn as the guiding principle for the Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienne founded in 1912, but has been acknowledged on the theological and scientific level as an appropriate model and modus operandi for practical theology. The depth of this theological approach is expressed distinctly in the following statement: “Das Modell besagt, daß der Weg praktisch-theologischer Reflektion nach folgenden Grundmuster verläuft: In Hinblick auf die jeweils zu reflektierende bzw. zu konzipierende Praxis

- wird zunächst die Situation mit ihren Gegebenheiten und systematischen Zusammenhängen in Gesellschaft und Kirche kritisch, d.h. mit dem Interesse an der Aufdeckung und Veränderung von Fehlentwicklungen, wahrgenommen und radikal, d.h. möglichst bis auf den Grund der Ursachen und Wirkzusammenhänge gehend, analysiert;
- folgt in einem zweiten Schritt die argumentative Zugrundelegung der im christlichen Glauben, näher hin in Schrift und Tradition enthaltenen Kriterien, um die Situation und Praxis nach dem Maßstab des Evangeliums zu beurteilen;
- gelangt man schließlich von dieser Orientierung aus über die Formulierung von Zielen, die Planung von Handlungsschritten und die Verständigung der beteiligten über ihre Rollen zu einer neuen, den situativen Erfordernissen und Möglichkeiten wie auch den theologischen Kriterien entsprechenden Praxis bzw. Konzeption einer solchen Praxis“. See H. Haslinger, „Zu Selbstverständnis und Konzept dieser Praktischen Theologie,“ in H. Haslinger (ed.), *Praktische Theologie: Grundlegungen*, Mainz, 1999, p.30.

The ‘See-Judge-Act’ pastoral method is also to be noticed in the theology of liberation. Liberation theology, in the words of Leonardo Boff, “begins with the moment of seeing. Then it engages in a theological reflection on this pastoral reading of reality, expounding its Christology, anthropology, and ecclesiology in this context – the moment of judgement. Finally, it plots practical courses of action for Church and society, in an effort to concretize human liberation from a point of departure that is at the heart of an oppressed society – the moment of action,” L. Boff, O.F.M., *When the Theology Listens to the Poor*, English Translation by R. R. Barr, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988, p.29.

on these above said methods our work is a critical – analytical and comparative work.

A word about the structure and content of our work: It is not a study of different religions in themselves or comparative religions that we intend here. Our effort is not to study relationship of Christianity to a particular religion and vice versa. We aim here at the global perspective of the relationship of Christians to other believers. We have also limited to the examples of two theologians for each approach in the first three chapters. We have limited them in one particular thought of building relationship with other religions. Our intention is to cross the barriers of divisions between religions and not cause violence in the name of One God. We have divided our study on approaches to inter-religious dialogue into five chapters.

In the first chapter we work on the exclusivist approach to other religions. After presenting exclusive faith in God, in Jesus Christ both from biblical and from Church Fathers' understanding, we present Karl Barth, a protestant theologian, and his perspective of explicit faith in Jesus Christ, and a Catholic theologian Leonard Feeney and his zeal for the salvation of souls.

The second chapter is an analysis on inclusivist approach to other religions. We begin with biblical and Church Fathers' understanding of inclusive faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved. With regard to Church Fathers' inclusivist approach we study here the Word of God – the seed – the Logos in the teachings of St. Justin, St. Irenaeus and St. Clement of Alexandria. The Catholic theologian we present here is Karl Rahner. It is a study on anonymous Christianity and implicit faith from Karl Rahner's theology, and the Lutheran theologian we present here is Wolfhart Pannenberg.

In the third chapter we examine the pluralistic approach to inter-religious dialogue. We begin with God's universal love for his creation. We present here from the biblical point of view God's universal love for all. Coming to the New Testament, it is Jesus' salvific love for everyone that makes him very special. Jesus came to bring salvation to everyone. He is the light of the nations. We study here the pluralist

theologians John Hick, a protestant perspective and Paul F. Knitter, a Catholic perspective.

In the fourth chapter we examine some of the important documents from the Second Vatican Council till to the present in relation to inter-religious dialogue. On relationship of Christians to various religions, the understanding of *Nostra Aetate* is that of a positive approach – “The church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.”¹⁴ The promulgation of the declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the Church’s relationship to other religions stressed the importance of inter-religious relationship. After twenty-five years of *Nostra Aetate* (October 28, 1965), we have the joint document of the pontifical council for Inter-religious dialogue and the Congregation for evangelisation of peoples on *Dialogue and Proclamation* (May 19, 1991). The document on *Dialogue and Proclamation* outlines the issues on Mission, Proclamation and Inter-religious dialogue. After studying some of these documents, we see how these documents have helped inter-religious dialogue. We also analyse to what extent in the teachings of the Catholic Church one can enter into inter-religious dialogue. What are missionary implications and how can one pastorally reach out to other faiths in the proclamation of and witness to Christ.

The fifth chapter is an analysis on the praxis of inter-religious dialogue. This being the final chapter we look into the practical analysis on exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist approaches. We analyse if these approaches have helped or damaged the Christian mission of inter-religious relationship. The questions we ask to the exclusivist approach: what was or what is Christian understanding of other faiths in our mission and what type of dialogue this approach presented or presents to other faiths? Who has benefited or who benefits to what extent and how? What was and what is the pastoral zeal for mission. To what extent did the Church create an atmosphere of respecting other faiths. To the inclusivist approach we ask: In replacing exclusivism to inclusivism has the Church suffered in its mission? What is

¹⁴ F. Gioia (ed), *Interreligious Dialogue – The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*, 1997, p.38.

the pastoral approach to anonymous Christianity and how does pastoral mission in its proclamation of and witness to Christ help to build a better relationship with other believers? To the pluralist approach we ask: What best results can this approach bring to inter-religious dialogue, or to what extent should one sacrifice one's own convictions in faith in order to have productive interfaith relations, does pluralism in claiming its position in turn become exclusivism, and if so where is the true identity of individual faiths, or as called by Barnes does it destroy "the otherness of the other."¹⁵ The other questions are, is Christian mission challenged or lost, what type of Christian mission does this approach lead to, and finally how can one pastorally approach to inter-religious dialogue in the context of religious pluralism. Having analysed these approaches pastorally we then see how we can practice interreligious dialogue. Keeping in mind the teachings of the Catholic Church on Proclamation-Mission-Dialogue and keeping in mind the goodness of other Religions-Traditions-Cultures, we attempt to outline some criteria for inter-religious dialogue from the perspective of pastoral theology.

The document on *Dialogue and Mission* (1984) states that the evangelising mission of the Church is a "single but complex and articulated reality." It indicates the principal elements of the mission: presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; inter-religious dialogue, and finally, proclamation and catechesis.¹⁶ It is a real witness to Jesus that in our work and teaching, in our work of liberation, entering into the poverty, destitution, suppression, and giving a respectful recognition to every individual as the child of God, which is most required of us Christians today and thus bringing joy and peace of Jesus Christ to the world. But to give real witness to our Christian faith we must enter into the social, economic and religious context of other believers. Interreligious dialogue seen primarily from pastoral perspective or in the practice of Christian living needs to recognise the religious identity of other believers. The Christian may also enrich his spiritual depth by learning and experiencing the goodness of other believers, or their spiritual dimensions. The overall picture of our research is to reflect in our Christian theology as how to avoid exclusivism without opting for relativism.

¹⁵ M. Barnes, *Theology and Dialogue of Religions*, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.7.

¹⁶ See F. Gioia (ed), *Interreligious Dialogue – The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*, 1997, p.608.

To state our thesis: Christian approach to interreligious dialogue ought to be of an open, sincere, religious and human nature, which treats other believers equal in all respects, which recognises and respects the human and religious dignity of the other believers. Christian openness to other believers ought to promote an open and cherishing relationship based on Christian faith and freedom of religion which in turn respects and recognizes the dignity and right of the believer to relate to God, creation and self. Even though with Second Vatican Council we have begun to take seriously the relationship with other religions, to see in them the positive values and open ourselves theologically and practically, the dangers of being closed to oneself, being prejudiced, and moving towards extreme positions to claim oneself superior and absolute to others to the extent of losing sight of others or destroying the other, is still of an immediate concern. This is seen clearly in religious fanatic or religious extreme groups. Religious extremists rather cause violence than to spread peace and love. There is a serious threat to me and to the other. And therefore the Christian needs, from his side, to open his heart and mind to the other, learn about the other, learn from the other. The problematic may be said: in forming the terminologies of our theologies do we forget the real existence of other believers? Do we also ignore or misinterpret our Christian faith?

Chapter One

Exclusivist Approach to Other Religions

Biblical – Historical and Theological Perspective

1.1 Exclusivism: terminology and meaning

Exclusivism is one of the perspectives that excludes other perspectives. The possibility of matters being viewed also from the *bona fide* perspective of the other person or group does not readily come into play. Whether it is a matter pertaining to philosophical, political or religious thought, when it comes to that of one's own thought or idea as superior or exclusive to the other, then perhaps we begin to realise what is meant by exclusivism.

In our thesis we use the term 'exclusivism' to religious perspective, and to the relationship of Christians to the other believers. It is in deep conviction and in presentation of Christian faith to the world at large, that exclusive attitudes in Christianity may have come into existence. It is in presenting Christian revelation and Christian faith as an ultimate answer to everything that may have given to Christianity exclusive attitudes. The systematic typologies 'Exclusivism-Inclusivism-Pluralism' first appears in the studies of Alan Race in 1983 and of Gavin D'costa in 1986,¹⁷ who themselves refer these typologies to John Hick. John Hick sets the exclusivist claim to a 'Christian monopoly of salvific truth and life' against the 'logical conclusion' to which observation of the 'fruits of religious faith in human life' inevitably leads.¹⁸ Alan Race notes that exclusivism "counts the revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole criterion by which all religions, including Christianity, can be understood and evaluated," and that the "inspiration for the exclusivist theories come chiefly from the Protestant theologians Barth, Brunner and

¹⁷ See A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983; G. D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism. The Challenge of other Religions*, Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986; But previous to A. Race one can already see the predicates 'exclusive' 'inclusive' 'pluralistic' in relation to other religions in J.H.Whittaker, *Matters of Faith and Matters of Principle. Religious Truth Claims and Their Logic*, San Antonio, 1981, pp.147ff. For an another definition and interpretation of the term 'Exclusivism', see also P. Schmidt-Leukel, 'Die religionstheologischen Grundmodelle: Exklusivismus, Inklusivismus, Pluralismus,' in A. Peter (ed.), *Christliche Glaube in multireligiöser Gesellschaft, Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, Immensee, 1996, pp.227-248.

¹⁸ See J. Hick and P. knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987, p.23.

Kraemer.”¹⁹ Paul Knitter defines exclusivists as “those who hold that there is only one true, saving religion – the religion founded on Christ.”²⁰ In this context of exclusivism, the doctrine ‘*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*’ seems to have played a greater role in the relationship of Christianity to other religions down through the centuries. Understanding from Denzinger what in the fifteenth century the Council of Florence had affirmed, “no one outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews and heretics and schismatics, can share in eternal life, but will perish in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”²¹ and from Luther who about hundred years later wrote in a strikingly similar terms, “Those who are outside Christianity, be they heathens, Turks, Jews or even false Christians and hypocrites...cannot expect either love or any blessing from God, and accordingly remain in eternal wrath and perdition,”²² it is quite clear how Christianity has dealt with other faiths because of her zeal for mission, truth and salvation. Christian Mission was portrayed more of a conversion of other believers to Christianity. In this respect John Hick quotes Julius Richter of 1913, who defined his subject of missiology as “that branch of theology which in opposition to the non-Christian religions, shows the Christian religion to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life; which seeks to dispossess the non-Christian religions and to plant in their stead in the soil of heathen national life the evangelic faith and the Christian life.”²³

1.2 Biblical evidence for Exclusivism

When we read the Bible we grasp two central biblical truths: first, the biblical affirmation that the world was created by God, and human beings created in God’s own image. This affirmation runs right through the scriptures. Even in Christ’s concern for all people is an evidence to see that all things – created and uncreated – belongs to God, and therefore to bring the message of Christ to all people. The creation story of the Old Testament is seen in the New Testament from a new event, that is, in Christ one enters into new creation, the old has passed away, behold the new has come (2 Cor.5:17). From this aspect of God as Creator, the creature is

¹⁹ Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 1983, p.11.

²⁰ Paul Knitter, “Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus,” in Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, p.3.

²¹ Denzinger, *Enchiridion* 1351.

²² Luther, *Larger Catechism* II, 3.

²³ John Hick and Paul Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* 1987, p.17; see also, Julius Richter, ‘Missionary Apologetics: Its Problems and Its Methods,’ in *International Review of Missions*, 2 (1913), p. 540.

bound by submission or loyalty to his Creator. The second central biblical truth is that of incarnation. That Christ came and shared our humanity is the primary message of the Gospels. His incarnation is to bring salvation to all people. He enters into the religious and cultural traditions of the people. He enters into the tragedies of the people. He proclaims the Gospel of love. He is not accepted by all. He suffers and dies on the Cross, an event that brings his Resurrection, an event that brings salvation to all.

From these two central biblical truths we look into the understanding of Exclusivism in the scriptures and how doctrines of the Church have been developed by these biblical affirmations. We present both Old and New Testament perspective on exclusive faith in Yahweh and Jesus Christ.

1.2.1 Exclusivist understanding of the Old Testament

1.2.1.1 Yahweh alone is the God of Israel: A God Experience

We see in O.T. two main avenues by which Israel's attitudes are conveyed: the conviction that Yahweh is Israel's God and the relationship of Israel to other peoples that tested their nationhood. God's dealings with Israel reveal God's ways and underline the agonies experienced by Israel as she battled time and again to maintain her nationhood under God. Thus Israel's attitudes are revealed in her interaction with non-Jews.²⁴ The reference 'the God of Israel' appears to us in Genesis 33:20 – "El-Elo'he-Israel" – God, the God of Israel. We have references earlier to God as God of Abraham and Isaac (Gen.32:9, 29). But reference to 'Israel' appears in the episode of Jacob fighting with the Lord, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel" (Gen.32:29). But it is in Genesis 33:20 that 'God of Israel' is mentioned. Later in the course of liberating Israel from Egypt the reference 'the God of Israel' is mentioned as in opposition to foreigners²⁵ – "Thus says the Lord, God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they hold a feast to me in the wilderness'" (Ex.5:1).

Israel stood in a special relationship with God, a relationship which resulted from the image of choice (Deut.7:7). The notion that Yahweh has chosen His people

²⁴ See K. A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*, Orbis Book, Maryknoll, 1991, p.8.

²⁵ See J. Schreiner, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Die Neue Echter Bibel, Echter Verlag: Würzburg, 1995, p.42-43.

belongs to the scope of deuteronomic theology. The tradition that God chose Israel is in fact present in the form itself that ‘Yahweh the God of Israel.’²⁶ Israel is chosen by God and therefore He makes covenant with Israel (Deut.5:2). Israel became God’s own people, chosen by God and brought into a covenantal relationship with God, which made Israel into a “people holy to the Lord” (Deut.7:6). God exercises his freedom in choosing Israel out of many nations. Israel was nothing before the nations. It is God’s special love for Israel that makes Him to choose Israel out of many nations (Deut.7:6-8). This act of choice results in a special relationship, in a special bond – a covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel. In His relationship with Israel Yahweh remains Lord and God, for He says, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me” (Deut.5:6-7).

Yahweh as the only true God is also realised in forbidding pagan life and thought (Deut.8:19-20, 18:9-14). For example, Israel was not to indulge in those mourning rites which were commonly practiced in the ancient Near East (Deut.14:1; Is.15:2, 22:12; Jer.16:6, 41:5; Ez.7:18 etc.). The book of Leviticus narrates that the people of Israel “shall not make tonsures upon their heads” – a reference to the pagan custom whereby the hair of the one in grief was shaved off and buried with the dead as an offering to the dead (Lev.21:5). Deuteronomy 14:3-21 warns the Israelites against eating “any abominable thing” and maintains a distinction between clean and unclean creatures. Israel’s special relationship to Yahweh helped them to see the practices of other traditions as abominable. In relationship to Yahweh Israel is to eliminate all so called abominable practices of other traditions. In the deuteronomic account of Israelite conquest, we see a violent elimination of the inhabitants who worshipped strange gods, so that “they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices, which they have done in the service of their gods, and so to sin against the Lord your God” (Deut.20:18). The biblical account does not spare Manasseh for adopting foreign cults as extensively as he did (2 Kgs.21). His religious policies form the background to the reforms carried out by King Josiah in the seventh century B.C. The account of those reforms refers more than once to the

²⁶ See J. Schreiner, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1995, P.23-24.

fact of Judah's kings having adopted un-Israelite religious practices (2 Kgs.23:1ff.), which would make the people of Judah traitors of Yahwism.²⁷

Belief in Yahweh as the only true God is strengthened by various acts of God to Israel, the most of all is that of bringing Israel out of Egypt. This deed demonstrates powerfully God's act of saving Israel. The powerfulness of Israel's God – Yahweh is put in contrast with other gods of the nations. Yahweh's powerfulness is demonstrated in the Mount Carmel episode, in which Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal, to certify their god, if he is powerful or living one, “cry aloud, for he is a god, either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened” (1Kg.18:27). In prophet Isaiah we read the absoluteness of Yahweh as “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god” (Is.44:6).

The notion that Yahweh as the God of the Fathers Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the God of Israel becomes more clear and convincing to the people of Israel by the fact that they experience His strong support and guidance. Their bondage experience in Egypt and God's act of liberating from this bondage is a remarkable event in their life, from where they begin to experience Him in every situations of their life. And so many titles or personifications come to be attached to the God of Israel. He is Creator (Gen.2-3; Ps.115:15; 121:2; 124:8, etc. – ‘Creator of heaven and earth’), He is Saviour (Ps.18:2f.), a Protector, a Helper (Ps.54:4), a Companion and a familiar Friend (Ps.55:13), a God of our Salvation (Ps.68:19-20), a God of mercy and Compassion (Ps.50), God of steadfast love and forgiving iniquity (Ex.34:7), He is my rock, my shield, my stronghold (Ps.18:2), a guide for ever (Ps.48:14), He is good and upright (Ps.25:8). The psalmists narrate in their prayers their experiences with God. And these experiences lead them to worship Yahweh as the only true God of Israel, and Yahweh's Lordship in turn demands the total obedience of Israel to Yahweh as an essential commandment.

1.2.1.2 Response from Israel : Total obedience to Yahweh

The biblical account over and again underlines the requirement of Israel to the obedience of Yahweh. The Old Testament conception of obedience is the supreme

²⁷ See K. A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*, 1991, p.12

test of faith in God and reverence for Him. It was vital and was not to be broken. Disobedience carried severe consequences. 2 Kings 17 emphasizes in the context of lax religious lifestyle, the importance of obedience to Yahweh (17:24-41). It is often referred that the exiles of 721 B.C. and 586 B.C. were the results of the disobedience to Yahweh (2 Kgs.17).The people of Israel were led to the conviction that the national survival was closely linked to the survival of the faith. Hence strict observance of circumstances and the Sabbath, and the rewriting of the existing records of their history to reflect the Deuteronomic teaching that obedience to God led them to peace and prosperity, while disobedience brought punishment in its wake.²⁸

After the return from exile, when Jews came to know that Samaritans were also worshippers of Yahweh as Jews (Ezra 4:1f.), and when Jews knew that there were Jewish and Samaritan (from the former northern kingdom) intermarriages, Jews were rather prejudiced with such developments. The Jews simply could not ignore the fact that the northern Jewish remnant had been sharing its land with nonworshippers of Yahweh. But in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. Nehemiah and Ezra take dramatic steps to ensure that those who lived in Jerusalem had authentic parentage (Neh.7:5f.). In this procedure “Nehemiah seemed anxious to achieve racial separation, and no doubt this was considered desirable in order to safeguard the priority of the Jewish religion.”²⁹ The two main reasons for the exclusion of other peoples were historical and religio-cultural, the latter reason seemed to exercise greater influence. The Ammonites and Moabites were excluded for historical reasons (Deut.23:4 – excluded “because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came forth out of Egypt), whereas the Egyptians were favoured for historical reasons (Deut.23:8 – “The children of the third generation that are born to them may enter the assembly of the Lord“). Marriage with Canaanites were forbidden on religious grounds. The parents of Samson question the wisdom of his marriage “from the uncircumcised Philistines” (Judg.14:3). Circumcision was at the very heart of the Jewish understanding of the covenant relationship with God. From Ezra 9:12 we understand Yahweh’s injunction regarding interfaith marriage – “Therefore give not your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or

²⁸ See K. A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*, 1991, p.13.

²⁹ K. A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*, 1991, p.14.

prosperity, that you may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever”.

We understand from the above instances that there was a strong approach not to deviate from Yahweh the God of Israel, not to worship other gods, not to enter into intermarriages, to shun abominable practices and traditions of other nations, to worship and to obey the God of Israel alone: “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart” (Deut.6:4-6). Total submission in obedience to Yahweh is very often demanded from the people of Israel, and is evident from the various biblical accounts – obedience to Yahweh also resulted in destroying the enemies of Israel. I Samuel 15:20 – “And Saul said to Samuel, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites”. Deuteronomy 7 narrates how Israel should fight against the seven greater and mightier nations than itself, how they should destroy their altars and cultures, in accordance to the command of the Lord, in order to secure allegiance to Yahweh alone. These and many other similar incidences in the Old Testament “indicate a triumphalism in the biblical account arising out of the conviction that Israel stood in the special relationship with God”. “Israel’s religion was a national religion from the beginning, which would account for this exclusivism.”³⁰

Even though in the Old Testament to some extent there is mingling of non-Jewish culture and form of worship with Israel, for example, adopting Canaanite fertility cult, Canaanite festivals in Israelite worship, Yahweh’s role as the provider of sustenance – a role which is credited to Baal, Israelite wisdom owing much to the wisdom traditions of other peoples, Solomon’s temple being fashioned after a Phoenician temple, etc, the overall emphasis is given to the Jewish form of worship, and other traditions and cultures are seen as profane. Yahweh as the God of Israel and the total obedience to Him alone is the exclusive content of the Old Testament.

³⁰ K. A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*, 1991, p.15.

1.2.2. Exclusivist understanding of the New Testament

1.2.2.1 Jesus as the fulfilment of the law and the prophets

We see how Jesus accepted that the Jewish religious traditions had much validity from the fact that he quotes *Shema*, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut.6:4; Mk.12:29). In quoting *Shema* Jesus affirms the basis of Jewish faith. Further, Jesus shares the view inherent in the Decalogue, that the primacy of God must influence interpersonal relationships (Mk.10:17-19; Ex.29:1ff.). Jesus accepts Jewish customs as valid, as when he advised the cured leper to show himself to the priest for certification (Mk.1:40-44). In Jesus the traditions of Judaism were seen to be fulfilled: Moses and Elijah appear with him at his transfiguration (Mk.9:2-8), he is seen as son of David, the Messianic figure (Mk.10:47, 11:10). “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Mt.5:17). The Gospels whether by what Jesus himself said or did or by other’s perception of him and his role endorse the traditions of Judaism. Certainly we do have instances where Jesus does in fact depart from Jewish traditions, in order to go further than the tradition itself, as in the case of divorcing a wife and marrying another would mean committing adultery, in contrast to the teaching of Moses (Mk.10:2-12). He also acted in contravention of the Sabbath law (Mk.2:23-28). He disregarded Jewish attitude relating to ceremonial cleanness (Mk.1:40-41, 7:1-15). He also taught that the Jews were no better than the Gentiles (Mk.12:1-14).

Jesus’ love and compassion for the non-Jews or Gentiles is remarkable. We see that in the story of good Samaritan, woman caught in adultery, prayer of the publican, meal with the tax collector, etc. He was also hard to them or criticized them. He likened them to dogs or swine (Mt.7:6). But Jesus’ love for Jews is also remarkable in continuing Jewish faith and in his fulfilment of Jewish tradition – law and the prophets. In him everything is complete what lacked in the Old Testament. “In many and varied ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb.1:1-2). He is the Messiah, Son of God, only beloved son of the Father. Through his life, death and resurrection he is the saviour of the world. From Jesus’ love for Jews as well as Gentiles and from the general picture from the Gospels we understand that Jesus proclaimed a mission of love or the kingdom of God to everyone.

1.2.2.2 Jesus as the only saviour of the world

The New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ is the only saviour of the world. In the Acts of the Apostles we read “[a]nd there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (4:12).³¹ In John 14:6 Jesus rules out all other roads to God, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” Jesus says that those who do not come to him, do not reach the Father. The only people who reach the Father are those who come to him. Jesus says that he comes from the Father (Jn.13:3), the Father has sent him (Jn.12:49), He has given him all things into his hands (Jn.13:3) and he goes to the Father (Jn.14:28, 16:17). “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me” (Jn.14:11). “The Father has sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 Jn.4:14). “For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn.3:17). Thus the understanding of Jesus as saviour primarily comes from his relationship to the Father. He is on a Father’s mission to the world.

It is in the particular teachings in the Gospels from Jesus himself clear to us or give a solid ground that Jesus as the only Son of God and only saviour of the world, which in fact causes dispute among Jews and lead Jesus to the crucifixion and death. And this teaching about Jesus as the Son of God and the saviour continues in the rest of the teachings of the New Testament, which makes even a strong case for exclusive faith in Jesus in order to be saved.

1.3 Exclusivism in the Teachings of the Fathers

1.3.1 Introduction

In this section we shall look into the formula ‘*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*’ from the historical and theological perspective of patristic era. Even though this axiom is linked with the name St.Cyprian of Carthage, it had historical antecedents, though in different forms and with different understandings. We shall study here both the Greek Fathers such as Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Latin Fathers such as Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose,

³¹ E. J. Sharpe in his evaluation on mission, dialogue and proclamation, says: “Much has been made of the late of the “no other name” text in Acts 4:12. But in biblical terms, it all begins with “no other gods” in Exodus 20:3 and “no graven images in the following verse.” E. J. Sharpe, “Mission between Dialogue and Proclamation,” in W. R. Burrows (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue*, Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993, p.169.

Jerome and Augustine. Historically the formula ‘no salvation outside the Church’ has been a readily recognizable means of delimiting both the nature and instrument of salvation, that is through Christ and his Church, although it has been modified and qualified in various dimensions as theological climates have offered.³²

The apologetic works of Justin Martyr, Aristides, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch and others revealed both the consonance with current philosophical schemes and Christianity’s distinctiveness when placed alongside religions of the heathen world. The early Apologists gave a great amount of concern to the relationship between Christianity, Judaism and Heathenism. Creative theology was not their task, rather they reflected, for the most part, the New Testament materials³³ and did not “add anything to the general faith of the Church.”³⁴ At the same time we must not forget to say that Justin stands out among them as a creative thinker in his use of the biblical materials and the philosophies with which secular thinkers were acquainted.

1.3.2 The Greek Fathers

1.3.2.1 Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius of Antioch seems to be the first to whom reference can be made in connection to ‘outside the Church no salvation’. As the Bishop of Antioch (ca.107-110) and Martyr, his witness is unforgettable as he pleads his influential people in Rome not to impend his Martyrdom with these words “I am the wheat of God. I must be ground by the teeth of wild beasts to become the pure bread of Christ.” Ignatius stresses the need for unity within the Church and union with the Bishop as a requirement for union with God in Jesus Christ. Drawing his attention to schismatics, who wilfully break this union, he writes, “[m]ake no mistake, my brothers. If anyone follows a man who causes schism he ‘does not inherit the Kingdom of God’. And any man who goes in for strange doctrine dissociates himself from the Passion.”³⁵ So the wilful and the guilty separation from the Church is clearly seen as the reason for exclusion from salvation.

³² See Y. Congar, *The Wide World My Parish*, London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1961, especially ch.10, “No Salvation outside the Church,” pp.93-154.

³³ See G. Lampe, “Christian Theology in the Patristic Period,” in *A History of Christian Doctrine*, H. Cunliffe-Jones (ed.), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, p.30.

³⁴ R. Seeberg, *The History of Doctrines in the Ancient Church, Vol. I, The History of Doctrines*, translated by C. E. Hay, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977, p.111.

³⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Philadelphians III*, in *The Early Christian Fathers*, H. Bettenson (ed. and transl.), London: Oxford University Press, 1956, p.64.

1.3.2.2 Irenaeus (ca.130-200)

It is assumed that Irenaeus gave a faint idea to the greater clarity of Cyprian by maintaining that the Spirit and faith are imparted only through the preaching of the Church. Irenaeus was expressing a common conviction when he said, “[w]here the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every kind of Grace.”³⁶ The Church as the sole guarantor of truth and entrance to spiritual life is alluded to by Irenaeus, as he says, “[s]ince therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man (depositing his money) in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth; so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the waters of life. For she is the entrance to life, all others are thieves and robbers.”³⁷ It would not be wrong to understand here that the Church is the exclusive entrance to spiritual life in Jesus Christ.

1.3.2.3. Origen (ca.185-254)

When we read *Contra Celsum* we understand that Origen is in the best tradition of the Apologists in his comprehensive definition of Christianity as a universal religion, as opposed to the more provincial religions of Judaism and those of the gentile world. Christianity as the superior religion will overcome these lesser ones.³⁸ He warns against the danger of seeking salvation in ways other than the Christian, as he says, “[l]et no one persuade or deceive himself: outside this house, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved; for if someone leaves, he is himself guilty of death,” “If anyone wishes to be saved ...let him come to this house where the blood of Christ is for a sign of redemption.”³⁹ We note here that the situation with Origen becomes more complex: one is, that he is very explicit on salvation in the Church only, and the other is, that he continues the Logos-theology of Justin Martyr (on Logos-theology of Justin Martyr we shall deal in the second chapter on Inclusivism), as in a Passage in *The First Principles* shows the Logos is said to be

³⁶ Irenaeus, “Adversus Haeresis,” III, 24.1, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103324.htm>, (access 30.01.2006)

³⁷ Irenaeus, “Adversus Haeresis,” III, 4.1, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103304.htm>, (access 27-11-2005)

³⁸ See “Contra Celsum,” ANF Vol. IV, p.497-669, taken from M. T. Marshal, *No Salvation outside the Church? A critical Inquiry*, Edwin Mellen Press, 1993, p.15.

³⁹ Origen, “Homili Iesu Nave,” 3. 5, in J.P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graecae*, vol.12, 161 volumes, in 166, Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1957.col. 841.

at work in all “rational beings” (*logokoi*), while the Spirit dwells only in the saints (*pneumatikoi*): the action of the Logos is more extensive than that of the Spirit.⁴⁰ We must also note that as Baker argues that the terms in which Origen describes the true Church preclude identification of it with the outward visible Church. Although Baker minimizes Origen’s grasp of the Church as an organized community with its own laws and constitution, Kelly agrees with Baker in noting that according to Origen’s mystical sense of the Church, ‘Christ’s body comprises the whole of creation; for according to Origen’s teaching all creatures will ultimately be saved.’⁴¹

1.3.2.4 Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215)

Clement of Alexandria insisted that one secures his or her salvation only in connection with the Church. In a statement he seems to equate human salvation with the Church: “His desire is salvation of men; and this has been called the Church.”⁴² But like Origen he took an optimistic view of the ultimate destiny of even the most wicked, and wanted to extend God’s gracious care to those who had not received the Judeo-Christian legacy. He did show appreciation for the values of Hellenistic culture and went further than Justin when he suggested that philosophy was given to the Greeks with the same purpose with which the law was given to the Jews: to serve as a handmaiden to lead them to Christ.⁴³

1.3.2.5 Gregory of Nyssa (ca.330-395)

In the Greek tradition Gregory puts his distinctive stamp on the Eastern Church in his writings on the Trinity and his interaction with Origen’s thought. His soteriology reflected the central thought of Greek theology, i.e. since God has entered the human race in Christ, humanity has been deified and made immortal. It is because Christ assumed human nature that all persons are drawn into the divine nature. Like Origen, he was at times more influenced by platonic philosophy than Scripture, particularly in his notion of immortality of the soul. His thought on universal salvation was based on the fact that all persons were created in the divine image.

⁴⁰ See Origen, “On the First Principles,” I, 3, 5, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04121.htm>, (access 28-11-2005)

⁴¹ J.Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine*, London: Methuen, 1903, p.363, and J.Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, London: A. & C. Black, 1980, p.202. I refer this citation from Gavin D’costa, “*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*”, in *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief*, I. Hamnett (ed.), London: The Colston Research Society, 1990, p.133.

⁴² Paed. III. 12 fin.; I. 6, 123, 114, as cited in R. Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, Vol. I, 1977, p.145.

⁴³ See Clement of Alexandria, “*Stromata*,” I.20, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02101.htm>, (access 3.12.2005)

The salvific process was a gradual development of the human soul, ultimately the attaining of the ‘vision of God’. In his ‘Catechetical Oration’, Gregory of Nyssa insisted that all had now heard the call to faith, to the effect that those outside the Church were guilty for it.⁴⁴

1.3.3 The Latin Fathers

1.3.3.1 Tertullian (ca. 160-225)

History credits to Cyprian a major development in the Catholic conception of the Church in the western theology, but prior to him we have the great Carthaginian lawyer and theological polemicist Tertullian, who is known as ‘Father of Latin Theology’. His writings afford an incomparable source of material on the life of the Church of his time.⁴⁵ The overarching issue of his many treatises was the holiness of the Church, of the one true Church, visible since the time of the Apostles and maintained through Episcopal succession, which is the only authoritative bearer of the revelation of Christ. And those who are not in communion with the apostolic churches but insist with their heresies to insert themselves into the apostolic age, to them Tertullian says: “Let them display the origins of their churches; let them unroll the list of their bishops, in unbroken succession from the beginning, so that the first bishop of theirs shall prove to have as his precursor and the source of his authority one of the Apostles or one of the apostolic men, who without being an Apostle continued with the Apostles.”⁴⁶ So the Church founded by Christ, handed down to the bishops through Apostles is an apostolic and a true Church. But in his later writings, he set up an opposition between the Church as defined by the succession of bishops and the Church as the gathering of “spiritual persons”. His new understanding of the Church led to the point of his saying, that, “the very Church itself is, properly and principally, the Spirit Himself.”⁴⁷ For Cyprian the Church is the guarantor of the Spirit, but for Tertullian, the Spirit is the guarantor of the Church. Many of the concerns of Tertullian are reflected in Cyprian’s practical treatises.

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, “Oratio Catechetica,” 30, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/29082.htm>, (access 3.12.2005)

⁴⁵ See H. von Campenhouse, *Men Who Shaped the Western Church*, M. Hoffman (trans.), New York: Harper and Row, 1960, p.10.

⁴⁶ Tertullian, “De Praescriptione Haereticorum,” 20,21,32,36 in H. Bettenson (ed. and trans.), *The Early Christian Fathers*, London: Oxford University Press, 1956, p.191.

⁴⁷ Tertullian, “On Modesty,” 21, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0407.htm>, (access 4.12.2005)

1.3.3.2. Cyprian of Carthage (ca.200-258)

As Bishop of Carthage Cyprian's theological understanding of the Church is profoundly challenged by the Decian persecution and Novatian schism (249-250). In this situation, Cyprian's quest for the proper ecclesiastical structure became an all-encompassing issue and the "whole heart of the great bishop was bound up with this idea."⁴⁸ Cyprian is traditionally known as the classic exponent of the doctrine of the visible Church as the one and necessary ark of divine salvation. The axiom 'no salvation outside the Church' and as such an exclusive approach of the Church is traced back principally to him. The axiom appears repeatedly in his writings. In each instance Cyprian addressed his warnings to people in danger of being separated from the Church or already separated from it. During his time, as a result of the Decian persecution, many Christians lapsed from their faith, presenting a problem for the Church leadership. Cyprian was strongly opposed to reconciling the lapsed without proper penitential discipline and felt that the bishops should be in agreement about the method of restoring those apostatising under persecution. He refused to recognize baptism that was received from heretical or schismatic hands.

Cyprian warns the Christians, if they do not obey their bishop, saying, "[l]et them not think that the way of salvation exists for them, if they have refused to obey the bishops or priests....The proud and insolent are killed with the sword of the Spirit, when they are cast out from the Church. For they cannot live outside, since there is only one house of God, and there can be no salvation for anyone except in the Church."⁴⁹ Confronting heresies and those who break away with the Church, he attacks them severely. Referring to heretics, he notes that not even martyrdom can avail them salvation, "because there is no salvation outside the Church."⁵⁰ The Church is the indispensable ark of salvation. The forgiveness of sins, direction of the Holy Spirit, true eucharist or true baptism can occur only within the Church and not outside of it. Spiritual vitality is not to be found elsewhere, but within the Church. To enjoy the spiritual benefits one must remain within the Church. Keeping in mind heretics and schismatics, he writes, "[w]hoever breaks with the Church and

⁴⁸ R. Seeberg, *The History of Doctrines in the Ancient Church*, Vol. I, The History of Doctrines, translated by C. E. Hay, Vol. I, 1977, p.180.

⁴⁹ Cyprian, Epist. 4, 4. *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinarum* (CSEL) 3, 2, pp.476-77, taken from J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001 edition, p.88.

⁵⁰ Cyprian, Epist. Ad Iubaianum 73, 21. CSEL 3, 2, p.795, taken from J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.88.

enters on an adulterous union, cuts oneself off from the promises made to the Church, and one who has turned one's back on the Church of Christ shall not come to the rewards of Christ: such a one is an alien, a worldling, an enemy. You cannot have God for your Father if you have not the Church for your mother."⁵¹ So the heretics and the schismatics are clearly in Cyprian's mind when he says that there is no salvation outside the Church.

Jacques Dupuis asks, did Cyprian, however, pass a negative judgement also on the pagans who have remained outside the Church? Were they too considered guilty and therefore excluded from salvation? He quotes on this point Francis A. Sullivan: "There is no instance in his writings in which Cyprian explicitly applied his saying: No salvation outside the Church, to the majority of people who were still pagans in his day. We know that he judged Christian heretics and schismatics guilty of their separation from the Church. Did he also judge all pagans guilty of their failure to accept the Christian Gospel and enter the Church? We do not know."⁵² Sullivan notes that when the early Christian writers spoke of people being excluded from salvation for being outside the Church, they were in fact warning the Christians whom they judged to be guilty of the grave sin of heresy and schism. He says, it is quite possible, that, if asked, they would have answered that there was no salvation outside the Church for Jews and pagans either. But it is important for the history of this axiom that we do not find them applying it to others than Christians at this time when Christians were still a persecuted minority. And it was a different case when Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman empire and when most people had accepted the Christian faith. After this change we find the Church Fathers applying the axiom 'outside the Church no salvation' to the situation of Jews and pagans.⁵³

1.3.3.3 Ambrose (ca.339-397)

Ambrose was the bishop of Milan and one of the traditional "Doctors" of the Latin Church. He was a key transitional figure between Cyprian and Augustine, but was

⁵¹ Cyprian, *The Unity of the Catholic Church* 6; *Ancient Christian Writers (ACW)* 25, p.48-49, taken from Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.88.

⁵² J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.88; F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the History of Catholic Response*, New York: Paulist press, 1992, p.22-23.

⁵³ See F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation outside the Church?*, 1992, pp.23-24.

less an innovator than a rigid guardian of orthodox Christianity.⁵⁴ Like Cyprian he saw the ultimate power and responsibility for the Church invested in the bishops of Christ. He also followed Cyprian's exclusivist position on the salvation outside the Church. In his letter 'Synagogue at Callinicum' he echoes a stance against the Jews, when he compares the spiritual vitality of the Church over against that of the Synagogue. He says that only the Church has "oil" that which heals, forgives and imparts the yoke of Christ, but the Synagogue has no "oil". The Spirit is absent from the Synagogue, and only the Church has the pouring of the special grace.⁵⁵

1.3.3.4 Jerome (ca.342-420)

Jerome is better known for his biblical translations and commentaries than for his creativity as a theologian.⁵⁶ He speaks on the familiar patristic theme of the Church as Noah's ark. Indeed this comparison of the Church to the ark goes back at least to Callistus, bishop of Rome (217-222). On Church, Jerome writes, "This is the house where alone the paschal lamb can be rightly eaten. This is the ark of Noah, and he who is not found in it shall perish when the flood prevails."⁵⁷

1.3.3.5 Augustine (ca.354-430)

Unity in the Church was central to Augustine's theology, as it was to Cyprian's, and accordingly he appropriates the axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Donatist controversy had threatened the unity of the African Church for nearly a century. The controversy was a combination of many influences arising out of the Diocletian persecution, which led to the formation of two warring churches, the Catholic and the Donatist. The fundamental question that disturbed Augustine was "[w]here is the Church, whether among us or among them."⁵⁸ Those separated from the Church, though baptized and practicing the sacraments, were excluded from salvation. Referring to a Donatist bishop, Augustine writes: "Outside the Church he can have everything except salvation. He can have honour, he can have sacraments, he can sing Alleluiah, he can resound with Amen, he can have the Gospel, he can hold and preach the faith in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit: but

⁵⁴ See S.L.Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology, The Library of Christian Classics*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956, pp.176-77.

⁵⁵ Ambrose, "Letter," 40: *The Synagogue at Callinicum*, in S.L. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology, The Library of Christian Classics*, 1956, p.15.

⁵⁶ S.L. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology, The Library of Christian Classics*, 1956, p.188.

⁵⁷ Jerome, "Letter," 15.2, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001015.htm>, (access 15.12.2005)

⁵⁸ De. unit. eccl. 2.2, as cited by Reinhold Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, Vol. I, 1977, p.318.

nowhere else than in the Catholic Church can he find salvation.”⁵⁹ Augustine’s contention is that it is only in the Catholic Church that the Spirit and love are bestowed.⁶⁰

We may ask, what may have been Augustine’s understanding of those faithful Jews who had good works and who lived under the Mosaic law. Augustine did not believe that good works were sufficient for salvation. Also those who lived under the Mosaic law were justified by faith in the incarnation which was to come. For him, living in accordance with reason did not make one Christian, as Justin believed, but faith in Christ did.⁶¹ If on the one hand Augustine’s conception of salvation was only in the Catholic Church through faith in Christ, which makes him an exclusivist, we may also say on the other hand, that his distinction between the visible and the invisible Church allowed a greater openness toward the non-Christians while remaining true to Cyprian’s formula. As Molly Marshall notes, if the formula implied only the visible Church, obviously there would be no hope for Jews, pagans, heretics or for any person who is not a member of the one Catholic Church.⁶² In short we can say, as J.P. Theisen concludes: “Augustine transmits to the Middle Ages a rather exclusivist understanding of the adage *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. While he refuses Cyprian’s position with regard to the validity of baptism outside the Church, he still insists on the necessity of the Church for salvation. Union with the Church is conceived rather rigidly; it is required for the reception of the Holy Spirit and eternal life.”⁶³ Before concluding on Augustine, I want to refer to one of his followers, Fulgentius of Ruspe (ca.468-533), also was a North African bishop, for his most rigorous form of this axiom, where he writes, “[m]ost firmly hold and by no means doubt, that not only all pagans, but also all Jews, and all heretics and schismatics who die outside the Catholic Church, will go to the eternal fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt.25:41).”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Sermo ad Caesarensis ecclesiae plebem 6; CSEL 53, pp.174-75, taken from Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.90.

⁶⁰ See Ad. Simpl. I; De. Bapt. I. 8, 10; Epistle 185, as cited in Reinhold Seeberg, 1977, pp.316-28, taken from Molly Truman Marshall, *No Salvation outside the Church? A critical Inquiry*, 1993, p.24.

⁶¹ See De Civitate dei, X,xxv, in Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Vol. 2, Philip Schaff (ed.), New York: Scribners Sons, 1904, pp.8-9, taken from Molly Truman Marshall, *No Salvation outside the Church? A critical Inquiry*, 1993, p.25.

⁶² See Molly T. Marshall, *No Salvation outside the Church? A critical Inquiry*, 1993, p.25.

⁶³ J.P. Theisen, *The Ultimate Church and the Promise of Salvation*, Collegeville, Minn.: St. John’s University Press, 1976, p.91.

⁶⁴ De fide ad Petrum 38 (79); Patrologia Latina 65, p.704, taken from Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.92.

1.3.3.6 Gregory the Great (ca.540-604)

Gregory was the fourth of the traditional Latin “Doctors” of the Church. Some historians consider him as the last great figure of the patristic era, while others see him as the first representative of Medieval Catholicism. Between Gregory the Great and his forbears in Latin theology there exists a basic unity of thought. He too postulated that all outside the Church’s bounds will by no means be saved.⁶⁵ In Gregory’s thought the Church became a bulwark of security in an age of superstition and fear. He raised the power of the leaders of the Church to the extent of almost making bishops and priests the dispensers of grace themselves.⁶⁶

1.3.4 Conclusion on exclusivist attitudes of Early Christian Fathers

- a. The study on the teachings of Early Christian Fathers is a complex one. We have seen above only a brief account of their teaching on salvation in the Church.
- b. Even though we looked into these Fathers from their exclusivist understanding of salvation, some of them may also be referred in the second to their inclusivistic approach. This naturally would mean that the teachings of the Early Fathers would not be exclusively exclusivistic and exclusively inclusivistic, but a genuine teaching that shows their eagerness in defending the faith in Christ that is handed down to the Church in varying circumstances.
- c. The demanding concern in the first five centuries was that of the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. Therefore, practically, every major Christian writer either composed a treatise in opposition to Judaism, or included this theme in other collections.⁶⁷ The existence of the Church and its role in salvation was to prove and to declare that in Christ the fullness of the truth had come, and thus the vital question in these early centuries was, where is salvation, “inside or outside the Church.”⁶⁸ ‘No salvation outside the Church’ had its genesis in the thought of the Latin Fathers as they sought to protect the Church from heterodox influences. Even though it was early applied to those who had separated themselves from the unity of the Catholic Church, by the time of Augustine, as Molly T. Marshall notes, “the

⁶⁵ mor. Xiv.v.5; ep.xi. 46, as cited in Reinhold Seeberg, *History of doctrines*, Vol. I, 1977, pp. 17-27.

⁶⁶ See R. F. Evans, *One and Holy : The Church in Latin Patristic Theology*, London: SCPK, 1972, p.146ff.

⁶⁷ See J. Pelican, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, Vol. I, *The Christian Tradition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, p.15.

⁶⁸ S. L. Greenslade, *Schism in the Early Church*, New York: Harper and Row, 1950, p.21.

formula was used as a delimiting means to exclude salvation through other means than Christ and his Church.”⁶⁹

1.4 Karl Barth and The Revelation of Jesus Christ

1.4.1 About Karl Barth and Church Dogmatics

Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* can be said without fear of contradiction that it is the most comprehensive dogmatics that has appeared since St. Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*, surpassing in respect of the range and the depth of its thought and the wealth of its material, the work of many patristic, mediaeval and reformed theologians. If it were at all possible to sum up its theme in one sentence, it might be said, making use of some felicitous words of Hans Urs von Balthasar, that its theme is the message of “God’s eternal Yea and Amen to Himself and His creation”,⁷⁰ as that message is made known to man, according to the witness of Holy Scripture, in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Barth was a legend in his life time for he more than anyone else, was responsible for setting the Church and its thinking (especially in Europe) on a different basis from previous decades, namely, God in His relation to man rather than the reverse.⁷¹ Throughout *Church Dogmatics* one is immediately immersed into the theology of Karl Barth as that of coming from above or transcendent. It is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ no doubt is the beginning of his theology. George Hunsinger in his ‘How to read Karl Barth’ says, “[a]t the point where most other contemporary theologies resort to the language of experience or the language of reason (whether separately or in conjunction, and however conceived), Barth opts instead for the language of mystery.”⁷² It is a dialectical method that he follows in his *Church Dogmatics*. Nothing is more likely to lead the reader of the *Church Dogmatics* astray than a nondialectical imagination. Barth proceeds from the premise that with the advent of the truth of God, the structure of the language has been ruptured at the very core.⁷³ The *Church Dogmatics* is concerned with the exposition and interpretation of a story, the story of God’s gracious dealings with mankind in Jesus Christ in eternity. It is rightly noted that the

⁶⁹ M. T. Marshall, *No Salvation outside the Church? A critical inquiry*, 1993, p.28.

⁷⁰ H. Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, second edition, 1952, P.36, quoted in H. Gollwitzer, *Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics, a Selection with Introduction* (1957), English translation by G.W. Bromiley, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961, pp.1 f.

⁷¹ See J. Thompsom (ed.), *Theology Beyond Christendom, Essays on the Centenary of the Birth of Karl Barth* Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1986, p.viii.

⁷² G. Hunsinger, *How to read Karl Barth, the Shape of his Theology*, New York: Oxford University Press 1991, p.ix.

⁷³ See G. Hunsinger, *How to read Karl Barth, the Shape of his Theology*, 1991, p.ix.

“concrete Word of God” as incarnate in Jesus Christ is regarded by Barth as “a surpassing miracle,” as “a pure happening,” and as an event so “unique” that no law can be invoked to explain it.⁷⁴ Robert Jenson writing on Barth’s theology, states: “It is this absolute priority of Jesus’ existence, of the life of our brother-man which is the key to the otherwise puzzling convolutions of the great dogmatic theology which Barth has developed through his years at Gottingen, Bonn and Basel, and recorded in the twelve huge volumes of the Church Dogmatics.”⁷⁵ Barth’s theology is a theology of God’s only revelation in Jesus Christ, and man’s relation to God is only through faith which is the work of the Holy Spirit and the gift of grace.

Coming to the theme of exclusivism in Barth’s teachings, the most extreme form of the exclusivist theory has been stated by him in his Church Dogmatics, Vol. I, 2 under the heading “The revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion.” For Barth, the fundamental is the guiding principle to which every theological concern is subject: i.e., the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, attested in Holy Scripture. From this standpoint the practice of ‘religion’ is seen as unbelief, and ‘the religions’ are in error and in sinful blindness.⁷⁶ We may ask in Barth’s approach, whether there is revelation outside the Bible, whether persons can come to know God apart from the biblical revelation, and whether there is point of contact (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) in a man or woman which can receive God’s revelation in Christ. And Barth exclaimed to these proposals with a „*vehement Nein!*“. We analyse in the following section how Barth’s revelation of God in Jesus Christ solely judges other faiths and separates other religions from revelation.

1.4.2 Revelation of God in Jesus Christ – a guiding principle to every theological concern

As a Christian theologian Barth is concerned only with the Christian understanding of revelation and holds that the Christian revelation is a unique revelation that can not be compared with anything else that is called revelation. Just as the Word of God is the source, the basis and the criterion of his theology, so also the Word of God determines his concept of Christian revelation. The Word of God as addressed to

⁷⁴ See H. Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 1972, p.70.

⁷⁵ R. W. Jenson, *God after God: The God of the Past and the Future as Seen in the Work of Karl Barth*, Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969, p.72.

⁷⁶ See A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 1983, p.11-12.

man is the Living God Himself in His revelation, and revelation is the coming of the Word of God, of God Himself in His Word, to man, a divine action initiated, executed and consummated by the sovereign and free grace of God. The Christian revelation is therefore a specific ‘reality’ of its own. Hence, Barth does not derive his concept of revelation from any general idea of revelation.⁷⁷ His concept of revelation he obtains from that particular event in which the Word came, and continually comes again, to man, the revelation, that is of God in Jesus Christ. For him the Christian revelation is a particular, a concrete, and a rational event: ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’ (Jn 1:14).⁷⁸ Christian revelation is the revelation of the Triune God, of the God, that is, who, according to the witness of the Holy Scripture and the Church’s proclamation based upon that witness, “is the Father of Jesus Christ, is Jesus Christ Himself, is the Spirit of the Father and of His Son.”⁷⁹

Revelation is a revealing about both God and man, and the judgement on ‘religion’ and ‘religions’ derives from both these elements. Revelation, as the self-manifestation of God, declares something which is wholly new about God, a knowledge which could not come to man by any route other than God Himself revealing it to man. In other words, “God is known through God and through God alone”.⁸⁰ God Himself has revealed Himself to man in His Word in Jesus Christ. The status of man is that of the status of a fallen man. It is God’s work of reconciliation that fills the vacuum in man. The work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ is the “Word in which God Himself has set the beginning of knowledge in the vacuum where there is no beginning for man as estranged from God and Himself”.⁸¹ It reveals that fallen man, because of his sinfulness, is estranged from God, and therefore in need of faith and thus grace in order to know God and to know himself.

Jesus Christ in the unity of His person and work represents the objective aspect of revelation. The work of the Holy Spirit in man, which enables him to receive this revelation in faith represents the subjective aspect of revelation. Sharply

⁷⁷ See H. Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1964, p.67.

⁷⁸ See *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 1, Edinburgh, English translation, 1936, p.127, 134, 333 f., The reference here I have taken from H. Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 1964, p.68.

⁷⁹ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol.I, 1, 1936, p.334, taken from H. Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 1964, p.68.

⁸⁰ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, 1, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957, p.44.

⁸¹ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, 1, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956, p.81.

distinguishing between the objective and subjective aspect of revelation, Barth does not dispute that God can and does reveal Himself also in nature and in history but contends that this objective revelation does not and cannot get through to man, to fallen man. In other words there is no way for a fallen man to reach God, to know God other than through God alone, through His revelation in Jesus Christ. In opposition to Emil Brunner, Barth rejects the proposition of a general revelation through creation.⁸² The general revelation in creation does not and can not reveal God, the world and man as they really are because it needs the knowledge of God's work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ and thus the knowledge of Jesus Christ Himself, of His person and work, to attain that true knowledge.⁸³ In Barth's view true knowledge of God, the world and man is not possible apart from the knowledge of God's work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ because it is only in and through that work and thus in and through Jesus Christ that we come to know who and what God and man really are and that the world has been created by God and for what purpose.

Since Barth's exclusive concern is with that revelation which exhibits the true being and nature of God, the world and man, and since he can find that revelation only in the person and work of Jesus Christ, all other so called 'revelations' are not regarded by him as revelation in the proper sense of the word. The latter, in his view, do not and can not exhibit the truth that is revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ and therefore can only lead to the knowledge of "idols." And for this reason Jesus Christ is for him not 'the final revelation', nor 'the crown of revelation', but the revelation.⁸⁴ The revelation in Jesus Christ is the answer to the fallen man. Man has been raised through Jesus Christ to receive the true knowledge of God and himself. It will not be wrong to say then, if there was no revelation in Jesus Christ, there would not have been true knowledge of God and man. Seen from this Barth's perspective of revelation of God in Jesus Christ as "God's eternal Yea and Amen to Himself and His creation", religion which is seen as an attempt to know God apart from revelation is therefore an activity of unbelief. "The genuine believer will not say that he came to faith from faith, but – from unbelief, even though the attitude

⁸² See H. Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 1964, p.69.

⁸³ See *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 1, 1936, pp.457 f., 469 f., taken from H. Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 1964, p.70.

⁸⁴ See H. Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 1964, p.70. The concept Jesus Christ as 'the final revelation' is by R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, pp.142, 153; The concept Jesus Christ as 'the crown of revelation' is by W.Temple, "The Universality of Christ" in *About Christ* (1962), p.20. I have taken these references from H. Hartwell, 1964, p.93, footnotes 133 and 134.

and activity with which he met revelation, and still meets it, is religion. For in faith, man's religion as such is shown by revelation to be resistance to it."⁸⁵ Secondly, religion which is an attempt by man to justify or redeem himself apart from revelation is therefore is an activity of unbelief. "Where we want what is wanted in religion, i.e., justification and sanctification as our own work, we do not find ourselves... on the direct way to God, who can then bring us to our goal at some higher stage on the way... God in His revelation will not allow man to try to come to terms with life, to justify and sanctify himself."⁸⁶ The result is that the religion is seen as an act of unbelief. The predominant theme of Barth's teaching – the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, as attested in the Holy Scripture – is a guiding principle to every theological concern.

1.4.3 Radical separation between 'revelation' and 'religion'

The reality and possibility of God's revelation belong exclusively with the divine initiative. Any attempt on the part of man to anticipate, predict or supply criteria out of his own reason by which the gospel may be interpreted, is a direct contradiction of the meaning and act of revelation. Both the revelation and its reception in the consciousness of man, are the result of divine graciousness: "Revelation is God's sovereign action upon man or it is not a revelation."⁸⁷ According to Alan Race, this leads ultimately to the radical separation between 'revelation' and 'religion'. It leads to the feature which contains within it the justification for the judgement which this theory pronounces on other faiths. That means, that the Christian gospel belongs to 'revelation', and the other faiths are the product of 'religion'. And this radical separation is not a result of an exercise in comparative religion, but arises out of Barth's understanding of Christian revelation.⁸⁸

Why there is no room at all for religion in revelation, is to say that Barth sharply distinguishes between religion as a human activity and faith as that event in the life of man which is the work of the Holy Spirit and as such God's gift to man. For Barth 'religion is unbelief'. His criticism of religion, which is highly praised by

⁸⁵ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 2, 1956, p.302.

⁸⁶ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 2, 1956, p.309.

⁸⁷ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 2, 1956, p.295.

⁸⁸ See A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 1983, p.13.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer,⁸⁹ has been widely understood as the rejection of all human religion.⁹⁰ Hans Waldenfels says, when Barth refers ‘religion as unbelief’ and as ‘the matter of Godless people’ in his Church Dogmatics, Barth uses Feuerbachs’ religion critique, where according to Feuerbach every religion is human projection, that is, human sketch of one’s own picture of wishes and ideals, and therefore religion is a human work, except that Christianity takes away this criticism. That is because he confronts Christian revelation as work of God to religions as work of People.⁹¹ So the religion as the human work is clearly seen by Barth as Unbelief and therefore is the rejection of human religion. Even in his epistle to the Philippians which has a more restrained language from that of Romans, we can observe in particular once more the emphasis on the mystery of the majesty and holiness of God, and the proposition that there is no bridge from man to God but solely the way from God to man, and the description of Jesus Christ as the end of all religion, including the Christian religion.⁹² But Herbert Hartwell would say, that this rejection of all religion was never Barth’s view, because already in his ‘The Epistle to the Romans’, for all its fierce onslaught on man’s religion, he says, with true religion in mind, that religion is unavoidable reflection in man’s soul, in his experience, of the miracle of faith which has taken place in his soul. In the two sections of his Church Dogmatics (Vol. I, 2, para. 17.2,3.) on ‘Religion as Unbelief’ and on ‘True Religion’ he has made clear that two kinds of human religion exist of which he rejects the one, but not the other.⁹³ Perhaps that is to say that there is only the ‘true religion’ which in fact is a Christian revelation, and as such Barth does not reject the ‘true religion’. There is a misunderstanding according to Herbert Hartwell with regard to Barth’s rejection of all religions. The misunderstanding is partly due to a misinterpretation of the ambiguous German term ‘Aufhebung’ as used in the title section on religion

⁸⁹ See D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (ed. Eberhard Bethage), London: SCM Press Ltd., 1971, P.286, also see pp.280, 361. In his letter dated July 18th 1944, he says: “To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be a man.... It is not the religious act which makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life,” *ibid.* p.361.

⁹⁰ See, N. Micklem, *The Abyss of Truth*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956, PP.113 f.; J. Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962, pp.177 f., 189,

⁹¹ See H. Waldenfels, *Religionen als Antwort*, München: Verlagsgesellschaft, Gerhard Kaffke mbh.,1980, p.62, Waldenfels writes: „Wenn K. Barth in seiner “Kirchlichen Dogmatik” I/2, §17, die Religion als “Unglauben” und als “die Angelegenheit des gottlosen Menschen” bezeichnet, macht er sich die Feuerbachsche Religionskritik (alle Religion ist menschliche Projektion, d.h. menschlicher Entwurf von Wunsch- und Idealbildern seiner selbst und damit Menschenwerk ist) zu eigen, mit der Ausnahme, dass er das Christentum dieser Kritik entzieht“.

⁹² See K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (1928), 6th. edition, translated by J.W. Leitch (1962), pp. 12, 100, 105.

⁹³ See H. Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 1964, p.87.

(*Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I,2, § 17). This term has a twofold meaning, a negative one: ‘abolition’ and a positive one: ‘exaltation’, and Barth uses both these connotations so that the title of *Church Dogmatics* I,2, § 17, as stated in English, which reads ‘The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion’, should have been rendered as ‘The Revelation of God as the Abolition and Exaltation of Religion’. In fact Barth is fighting against man-made and man-owned religion, which God’s revelation in Jesus Christ has abolished, as unbelief. Because of man’s sinfulness no human religion, not even Christian religion, can be in itself and as such true religion. It can however become true religion, or Christian religion becomes a true religion, only as a work of faith in and obedience to the divine revelation of Jesus Christ, and thus only by grace.⁹⁴

The provocative statement ‘religion is unbelief,’ if considered in the light of what Barth says about true religion, that is religion that has its total existence in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, attacks the man, the religious man, who imagines that he can reach out to God, that is, he can know God and can justify and sanctify himself by means of his own religious efforts (man-made religion), thus confusing his religion and his piety, with faith. Here man identifies revelation with religion, making it a means of self-justification and self sanctification. This would result in refusing to live by the grace of God which has been revealed to man in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. And precisely this rebellion of man, of religious man refusing to accept the grace, against God’s grace in Jesus Christ which Barth characterises as unbelief.⁹⁵

To differentiate between religion as unbelief and true religion as seen by Barth: in the former man does the talking and thus shows that he does not believe, whereas in the latter man listens to God’s Word, Jesus Christ and thus shows that he believes; in the former man tries to live a religious life by his own resources, rejecting God’s grace, whereas in the latter he lives by faith and thus by and from grace; in the former Christian revelation is explained in terms of religion, making it one of the world’s religions and in the latter religion is explained in the light of Christian

⁹⁴ See H. Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 1964, pp.87-88

⁹⁵ See H. Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 1964, pp.88-89.

revelation with the result that Christian religion is marked off as the one and only true religion in as far as it lives by and from the grace of God in Jesus Christ.⁹⁶

1.4.4 Two elements in Revelation which show why religion is really unbelief

To realize that religion is really unbelief, we need to consider it from Barth's view on the revelation attested in the Holy Scripture. There are two elements in that revelation which make it unmistakably clear.

1.4.4.1 Revelation is God's self-offering and self-manifestation

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. In revelation God tells man that He is God, and as such that He is his Lord. In saying this to him, revelation tells him something utterly new, something which apart from revelation he does not know and can not tell either himself or others. If it is true that God is God and that as such He is the Lord of man, then it is also true that man is so placed towards him, that he could know Him. But this is the very truth which is not available to man, before it is told him in revelation. The truth that God is God and our Lord, and the further truth that we could know Him as God and Lord, can only come to us through the truth itself. This 'coming to us' of the truth is revelation. The activity which corresponds to revelation would have to be faith. That is, we need faith to recognize the self-offering and self-manifestation of God. So the fact is that the truth comes to man, or given to man or revealed to him, and it is also the fact that man cannot attain the truth by his own efforts. The genuine believer will not say that he came to faith from faith, but from unbelief, even though the attitude and activity with which he met revelation, and still meets it, is religion. 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.⁹⁷

1.4.4.2 Revelation is the act by which in grace God reconciles man to himself

There is a radical assistance of God, in which this assistance comes to us as those who are unrighteous and unholy, and as such damned and lost. The affirmation

⁹⁶ See *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 2, 1956, pp.326, 344 f.

⁹⁷ See J. Hick and B. Hebblethwaite (eds.), *Christianity and Other Religions*, London: Collins, 2001, pp.8-9.

which revelation makes of man is that he is unable to help himself either in whole or even in part. Again he ought not to have been so helpless. It is not so inherent in the nature and concept of man that he should be unrighteous and unholy and therefore damned and lost. He was created to be the image of God, i.e. to obedience towards God and not to sin, to salvation and not to destruction. But he is not summoned to this as to a state in which he might still somehow find himself, but as one in which he no longer finds himself, from which he has fallen by his own fault. But this, too, is a truth which he cannot maintain: it is not present to him unless it comes to him in revelation, i.e. in Jesus Christ, to be declared to him in a new way. He cannot in any sense declare to himself that he is righteous and holy, and therefore saved. It is God's revelation in Jesus Christ who comes to him, to make him righteous and holy. 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. Jesus Christ, as the self-offering and self-manifestation of God, replaces and completely outbids those attempts, putting them in the shadows to which they belong. The revelation of God – God in Jesus Christ replaces all the different attempts of man to reconcile God to the world.⁹⁸

Our faith in Jesus Christ consists in our recognizing, admitting, affirming and accepting the fact that everything has actually been done for us once and for all in Jesus Christ. 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.

1.4.5 Solely the gospel of Jesus Christ judges other faiths

“Revelation does in fact not differ from the person of Jesus Christ, and again does not differ from the reconciliation that took place in Him. To say “revelation” is to say “The Word became flesh.””⁹⁹ The Word of God is revealed in the Holy Scripture. The Word of God as revealed in the Holy Scripture is Jesus Christ himself. The guiding principle to one's life is the revelation or the Word of God, Jesus Christ or his Gospel. It is not Christianity as a developed historical religion with its own structures and complex organization, which judges other faiths, but the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christianity itself, indeed, stands condemned, if it fails to

⁹⁸ See J. Hick and B. Hebblethwaite (eds.), *Christianity and Other Religions*, 2001, pp.10-11.

⁹⁹ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 1, 1960, p.134.

obey the faith with which it has been entrusted. The Church itself, as an institution, has no theological justification to view as superior to other faiths. Barth is anxious nevertheless to distinguish 'right and true religion' from the variety of religious activity in the world, and in this sense he recognizes that the Christian stands more disposed to a correct orientation: "At the end of the road we have to tread there is, of course, the promise to those who accept God's judgement, who led themselves to be led beyond their unbelief. There is faith in this promise, and, in this faith, the presence and reality of the grace of God, which, of course, differentiates our religion, the Christian, from all others as the true religion."¹⁰⁰

1.4.6 Conclusion

It is easy to misunderstand Barth's judgement on the world of the religions. Some have seen in it most harmful and distorting bigotry, the product of narrow-mindedness and cultural isolation. This would certainly be to misrepresent his genuine theological concern, which is the defence of the absolute sovereignty of God. It is not out of a perverted Christian arrogance that Barth asserts the supremacy of the Christian way, but from sheer obedience, as he sees it, to the truth as it has been given in Jesus Christ. In fact Barth was quite willing to see the greatness of human achievement, art and culture that is reflected in the non-Christian faiths. For he says, "[i]n the sphere of reverence before God, there must always be a place for reverence for human greatness."¹⁰¹ Yet Barth seems to have had a keen awareness of the propensity for sin and idolatry that lies close to the heart of religious practices, and he has ample evidence from the history of religions to justify his sensitivity. And this awareness would account in part for the extreme form of his dialectical theology in respect of a Christian theology of religions. But a greater part of his extremism, and this includes now the polemic nature of his pronouncements, probably lies in his reaction to the liberal theology of his teachers. These tended to view Christianity as one form of religion alongside others, and its relevance in the world was measured against categories other than those of the gospel itself. For Barth, this led to error. Moreover it was an act of rebellion by man against the sovereignty of God. And therefore Christianity had to be proclaimed as *sui generis*.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 2, 1956, p.327.

¹⁰¹ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 2, 1956, p.301.

¹⁰² See A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 1983, p.14.

At the same time, it is also hard not to feel offence at Barth's theory because he states it in such extreme terms, which directly affect other faiths of the world. But many of Barth's disciples have pointed out to his later writing as a better and more profound expression of his thought, claiming that it is possible to detect a change of mind there. In his *Church Dogmatics* Vol. IV, 3, he in fact outlines the relationship of the Christian community to the world, and therefore implicitly also to the world religions. Barth says, "[i]n each and every man to whom it [the Gospel of Jesus Christ] 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."¹⁰³ We can see a new emphasis in this passage. Earlier as a dialectical theologian Barth insisted that God's word, spoken to man in Jesus Christ was always a paradoxical address consisting of 'yes' and 'no' simultaneously. The 'yes' referred to new life which is the result of salvation brought by Jesus Christ, and 'no' referred to man as he exists in ignorance of, or in hostility towards the gospel. The shift in Barth's thought is towards a greater emphasis on God's 'yes' and away from the polemical approach of his former period. Man must never be seen in terms of God's 'no,' but always from the standpoint of the gospel as the creature who has a future in the body of Christ. This is to say that there is a positive approach to every man whether he is in faith or unbelief, but he has a future in the body of Christ. In this Barth makes use of a distinction in the definition of man, i.e., man as the subject of his own existence is culturally determined both by his environment and his past, but man as his unique self is "immediate to God and his neighbour."¹⁰⁴ The person who is addressed by the gospel is approached by virtue of his "immediacy to God" and secondarily because he is outside the body of Christ. Even though the question of the relation of the Christian Church to other faiths is never raised explicitly in this section of *Church Dogmatics*, we can understand the change in Barth's views as one of emphasis, and not in his underlying theology of religions as presented in his earlier writings.¹⁰⁵ This is to say that the latter work of Barth is continuous with his

¹⁰³ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, 3, II, 1962, p.810.

¹⁰⁴ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, 3, II, 1962, p.804.

¹⁰⁵ See A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 1983, p.16. A similar observation is made by J.A.Veitch, thus: "In volume one of 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

earlier essential conviction that “[w]e must not ascribe to him [man] any existence except as the possession of Christ”.¹⁰⁶ In the theology of religions, says Alan Race, this leads to exclusivism.¹⁰⁷ Gavin D’costa notes that strictly speaking, neither Barth nor Kraemer thought that their exclusivist theologies actually entailed that all those who did not confess Jesus as Lord suffered eternal perdition. The main thrust of both these theologians was to maintain the priority and “necessity” of confession and surrender to Jesus as Lord.¹⁰⁸ We may do injustice to Barth if we state that it was Barth’s intention to exclude non-Christians from the salvation of Christ. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger states, “[p]robably no one today takes the position of exclusivism in the sense of denying salvation to all non-Christians – which, by the way, was not even Karl Barth’s view.”¹⁰⁹

1.5 Leonard Feeney and ‘Outside the Church no Salvation’

1.5.1 Introduction to Feeney: Faith, Excommunication, Reconciliation

It was the faith in Christ and in the Catholic Church that matters most in the life of Leonard Feeney. That there is only one true Church, the One, Holy, Catholic, apostolic, and Roman Church, outside of which no one can be saved, has always been taught by the Catholic Church. The traditional axiom of exclusivism ‘*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*’ (Outside the Church, no salvation) found its way into the Church’s official doctrine, indeed in its rigid form, at the council of Florence (1442),¹¹⁰ to the effect that all those outside the visible Catholic Church are destined for eternal damnation. This dogma, however, has been under attack in recent times. The popes in the last century had to rebuke repeatedly the liberal Catholics for their tendency to dilute this dogma, “reducing it to a meaningless formula.”¹¹¹ But in the

balance”, ‘Revelation and Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth’, in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1971, p.20.

¹⁰⁶ *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, 2, 1956, p.296.

¹⁰⁷ See A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 1983, p.16.

¹⁰⁸ See G. D’costa, *John Hick’s Theology of Religions: A Critical evaluation*, Boston: University press of America, 1987, p.23

¹⁰⁹ J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004, p.80.

¹¹⁰ The axiom ‘*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*’ was borrowed from Fulgentius of Ruspe (467- 533). Formerly, this principle was applied to situations of schisms and heresy in the Christian fold. The document of the Council of Florence began to apply this to the other religions with a negative attitude as regards the role of ‘pagan’ religions in the objective economy of salvation. The council of Florence states: “no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of life; but they will go to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before the end of their life they are joined to it” Neuner & Dupuis, ed., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001, 1005.

¹¹¹ Pope Pius XII, *Humanis Generis*.

late 1940's and early 1950's the same dogma has been misrepresented on the opposite side by Feeney and his followers, changing "outside the Church no salvation" into "without water baptism there is absolutely no salvation," thereby denying doctrines which had been positively and unanimously taught by the Church, viz. baptism of Blood and baptism of Desire.¹¹²

Leonard Feeney was born in Lynn, Massachusetts on February 15, 1897. He entered the seminary at an early age and was ordained in 1927. After ordination, he studied at Oxford university for a time, and upon his return to America, he taught at Boston College. He was a very gifted writer and the author of many books. In 1934 he published a collection of essays entitled 'Fish on Friday' which became a best seller. In one of the essays that appears in this book he made quite plain that at that time he believed a well-intentioned Protestant could be saved. But it is in his book 'Bread of Life' which appeared in 1952 that he insists very often that for one to be saved one must be absolutely baptized in water. 'Bread of life' is a collection of lectures or conferences that were given by Feeney at St. Benedict Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1942 to 1952. It is a significant work because in it Feeney sets forth his theological position with regard to Justification, Salvation and Baptism.

It is said that his excommunication in 1953 was unjust and invalid because of a defect of form. It was unjust, because he was excommunicated for his defence of Catholic orthodoxy in general and of the doctrine "outside the Church there is no salvation."¹¹³ On his death, the obituary in The New York Times appeared under the headlines, "Leonard Feeney, Jesuit priest, 80; Ousted in Dispute Over salvation", "The Rev. Leonard Feeney, a Jesuit Priest who was excommunicated for nearly 20 years for preaching that there was no salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church, died yesterday. He was 80 years old."¹¹⁴ When we follow his excommunication case, we understand that it leads to an unpleasant relationship between him and the official authorities of the Catholic Church. The disobedience and non-submission to

¹¹² See F. Laisney, *Is Feeneyism Catholic?*, Missouri: Angelus press, 2001, pp.1-2.

¹¹³ See R. Mary, *Father Feeney and the Truth about Salvation*, Richmond: St.Benedict Center, 1995, Chapter on 'Excommunication', pp.21-28. See also articles about Feeney, 'The Case of Fr.Leonard Feeney' at <http://alcazar.net/Feeney2.html>, (access 11.05.2004); A. O. Assessor, 'The Case against Father Feeney and for Baptism of Blood and Desire,' at <http://matt1618.freeyellow.com/desire.html>, (access 11.06.2004); Fr. W. Most, 'Tragic errors of Leonard Feeney,' at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/SCRIPTUR/FEENEY.TXT>, (access 05.05.2004)

¹¹⁴ *The New York Times*, Feb.1, 1978, p.B2.

the Catholic Church by Feeney has also played a negative impact in this whole process. It is of no interest to us here as why or for what reason he was excommunicated, but to see and understand if his teaching had a literal interpretation of the axiom ‘no salvation outside the Church’, and this too to what extent. To state his position as that of a strong reply to the liberal Catholics is not absolutely wrong. It was an answer to them that he takes a literal stance on the teachings of the Church, ‘no salvation outside the Church.’

About 20 years of excommunication for his teachings? or for his disobedience to the Catholic Church? ends in his reconciliation¹¹⁵ to the Catholic Church in 1972. He taught ‘outside the Church no salvation,’ but was kept outside the Catholic Church for about 20 years, and died as reconciled in the Catholic Church. The reconciliation process was that he had to make a profession of faith. The followers of Feeney are strong in their crusade and teaching about the doctrine on ‘no salvation outside the Church,’ We see in the following subsection at some of the key elements of this doctrine as presented by Feeney.

1.5.2 Defender of the doctrine ‘no salvation outside the Church’

1.5.2.1 Rigorous stance on the doctrine

It was on Thursday, July 28 1949 the Prefect of the Holy Office approved the decree in a response to the controversy that arose in the wake of Feeney’s interpretation of the doctrine ‘outside the Church no salvation.’ The document made the official Catholic position clear:

To gain eternal salvation it is not always required that a person be incorporated in fact as a member of the Church, but it is required that he belongs to it at least in desire and longing. It is not always necessary that this desire be explicit..... when a man is invincibly ignorant, God also accepts an implicit desire, so called because it is contained in the good disposition of the soul by which a man wants to be conformed to God’s will.¹¹⁶

This document, which is a letter of the Holy office to the archbishop of Boston, makes clear the Catholic position of the axiom ‘no salvation outside the Church’, in a sense, that it explains that the necessity of belonging to the Church for salvation is one of the means, and not only of precept. It goes on to clarify what this must mean

¹¹⁵ See R. Mary, *Father Feeney and the Truth about Salvation*, 1995, pp.29-35.

¹¹⁶ H. Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma: The Church Teaches*, London: Herder & Herder, 1957, pp.274-275.

for persons in different situations. It states that one is also related to the Church in desire or longing, even implicitly, and such a desire is informed by supernatural faith and love.¹¹⁷

But the position of Feeney was that without Baptism of water there is no salvation. It is simply to say that if one wants to be saved, he must actually be a baptized member of the Catholic Church. That is to say, he must be incorporated into the Church by Baptism of water. We understand here that only through the visible Church one attains salvation or one can get into heaven. He says, “[y]our belief that those outside the Church can get into heaven is a terrible belittling of the labours of the twelve Apostles, who cast lots for the whole world and went off here and there all over the earth. It is a terrible belittling of all the travelling the great priests and apostles of the Church did in the early days, and all down the centuries.”¹¹⁸ In the ‘Bread of life’ he speaks very often to the waters of Baptism as the only and absolute way to salvation. In his teaching, often quoting the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church, he gives rather a rigid and literal interpretation of the doctrine ‘no salvation outside the Church,’ and often refers liberals as of distorting this doctrine. It was the move of the liberal Catholics during his time to give a liberal interpretation of the axiom ‘no salvation outside the Church’ and thus incorporating that one can also be saved by a desire or longing, and not necessarily by Baptism of water alone or by visible Church alone.

1.5.2.2 Effect of Baptism of desire: Justification

Feeney says that Baptism of desire is not a Sacrament of the Church, the sacraments have to be visible, Christ’s Baptism was not a baptism of desire, Christ’s Baptism was so overwhelmingly a Baptism of water that he himself stripped of his garments and waded into the river Jordan to be baptized by John. Attacking the liberals he says that the liberals insist on the desire more than on the Baptism, on the thirst more than the water, on the longing more than the Sacrament, on the inner holy impulse more than the outward holy rite. Referring to Baptism of desire he makes a clear distinction between Justification and Salvation. The effect of the Baptism of desire is Justification and the effect of the Baptism of water is Salvation. A man in

¹¹⁷ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, P.127. See also the letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston (8 August 1949), in DS 3866-72.

¹¹⁸ L. Feeney, M.I.C.M., *Bread of Life*, Still River: Saint Benedict Center, 1974, p.181.

the Old Testament waiting and wanting Baptism to be instituted, and a man in the New Testament waiting and wanting Baptism to be administered could both be justified. And by Justification he understands getting into the State of Sanctifying Grace. He admits that desire for Baptism is sufficient for Justification. By Justification, one is given the remission of original sin and actual sin and thus “getting into the Sanctifying Grace.” While a man could be justified and be in the State of sanctifying Grace by desire for Baptism, Feeney absolutely insisted that such a person could never be saved. He could never get into heaven.¹¹⁹

1.5.2.3 No Salvation without Baptism of water

Indeed, Feeney did accuse cardinal Gibbons and Baltimore Catechism of heresy for teaching that “[t]here are three kinds of Baptism: Baptism of Water, Baptism of Desire, and Baptism of Blood.” Quoting St. Paul on ‘One Baptism, One Lord and One Faith’ (Eph.4:5) and the Council of Trent, ‘[i]f anyone shall say that true and natural water is not of necessity in Baptism, and therefore shall turn those words of our Lord, Jesus Christ, “unless one be born again of water and the Holy Spirit” (Jn.3:5), into some metaphor, let him be anathema’, he absolutely denied that by Baptism of desire or blood one can be saved.¹²⁰ We present here a series of questions and answers as he expressed his position on ‘being saved’ in ‘Bread of Life’:

Q. What does “Baptism of Desire” mean?

A. It means the belief in the necessity of Baptism of Water for salvation, and a full intent to receive it.

Q. Can “Baptism of Desire” save you?

A. Never.

Q. Could “Baptism of Desire” save you if you could really believed it could?

¹¹⁹ See L. Feeney, *Bread of Life*, 1974, pp.39-41. On the Catholic doctrine on Justification, as stated in “Fr. Feeney facts” at <http://alcazar.net/Feeney3.html> (access 10.06.2005): “The Catholic doctrine on justification is radically different from that of Martin Luther. In Catholic teaching, on the negative side, when a man is justified a “real eradication of sin” takes place. Sin is really and truly taken away. It is not just covered up. On the positive side, an “inner renewal and sanctification of the soul occurs. This renewal and sanctification is caused by Sanctifying Grace. Thus a man in the State of Grace is truly sanctified. He is made in his soul supernaturally beautiful. He is a friend of God. He is a child of God. And he is an heir of heaven.” Thus the, “The essential error of Fr. Feeney, then, is rooted in his novel distinction between Justification and Salvation which involves errors touching both Justification and Sanctifying Grace. In these matters, Fr. Feeney departs from the doctrine of the Catholic Church. He does this in order to foster and to protect his own doctrine of no Salvation without Baptism of Water.”

¹²⁰ See L. Feeney, *Bread of Life*, 1974, p.117.

A. It could not.

Q. Could it possibly suffice for you to pass into the state of justification?

A. It could.

Q. If you got into the state of justification with the aid of “Baptism of Desire”, and then failed to receive Baptism of Water, could you be saved?

A. Never.¹²¹

Feeney has so often used the ‘waters of Baptism’ and the absolute necessity of baptizing everyone in order to be saved in his sermons, that we are led to conclude, that he was on a great challenge to ‘convert’ (baptize) the whole world into Christianity. Perhaps it would be right to say that he was too concerned to save everyone from the fires of hell. In him one experiences the strong Catholic and literal faith with deep conviction that without Baptism of water the ‘souls will be lost.’ He writes: “The only remedy against original sin is baptism, and all those whom God predestined to salvation, He draws them to this remedy. All the children who die unbaptized and all the adults who die ignorant of baptism, or who, having been drawn to it by God’s Providence, refuse it, are not predestinate, but will perish eternally.”¹²²

The incarnation of Jesus was to bring the waters of redemption. Jesus’ last commission to his Apostles, “go therefore, teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy spirit” (Mt.28:19-20), and “go into the whole world, he that believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk.16:15-16), and so Jesus leaves to us the fruit of his passion, death and redemption i.e. the Sacrament of Baptism. In the words of Feeney, “Jesus says, “I am not coming any more, until the Last Day. I am giving you the water I well earned by my Redemption. If that does not teach you, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.””¹²³

1.5.2.4 Condemnation of unbaptised into hell

¹²¹ L. Feeney, *Bread of Life*, 1974, P.121.

¹²² T. M. Sennott, *They Fought the Good Fight*, 1987, p.274. This book is just a reprint of writings of Feeney and Brownson, who are basically in agreement. Sennott is a strong follower of Feeney.

¹²³ L. Feeney, *Bread of Life*, 1974, p.20.

We state here some of Feeney's own words, "If you do not receive Baptism of water, you cannot be saved. Whether you were guilty or not guilty for not having received it. If it was not your fault that you did not receive it, then you just do not go to heaven. You are lacking something required for heaven." "Unbaptised adults who die go to hell. Notice they do not go either to Limbo or to heaven."¹²⁴ Today these statements seem to us as extreme form of condemning a person. In the theology of religions these statements are regarded as exclusivism. It looks from the perspective of Leonard Feeney that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is limited to the people who receive only baptism of water.

1.5.3 Conclusion

Certainly we can say that the predominant intention of Leonard Feeney as a theologian was to gain salvation for everyone and that too within the Catholic Church. His faith in Jesus Christ and in the Catholic Church has led him to understand that the adherents of other religions have no salvation unless they enter the Catholic Church with baptism of water. One great difference between the Catholic and the Protestant exclusivistic position is that for the Protestant it is Christ, the fixed point outside of which there is no salvation, but for the Catholics it is the Church outside of which there is no salvation. During the reformation time, both Luther and Calvin spoke of the Church as the locus of salvation, using the familiar image from patristic theology of the Church as a "Mother." Even though the fundamental ecclesiological and soteriological issues separated the reformers from their Roman Catholic heritage, yet the Reformers insisted that salvation was offered only through Christ and refused to imply that any Protestant tradition would separate professing Christ from implicit membership in Christ's Church. According to Molly Truman Marshal it "is fair then to say that the well known formula 'no salvation outside the Church' is as much a part of classic Protestant theological thought as it is of Roman Catholic."¹²⁵ However the difference may be, today in the theology of religions these exclusivistic positions in common are rather considered extreme ways of portraying one's arrogance.

There are three elements involved in all exclusive claims as shown by Stanley Samartha. He says, first, there is the powerful initial vision or experience or

¹²⁴ L. Feeney, *Bread of Life*, 1974, pp.126-28.

¹²⁵ M. T. Marshal, *No Salvation outside the Church? A critical inquiry*, 1993, p.12.

response to Truth, which, because it is the total response of the person, often needs no further corroboration. This is more than just a conviction. Within the core of every religion there lies this powerful experience or vision that becomes non-negotiable in the life of the believing community. Here begins the true religion at the point where the push of human longing meets the pull of God's grace. Second, in certain cultures this feeling of certainty (one's religion as the only true religion) leads to a feeling that others are not only different but also false or wrong. It may be due to a hidden fear, that unless one charges that other commitments are false, the truth of one's own commitment might be in danger. And then in this phase, the person who makes exclusive claims seeks scriptural support or theological argument to affirm why his commitment is the only true one. Thus this attitude becomes hardened and brooks no further discussion. It even generates a sense of insecurity, fear, about discussing such matters in the open. And from this, the jump to the next stage is not too difficult, namely to a zeal to eliminate other commitments as false and thus propagate one's own as the only true one. Therefore other religions, regarded as false, absurd and wrong, must be eliminated, conquered, displaced, in the interest of Truth itself as received and understood by the exclusive community. Having been possessed by Truth, the community now regards itself as possessing the Truth. This attitude is later, when mixed up with sociological factors, political considerations, and particularly economic affluence, that is, when power factors get mixed up with exclusive claims, attitudes become hardened, with serious consequences to life in the pluralistic community.¹²⁶

Stanley Samartha further says, that these exclusive claims, divide people into "we" and "they," "those who are "saved" and those who are "not saved," those on the "inside" and those on the "outside." It makes cooperation among different religious communities difficult, if not impossible, for tackling common human problems in society, or can lead to tensions and conflicts in society. In a pluralistic world, "an exclusive claim for any one particular religion introduces an element of theological injustice into God's creation." And therefore interactions and mutual criticisms should take place for the sake of mutual enrichment¹²⁷.

¹²⁶ See S. Samartha, "Exclusive Claims: Roots and Consequences," in E. Chia, FSC (ed.), *Dialogue, Resource manual for Catholics in Asia*, 2002, pp.278-79.

¹²⁷ See S. Samartha, "Exclusive Claims: Roots and Consequences," in E. Chia, FSC (ed.), *Dialogue, Resource manual for Catholics in Asia*, 2002, pp.281-82.

Chapter Two

Inclusivist Approach to Other Religions

Biblical - Historical and Theological Perspective

2.1 Inclusivism: terminology and meaning

In the Christian theology of religions inclusivism is both an acceptance and a rejection of other faiths. On the one hand it accepts the spiritual power and depth manifest in them, so that they can properly be called a locus of divine presence. On the other hand, it rejects them as not being sufficient for salvation apart from Christ, for Christ alone is the Saviour. To be an inclusivist is to believe that all religious truth of other religions belongs ultimately to Christ. Inclusivism seeks to discern ways by which the other faiths may be integrated creatively into Christian theological reflection. That is to say, it aims to hold together two equally binding convictions: the operation of the grace of God in all the great religions of the world working for salvation, and the uniqueness of the manifestation of the grace of God in Christ, which makes a universal claim as the final way of salvation.¹²⁸ In other words, if exclusivism is to exclude other religions working for salvation other than explicitly in and through Christianity, inclusivism is to include other religions working for salvation through their religions but implicitly through Christ.

One may say, that for the last four decades, the Christian mind has now for the most part made the move from an intolerant exclusivism to a benevolent inclusivism. But the later, no less than the former, rests upon the claim to Christianity's unique finality as the locus of the only full divine revelation and only adequate saving event. Believers of other religions can be saved because, unknown to them, Christ is secretly "in a way united" with them. But the saving truth unknown to them is known to the Church, which is God's instrument in making redemption known.¹²⁹ The relationship of Christianity to other faiths is that of complete to incomplete, explicit to implicit, and open to anonymous. We quote Bede Griffiths' understanding of this approach: "we have to show how Christ is, as it were, 'hidden'

¹²⁸ See A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 1982, p.38.

¹²⁹ See J. Hick and P. F. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987, p.22.

at the heart of Hinduism, of Buddhism, of Islam, and how it is the one Word of God which has enlightened mankind from the beginning of history...”¹³⁰

Since the Second Vatican Council, which has undoubtedly given the greatest impetus to an inclusivist theology of religions, there has been no single line of development.¹³¹ This inclusive theory is also commonly described as “Christ within the religions.” Among those associated with this position are Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, Walter Kasper, Gavin D’costa, David Tracy, Rowan Williams, to name just a few of the more notable names. The actual details of their theological explanations of the “presence of Christ in the religions” vary considerably from theologian to theologian. Yet all are united in their affirmation that the grace of Christ can be savingly, if imperfectly, present in the religions, although the fullness of that saving presence is found in the explicit religion of Christ alone. Since Second Vatican council, Catholic writing on this subject has been plentiful, and producing much fruit. However inclusivism is not the sole prerogative of the Catholic Church, it also occurs in the Orthodox and Protestant traditions.

We shall analyse inclusivist approach from biblical, Fathers of the Church, and from the viewpoint of two theologians – Karl Rahner and Wolfhart Pannenberg – a Catholic and a Lutheran perspective.

2.2 Inclusivism in the Bible

Even though Judaism and Christianity are dominant religions from the biblical perspective there still appears in the Bible positive links with non-Jewish traditions and non-Christian religions. The roots of biblical religion are deeply implanted in the religions and cultures surrounding Israel. There was a sharp self-consciousness in Israel of its religious identity as God’s chosen people which resulted in negative

¹³⁰ B. Griffiths, *Christian Ashram*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966, p.92.

¹³¹ J. Hick in fact speaks of two forms of Christian inclusivism: 1. One defines salvation in traditional terms, holding that in order to be saved one must personally accept Jesus as one’s Lord and saviour, but adds that those who do not encounter him in this life may do so after death. This is an increasingly favoured option among conservative Christians; 2. The other form of inclusivism is compatible with the wider understanding of salvation as salvation/liberation or actual transformation of men and women as happening in this life outside Christianity as well as within it. It insists that the salvific influences of Torah, of Islam, of Hindu spiritual practices, of Buddhadharma are all due to the salvific work of Christ, who is secretly at work within all these traditions. For more details, see J. Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, pp.19-23.

judgements on other religious systems and looked upon them as worthless idolatry. But at the same time, Bible's attitude to individual gentiles rather was positive and of admiration, acknowledging a genuine religious experience in individual 'pagans'. The authors Senior and Stuhlmüller in their elaborate survey entitled '*The Biblical Foundations for Mission*' point to some biblical themes capable of orienting us toward a more positive evaluation of non-biblical religions. To quote them: "Many of the biblical themes we have discussed, such as the expansive nature of religious experience, the revelation of God in creation, the recognition of the gentile's capacity to respond to the Gospel, and the awed awareness that God and his Spirit range far beyond the boundaries of human expectation, are some aspects of the biblical data that suggest positive links with non-Christian religions."¹³²

We shall see briefly the positive attitudes towards other traditions, both from Old and New Testament perspective, and see how they support the inclusive theory in the Christian theology of religions. We look into some of the biblical data capable of providing valid basis for such a positive evaluation of other traditions.

2.2.1 Positive attitudes of non-Jewish traditions in the Old Testament

2.2.1.1 Covenant with human race

The covenant of God with the patriarch Abraham constitutes Israel as God's specially chosen people. The covenant creates the identity of Israel as the people of God. In the covenant one finds the foundation of Israel's religious experience, or the starting point of dialogue with God in a history of salvation. "I will be your God and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12), such was the religious awareness of the people of Israel. Yahweh stands as a partner in this dialogue. He intervenes powerfully in their history, vowing to be with them (Ex. 3:13-15), working wonderful deeds for their liberation, leading them to the promised land. From the covenantal experience, the people of God discover the transcendence of God the Creator who made all things (Gen.1-2).

The Genesis account of Adam's creation does not speak of a covenant relationship between God and the first human being He created, but it does testify to the intimate personal dealings of the Creator with Adam, the father of the human race. These

¹³² D. Senior and C. Stuhlmüller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1983, p.346.

relations, as the Church Fathers well understood, are symbolic of a first universal covenant with the human race. Such interpretation is not, moreover, without foundation in the Bible. Book of Sirac speaks of the “eternal covenant” established by God with the first parents (17:12); Jeremiah 33:20-26 and Psalm 89 make reference to a “cosmic covenant” through creation.¹³³

The first time that the Priestly writer uses covenant terminology is in the Noah cycle (Gen.9).¹³⁴ This covenant had already been announced before the flood (Gen. 6:18) to Noah, “a righteous man, blameless in his generation,...walked with God” (Gen.6:9). It is a covenant by God through Noah with all creation. The sign of this “everlasting covenant” (Gen 9:1-16) between God and the earth is the rainbow,¹³⁵ a symbol of the persistence of the cosmic order, of a new world order that cancels out the destruction of the flood.

So besides God’s covenant with Israel as the chosen people of God, one must also see God’s personal dealings with creation. Creation history or “the cosmic covenant” is part not of a natural history but of a history of salvation. And from this perspective of God’s creation, we shall see the goodness found in other traditions in the Old Testament as that is required for an inclusive theory.

2.2.1.2 The ‘Pagan Saints’ of the Old Testament

We take this title ‘Pagan Saints’ from Jean Danielou.¹³⁶ He speaks of the positive evaluation of the ‘nations’ in the O.T. from the perspectives of the personal life of the individuals who lived outside the dispensation of God’s chosen people, and the intrinsic value of the religions of the nations to which these individuals belonged. To our concern here for an inclusive position it is sufficient to see from both these perspectives the goodness or positive values of non-Jewish people, both as an individual and as tradition. In these individuals, what we trace is that it is the faith that made the “pagan saints” righteous before God. In a celebrated passage of the

¹³³ See R. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, London : Sheed and Ward, 1992, pp.1-13.

¹³⁴ See R. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 1992, pp.32-39, 173.

¹³⁵ The sign of the covenant with Abraham will be circumcision, and that of the covenant with Moses is the Law to be observed by the people.

¹³⁶ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.34. J. Dupuis relies for the analysis of the “pagan saints” much on J. Danielou, *Les saints “paiens” de l’Ancien Testament*, Paris, Seuil, England, 1956. The same is translated: *Holy Pagans in the Old Testament*, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1957.

letter to the Hebrews (11:4-7), Abel, Enoch and Noah, who are characteristically set forward before Abraham, appear as models of faith “without [which] it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb. 11:6). The letter to the Hebrews thus testifies that saving faith was possible outside the Jewish dispensation, even before God manifested himself to Abraham and Moses. Even though this divine manifestation to the “nations” may have been obscure, it concerned God’s salvific action in the world.

2.2.1.2.1 The faith and righteousness of Abel

“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous” (Heb. 11:4). Danielou speaks of Abel as the first pagan saint presented by the Bible. His righteousness before God is a matter of election: “Abel is not chosen because he is just; he is just because he is chosen....Abel is the first of elect, chosen by God, at the beginning of history, in the midst of the pagan world, to be the first recipient of the liberality of love.”¹³⁷ Abel is also the first martyr (see Mt.23:34-35), whose split blood prefigures the sacrifice of Christ (see Heb. 12.24).

2.2.1.2.2 The faith of Enoch

“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death...Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:5-6). “Enoch walked with God” (Gen. 5:22). “Enoch pleased the Lord...; he was an example of repentance to all generations” (Sir. 44:16). Commenting on the content of the faith of Enoch from the letter to the Hebrews 11:6 – “For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him”, Danielou writes, that it “is perhaps the most important in the Scriptures on the religious situation of the pagan world.”¹³⁸ The faith of the pagans is the faith in the covenant of the living God.

2.2.1.2.3 The faith of Noah

The letter to the Hebrews attributes faith and righteousness to Noah. “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes from faith” (Heb. 11:7). The Bible witnesses

¹³⁷ J. Danielou, *Les saints «paiens» de l’Ancien Testament*, Paris, 1956, pp.47-48.

¹³⁸ J. Danielou, *Les saints «paiens» de l’Ancien Testament*, 1956, p.59.

repeatedly to Noah's holiness: "Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8); he "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9); Wisdom mentions his justice (Wis. 10:3); For Ben Sirac "Noah was found perfect and righteous" (Sir. 44:17). The letter to the Hebrews celebrated his fear of the Lord (Heb. 11:7). But above all, it is Noah's faith that the New Testament exalts. Jesus himself praises Noah for obeying God's word regarding God's impending judgement in the midst of the people's incredulity (see Mt. 24:37-39). Noah escaped the God's judgement of the nations through his righteousness. He typifies the person who is saved. He became the instrument of the world's salvation (Sir. 44:16-17); the "remnant" which is saved from God's judgement is the principle of a new humanity. Thereby Noah prefigures Christ. According to Danielou, "[t]he covenant with Noah corresponds to cosmic religion and bears essentially on God's fidelity in the world order."¹³⁹

2.2.1.2.4 Job and Melchizedek

Job and Melchizedek represent mythical rather than historical figures. But they still revealed message which is being conveyed to the faith of Israel, that the pagan faith and holiness before God were indeed possible and were realities. The Bible speaks of Job as blameless and upright, one who feared the Lord and turned away from evil (Job.1:1); clothed with righteousness (Job. 29:14). Job's faithfulness in the midst of misfortune proves his integrity in the abundance of God's blessings. Job does not accuse God of his suffering. His suffering brings him to the realisation that everything is on God's part a gratuitous gift. God is supreme. One can only confess the mystery of God's almighty power and his supreme freedom in creation, committing oneself in faith and adoration.

Melchizedek ranks among the most eminent non-Jewish figures of the Old Testament. In Genesis he is described as "priest of God Most High", blessing Abraham: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand'" (Gen. 14:18-20). In the book of Psalms he is referred as the model of the "eternal priest": "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4). Danielou says, "Melchizedek is the high priest of

¹³⁹ J. Danielou, *Les saints «païens» de l'Ancien Testament*, 1956 p.100.

the cosmic religion. He gathers in himself all the religious wealth of sacrifices offered from the beginning of the world till Abraham and attests that they were acceptable to God.”¹⁴⁰ So we can speak of religion of humankind before Abraham which extends to all people, and in it Melchizedek is the priest who offers the pure oblation of bread and wine, the thanksgiving sacrifice. He is sent by God to Abraham, from whom he received the tithe to serve for the divine cult (Gen. 14:20). Abraham, the initiator of the new and higher covenant, pays homage to Melchizedek.

2.2.1.2.5 Conclusion

The above examples show the faith of the non-Jews. The creation story and God’s guidance to the human race besides Jews as chosen race, gives us an understanding of God’s positive role in human creation. The faith and the goodness of the pagan people together with the chosen race are shown to be in line with God’ salvific role to the whole humanity. Indeed it is Israel who is a chosen race and who deserves the name ‘God’s elect.’ It is through Israel that the salvation is manifested to the nations. In Isaiah we read that the Servant of Yahweh will be “a covenant to the people, a light to the nations” (IS.42:6; 49:8). So the election of Israel, one could say, was to be a light to the nations. This election calls in Israel for a universal vision of God’s plan. Israel’s attitude to the nations is characterised by a humanist interest. The election of Israel does not cut off Israel from the nations, rather it situates in relation to the nations. It does not mean that God did not condemn the nations for their abominable deeds, rather God did condemn them. God also condemned the wrong deeds of Israel. But God also saw the goodness of the nations. And there was a relationship of the nations to Israel, a relationship that was based on their goodness and their faith in God. Thus we see in the Old Testament positive role of the non-Jewish people in the salvation history.

2.2.2 Positive attitudes towards the non-Jews in the New Testament

2.2.2.1 The New Covenant extends to ‘gentiles’ or ‘nations’

Whatever may have been the understanding in Israel of God’s new covenant with his people, as may be the return from exile or the rebuilding of the temple, the New Testament testifies to the initiation by God of the “new covenant” in Jesus Christ

¹⁴⁰ J. Danielou, *Les saints «paiens » de l’Ancien Testament*, 1956p.130.

(Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8; 9:15; etc.). The “new covenant,” however is broader than the first, and henceforth the one “people of God” expands, extending as it does to the “gentiles” or “nations,” indeed, to the whole humankind.¹⁴¹ This is very evident to us from the mission of Jesus. Even though the historical mission of Jesus was principally directed towards Israel, Jesus went out of the boundary of Israel to the so called gentiles or pagans, to the non-Jews.

2.2.2.2 Jesus and the faith of the Pagans

2.2.2.2.1 The faith of the Centurion

In Mathew 15:24, Jesus explicitly states that he was sent “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Even when he sent the twelve out on the mission, he charged them not to go “among the gentiles”, not to enter any “town of the Samaritans”, but to “go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 10:5-6). But on the other hand we see that Jesus shows admiration for the faith of the centurion when he says: “Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith” (Mt.8:10). Perhaps, keeping in mind this faith of the pagan here, Jesus says further in the same chapter that many, coming from East and West, will be admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt.8:11-12). So it is not just Israel, but others also will enter the Kingdom.

2.2.2.2.2 The Canaanite woman

A second incident with regard to the faith of the pagans is that of the Canaanite woman. Jesus heals the possessed daughter of a Canaanite woman and marvels at her faith: “Woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire” (Mt.15:28). Jesus is astonished at the faith of the pagan and this faith results in miracles. The healing miracles and exorcisms worked on behalf of “others” are thus an indication that the Reign of God is present and at work among them also.

2.2.2.2.3 The Samaritan woman

The Gospel of John 4:1-6 shows Jesus conversing with a Samaritan woman. The Evangelist notes in the same chapter that “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (Jn.4:9). The Samaritans were considered foreigners. But Jesus, however, wonders at the woman’s disposition to believe and at her thirst for the “living water” (Jn.4:7).

¹⁴¹ See J.Dupont, „*Note Sur le ‚Peuple de Dieu’ das les Actes des Apôtres* ». In *Commission Biblique Pontificale, Unite et diverite dans l’eglise*, 209-22, Rome : Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989, Cited in J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.32.

We also notice that Jesus does not reject the Samaritan worship on Mount Gerizim as opposed to worship in Jerusalem; what he does is to announce to the woman that “the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father..., when true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him” (Jn.4:20-23). From this incident we may say, that all worship, Jewish as well as foreign, must give way to true spiritual relationship with God.

2.2.2.2.4 The good Samaritan

The Gospel of Luke chapter 10 narrates the parable of the good Samaritan. The attitude of the good Samaritan is praised and preferred to that of a priest and a Levite (Lk.10:29-37). The Gospel narrates about the Samaritan who took care of the wounded. Among the Levite, the priest and the Samaritan, the one who proved to be the neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers is the Samaritan. Jesus proposed him as an example to the Jews: “Go and do likewise” (Lk.10:37).

2.2.2.3 The attitude of the Apostolic Church toward pagans in the N.T.

The Acts of the Apostles is a fruitful source for a more positive and inclusivist appreciation of the operation of God’s Spirit outside Christianity. A first step toward the pagan is made by Peter in his preaching to the household of the centurion Cornelius at Caesarea (Acts. 10:1-44). While Peter was announcing the Good News of Jesus, “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (Acts.10:44). That “the gift of the Holy spirit had been poured out even on the gentiles” (Acts.10:45). This became a sign for Peter that the gentiles were also called, that they too can be acceptable to God: “truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts.10:34-35).

The inclusivist aspects also become more explicit in Paul’s speech on the Areopagus (17:22-31). In this passage Paul acknowledges the authenticity of the worship of the men of Athens at their altar ‘to an unknown God,’ but proclaims his identity in terms of the man Jesus, whom God has raised from the dead and appointed him to judge the world. Alan Race says, “Paul therefore includes impressive spiritual life of the men of Athens in the Christian way of salvation by conferring a name on the God whom they already worshipped but did not truly recognize. By being so included,

their religion was simultaneously brought to completion and perfected. Another way of expressing the same theology is to say that the men of Athens had been Christians without knowing the fact.”¹⁴² Commenting on Paul’s speech at Athens (Acts.17:22-31), Jacques Dupuis says, whatever be the exegetical problems raised by this passage concerning the Pauline or Lukan authenticity of the discourse, “the message surely seems to be that the religions of the nations are not bereft of value but find in Jesus Christ the fulfilment of their aspirations. In comparison with what is offered in Jesus Christ, they seem very spare, but this does not prevent them from being a positive preparation for Christian faith.”¹⁴³

2.2.2.4 Conclusion

The above examples show that for Jesus, and for the Apostolic Church with Peter and Paul, saving faith is not only remotely accessible to pagans and foreigners, but it is also actually operative among them. So too foreigners may already belong to the Kingdom of God, the call to which extends beyond the limits of Israel’s chosen people. There seems rather an apparent contradiction between Jesus’ mission to the “only lost sheep of the house of Israel” and his inclusion of the pagans in the Kingdom of God. Joachim Jeremias, in his study entitled, *‘Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*’ tries to resolve the apparent contradiction: on the one hand, Jesus limited his activity to Israel, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and sent his disciples on mission during his life-time, charging them not to cross the boundaries of Israel; on the other hand, he consistently and firmly promised to pagans a share in the Kingdom of God. Jeremias thinks that he can solve the contradiction as follows: “we have to do with two successive events, first the call to Israel, and then subsequently the redemptive incorporation of the Gentiles in the Kingdom of God.”¹⁴⁴

Secondly, this inclusion of the Gentiles in the Kingdom of God, is not necessarily to be understood as being delayed to the end time. The “eschatological Kingdom” - “I tell you, many will come from East and West and sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt.8:10-12), which opens up to the gentiles is already announced by God at the beginning of his ministry (cf. Mk.1:15), already breaking in during his ministry (cf. Mt.12:28; Lk.4:21), established by God

¹⁴² A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 1982, pp.39-40

¹⁴³ J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.49.

¹⁴⁴ J. Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, London: SCM Press, 1958, p.71.

on earth in Jesus' death and resurrection (cf. Lk.22:16), and to be announced by the Church (cf. Mk 16:15) until it grows unto its fullness (cf. Mt.6:10; 25:31; Lk.11:2). From here we build up the theory that the gentiles are included in the Kingdom of God. They also receive a share in the Kingdom of God.

2.3 Inclusivism in the Teachings of the Fathers

2.3.1 Introduction

In the view of the Church Fathers, as we shall see, salvation history extends beyond the Judeo-Christian dispensation to the surrounding cultures which they encountered. In this section, we shall present some thoughts of a few Early Fathers on the universal and active presence of God through His Word. The Word of God is not bound and limited to one religious tradition. The writings of the Early Fathers do concern the aspects of the surrounding Hellenistic culture. The Fathers of the Church saw the positive value in the Hellenistic culture, but they were also very strong in condemning all forms of polytheism and idolatry. They condemned likewise religious practices widespread during the Hellenistic period, such as magical incantations and soothsaying; they denounced astrology, in which they saw an ungodly manifestation of ancient fatalism. The Fathers opposed vehemently the "mystery religions" which were spreading everywhere around the Mediterranean Sea. They denounced the seduction of the East from which new cults had come to the West, such as that of the Mitras; they denounced dualism, from where Manichaeism implanted itself.¹⁴⁵

All these negative aspects or assessments, does not represent the entire picture of the surrounding cultures and religions. The fact is that the Church Fathers witnessed to a remarkable opening toward aspects of surrounding culture and religion. The dominant theme of some of the Church Fathers that would support the inclusivist position is that of Logos-theology. It is the Word became flesh or The Word of God that is universal and active everywhere. From this perspective of Logos-theology we analyse Church Fathers.

2.3.2 The Logos-theology of the Church Fathers

At the beginning of the Christian era, both in Hellenistic philosophy and in Semitic thought, the concept of *Logos* or *Dabar* occupied a prominent place in the minds of

¹⁴⁵ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.54.

the thinking people. The term 'Logos' stood for reason, thought, intelligibility, or an expression to a philosophical ideal. The term '*Dabar*' precisely in O.T. meant a dynamic divine attribute by which God of the covenant intervened in the history of the chosen people in deeds and words; to the pious Jew, *Dabar* referred to Yahweh's personal manifestation and revelation. In the N.T. we encounter the term 'Logos' in the Gospel of John 1:14. But why Christ was called Logos in the fourth Gospel remains disputed in New Testament exegesis even today. According to McKenzie, it is likely, that the Gospel according to John meant to emphasize the fact that in Christ's person the revelatory function of the Old Testament *Dabar* Yahweh had been fully realized.¹⁴⁶

The Logos of the Christians is a person and a divine person, and this truth became the core of the early Christian message. It was often challenged by outsiders, or to say, Christianity had to meet the challenge of other doctrines or had to confront human wisdom outside the Church. In this confrontation, what Jacques Dupuis calls, "a dialogue was opened with human wisdom outside the Church."¹⁴⁷ The dialogue took the form of a Logos-theology. The Christian Logos had to be defined in relation to its counterparts. While for the early Christians the Logos was personal, it was impersonal for Hellenism. In Hellenistic philosophy it was knowledge or wisdom, which had a cosmic significance. But Christian theology developed '*Logos*' in terms of Christ became flesh, or the Word of God, God's Wisdom, divine truth, having a universal and eternal significance. From this perspective of Logos-theology, we shall see, what does Christ mean to the world? Or what newness does He bring to the world?

2.3.2.1 Justin Martyr: The cosmological function of the Logos

Saint Justin was the philosopher and the most important of the Greek apologists of the second century. He stresses the cosmological function of the Logos. In his writings the Logos designates the Son precisely in his cosmological function, namely in his relation to the cosmos. He is the *dunamis* of God, an energetic Word (*logike dunamis*), the creator and organizer of the cosmos. Justin writes: "And His Son, who alone is properly called Son, the Word, who also was with Him and was begotten before the works, when at first He created and arranged [*ekosomese*] all

¹⁴⁶ See J. McKenzie, *Myths and Realities*, Milwaukee: Bruce, 1963, p.57.

¹⁴⁷ J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.55.

things by Him, is called Christ, in reference to His being anointed and God's ordering [*kosmesai*] all things through Him.”¹⁴⁸

The cosmological function of the Logos is, in effect, the foundation for Justin's theology of revelation. The Father acts through the Son. All the divine manifestations in the world take place through Him. The Son is the incarnate Word of God. Justin says, we have been taught that Christ is the Christ, the first-begotten of God, and have previously testified that he is the Logos of which every race of humans partakes. Those who lived in accordance with the Logos (*meta logou*) are Christians, even though they were called godless, such as among Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus and others like them, among the barbarians Abraham, Hananias, Azarias, Misael, and Elijah, and many others whose deeds and names we do not list, knowing that this would be lengthy. So also those who lived contrary to the Logos were ungracious and enemies to Christ. But those who lived by the Logos, and those who live so now are Christians.¹⁴⁹

In the *Second Apology* Justin writes: “For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part [*kata meros*] of the Word. But since they did not know the whole of the Word, which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves.”¹⁵⁰ This and the following quotations demonstrate from the view of Justin that Christ, the eternal Word is also present in philosophies or in Hellenistic culture, not entirely but in part. Justin writes that,

The Christ whom Socrates knew in part (*apo merous*) – for he was and is the Logos present in all things (*ho en panti on*), and it is he who by means of the prophets foretold the future, and by means of himself, being made like to us, gave us his teaching – has convinced not only the philosophers and the educated, but also craftsmen and utterly ignorant people, who have scorned public opinion, fear and death; for he was the power (*dunamis*) of the ineffable Father, and not a product of human reason (*logos*).¹⁵¹

We may say that all have share in Christ. Some have received Him partially. We, Christians, to whom Logos revealed himself in his incarnation have been blessed with complete manifestation. In all persons a seed of the logos may be found, and

¹⁴⁸ Justin Martyr, 2 Apology, VI, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0127.htm>, (access 20.12.2005)

¹⁴⁹ See Justin Martyr, 1 Apology, XLVI, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm>, (access 20.12.2005)

¹⁵⁰ Justin Martyr, 2 Apology, X, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0127.htm>, (access 20.12.2005)

¹⁵¹ Justin Martyr, 2 Apology, X, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0127.htm>, (access 20.12.2005)

yet to us Christians the entirety of the Logos has been made manifest. The Truth is revealed in terms of participation. Saldhana states: “The Fathers saw the whole matter in terms of participation, a sharing in different degrees, and in different ways in the same central reality of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵²

Jacques Dupuis, summarizes Justin’s thought in four points: 1. There exists three kinds of knowledge: that proper to the nations, the Jewish, and the Christians; 2. Of all religious knowledge in its different kinds, the Logos is the unique source; 3. The difference between the various kinds of knowledge corresponds to various forms of participation in the Logos: extending to the whole cosmos and to all human beings, the intervention of the Logos in Israel becomes more decisive; it is complete only in Christ’s advent in the flesh; 4. All persons who have known the Truth and lived righteously are Christians, for, and insofar as, all have partaken of, lived according to the Logos who is all Truth.¹⁵³ So Justin espouses the belief that both Gentiles and Jews will be saved on the basis of their piety and holiness or righteousness. He states that “Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above all that He is the Word [*Logos*] of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived according to the reason are Christian.”¹⁵⁴

2.3.2.2 Irenaeus: God’s revealing Word

Irenaeus not only brought out the historical significance of the Mosaic and Christian dispensation, but also integrated the pre-Mosaic dispensation in the history of salvation, thus making room for a salvific value of pre-biblical religions. He shows this development from the perspective of creation. Through his Word or Logos, God creates human beings that they may live. All divine manifestations take place through Logos: “through the Son, who is in the Father, and has the Father in Himself -- He who is, the Father bearing witness to the Son, and the Son announcing the Father.”¹⁵⁵ The first of the divine manifestations is creation itself. Irenaeus finds in the order of creation itself both a historical and a personal manifestation of the Logos. In his view the human person’s knowledge of God is already a response to a

¹⁵² C. Saldanha, *Divine Pedagogy: A Patristic View of Non-Christian Religions*, Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1984, p.186.

¹⁵³ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.59.

¹⁵⁴ Justin Martyr, *1 Apology*, XLVI, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm>, (access 20.12.2005)

¹⁵⁵ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 6, 2, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103306.htm>, (access 20.12.2005)

personal divine initiative. The knowledge of God which he considers, consists in acknowledging God as the infinite person who graciously addresses himself to us. And in this sense, knowledge of God supposes a personal encounter with God. In Irenaeus' view, such an encounter, which in every event is an encounter with the Logos. And it is made possible through creation, for through it the Logos speaks to the people.¹⁵⁶

Irenaeus says, “[f]or by means of creation itself, the Word reveals God the Creator; and by means of the world [does He declare] the Lord, the maker of the world; and by the Son the Father who began the Son. And these things do indeed address all humans in the same manner, but all do not in the same way believe them.”¹⁵⁷ Speaking in terms of Logos and the knowledge of God, we try to understand Irenaeus' thought as the knowledge of God that has been granted to all; however, this knowledge he identifies with the knowledge of the Father through the Son. This thought is clear from his second book of *Adversus Haereses*, where he says that, although no one knows the Father, except the Son, nor the Son except the Father and those to whom the Son will reveal him, yet all know this one fact at least, because the Word, implanted in their minds, moves them and reveals to them that there is one God, the Lord of all.¹⁵⁸

Irenaeus is definite in attributing to the Logos God's self-disclosure in the old dispensation. In Irenaeus' own expressions, the Word, or even Jesus Christ, was “present in”, “descended in”, or “passed through” the Old Testament economies. The words of the prophets are not merely words about Christ, but the words of Christ, and in like manner their actions are “typological events,” types of the things to come. The Word manifested already himself to Adam in the garden; the Word speaks to Noah, Abraham, Moses and through prophets and laws. But we must make very clear that the Word that was spoken in Old Testament was a preparation for the new things to come, for the final manifestation of the Word. Irenaeus brings out this thought clearly in his IV book of *Adversus Haereses* stating a difference between Christ that was heralded in Old Testament and Christ given: “What then did the

¹⁵⁶ J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.62.

¹⁵⁷ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 6, 6, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103406.htm>, (access 20.12.2005)

¹⁵⁸ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, II, 6,1, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103206.htm>, (access 20.12.2005)

Lord bring to us by His advent? -- know ye that He brought all [possible] novelty, by bringing Himself [*omnem novitatem attulit seipsum afferens*] who had been announced.”¹⁵⁹

So for an inclusivist theory in the theology of religions it is sufficient for us to know that God speaks through creation or the knowledge of God is available at creation, which God reveals through his Word, through Logos, and makes known to us fully through Jesus Christ. The order of creation was only the first stage of God’s manifestation through the Logos. What is complete or full manifestation is Jesus Christ himself in the flesh or Jesus’ incarnation in the flesh. We could then say, that God Jesus Christ is implicit in creation but explicit in incarnation. This implicit faith, acknowledging God in creation is what we look in the inclusivist theory in the theology of religions.

2.3.2.3 Clement of Alexandria: Philosophy to the Greeks and Law to the Hebrews

At first we note a difference between Clement and his predecessors Justin and Irenaeus. While Justin and Irenaeus seemed to attribute all knowledge of God to the action of the divine Word, Clement distinguishes two distinct levels. In his view, one can attain a common elementary knowledge of God through the use of reason (here logos means human reason), and it is accessible to all human beings and is called natural: “There was always a natural (*phusikes*) manifestation of the one Almighty God, among all right thinking people.”¹⁶⁰ And at another level, there is, the personal action of the Logos, which introduces people into God’s secrets otherwise inaccessible.

The Christian philosophy stands for Christian truth and practice, which witnesses a special divine assistance granted to them. The pagan philosophers too have among the nations a divine mission. Clement explains this in the following passage: “The Shepherd cares for each of his sheep; and his closest inspection is given to those who are excellent in their natures, and are capable of being most useful. Such are those fit to lead and teach, in whom the action of Providence is conspicuously seen;

¹⁵⁹ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 34, 1, at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103434.htm>, (access 21.12.2005)

¹⁶⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, V, 13, see A. Roberts and J. Donalson (ed.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, Grand Rapids, Mich: Eardmans, 1979, p.465.

whenever either by instruction, or government, or administration, God wishes to benefit.”¹⁶¹ Philosophy comes from God; it constitutes for the Greek world a divine economy. For Jews it was the Law which constituted divine economy. Both were designed by God to lead people to Christ. Clement says: “To the Jews belonged the Law and to the Greeks philosophy, until the Advent; and after that came the universal calling to be a particular people of righteousness, through the teaching which flows from faith, brought together by one Lord, the only God of both Greeks and barbarians, or rather of the whole race of humans.”¹⁶² He says again, “[a]s the proclamation (of the Gospel) has come now at the fit time, so also at the fit time were the Law and the Prophets given to the barbarians, and philosophy to the Greeks, to fit their ears for the Gospel.”¹⁶³ Philosophy was therefore only a preparation, a way for the Greeks to lead to Christ.

Clement, in fact, does not hesitate to call philosophy a covenant (*diatheke*) made by God with people: “All things necessary and profitable for life came to us from God, and philosophy more specially was given to the Greeks, as a covenant (*diatheke*) peculiar to them – being, as it is, a stepping-stone (*hupobathra*) to the philosophy which is according to Christ.”¹⁶⁴ One thing is clear from Clement that philosophy is a partial knowledge, and Christ alone is the whole truth.

2.3.2.4. Conclusion

As we saw above, there is a basis to the inclusivist theory from Church Fathers. Justin speaks of the Word or Jesus Christ from the Logos perspective, Irenaeus from word being revealed and active in creation and Clement sees this Word or Logos in the philosophy of Greeks. From here one thing is clear that if the inclusive theory has come to the limelight surrounding Vatican II, its seeds were already existing in some of the early Church Fathers. The early Church Fathers did encounter the problems concerning other faiths and traditions, and so did answer to them in their time. They were open to God’s universal presence, and saw how God is also active

¹⁶¹ *Stromata*, VI, 17; See A. Roberts and J. Donalson (ed.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, 1979, p.517.

¹⁶² *Stromata*, VI, 17; See A. Roberts and J. Donalson (ed.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, 1979, pp.517-18.

¹⁶³ *Stromata*, VI, 6; See A. Roberts and J. Donalson (ed.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, 1979, p.490.

¹⁶⁴ *Stromata*, VI, 8; See A. Roberts and J. Donalson (ed.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, 1979, p.495.

in the life of the pagans. They also saw the difference between partial and full knowledge. Summing up what he views as the conviction of the Church Fathers, Saldanha writes: “In spite of the grace, faith and justification he possessed, the good pagan or Jew of the Old Testament stood in need of a new grace, a new faith, a new justification in order to attain salvation - and this could only come to him through the knowledge and acceptance of the Crucified One, be it in life (through conversion and baptism) or in death (by coming into contact with Christ’s death in some mysterious way).”¹⁶⁵

2.4 Karl Rahner’s theory of Anonymous Christian

2.4.1 Rahner in the surrounding theological perspective

The Church has always concerned to account for the possibility of salvation for those who are not baptised. This concern for salvation of non-Christians has in the past caused many theories to come into existence. Perhaps one question over and again troubled and continues to trouble theologians is that how can non-Christian be not saved or how can he be saved. Vatican II was an eye opener to the world, surrounding which many theologians’ contribution to this field of salvation of non-Christian was a highly discussed concern. Before entering into the discussion of Karl Rahner’s theory of Anonymous Christian, we look into the theological perspectives that surrounded Vatican II in which Karl Rahner’s thinking on non-Christians appears as dominant to the Vatican II. From the exclusivist understanding of Christianity one moves towards inclusive theory at Vatican II. The contribution to this progress are many theologians in list. We study in the following subsection the theological perspectives from the fulfilment theory to the mystery of Christ in the religious traditions.

2.4.1.1 The Fulfilment Theory surrounding Vatican II

There were many theologians surrounding Vatican II according to whom the various religions of humanity represent the human beings’ innate desire for union with the Divine. This desire is expressed in diverse cultures and geographical areas of the world. But Jesus Christ and Christianity, denote God’s personal response to this universal aspiration. While all other religions are varied expressions of *homo naturaliter religiosus*, and so of “natural religion,” only Christianity, as the divine

¹⁶⁵ C. Saldanha, *Divine Pedagogy: A Patristic View of Non-Christian Religions*, 1984, p.166.

response to the human quest for God, is “supernatural religion.” This position has been often referred to as the “fulfilment theory.” According to this theory, salvation in Jesus Christ reaches the members of other religions as the divine response to the human religious aspiration expressed through their own traditions, but these religious traditions themselves play no role in the mystery of salvation.¹⁶⁶ For this theory the other religions could be seen as “preparation for the Gospel” before the Christ event. But they become obsolete with the event and henceforth are deprived of any positive role in the salvation of their members. The well known theologians of this position are Jean Danielou, Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

2.4.1.1.1 Jean Danielou

Jean Danielou may be considered the first western exponent of the fulfilment theory. From the early 1940s down to the 1970s he wrote abundantly on this subject.¹⁶⁷ His standpoint with regard to other religious traditions is seen from God’s plan for salvation of humankind in Jesus Christ. Danielou draws a sharp distinction between nature and the supernatural, or equivalently between religion and revelation. “Non-Christian” religions belong to the order of natural reason, the Judeo-Christian revelation to the order of supernatural faith. To this corresponds two God-given covenants: the cosmic and the historical, one through God’s manifestation through nature and another through God’s personal manifestation in history. The knowledge of God available to the non-Christians is that corresponding to the order of nature. The religions of the world are thus made up of a mixture of truth and falsehood, of light and darkness, or of right conduct and evil ways. They belong to the order of “cosmic religion,” corresponding as they to the “cosmic covenant.” In this so called “cosmic religions” there have been living people who have been pleasing God or so called pagan saints, and from their goodness and saintliness they may situate themselves in preparation for the gospel. Danielou says, “[t]he religions of nature bear witness (and this is the measure of their real worth) to the natural tendency of

¹⁶⁶ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.132.

¹⁶⁷ For example, see J. Danielou, *Holy pagans in the Old Testament*, 1957; *The Salvation of the Nations*, 1962; “Christianity and Non-Christian Religions,” in *The Word in History*, ed. P.Burke, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966, pp. 86-101; For a study of Danielou’s approach to religions, see D.Veliath, *Theological Approaches and Understanding of Religions: Jean Danielou et Raimundo Panikkar: A study in contrast*, Bangalore: Kristu Jyothi College, 1988.

man towards God: Christianity is God's approach toward man in Jesus Christ, taking possession of man to bring him to himself."¹⁶⁸

2.4.1.1.2 Henri de Lubac

Henri de Lubac came to the theology of religions through comparative studies between "some aspects of Buddhism" and Christianity, in which he pointed to two apparently irreconcilable visions of the human person's path to liberation in different worldviews.¹⁶⁹ He speaks of Christianity from the point of 'something absolutely new', which Christianity represents in the religious history of humankind. Accordingly he says, Christianity brought into the world something absolutely new. Its concept of salvation is not only original in relation to that of the religions that surrounded its birth; it constitutes a unique event in the religious history of humankind. Christianity alone affirms a transcendent destiny of the human person and for the whole of humankind a common destiny. And for this destiny the entire world is a preparation.¹⁷⁰

Just like Danielou for de Lubac also the relation between the world religions and Christianity is a factor that distinguishes nature from supernatural. The supernatural is absolutely gratuitous on the part of God, and fulfils the natural desire of the human person for union with the Divine. As the embodiment of God's grace in Jesus Christ, Christianity is the supernatural religion. But it does not follow that the other religions lack everything that is true and good, for "grace does not destroy nature." The religions of the world contain at once the "seeds of the word" and spurious elements, traces of God and traces of sin. Without competing with other religions, Christianity unveils their positive values and by assuming them, it purifies and transforms them.¹⁷¹ According to the fulfilment theory which de Lubac makes his own, the mystery of Christ reaches the members of other religious traditions as

¹⁶⁸ J. Danielou, *The Lord of History: Reflections on the inner meaning of History*, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958, pp.115-19.

¹⁶⁹ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.137.

¹⁷⁰ See H. de Lubac, *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Paris : Cerf, 1952, pp.107-10 ; See also the entire chapter, entitled « *Le Christianisme et l'histoire* », pp.107-132.

¹⁷¹ See N. Eterovic, *Christianesimo e religioni secondo H. de Lubac*, Rome: Citta Nuova, 1981, pp.283-84.

the divine response to the human aspiration for union with the Divine, but the religious traditions themselves play no role in this mystery of salvation.¹⁷²

2.4.1.1.3 Hans Urs von Balthasar

Von Balthasar has indeed repeatedly compared Christianity with the other religions of the world, to show the contrast, which exists between and the absoluteness of Christianity. His view rightly falls under the label of the fulfilment theory, being akin to that of Danielou and de Lubac, with some nuances.¹⁷³ Balthasarian expression “Concrete Universal” with regard to the mystery of Jesus Christ, indicates well the absolute character of His person in the order of the relationship between God and humankind.¹⁷⁴ Christianity remains as the one universal religion destined for all people. It is because Christianity assumes and fulfils all the positive elements involved in the fundamental attitude of the human being, while at the same time transcending them. It fulfils the aspirations of the Eastern religions toward the “One” but without loss of the self to the person. The mystery of Jesus Christ is that of the total self-gift of the God of love to humankind in his Son made man, in whom God calls all human beings to a personal communion with God as an I to a Thou. What is specific to Christianity and makes its absolute character is the “Trinitarian Christ.” Jesus Christ is the “Concrete Universal” (*universale concretum et personale*). He is personally the “whole present in the fragment” (*das Ganze im Fragment*), for in him all things are integrated in the Word of God who is love.¹⁷⁵

2.4.1.1.4 Conclusion to the fulfilment theory

At all events, according to the fulfilment theory, there is no salvation without Gospel or any such thing as “Anonymous Christianity.” In fulfilment theory one speaks of God’s ultimatum in Jesus Christ. In the person of Jesus Christ and then from Christianity everything what man aspires for the divine is seen as being fulfilled. Christianity is seen here as supernatural or as gratuitous religion, but other religions

¹⁷² For more on de Lubac’s understanding on the relationship between Christianity and world religions refer H. de Lubac, *Paradoxe et mystere de l’eglise*, Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967c, pp.120-163 – the chapter entitled as, “*Les religions humaines d’apres les peres*”. The same book is translated in 1969 as *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*.

¹⁷³ For a study of von Balthasar’s position, see, R. Gawronski, *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1995.

¹⁷⁴ The expression, ‘*Universale concretum et personale*’ which goes back to Nicholas of Cusa, is found repeatedly in von Balthasar. See, for instance, H. Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1964, p.89.

¹⁷⁵ See H. Urs von Balthasar, *Das Ganze im Fragment: Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie*, Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1963, pp.243-350.

as from nature and as having goodness or seeds of the word, and can be completed only in Christianity. It is perhaps like the Old Testament being fulfilled in the New Testament, or old covenant being replaced by a new covenant, but old being the preparation for the new one.

2.4.1.2 Mystery of Christ in the religious traditions

From the fulfilment theory which states that the non-Christian aspires for divine by nature, we move to the presence of the mystery of Christ in other religious traditions. The theological views on the mystery of Christ in other religious traditions seem to present to the other religious traditions a greater openness with regard to the operative presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ, as a universal Saviour. These views seem to say that the members of other traditions are saved by Christ not in spite of their allegiance and sincere practice of their tradition but through that allegiance and practice.¹⁷⁶ That means that their religious allegiance and sincere practice does play a role in their salvation, but with Christ alone. The other religions retain their value for their followers until such time as the Gospel would be existentially “promulgated” to each individual person. The theologians in this regard are: Karl Rahner on “Anonymous Christianity,” Raimon Panikkar on “Unknown Christ,” Hans Küng on “Ways of Salvation,” and Gustave Thils on “Mediations of Salvation.”

2.4.1.1.2.1. Raimundo Panikkar

It is from Panikkar’s book “*The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*” that the theory of the “presence of Christ” in the religious traditions, derives its name. Speaking specifically of Hinduism, Panikkar wrote: “There is a living presence of Christ in Hinduism.”¹⁷⁷ With this affirmation, Panikkar expressed from the outset his firm stand in favour of a theory which would go beyond any form of “fulfilment theory,” as the term has been explained above. He writes: “Christ is not only at the end but also at the beginning. Christ is not only the ontological goal of Hinduism but also its true inspirer, and his grace is leading, though hidden, force pushing it towards its full disclosure.”¹⁷⁸ Elsewhere he writes: “Christ does not belong to Christianity, but he only belongs to God. It is Christianity and Hinduism as well that belong to Christ,

¹⁷⁶ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.143.

¹⁷⁷ R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964, p.ix.

¹⁷⁸ R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 1964, p.x.

though in two different levels.”¹⁷⁹ According to him, “Hinduism is the starting-point of a religion that culminates in Christianity”; it is “Christianity in potency”; it already contains “the symbolism of the Christian reality.” For Panikkar the mystery of Jesus Christ is present in a hidden way in other religious traditions and in particular in Hinduism, but this mystery of Jesus Christ is perceptible to Christian faith alone. For Panikkar, Christ is the most powerful symbol of the full human, divine, and cosmic reality which he calls the mystery. The symbol can have other names: for example, Rama, Krishna, Ishwara or Purusha. Christians call him “Christ” because it is in and through Jesus that they themselves have arrived at faith in the decisive reality. Each name, however, expresses the indivisible mystery, each being an unknown dimension of Christ.¹⁸⁰

2.4.1.2.2 Hans Küng

It was in Bombay in 1964 that Hans Küng for the first time touched upon the theology of religions in a communication he made at a conference entitled “Christian revelation and Non-Christian Religions.”¹⁸¹ Küng affirms that the other religions also proclaim God’s truth in some way, and states further that when their followers convert to the Gospel, they should not renounce whatever good in those religions. He writes:

As against the “extraordinary” way of salvation which is the Church, the world religions can be called – if this is rightly understood – the “ordinary” way of salvation for non-Christian humanity. God is the Lord not only of the special salvation history of the Church, but also of the universal salvation history of all mankind; this universal salvation history is bound up with the special salvation history in having a common origin, meaning and goal and being subject to the same grace of God.¹⁸²

Speaking in terms of “ordinary” and “extraordinary” ways of salvation has raised many objections¹⁸³. For Küng, the former is operative in general salvation history for non-Christians, and the latter is operative in the Church for Christian salvation.

¹⁷⁹ R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 1964, pp.20-21.

¹⁸⁰ See R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981, pp.23-30. It is a revised edition of the original 1964.

¹⁸¹ H. Küng’s communication is published in J. Neuner (ed.), *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, London: Burns and Oates, 1967.

¹⁸² H. Küng, „The World Religions in God’s Plan of Salvation,“ in J. Neuner (ed.), *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, 1967, p.51.

¹⁸³ It may be that these terms ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ were not too clear that Pope Paul VI wrote in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nunciandi* (no. 80) clarifying: according to the divine plan, salvation through explicit faith in Jesus Christ in the Church is understood to be the norm;

2.4.1.2.3 Gustave Thils

Thils affirms a “universal revelation” of God to humankind. Creation is able not only to disclose to human reason the existence of a Creator God but also to manifest to the eyes of faith the loving providence of God. Thils recognizes in the religions an “analogical” salvific value. The salvation of their members is not in spite of their religion, but in it, for he says, “inasmuch as they embody [God’s] universal saving design and correspond to universal revelation, religions [have] a true salvific efficacy.” And thus they have in God’s eyes a certain “legitimacy,” and they may be called “ways” of salvation insofar as they express and embody a “providential order” of God for their members; in that sense they can be said to be for them “ordinary ways of salvation.” Thils speaks in terms of general economy of salvation corresponding to God’s universal revelation for the “way of non-Christian religions,” and for the “way of Christianity” there is “special economy of salvation” realised in Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁴

2.4.2 Karl Rahner: Christianity and anonymous Christianity

It is the hidden, unknown operative presence of the mystery of Christ in other religious traditions that Karl Rahner has designated by the controverted term “anonymous Christianity.”¹⁸⁵ We shall analyse basically his four theses on this theme as developed in his article “Christianity and the non-Christian Religions.” But before that we shall brief Rahner’s theological basis for anonymous Christianity.

2.4.2.1 Transcendental theological basis

The term “transcendental” refers to a metahistorical, a priori disposition of the human person, who asks after the question of being, and who thereby experiences him or herself as being with an unlimited horizon, open to the mystery of God. Rahner’s transcendental theological basis for “Anonymous Christian” is to be traced

therefore, the “ordinary paths of salvation” are those revealed by the word and the life of Jesus Christ, even though God can work salvation by “extraordinary ways” known to him.

¹⁸⁴ G. Thils, *Propos et Problemes de la theologie des religions non chretiennes*, Tounai : Castermann, 1966, pp.131-36. I have taken this citation from J. Dupuis, *Towards a Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.156.

¹⁸⁵ The theme is treated by K. Rahner in several essays contained in *Theological Investigations*, 23 vols., London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961-92. For studies of Rahner’s thought on this point, see, among others, G. D’costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of other Religions*, New York: Oxford, 1986, pp.80-116.

from his discussion about Grace and Nature.¹⁸⁶ The distinction between nature and grace is a distinction within the concrete created order of reality. Creation in and for itself may be spoken of as “grace” only in an improper sense. Human beings (concrete nature) always and everywhere exist within the order of grace. Concrete human nature is always already qualified by a supernatural finality and by God’s offer of himself, which is freely given to all as disclosed in His universal salvific will through Christ. The concept of “pure nature” is an abstraction and not a concrete existing entity. Pure nature does not actually occur in a pure state in the world and history. For Rahner, the mistake of the neo-scholastics was to confuse and exchange an abstraction (pure nature) for what concretely exists (concrete human nature as always already graced) and what was concrete for what is abstract.¹⁸⁷ Concrete human nature is a composite of pure nature and grace. No precise delimitation may be made between the two in human experience. We cannot assign some parts of experience to the realm of pure nature and others to the realm of grace.¹⁸⁸ Grace ought best be conceived not as a static quality but as a dynamic orientation given in human existence. It follows then that the self-transcending dynamism of man and its fulfilment is always already qualified by grace and falls within human beings consciousness and experience, though in any given individual it may not be self-consciously adverted to or adequately expressed.¹⁸⁹

Because of the relation between Grace and Nature, the human being is conditionally yet constitutively oriented towards God and whereby a new formal object forming man’s horizon is given him, what Rahner terms the “transcendental relation between God and man”.¹⁹⁰ According to Rahner, “[m]an is the being who possesses unlimited transcendence of Knowledge and freedom. The inner dynamism of his spirit is directed to absolute being, to absolute hope, to absolute future, to good in itself, to what is unconditionally right, and thus to God.”¹⁹¹ God as the ultimate mystery is rather something implicit and prethematic, and yet real relation between

¹⁸⁶ The major extended discussions of nature and grace can be found in “Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace,” K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1, pp. 297-317; “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace,” *Theological investigations*, Vol. 1, pp.319-346; “Reflections on the Experience of Grace,” *Theological investigations*, Vol.3, pp.86-90; “Nature and Grace,” *Theological investigation*, Vol. 4, pp.165-188.

¹⁸⁷ E. Conway, *The anonymous Christian- a relativised Christianity?*, 1993, pp.10-16.

¹⁸⁸ See, K. Rahner, “Philosophy and Theology,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, pp.72f.

¹⁸⁹ See, K. Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, P.183.

¹⁹⁰ K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, tran. William Dych, New York: Seabury Press, 1978, pp. 153f.

¹⁹¹ K. Rahner, “Anonymous and Explicit Faith,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 16, p.55

God and self is truly transcendental, i.e. the condition of the possibility for the intelligibility for all explicit religious assertions. Rahner can call the explicit, thematic, or categorical history of religions the history of the transcendental relationship between God and men.¹⁹² And from this position of transcendental relationship between God and men Rahner puts forward his “anonymous Christianity” based upon the reality of a universal salvific will of God, but distilled from the confession of Jesus as the Christ or as the absolute self-communication of God to humanity.

2.4.2.2 Christianity as the absolute religion intended for all

Christianity cannot recognise any other religion beside itself as of equal right. This is self-evident and basic to Christianity’s understanding of itself. The valid and lawful religion for Christianity is God’s free self-revelation by communicating Himself to man. God’s relationship is same for all men because it rests on the Incarnation, death and resurrection of the Word of God become flesh. Christ and his continuing presence in the world (which we call ‘Church’) is the religion which binds man to God.¹⁹³

Rahner develops his thesis on “anonymous Christianity” affirming first of all that Christianity is the absolute religion from a historical perspective of the religion, i.e. from Incarnation, going back to history of humanity. Christian religion has a history. It did not always exist, but began at some point in time. With the unique event of Jesus Christ comes the talk of the abolition of the validity of the Mosaic religion and of all other religions. Rahner asks, “at what exact point in time the absolute obligation of the Christian religion has in fact come into effect for every man and culture.” He answers, “wherever in practice Christianity reaches man in the real urgency and rigour of his actual existence, Christianity - once understood – presents itself as the only still valid religion for this man, a necessary means for salvation.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² See K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 1978, pp. 140-42; Johann Baptist Metz, one of Rahner’s former students, has been critical of Rahner’s transcendental approach to theology. For Metz, the transcendental moment immunizes the contents of Christian faith against the challenges, dangers, and threats of history and society, see J. B. Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Political Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith, New York: Crossroad, 1980, pp.161-68.

¹⁹³ K. Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, p.118.

¹⁹⁴ K. Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, p.120

And this develops the question of the concrete human existence or the social form of religion.

Thus in his first thesis, Rahner speaks from the Christian religion as absolute religion, which comes into existence with God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ offering salvation to all, which comes into contact with humanity and playing also a social role of religion, entering into the inner factor of every people and culture, entering into the one history of the world where both Christians and non-Christians live in one and the same situation and face each other in dialogue. And this opens the question of the theological meaning of the other religions which is developed in the second thesis.

2.4.2.3 Natural and supernatural elements in non-Christian religions

Rahner begins his second thesis as: "Until the moment when the gospel really enters into the historical situation of an individual, non-Christian religion.....does not merely contain elements of a natural knowledge of God,It also contains supernatural elements arising out of grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ."¹⁹⁵ The second thesis discusses the relation between nature and grace, and the doctrine of man, and thus sees supernatural, grace-filled elements in a non-Christian religion. Nature and grace do not describe entirely separate and distinct phases in the historic life of the individual or community. He says, 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 victory in man's free acceptance of it, this being again the result of grace.¹⁹⁶ Man is created as "a being of unlimited openness for the limitless being of God,"¹⁹⁷ and in the acceptance of his unlimited openness he can be said to be already living a spiritual existence. For Rahner says: "In the acceptance of himself man is accepting Christ as the absolute perfection and guarantee of his own anonymous movements towards God by grace, and the acceptance of this belief is again not an act of man alone but the work of God's grace which is the grace of Christ... ." ¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ K. Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, p.121.

¹⁹⁶ K. Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, p.124.

¹⁹⁷ K. Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, p.392.

¹⁹⁸ K. Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, p.394.

Grace is operative in the personal life of the individual. When an individual makes a moral decision in his life, this moral decision can also be thought to measure up to the character of a supernaturally elevated than merely to think that this is a result of 'natural morality'. As a result of grace working in an individual, in his spiritual and moral life, the individual life is elevated from what is called just a 'natural life.' And hence one could see in the life of these individuals or in other religions the capacity for having a positive significance. This positive significance of the religion contributes to this religion as to call it a legitimate or lawful religion. According to Rahner, a "lawful religion means here an institutional religion whose 'use' by man at a certain period can be regarded on the whole as a positive means of gaining the right relationship to God and thus for the attaining of salvation, a means which is therefore positively included in God's plan of salvation."¹⁹⁹

To sum up the second thesis, grace works on nature, and the natural life is elevated. This is seen from the moral life of an individual and through his relationship to God. There are expressions in the life of a non-Christian, that through the sacred rites and scriptures, he experiences a relationship between man and God. There are genuine religious acts directed to the one true God. This is seen as a positive significance in other religion, making it a lawful religion.²⁰⁰ Hence the grace of God can be said to be operating anonymously within the religion itself working for salvation. And this leads to Rahner's third thesis to develop further the relationship between Christianity and other religions.

2.4.2.4 Christianity relates to non-Christian as anonymous Christian

If the non-Christian religions are legitimate or lawful religions in God's plan of salvation as stated in the second thesis, then "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

¹⁹⁹ K. Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, p.125.

²⁰⁰ According to Rahner: "If we say that there were lawful religions in pre-Christian ages even outside the realm of the Old Testament, this does not mean that these religions were lawful in all their elements – to maintain this would be absurd. Nor does it mean that every religion was lawful; for in certain cases several forms, systems and institutions of a religious kind offered themselves within the historically concrete situation of the particular member of a certain people, culture, period of history, etc., so that the person concerned had to decide as to which of them was here and now, and on the whole, the more correct way...of finding God," K. Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, p.130.

Christian.”²⁰¹ The non-Christian is an anonymous Christian from the fact that he has experienced the grace of God. This grace, understood as the a-priori horizon of all spiritual acts, accompanies his consciousness subjectively, even though it is not known objectively. An anonymous Christian, who is already on his way towards his salvation, which reaches him from Christ, is in need of the proclamation of the Gospel. The proclamation of the Gospel turns an anonymous Christian into someone who now also knows about his Christian beliefs in the depth of his grace-endowed being by objective reflection and in the profession of faith which is given a social form in the Church. This leads to Rahner’s fourth thesis where he defines the constitution of the Church.

2.4.2.5 Presence of a hidden reality outside the visible Church

Christianity in the full sense of the term involves as one of its factors “a conscious awareness of faith, an explicit Christian creed, and a constitution of the Church as a society.”²⁰² Explicit Christian faith and the visible Church may go hand in hand. When Rahner sees that non-Christianity as a world which is to be brought to the explicit consciousness of what already belongs to it as a divine offer or already pertains to it, that is to say, that divine gift of grace in non-Christianity accepted unreflectedly and implicitly, he also sees that the Church then 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 outside the visible Church. And in this sense one can speak of the unification of the whole human race in the one Church of Christ.²⁰³ This thought on the unification of whole humanity in the one Church of Christ can also be understood from Pannenberg’s thinking on whole humanity being unified in Christ at ‘*eschaton*,’ which we shall analyse later in the next section.

2.4.3 Conclusion

It was not easy for one to understand Rahner’s controverted term “Anonymous Christianity.”²⁰⁴ The thesis on anonymous Christians has been the object of

²⁰¹ K. Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, p.131.

²⁰² K.Rahner, “Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary task of the Church,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 12, 1974, p.163.

²⁰³ K. Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5, p.133.

²⁰⁴ For more details in this regard read: K. Rahner’s *Theological Investigations*, “Observations on the problem of ‘the Anonymous Christian,’” Vol.14, 1976, pp.280-294; “Anonymous Christianity and

numerous criticisms from theologians as Hans Küng and Cardinal Ratzinger.²⁰⁵

Hans Küng asks, does ‘anonymous Christians’ solve the problem? In his words:

*Ist das Problem gelöst? Marschieren die Massen der nichtchristlichen Religionen nicht nur im Kopf des Theologen in die heilige römische Kirche ein? In Wirklichkeit jedenfalls bleiben sie, die Juden, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhisten und alle die anderen, die selber sehr wohl wissen, was sie, völlig ‘unanonym,’ sind, draußen. Eine Scheinlösung, die nur ein schwacher Trost ist: kann man einen Verein, der an Mitgliederschwund leidet, dadurch sanieren, daß man auch die Nichtmitglieder zu ‚verborgen‘ Mitglieder erklärt? Und was würden die Christen sagen, wenn sie von den Buddhisten gnädig als ‚anonyme Buddhisten‘ anerkannt würden?*²⁰⁶

The thesis on Anonymous Christians has been censured for operating on the basis of an abstract and overly optimistic view of religions. By making them embodiments of God’s universal will of salvation, it does not emphasize enough the fundamental ambiguity of the religions, which are also the expression of sinful human blindness. Moreover, as Claude Geffre sees “the theory of anonymous Christians does not take seriously enough the newness of Christian existence with relation to human nature as a prior condition for grace.”²⁰⁷

To understand the non-Christian religion and to speak of them in terms of anonymous Christians was and is a concern also for the missionary activity of the Church. However it was difficult to accept this notion on non-Christians, it was an eye opener to the world at large, and to believe that the mystery of Christ present in all, which also gave a great thrust to the people in general to go out to the non-Christian in relationship of God’s love to them. The explicit and the implicit Christian faith is indeed seen in what Rahner speaks from the point of authentic Christianity “in the one love for God and men, love of God and love of neighbour being mutually dependent in a unique fashion on each occasion.” Further he says,

the Missionary task of the Church,” Vol. 12, 1974, pp.161-178; “Anonymous and explicit faith”, Vol.16, 1979, pp.52-59; “Jesus Christ in the non-Christian Religions,” Vol. 17, 1981, pp.39-50; “Christianity and the non-Christian religions,” Vol. 5, 1966, pp.115-134; E. Conway, *The anonymous Christian- a relativised Christianity?*, 1993; there has been much written on terms -anonymous Christian and Christianity and objections to them, one example to give is that Henry de Lubac rejects the concept of ‘anonymous Christianity’ but has no objection to the term ‘anonymous Christian’- see H. de Lubac, *Geheimnis aus dem wir leben*, in *Kriterien* 6, 1966, pp.131-154, esp.149ff.

²⁰⁵ See H. Küng, *On Being a Christian*, N.Y.: Garden City, Doubleday, 1976, pp. 97-98, and J. Ratzinger, *principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, pp.162-66, 169-71.

²⁰⁶ H. Küng, *Christ Sein*, München, 1974, p.89f.

²⁰⁷ C. Geffre, O.P., “From the Theology of Religious Pluralism to an Interreligious Theology,” in D. Kendall and G. O’Collins (eds.), *In Many and Varied Ways*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003, p.48.

“authentic Christianity is real love of God and neighbour for their own sake, which, ... must be directed to God and neighbour in an irreversible and inexhaustible transcendence.”²⁰⁸ This incomprehensible love of God makes apparently excessive demands on man and grows up mysteriously and as it were invisibly in many different shapes and on apparently unfertile soil. It can be fidelity to one’s own conscience, can be an ultimate, solitary unrewarded responsibility for others.²⁰⁹ This love of God liberates us from everything.

2.5 Wolfhart Pannenberg’s perspective of other religions

2.5.1 Encountering conflicting truth claims

The question concerning conflicting truth claims is so often at the centre of theological discussions of religious pluralism, and as Amos Yong states, it has not shown signs of resolution in so far as the “debates have proceeded from within the frame work of propositional discourses. Among other reasons, this is in part due to the inadequacies of language to capture and communicate transcendental realities, in part due to the variety of interpretative systems associated with the religions, and in part due to religious truths claims as inviting inhabitation and practical embodiment rather than just describing the objective realities.”²¹⁰ The question regarding the truth claims in diverse religious traditions lies at the heart of inter-religious encounter. Pannenberg’s theology of religions primarily deals with the question of truth in religions. It was in Spring 1988 that Pannenberg published his first volume of his Systematic Theology in German, in which he includes the theme of other religions.²¹¹ This volume begins with the question of truth as how truth is the foundation of systematic theology, and then as how the concept of God relates to this truth, and further, how the reality of God is understood in relation to other religions. Pannenberg’s central significance lies in his understanding of the nature of theology and the nature of truth to which theology is related. He asserts that by nature, truth can not be subjective, it can only be personal, when it can be claimed at least in principle to be true for all. He declares that truth is essentially historical and

²⁰⁸ K. Rahner, “God’s Transcendence and Concern for the Future,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 20, pp.176-177.

²⁰⁹ See K. Rahner, “God’s Transcendence and Concern for the Future,” *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 20, p.178.

²¹⁰ A. Yong, “The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth and the Religions,” in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 57, 2004, 1, p.14

²¹¹ For a more comprehensive treatment of the topic see W. Panneberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, 1991, pp.119-36.

ultimately eschatological. And until the *eschaton*, truth will remain provisional and truth claims are contestable.²¹² In contesting for truth claims the history of religions plays the central role and religions compete for the universal truth.

2.5.1.1 Truth claims in the history of religions

Pannenberg's point of departure for assessing the value of religions is the phenomenology of religions.²¹³ But his is a theological interpretation and "critical appropriation" of religions; in other words, it is a theological reflection on the results and approaches of empirical findings in psychology, sociology and history of the religions. He champions an anthropologically based view of religion. He labels his approach as a "fundamental-theological anthropology."²¹⁴ In his view, religion is an essential dimension of human life, and it belongs to the nature of humanity to be open to God and search for meaning and truth. In contrast to Karl Barth, who vehemently opposed religions since they not only represented inadequate views of God but also represented false human attempts to find a contact point between humanity and deity, Pannenberg believed religions play a crucial role in revelation, since the claim for the truth of god(s) lies at the heart of religion.²¹⁵ And the history of religions represents this endless search for universal truth. The role Pannenberg assigns to the religions is seen as necessary mediations of humanity's innate, and yet unthematic, knowledge of the infinite mystery. But his critique of a general concept of religion will lead us to consider the history of the religions as an empirical standpoint from which to compare conflicting religious truth-claims. He interprets the ongoing conflict between various gods and religions in history as the Christian God's self-revelation to humankind.²¹⁶

For Pannenberg the claim for truth must have a historical past which should be related to the eschatological future of salvation. The truth claim of the Christian proclamation has its basis in this historical past and the eschatological future, and

²¹² See S. J. Grenz, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's quest for ultimate truth," in *The Christian Century*, September 14-21, 1988, pp.795-98

²¹³ "Today, the phenomenological method is obviously the dominant one among the science of religions." See W. Pannenberg, "Toward a Theology of the History of Religions," in Vol.2 of *Basic Questions in Theology*, 1971, p.72.

²¹⁴ See W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985, p.18-21.

²¹⁵ See S. J. Grenz, "Commitment and Dialogue: Pannenberg on Christianity and the Religions," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no.1, 1989, p.201.

²¹⁶ See S. Lösel, "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Response to the Challenge of Religious pluralism: The Anticipation of Divine Absoluteness?," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 34:4, Fall 1997, p.501.

that is what differentiates Christianity from other religions and which results in conflicting truth claims. A theology of the world religions that wants to be true to the empirical situation in the way the religious traditions confront each other must not play down the conflict of truth claims. In the history of religions there has always been competition and struggle for superiority on the basis of different truth claims.²¹⁷ Religions have presented themselves generally their historical beliefs, their doctrines like the one on reincarnation, on different ways of conceiving and experiencing the ultimate reality as personal or non-personal. Religions also speak of their experience of salvation in the encounter with the absolute reality. They also present their authentic life and divine experiences. Move towards authentic life has been part of the religious traditions. Purification has been a necessary part of religious history. The religious traditions continue to illumine the life of its adherents in the context of their world. Pannenberg says that in the history of religions, in the case of encounter or confrontation between different religious cultures, to prove the superiority of particular tradition, the basis was whether that tradition illumined the people's experiences of their life and world.²¹⁸ Religions have sprung up with some sort of history, they have grown up with particular tradition, have had cultural and social influences upon them, their adherents have taken shelter in them, they have looked answers for divine life in them, they have illumined the life of the people, and they have also witnessed to the conflicting truths between them or rather to say they have had different experiences based on their religious traditions. But in the conflicting truth claims one has also further been able to recognise the elements of truth in other traditions and to incorporate them into one's own faith.

2.5.1.2 The truth claim in the history of Christian religion

When Pannenberg speaks of truth claims in religions and how religious traditions have illumined the life of the people, he at the same time emphasises the Christian truth claim. And here too for him history is very important.²¹⁹ The Christian faith

²¹⁷ See W. Pannenberg, "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting truth claims," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, G. D'costa (ed.), Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1990, p.102-3.

²¹⁸ See W. Pannenberg, *Theology and Philosophy of Science*, 1976, pp.301ff. Pannenberg agrees with W. C. Smith's project of a theology of religion regarding a tradition illumining one's life and world,

²¹⁹ We can also read about the development of the history of religion and the place of Christianity in the history of religion, the development of the monotheistic culture in J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004, pp.25-32. Cardinal Ratzinger develops the theme of the history of religions from primitive experience to

goes back to the historical past and is related to an eschatological future of salvation. The notion of salvation as presently available in terms of experiential transformation as in many religions, Pannenberg says, does not square with biblical evidence. Biblical God is not some transcendent reality which human beings may experience and respond to in different ways. Rather the claim is that the transcendent God is present in Jesus' activity and that the appropriate response can only be faith. The presence of God in Jesus was not first a matter of Christian experience,²²⁰ but a claim of Jesus himself and this claim involved eschatological finality. In the Christian faith, the coming of the kingdom of God, which would give final evidence of God as the Lord of all people, which was only spoken in terms of expectation in the Jewish faith, validates the claim of Christian revelation about the unique place of Christ in the history of religions. And as Pannenberg says, the truth depends on God's vindication of the claim involved in Jesus' activity, a vindication that the disciples discerned in the Easter appearances of their Lord, that however, remains dependent on the final future of God.²²¹ The truth claim in the history of Christian religion is that God reveals himself in Jesus Christ, who proclaims his kingdom on earth and relates it to the eschatological future of salvation.

2.5.2 Pannenberg's Christian Inclusivism

Referring to John Hick's criticism on Christian inclusivism, Pannenberg says, if "his criticism were only directed against exclusivist view that there can be no salvation outside the Christian Church, agreement would be more easily obtained."²²² And arguing against pluralism of John Hick, who thinks that inclusivist position is inadequate, Pannenberg makes his position in the theology of religions as that of an inclusive understanding of other religions. He says, according to the inclusivist position "human persons from all cultures can be spiritually close to the kingdom Jesus proclaimed without even knowing about Jesus." Referring to the parable of the last judgement, in which Jesus and his proclamation are the final norm in deciding

mythical religions, and from mythical religions to three ways of moving beyond myth: mysticism, monotheistic revolution and enlightenment. While eastern or asiatic religions are referred to mysticism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are referred to monotheistic revolution.

²²⁰ Hick would say, that there was a first order religious experience of "the presence of God" in Jesus. Elsewhere he called it "the Christ event," see J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, London: Collins, Fount, 1977, p.111ff.

²²¹ See W. Pannenberg, "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting truth claims," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, G. D'costa (ed.), 1990, p.101-2.

²²² W. Pannenberg, "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting truth claims," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, G. D'costa (ed.), 1990, p.98.

on whether a person will be admitted to or excluded from the communion of the kingdom, he says, “Jesus is the norm even in relation to those who never knew him in their lifetime. The conclusion is that many do in fact belong to Jesus and in the kingdom he proclaimed who were not members of the Chosen people of Israel or of the Christian Church.”²²³ From his study on the history of religion and seeing that the truth claims in religions conflict, he accepts the elements of truth in other religions and includes them in the eschatological future of salvation.

We may ask how Pannenberg’s eschatological outlook, which is one of the most definitive characteristics of his thought, which also does show an exclusivist tendency, be reconciled with his inclusivist standpoint? One can find the answer in his treatment of the role of the Spirit in his Trinitarian theology. Stanley Grenz, a long-time interpreter of Pannenberg’s theology, makes a profound observation in noting that one of the major resources for the theology of religions in Pannenberg’s system is his understanding of God, especially his understanding of the role of the Spirit in the Godhead. Pannenberg is able to “move beyond traditional Christocentrism and to elevate the Spirit as the Trinitarian member most specifically operative in the world.”²²⁴ His pneumatological approach allows him to see the saving work of God in the context of the divine activity in creation as a whole. The Spirit elevates creatures above themselves to participate in the life of God. From his pneumatological perspective one can see the continuity between creation, the new life in faith and the *eschaton*, that is the completion of the creation by the power of the Spirit. The experience of faith is a heightening of the “exocentric” life that the Spirit already activates everywhere, especially in human beings. And the same Spirit is present in the religious traditions of the human persons, which have given rise to the various religious traditions of human history.²²⁵ Through this intratrinitarian relations, Pannenberg is able to maintain that everywhere in relations where the divine mystery is at work, the Son is work too. And in this way, the possibility of salvation is not confined to the Church. For Pannenberg, Jesus is “the universal

²²³ W. Pannenberg, “Religious Pluralism and Conflicting truth claims,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, G. D’costa (ed.), 1990, pp.98-99.

²²⁴ S. J. Grenz, “Commitment and Dialogue: Pannenberg on Christianity and the Religions,” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no.1, 1989, p. 204-6.

²²⁵ See S. J. Grenz, “Commitment and Dialogue: Pannenberg on Christianity and the Religions,” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no.1, 1989, p. 204-5.

criterion of judgement or salvation, but not the indispensable historical means of salvation.”²²⁶

The inclusive theory of Pannenberg recognizes the specific truth claims of one’s own tradition, and in the same way he does not relativize or play down the Christian truth claim, which is a norm for everyone. When religions compete for the universal truth they also in their respective religion display the truth they have, and Christians have the possibility here to recognize the elements of truth in other religions, because of which dialogue and harmony between religions can be sought.

2.5.3 Ecumenism and Dialogue in Pannenberg

The departing point for ecumenism and dialogue in Pannenberg is, first of all, the unity of the Church. It is more sensible to speak of Christian relationship with world religions only when Christianity seeks relationship with its own various denominations. Pannenberg’s distinctive view of relating to other religions also comes into focus in his specific understanding of the role of Christian ecumenism. First of all, in the light of his search for universal truth, Pannenberg has aimed for the whole worldwide Church rather than any specific denomination. But at the same time, he is not satisfied to write only to the Church and Christians alone but instead to the rest of humanity as well, because the Church is an anticipation and a sign of the unity of all people under one God.²²⁷ The Church is the sign of the kingdom of God. And as a sign it points “to a future society of peace and justice that no political system can bring into existence, and as a reminder of the transience of all social orders in contrast to the finality of God’s rule.”²²⁸ The role of the Church is to bring unity of mankind, and to witness the future of humanity that is reconciled to God. In this sense the Church is essentially missionary. Pannenberg is not content to promote ecumenism for its own sake, rather ecumenical endeavours must point to the final goal of the Church: the unity of all people of God under one God. The unity and peace among Christians and between them and their God are proleptic signs of the renewed humanity.

²²⁶ W. Pannenberg, “Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology,” in *Harvard Theological Review* 77, April 1984, p.136.

²²⁷ See W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p.xv.

²²⁸ S. J. Grenz, *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 1990, p.153.

Secondly, Pannenberg sees in Christianity esp., in its dialogue with other religions, a syncretistic religion in that it assimilates, incorporates and critically adopts elements from other religious traditions, even those in competition with it. Pannenberg is very much against the playing down of the truth claims in order to engage oneself in genuine inter-religious dialogue. His approach to inter-religious dialogue in a situation of religious pluralism is that Christianity should deal with it differently, i.e. it must be open and be ready to accept whatever the truth the Christian can accept and learn from other religious traditions so that he can incorporate those elements of truth into his own understanding of God and of his revelation. And this does not require relativizing the claim of the Christian faith to the eschatological finality. Rather, “this claim should produce an awareness of the provisional character of our present experience and knowledge to the effect that the Christian should be enabled to recognize his or her need for deeper insight, not least in a situation of encounter with other religious traditions.”²²⁹ It is not for a lacking of truth in Christianity that one seeks encounter with other religions and seeks inter-religious dialogue, but it is also to recognize the truth in other religions from their perspective.

Thirdly, Pannenberg comes to the table of dialogue with the adherents of other religions with a set of commitments, the most important of which is that there is one, unified, coherent truth to be searched for. For the search of the universal truth the history of religions remains a sort of criterion. In the history of Christian religion, Christ represents the final revelation of God. Even though this may sound an exclusive way, his thought on “*eschaton*” where the truth of any religious claim can be ultimately established, the dialogue with other religions becomes a real process. Till “*eschaton*” the religions themselves and not only their truth claims are provisional in nature. And in this sense one religion can not claim for superiority over the other.²³⁰ Finally the purpose of dialogue is not to soften the differences between religions, rather to give importance to the search for the unified truth.

²²⁹ W. Pannenberg, “Religious Pluralism and Conflicting truth claims,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, G. D’costa (ed.), 1990, p.103

²³⁰ See V. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003, pp.243-44.

2.5.4 Conclusion

It is important to note the differences between Rahner and Pannenberg. The differences lie in their emphasis in the inclusivist approach of the presence of Christ in the mystery of religions. While for Rahner it is the grace of God operating in creation, the role of the universal saving action of the Spirit, from the self-understanding of Christianity itself that must lead one to reflect on other religions and thus recognizing the positive elements of truths in other religions, for Pannenberg, it is a competition for the search of universal truth in which history of religions is very important. Both of them in their inclusivist approach present Christ's presence in other religions, but Christ is the revelation of God, in whom the whole of humanity is unified. This inclusive model is also called "Christocentric" in contrast to the exclusive model which is "ecclesiocentric." The difference is that eschatological salvation remains christocentrically anchored to the present. Salvation is bound to Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God, crucified and risen. Christocentrism manifests itself in Vatican Documents, in *Lumen Gentium* as: "Christ alone" is declared as the "mediator and way to salvation,"²³¹ in the Decree on *Ad Gentes*, as "although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please him,"²³² in *Nostra Aetate*, where it says that the Church must proclaim Christ, "who is 'the way, the truth and the life' (Jn.14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their life,"²³³ and in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, Christ is presented as the Alpha and the Omega of human history. But in all this, one must make note that this Christocentric model does recognize the positive elements of truth in other religions. And that is a Christian openness to other religions.

²³¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

²³² *Ad Gentes*, 7.

²³³ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

Chapter Three

Pluralistic Approach to Other Religions

Biblical – Theological Perspective

3.1 Religious Pluralism: context and meaning

3.1.1 Religious Pluralism: terminology and meaning

Oxford English Dictionary gives the meaning of “pluralism” as “a condition or a system in which two or more states, groups, principles coexist,” or in the philosophical sense, “a theory or system that recognizes more than one ultimate principle.”²³⁴ The term ‘pluralism’ as we have already mentioned goes back to John Hick to his typology of exclusivism inclusivism and pluralism. The religious understanding of this word pluralism or the term ‘religious pluralism’ refers phenomenologically, as John Hick says, simply to the fact that the history of religions shows a plurality of traditions and a plurality of variations within each tradition. Philosophically the term refers to a particular theory of the relation between these traditions, with their different and competing claims. This is the theory that the great world religions constitute variant conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, the one ultimate, mysterious divine reality.²³⁵

In parallel to exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, one may also refer to ecclesiocentrism, christocentrism and theocentrism. The pluralistic theory of religions is also spoken in terms of theocentrism²³⁶. Theologians of theocentric orientation, despite their differences in details, “agree in their rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as the universal mediator of salvation.” And the words “Jesus alone” or “only Jesus” is seen as a rhetoric and hyperbole.²³⁷ In contrast, they refer to the always greater God. Theocentrism is the pluralistic paradigm, according to which

²³⁴ J. Pearsal (ed.), *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 10.ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p.1101.

²³⁵ See J. Hick, “Religious Pluralism”, in M. Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol.12, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987, p.331.

²³⁶ There are, for example, works in this regard such as, R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 1981, or J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985, and Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985.

²³⁷ H. Waldenfels, “Mission and Interreligious Dialogue: What is at stake?,” in P. Mojzes, and L. Swidler (ed.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p.151.

Christ is one saviour among other saviour figures and not an exclusive one. In this view, God alone stands at the centre. The various religions, Christianity included, represent many ways leading to God. Besides this threefold typology there is yet another one, called realitycentrism. This is associated recently by John Hick, among others, according to which the centre of religions is not a God or gods but an ultimate reality (however that is named). Some pluralists seem to shift to this orientation, but at this moment the shape and the content of this option are still quite vague and undefined.²³⁸ So theocentric worldview comprises alternative positions according to which a “normative” function is or is not attributed to Jesus Christ with regard to humanity’s relation to God. In theocentrism, J.P.Schineller observes two divergent interpretations, according to which the person of Jesus Christ, understood as nonconstitutive of salvation, is nonetheless normative for some, while for others it is neither constitutive nor normative. Example for the normative Jesus would be Troeltsch and Tillich, and the process theologians such as John B.Cobb and Schubert M.Ogden. For the non-normative Jesus, the main protagonist is John Hick.²³⁹ Thus from theocentrism or from pluralistic perspective Jesus Christ is seen as not definitive mediator for salvation but seen as normative to some and as non-normative to others. The former means, that Jesus Christ is the mediator who brings salvation, in whose person and deeds the love of God is clearly revealed. He is normative for the salvation of the people. But without him we do not remain without salvation, but we remain only without his perfect expression. This also means that there are other mediators. The latter means that Jesus Christ is neither definitive nor normative for the salvation of the people. But God is a Transcendent Reality or Absolute Real. The authors, however, who advocate theocentric pluralism, differ from one to another in various respects. We shall look into in this chapter John Hick, a protestant perspective and Paul Knitter, from the Catholic perspective of Pluralism.

²³⁸ See V. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003, p.25.

²³⁹ For more details on this theme see J.P. Schineller, “Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views,” in *Theological Studies* 37, 1976, pp.545-66. He refers here to 1. Ecclesiocentric universe, exclusive Christology, 2. Christocentric universe, inclusive universe, 3. Theocentric universe, normative Christology, 4. Theocentric universe, non-normative Christology; also see J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, pp.185-89; “Das Christentum und die Religionen,” in *Internationale Theologenkommission, in Arbeitshilfen* 136, Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn, 30.September 1996, pp.10-12.

From this brief and general understanding of the term ‘pluralism,’ let us analyse the situation or the context that calls for religious pluralism.

3.1.2 The context and factors of religious pluralism

The consciousness of the present-day religious pluralism is on the one hand the result of the still ongoing migration and mixing of peoples and national groups. Today not only in the East, in Asia, but also in majority of European countries the most various nationals and religious groupings are living side by side. Even though the non-Christian groups in Europe still form only minorities, they nevertheless represent in a tangible way the pluralism of religions. The consciousness of pluralism is then further increased through the encounters resulting from modern mobility, tourism, international politics and economic relations, and also because of modern news reporting, and especially audio-visual technologies. As Hans Waldenfels puts it, never before has the knowledge of the Other and the Alien been so wide-spread as today, and the experience of pluralism leads to a positive result only then when for me the alien you becomes an equally significant subject.²⁴⁰

The contemporary experience and views of religious pluralism seems to show us that Christianity is no longer self-evident, no longer the ‘only way’ or no longer the ‘only option.’ Christianity has become one option amidst a whole range of options, one of the many ways to give meaning to life. Moreover these other ways are not only simply available, they rather clamour for our attention. They are sensitive to market trends. And they often look like more ‘fun’ than Christianity. The practitioners of these other ways are familiar to us. We live beside them, we work with them, we know them personally – and they are fine, upstanding citizens, men and women of integrity, who are as idealistic and spiritually sensitive as most of the Christians we know. In other words, our daily experience makes clear to us the fact that there are not only other options available to us, but they also bear fruit, virtuous living and spiritual depth. If that is the case, does it make a difference if I am a Christian and, secondly, is it not pretentious for Christians to claim that they alone possess the truth? asks Terrance Merrigan.²⁴¹ In more theological terms, they mean:

²⁴⁰ See H. Waldenfels, “Mission and Interreligious Dialogue: What is at stake?,” in P. Mojzes and L. Swidler (eds.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p.143.

²⁴¹ T. Merrigan, “Religious Pluralism and the Vatican Document ‘Dominus Iesus,’” in *Sacred Heart University Review* 20, 1999-2000, pp.63-79.

what is distinctive about Christianity as a world religion and what is the relationship of Christianity to the other world religions?

3.2 The Biblical foundations for Religious Pluralism

Here we shall not follow the method used in the previous two chapters on exclusivist and inclusivist approaches, where we analysed separately Old and New Testament foundations. For a pluralistic view, we refer to the theocentric perspective of the Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament together. We shall study the concept of God and of Jesus Christ and the role of the Spirit in their love for humanity, and the universal salvific will of God.

3.2.1 The universal God

3.2.1.1 God's love for humanity

One thought that remains always in the hearts and minds of believers is that of God's love. The main biblical-theological reason for pluralism is God's love.²⁴² The love of God is spoken and experienced through various ways. The Scripture - Old and New Testament – is the result of God's love for humanity. God's love for humanity is witnessed in his deeds, through miracles and His saving deeds. Through the Scripture God wants to communicate to the people his everlasting goodness. The love of God communicated through the prophets and through Jesus Christ is the universal love or God's love for everyone. God can not be partial in his love. Jesus himself speaks of God the Father in terms of His love for all, “for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mt.5:45). It is his saving love that brings the whole human race into one universe. Through the creation of human race God entered into a relationship with humanity. And through his continuous support, which is by staying by our side, He continues this relationship, and finally by saving us (speaking in terms of salvation) God brings his creation to completion. God is by nature a universal Saviour.

3.2.1.2 The universal salvific will of God

The classic biblical text for the universal salvific will of God, 1 Tim 2:4-6, bases this on the universal mediation of salvation by Jesus: “God...desires all humans to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is

²⁴² See, J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, London: Collins, Fount, 1977, pp.122-23.

one mediator between God and humanity, the human being Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time.” This biblical view, however, in the new attempt is cut in half. It is done rather to suit it for pluralistic view. More precisely said, the first sentence in the cited scriptural text, which speaks of the universal salvific will of God, is separated from its grounding – that there is one God and one mediator of salvation – and is taken alone. Hans Waldenfels says that the basis for this is that God’s salvation also finds expression in other religions. If the one God in the many religions is in fact one, the adherents of the various religions indeed meet the one God of salvation, and they do not need the name of Jesus to attain this salvation.²⁴³ The God who created all human beings in His own image and the God whose universal will is to save all in fact comes from the love of God for all. Placing much emphasis upon the universal salvific will of God Hick asks, “[c]an 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?”²⁴⁴

3.2.2 Jesus the Saviour

3.2.2.1 Salvation in Jesus

There are a number of references in Luke and Acts which indicate that God has transferred the divine prerogatives of salvation to Jesus (Acts 4:12; 5:31; 13:23; Lk 1:47, 69, 77; 2:11). “Although salvation is the gift of God the Father, it is clearly linked with Jesus, the only Saviour; only through him may men receive salvation.”²⁴⁵ “I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (Jn 14:6), “he who comes through me will have abundant life,” “I have come that you may have life.” These are some of Jesus’ teachings which give certainty to us to acknowledge Him as the Saviour of all or to say that in Him there is the fullness of life. For a pluralistic theory, the problem is not that Jesus is the saviour, but that He is the only Saviour. For we read in Acts, that there is no salvation in anyone else at all, for there is no other name under heaven granted to men, by which we may receive salvation (Acts 4:12). Pluralistic understanding of Jesus as normative or non-normative is a tendency to put Jesus in line with other

²⁴³ See H. Waldenfels, “Mission and Interreligious Dialogue: What is at stake?,” in P. Mojzes and L. Swidler (eds.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p.151.

²⁴⁴ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.122.

²⁴⁵ I.H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1970, p.169.

saviour figures or mediators of other religions, thus making an attempt to take away that finality of salvation from Jesus Christ, or rather pluralist theologians would prefer to say that salvation belongs to God.

The whole concept of salvation is different in different religions. Christianity proclaims Jesus Christ as the only Saviour or in whom alone there is salvation. Here salvation is understood not merely in its phenomenological sense, but also refers to the eschatology. Perhaps the pluralist theologians emphasize the understanding of the term 'salvation' or 'being saved' more from phenomenological sense of the word, and therefore they speak more in terms of liberation, or saving in terms of God's love and justice.

3.2.2.2 The theocentric Jesus

Even though the widespread message of the New Testament is undeniably Christocentric, Paul Knitter says, the original message of Jesus was theocentric. Jesus' main task was to announce the "kingdom of God" (Lk. 11:20; 17:21). His mission and person were profoundly kingdom-centered, or God-centered. Jesus was theocentric, and is also understood from the content of his prayer and work - "thy kingdom come; thy will be done." Knitter further says that the christocentrism of the New Testament does not lose hold of Jesus' original theocentrism. Referring to the three texts in which Jesus is proclaimed as God or as divine (Jn. 1:1; 20:28; Heb. 1:8-9), he says that there "an evident subordination is preserved." Even Paul in urging his radical christocentrism, reminds his communities that: "You belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."²⁴⁶ Stanley Samartha says the "New Testament constantly emphasizes that it was God who raised Jesus from the dead, not that he raised himself. "you killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15). The witnessing finger points to Jesus Christ, but does not stop there; it points beyond to "the God of our fathers who glorified his servant Jesus" (Acts 3:13)."²⁴⁷ For a theocentric model in religious pluralism Jesus

²⁴⁶ See P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 1985, p.174; See also E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, New York: Crossroad, 1979, p.140. See also N. Perrin, *The kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963, pp.229-56; See also R.E. Brown, *Jesus, God and Man*, Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967, pp.23-28.

²⁴⁷ S. Samartha, "The Lordship of Jesus Christ and Religious Pluralism," in G. H. Anderson and T. Stransky (eds.), *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981, p.26.

is truly a saviour, and Jesus is shown as One who experiences special and unique love from God the Father, or Jesus is shown as the One whose task is to proclaim the kingdom of God, and an emphasis is given more to God.

3.2.2.3 Jesus the liberator

In his teaching and working miracles Jesus' love and concern for the sick, the little ones, and the suffering ones is enormous. There are many examples showing Jesus as a healer, as compassionate and forgiving, as a teacher who loves enemies, a comforter, one who does justice, etc. Jesus became human to repair the brokenness of mankind. Jesus' life, suffering and death is to redeem mankind, to free mankind from suffering and death. All sufferings that was, is and will be on earth is borne by him. Through his suffering and death we attain life. In him we find a wonderful meaning for our suffering and death. The biblical Jesus, is presented as God, son of God or Saviour. The meaning of Christianity rests on this position. Christianity professes this faith. This understanding of Jesus as God and Saviour can not be substituted with Jesus as only a liberator from only a human perspective and one mediator among others. It is a fact that Jesus redeemed many from their tragedies and it is phenomenologically evident. He is a redeemer, a liberator, and he is God who took the form of a man, and that is the Christian faith, which we don't think needs to be ignored in order to understand other religions.

3.2.3 The Holy Spirit

In John's Gospel Jesus affirms "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now...When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:12-13). Pluralist theology takes hold of this "Spirit" perspective in their analysis for a theology of religions. The Spirit of God is referred in His various actions, especially in his guiding presence. The Spirit of God was present before Jesus Christ and is present after his death and resurrection. In various religions there is an understanding of the Spirit of God as one of God's presence, or divine presence.

Paul Knitter while referring to John 16:12-13 –"When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" says that if "we believe in the Holy Spirit, we must

believe that there is always “more to come.””²⁴⁸ In response to Knitter, Karl-Josef Kuschel says

Of all possible gospel texts, Knitter appeals to John for his “pluralistic” understanding of God as though John’s Spirit Christology were not in fact the most christocentric theology in the entire New Testament. Knitter interprets the Johannine passage, “When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth,” as if it did not refer to the spirit and truth of Jesus Christ, but rather to something totally open, as though John’s God were the ineffable Mystery which can never be adequately described by any religion and must remain open on principle.²⁴⁹

Indeed the Holy Spirit works as a person of the Trinity and is not limited to the historical functions of Jesus. He is an everlasting guiding person in truth. The theology of religions definitely sees an wonderful presence of the Holy Spirit in his leading all into the truth, but one must also be aware and cautious not to separate the Holy Spirit from Jesus Christ as if to emphasize one and to ignore the other. The role of the Holy Spirit has been to make followers of various religions to the idea of openness.²⁵⁰ On the basis of these considerations, what is needed is “the basic common ground of the world religions.” The very same Divine Reality is present in various religions and cultures.²⁵¹

3.2.4 The Kingdom of God

The question that we have often asked is that of the salvation of non-Christians. The proclamation of Jesus as transmitted in the gospel tradition does not support the view that the salvation is limited to the Church or to a narrow ecclesiocentrism. In fact Jesus anticipated that people from all nations will participate in the future of God’s kingdom. He says, “men will come from east and west, and from the north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God” (Lk.13:29). And in Mathew’s gospel too an equally universal outlook is given, when it is said that many will be admitted to the kingdom on the basis of their works although they did not know Jesus (Mt. 25:40). This parable of the Last Judgement has often been interpreted as referring to believers who did not recognize that it was Christ whom they benefited

²⁴⁸ P. F. Knitter, “Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, New York: Orbis Books, 1997, p.8.

²⁴⁹ K. J. Kuschel, ““Faithful” to the New Testament,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.87.

²⁵⁰ See, J. Hick, *God has Many Names*, 1982, p.41.

²⁵¹ See, J. Hick, *Death and Eternal life*, London: Collins, New York: Harper & Row, 1976, p.30; *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.141.

in their charitable works. This parable also means that all will have to face the eschatological judge.

Hick says if we define salvation as being forgiven and accepted by God because of the atoning death of Jesus, then it is a tautology that Christianity alone knows and teaches the saving truth that we must take Jesus as our lord and saviour, plead his atoning death, and enter into the Church as the community of the redeemed, in which fruits of the Spirit abound. But the fruits of the Spirit seem to be as much evident outside the Church as within it. Therefore Hick says, that Jesus was more concerned with lives of men and women than with any body of theological propositions that they might have in their minds. In his parable of the sheep and the goats the criterion of divine judgement is simply whether we have fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and the imprisoned (Matt. 25:31-46) – in other words, whether our lives have shown the fruits of the Spirit. Therefore salvation, Hick defines, in a concrete way, as an actual change in human beings, a change that is manifested by moral fruits. And these are found in other world religions too.²⁵²

Human transformation is given more concern in the pluralistic approach, and it is also founded from Jesus' role in transforming human persons into new beings. Jesus comes to save the human person, transforms him, calls him to conversion of heart, gives him the newness of being. Jesus brings a transformation in the human person, relating the person spiritually to the divine Father. This transformation and divine relationship is also a concern of many religions. And therefore pluralists may see Jesus primarily as liberator, or one who transforms, one who brings justice and peace in the world, one who is in relationship with the Father and one who brings it to mankind.

3.2.5 Conclusion

It should be noted that Hick pays little attention to Christian reflection upon the issue of Copernican Revolution in the Bible or within the first five centuries of

²⁵² See J. Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, p.16-17. Hick explains here how in different religions the term God understood from different perspectives but ultimately spoken in terms of actual self in relation to ultimate reality, "doing God's will" or "actual self must cease to be private self" by surrendering self to the divine or "awakening to reality through the death of ego."

Christian thought. This may be because Hick considers that, “neither Old nor New Testament writers knew of any of the great world faiths beyond Judaism and Christianity. And therefore no application of biblical statements to Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. can possibly claim to represent the original meaning of the text.”²⁵³ Consequently, Hick believes that he is dealing with issues and contexts “which did not and could not come within the purview of the prophets and apostles of old.”²⁵⁴

On the other hand from a biblical perspective of pluralistic approach, we do not have great difficulties when it comes to God – universal God, Jesus – saviour and liberator, and Spirit – as guide and inspirer, or from Kingdom of God – as of love and justice to be preached. Pluralists tend to speak in general or universal terms. God is understood as God of all and Spirit is there to lead and to guide all in their worldly pilgrimage. We do see from a pluralistic perspective a tendency to speak of the Spirit and Kingdom of God independently of Jesus Christ. *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA) asserts that Christology is necessarily integrated with Pneumatology as well as Trinitarian Faith. It is the “uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance” (EA 14). One cannot “separate the activity of the Holy Spirit from that of Jesus the Savior” (EA 16). The Holy Spirit, “the prime agent of evangelisation” (EA 17), is “an absolutely vital part of the mystery of Jesus and the salvation which he brings” (EA 15). Jesus and his Spirit are only adequately comprehended within the “Trinity’s plan of salvation” (EA 15); there are no two parallel economies of salvation.

3.3 John Hick’s Copernican Revolution

With the unavoidable consciousness that Christianity exists in a world of religious plurality, Christian attitudes to other religions are pressing issues on today’s theological agenda. The theological reflection arising from this agenda reflect a number of practical issues, for example: how should religious education be taught; what kind of social and political cooperation is permissible with the people of other faiths; is it proper to use Buddhist meditational techniques for prayer or Hindu scriptures in the liturgy? On a less institutional level, those mixing daily with people of other religions are faced with more personally pressing questions: is a Hindu really damned because he or she is not a Christian? How can one appropriately

²⁵³ J. Hick, *The Second Christianity*, (3.ed. of Christianity at the Centre), London: SCM, 1983, p.77.

²⁵⁴ J. Hick, *The Second Christianity*, (3.ed. of Christianity at the Centre), 1983, p.77.

maintain a Christian witness in a house shared with Sikh students? These are some of the issues that primarily confront Christians who are being challenged by the changing historical circumstances.²⁵⁵

As we have already seen in the first and the second chapters the question whether salvation is possible outside Christianity, this chapter too analyses the same theological question. “Do we regard the Christian way as the only way, so that salvation is not to be found outside it; or do we regard the other great religions of mankind as other ways of salvation?”²⁵⁶ is a question which Hick puts in the theology of religions. In this section we examine briefly Hick’s Copernican Revolution. We understand that in Copernican revolution God or the transcendental reality is at the centre and all religions revolve around that transcendental reality or God, thus all religions have a salvific value in themselves and they are proper ways to their adherents.

3.3.1 Background to Hick’s theology of religions

3.3.1.1 The starting point of Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis

The starting point of Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis in the Christian theology of religions is to be found by looking first at the actual lives of people within the contexts of our own and other traditions. Particularly since the end of the second world war, the awareness that Christianity is one world religion amongst others, has become prominent in public consciousness. We may say that three significant developments have contributed to this consciousness. 1. An exposition of information in the West about the religions of the world through publications. 2. Travel opportunities have multiplied and great number of Westerners have spent time in non-Christian countries. 3. Massive immigration from East to West, bringing Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists to settle in Europe and North America. A further result, making an even deeper and more significant impression on many people is the fact that by coming to know individuals and families of these various faiths, it has become fairly common discovery that these adherents of other faiths are in general no less kindly, honest, thoughtful for others, no less truthful, honourable, loving and compassionate, than are in general our Christian fellow citizens. Hick

²⁵⁵ See, G. D’Costa, *John Hick’s Theology of Religions: A Critical evaluation*, 1987, p.2; For the detail to the background to Hick’s Copernican Revolution, see, *ibid.*, pp.1-39.

²⁵⁶ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.120.

often speaks that his limited experience with the people of other faiths has led him to think that the spiritual and moral fruits of these faiths, although different, are more or less on a par with the fruits of Christianity. He also comes to this conclusion by reading some of the literature of the other faiths, their scriptures and philosophies.²⁵⁷

It is a common experience today to get involved and work along side with members of other religions. The actual fact is that generally people of all religions do not discriminate each other on religious grounds. People begin to accept the differences in religions. Theological and philosophical differences are not sought as priorities to be dealt in the ordinary life of the persons. The actual life as it exists is the priority of most of the people. People look forward to good and authentic life on all grounds. People look forward love, sincerity, compassion, justice and peace. They seek spiritual growth. John Hick says: “When I meet a devout Jew, or Muslim, or Sikh, or Hindu, or Buddhist in whom the fruits of openness to the divine reality are gloriously evident, I can not realistically regard the Christian experience of the divine as authentic and their non-Christian experiences as inauthentic.”²⁵⁸ From this actual religious context Hick formulates a theory known as the Copernican theory in the theology of religions. Besides these actual religious contexts there are two theologians who have greatly influenced Hick’s Copernican revolution.

3.3.1.2 Influence of Troeltsch and Smith

During the period 1900-1950 in the Protestant theology one could see the emergence of modern inclusivism especially in 1913 in the work of John Farquhar’s *The Crown of Hinduism*. This gave a forceful and clear expression to the view that Christ (and not Christianity) was the fulfilment and crown of Hinduism, analogous to Christ’s fulfilment of the law and prophets of Judaism. If Farquhar represented the emergence of modern inclusivism, the later works of Ernst Troeltsch and William Hocking exemplified the seeds of Protestant “pluralism.” John Hick refers to Troeltsch as a precursor of his own Copernican pluralism. Even though the earlier work of Troeltsch (*Christian Thought: Its History and Application*, 1923) represented a type of inclusivism, for all that is good and true finds its culmination and fulfilment in Christianity, he wrote of the Christian revelation, that it “must be understood not only as the culmination point but also as the convergence point of all

²⁵⁷ See, J. Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*, 1995, pp.12-14.

²⁵⁸ J. Hick, *Problems of religious Pluralism*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1985, p.91.

the development tendencies that can be discerned in religion.”²⁵⁹ Troeltsch’s sociological and historical studies eventually led him to conclude that Christianity could not viably claim special status or superiority among the world religions, but should be seen as one among many paths of salvation which takes its cultural milieu. Troeltsch, like Hick, tended to view the various religions as legitimate and saw the different revelations of God’s activity and precluded the idea of a common world religion.²⁶⁰

Since 1970 Hick has shown much interest in another major protestant pluralist Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Smith attacks the very concept of “religions” as mutually exclusive ideological communities. He argues that with the exception of Islam, it was not until the seventeenth century that such a concept of religion took shape and was especially nourished in the Christian west.²⁶¹ He argues for a common religious unity in “faith” which is expressive of the personal attitude of awe, surrender, trust, love and wonder in relation to the “transcendent.”²⁶² Hick shares much in common with Smith, and Smith’s influence has been considerable. A significant point about Smith’s pluralism is its theocentrism, rather than christocentrism. While still affirming, like Troeltsch, that Christians may find God in Christ, Smith is firm that the “transcendent” is to be found in “faith” and its respective appropriation in the different cumulative traditions. Another significant factor, which Smith shares with Hick and with many other pluralists, is his emphasis on an all loving God which he argues runs against the exclusivist strain that implies that only a small minority can come to know and worship God.²⁶³

From the Roman Catholic theological point of view Hick acknowledges that the “Vatican II pronouncements are magnificently open and charitable.”²⁶⁴ However, he

²⁵⁹ E. Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions*, London: SCM, 1972, p.114.

²⁶⁰ See E. Troeltsch, *Christian Thought: Its History and Application*, London: University of London Press, 1923, pp.28ff; J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.147.

²⁶¹ See W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind*, (2nd ed.), Sheldon: New York, London: Harper & Row, 1978, chs. 1-3.

²⁶² See W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind*, (2nd ed.), 1978, pp.141, 170-71, 191.

²⁶³ See W. C. Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972, p.138, and in *Towards a World Theology*, London: Macmillan, 1980, p.171; J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.131; P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World religions*, 1985, p.140.

²⁶⁴ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.126.

feels that the Council failed to “make the Copernican revolution that was called for,” as it “still assumes without question that salvation is only in Christ and through incorporation into his mystical body, the Church.”²⁶⁵ Hick has also paid much attention to Karl Rahner’s anonymous Christians but has constantly criticised it for its imperialist offensiveness and for perpetuating a stalemate in dialogue.²⁶⁶

3.3.2 Arguments for Copernican Revolution

Hick has written surmountable literature for his thesis on religious pluralism. There is also a mountable literature on him. There are many arguments²⁶⁷ for his thesis. But I shall confine myself to a few of them, which would be sufficient to give a general idea of his religious pluralism.

3.3.2.1 From tenuous nature of Ptolemaic theology

Hick’s first argument is to criticise the tenuous nature of Ptolemaic theology which characterises nearly fifteen centuries of Christian history. He characterises most of the Christian tradition as “Ptolemaic,” which he defines as a theology “whose fixed point is the principle that outside the Church, or outside Christianity, there is no salvation.”²⁶⁸ According to Hick, Ptolemaic theology ironically contradicts the very doctrine of “God which it presupposes.” He wonders whether one can accept its “conclusions that 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.”²⁶⁹ By the very doctrine of God we understand that God can not be limited to one part of the world, to one history, to some continents, to some people, to some cultures. God is a God for all, a universal God, a God of love who seeks to save all.

3.3.2.2 From holy people within the non-Christian religions

The second argument for Hick’s theory comes from encountering saintly and holy people within the non-Christian religions. In the second Chapter we have already seen that many non-Jews were also saintly or holy people. Hick appeals to the

²⁶⁵ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.125-26.

²⁶⁶ See J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1982, pp.27, 68.

²⁶⁷ For more details on arguments for Copernican Revolution, see G. D’Costa, *John Hick’s Theology of Religions: A Critical evaluation*, Boston: University press of America, 1987, pp.41-71.

²⁶⁸ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.125.

²⁶⁹ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.125.

increasingly common experience of new religious communities and new cultural influences in many large cities. Through his involvement with community relations work, he met individual saintly and holy people from non-Christian religions. He also found within their religious communities, “human beings opening their minds to a higher divine reality, known as personal and good and as demanding righteousness and love between man and man.” He says, “I could see that the Sikh faith, for instance, is to the devout Sikh what the Christian faith to the sincere Christian; but that each faith is, naturally enough, perceived by its adherents as being unique and absolute.”²⁷⁰ Thus through his encounter with the adherents of other religions, gathering from their spiritual experiences, Hick formulates their theological reflections for his Copernican Revolution.

3.3.2.3 From proper understanding of Jesus

The argument here is based on Hick’s theocentric paradigm, in which a decisive problem is addressed in regard to Christology and world religions, in which the divine incarnation of Jesus is spoken in mythological terms.

3.3.2.3.1 Jesus from the perspective of world religions

3.3.2.3.1.1 From natural tendency to an elevated status

Hick rejects the traditional Christology, which logically entails that no one can be saved outside Christianity or Church or Christ. Seeing from many religions how their founders being exalted from a human to an elevated divine status, it is a projection of our spiritual needs upon these founders. Hick is pointing to the projection of Christian spiritual needs upon Jesus as similar to that of Buddhist’s upon Gautama.²⁷¹ Hick recognises a Feuerbachian note in speaking of natural religious tendency which exalts founders of religions by elevating them from the human status to that of divine. He says “Feuerbach’s account of the idea of God as a projection of human ideals has a certain application here.”²⁷²

3.3.2.3.1.2 From subjective intentionality

²⁷⁰ J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1982, p.18.

²⁷¹ See J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, SCM: London, Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1977, pp.167-70.

²⁷² J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 1977, p.168.

In every religion there is what is called the spiritual need of the human person. The devout and sincere adherent of every religion seeks shelter in his religious belief, scripture, or in his religious founder, or in the God he understands through his religion. The life of Jesus was to bring the people to God. In Jesus people see their spiritual needs being raised to God. Hick calls that the Christian's spiritual needs upon Jesus, or that of Buddhist's upon Gautama, is of "subjective intentionality." Hence Hick questions to "what extent is the exaltation in Christian example of the man of Nazareth into the divine Christ...a supreme example of this projection upon Jesus of ideals to answer our spiritual needs?"²⁷³ We understand from Hick that all have spiritual needs, and those needs are of subjective intentions.

3.3.2.3.1.3 From psychological to ontological exclusive absolutes

The third point Hick speaks in terms of proper understanding of Jesus is that which is related to the "subjective intentionality," is the strong and understandable tendency to transpose psychological absolutes into ontologically exclusive absolutes. Because of people's momentous spiritual experience of encountering salvation, this "quality of psychological absoluteness" is transposed into a "doctrine of the exclusive validity of believer's own experience."²⁷⁴ One can also see here that a similar tendency is discovered in "non-religious" cases of being in love and experiencing intellectual illumination. In matters of religious experience, Hick suggests that we should analogously realise that the "experience of saving encounter with God does not in itself entail that there are not, outside Christianity, other encounters with God exhibiting the same quality of psychological intimacy and finding expression in their own mythology."²⁷⁵ In this sense, understanding Hick, one may say that the claim Jesus is God incarnate expresses the religious significance and importance of Jesus to Christians, nothing more and nothing less.

3.3.2.3.1.4 From Christian to non-Christian religious experience

Fourthly, Hick's argument against "traditional Christology" arises from taking Christian religious experience seriously. He applies this principle of treating religious experience as being true to the non-Christian religious experience, and

²⁷³ J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 1977, pp. 167-68.

²⁷⁴ J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 1977, p. 173.

²⁷⁵ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.174. Hick cites here Troeltsch's psychological and cultural arguments to support his view.

therefore offers the Copernican revolution to harmonize the consequences and application of this principle. As we have seen above (3.3.2.2) that this argument from religious experience is rather by encountering saintly and holy people in other religions. There is Christian religious experience – certainly by an encounter with Jesus and there are saintly and holy people, but one also encounters saintly and holy people in other religions and one may say that they have become so through their non-Christian religious experience.²⁷⁶

3.3.2.3.2 Jesus from the perspective of divine incarnation

3.3.2.3.2.1 Divine incarnation as mythological

Already in 1966 Hick published an Essay fittingly titled “Christology at the Crossroads,” where Hick was clearly troubled by the implications of the incarnation for other religions, while still holding to the idea of incarnation in its classical sense.²⁷⁷ Soon he began to apply the concept of myth to Christology, and that helped him revise the notion of incarnation, among others. It opened a way for him to account for the existence of seemingly conflicting truth claims between religions, and it also brought to focus his idea of religious language. In traditional Christianity, incarnation language has been taken for granted. God is present in Christ in a specific and unique way. God becomes flesh in Jesus Christ. God empties Himself and takes the form of a human person. God becomes man. This theology of incarnation becomes problematic to Hick’s theology of pluralism. He contends, that the traditional talk about the incarnation has to be demythologised and set in harmony with other major religions. For him incarnation is all about making real the presence of the Divine to all men and women. It is not about God becoming a human being. And that kind of idea is totally repulsive to contemporary people.²⁷⁸ Hick speaks that Jesus’ divinity has to be understood metaphorically.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ On religious experience of other believers - a perspective of William James, see D. Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990, pp. 28-38, James “loved learning how others experience the world in the belief that by learning from others we might enrich our own tradition and finally understand its uniqueness” p.28; “What consistently interested James in the religions was religious experience, especially the “feeling” element,” p.32; “I may not be able to define religion but I know it when I see it,” P. 34.

²⁷⁷ See, J. Hick, “Christology at the Crossroads,” in *Prospect for Theology*, F. G. Healey (ed.), London: James Nisbett, 1966, pp.137-66.

²⁷⁸ See, J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 1985, p.14.

²⁷⁹ See, J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1982, p.74. To quote Hick: “The conclusion to which some of us within the Christian fold have come is that the idea of divine incarnation is a metaphorical (or, in technical theological language, a mythological) rather than a literal idea,” *ibid*, p.58.

It was in 1977 the seven authors chaired by John Hick published the volume of essays called '*The Myth of God Incarnate*,' which immediately in various Churches of England brought heavy criticism of the book, even naming the authors as "Seven against Christ", or the word "heresy" was commonly used in this connection. For developing a pluralistic theology of religions, Hick argues for a mythological interpretation of Christology, where Christ is depicted as the embodiment of divine love, complementary to what Buddhism reveals about the life in the intense experience of release from suffering, or to Hinduism's source of life and purpose. Logos, for Hick, transcends any particular religion and is present in all of them.²⁸⁰ His attempt to give a mythological or metaphoric interpretation to Incarnation helps also to place Christianity on an equal level with other religions. For he says, "the realisation that religious language expresses our apprehension of the divine in mythic pictures, and that these pictures are human and culturally conditioned, has opened up for some the possibility that the different mythologies of the great religious traditions may constitute alternative, or perhaps even complementary, rather than rival ways of picturing the divine reality."²⁸¹

3.3.2.3.2.2 Jesus Christ among other saviours

For Hick the development of the doctrine of incarnation has little to do with Jesus or with his early disciples. Hick maintains that neither Jesus nor his disciples interpreted Jesus as God incarnate. According to him it was a later development of the Church seeing the power of Christ-event to elevate Jesus to the status of God. And in this process the Church made use of the Old Testament concepts of divine sonship and the suffering servant. The development of Christology goes back to the spreading of the Gospel into the Greco-Roman world, the language and philosophy of culture that was employed that time to give meaning to their experience, and thus this Christology was a historical accident. Hick is of the opinion, that, had the Gospel spread to the East, it might have taken another kind of development: "Instead of being identified as the divine Logos or the divine Son he would have been identified as a Bodhissatva who, like Gotama some four centuries earlier, had attained to Buddhahood or perfect relationship to reality, but had in compassion for

²⁸⁰ See, J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1982, p.75.

²⁸¹ J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 1985, p.12-13.

suffering mankind voluntarily lived out his human life in order to show others the way to salvation.”²⁸²

Thus for Hick the preference for a pluralistic understanding of Christ is a “degree Christology” in contrast to a “substance Christology” that holds that Jesus is unique. This would mean that Christ differs from other humans only in degree. Hick claims that substance Christology must be rejected because theology no longer treats the incarnation factually, and so the mythical understanding is in line with degree Christology:

Incarnation, in the sense of the embodiment of ideas, values, insights in human living, is a basic metaphor. ... Now we want to say of Jesus that he was so vividly conscious of God as the loving heavenly Father, and so startlingly open to God and so fully his servant and instrument, that the divine love was expressed, and in that sense incarnated, in his life. This was not a matter (as it is in official Christian doctrine) of Jesus having two complete natures, one human and the other divine. He was wholly human; but whenever self-giving love in response to the love of God is lived out in a human life, to that extent the divine love has become incarnate on earth.²⁸³

In the context of Hick’s understanding of divine incarnation of Jesus Christ as mythological and Jesus Christ as one among many saving figures, Hick says that in contrast to the only name of Jesus Christ in whom that one may be saved, God has many names in other religions:

When I say in a summarizing slogan that God has many names, I mean that the Eternal One is perceived within different human cultures under different forms, both personal and non-personal, and that from these different perceptions arise the religious ways of life which we call the great world faiths. The practical upshot of this thesis is that people of the different religious traditions are free to see another as friends rather than as enemies or rivals. We are members of different households of faiths, but households each of which has some precious and distinctive contact with the Eternal One, which other can perhaps learn to share. We should, then, go forward into the new age of growing interreligious dialogue with hope and with positive anticipations and with a sense of pleasurable excitement.²⁸⁴

God’s love is experienced in various ways. God’s love is manifested in all religions. The language of God’s love becoming incarnate is also a matter of how one understands it. One may also speak metaphorically as God’s love becoming flesh in

²⁸² J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p.117.

²⁸³ J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1982, pp. 58-59.

²⁸⁴ J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1982, p. 59.

all people, meaning to say that one experiences God's love in a special way. One may also speak that Christ's "divinity" in terms of specific God – consciousness, which also may not mean that other religious leaders could not share the same consciousness. It may not harm when we say that God's love is incarnated in all religions, but to speak in terms of Jesus Christ as one among other world saviours or prophets would indeed question the unique faith of Christians in Jesus Christ as a Saviour for all as Christians would understand the doctrine of divine incarnation of Jesus Christ. The "Word became flesh" is Jesus Christ.

3.3.2.3.3 Jesus from the perspective of salvation

3.3.2.3.3.1 Salvation as actual transformation of human life

A Christian understanding of salvation ought not to be separated from God's revelation in Jesus Christ, or one ought to speak of salvation through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The salvation of mankind takes place in God's reconciliation work through Jesus Christ. Redemption is common to Christians and Jews. Muslims think in terms of a total submission to God, who is the giver of life and who is gracious and merciful to humankind. The Eastern religions do not always experience the ultimate reality we call God as a personal being and do not think primarily in terms of guilt and forgiveness. Hick says, if salvation consists in a change of status in the eyes of God from the guilt of participation in Adams original sin to a forgiveness made by Christ's sacrifice on the cross, the appropriation of which is conditional upon a personal response of faith in Christ, this salvation can naturally be seen as restricted to the Christian faith community. And that is an exclusivist approach to other religions. If on the other hand salvation is understood as the actual transformation of human life from self-centredness to Reality-centredness, this is not necessarily restricted within the boundaries of any one historical tradition.²⁸⁵ But, salvation, in the inclusivist approach, is seen from the benefits of Christ's sacrifice as not confined to those who respond to it with an explicit act of faith. The juridical transaction of Christ's atonement covered all human sin, so that all human beings are now open to God's mercy, even though they may never have heard of Jesus Christ and why he died on the cross of Calvary.

²⁸⁵ See J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 1985, p.32.

Pope John Paul II in *Redemptor Hominis* speaks in this way or in an inclusive way when he says, “man – every man without any exception whatever – has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man – with each man without any exception whatever – Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it.”²⁸⁶ Hick says that this statement of Pope could also be an expression which accepts the understanding of salvation as the gradual transformation of human life and sees this as taking place not only within Christian history but also within the contexts of all the other great world traditions.²⁸⁷ But this is falling back into christocentric approach. And therefore Hick sees the possible answer to the question of salvation or liberation in the cumulative religious traditions in pluralism. Because, according to Hick, the more inclusivist interpretations of the christocentric absolutism of traditional Christian theology “only amount to epicycles added to a fundamentally absolutist structure of theory in order to obscure its incompatibility with the observed facts.”²⁸⁸ For him salvation or liberation is taking place within all the great religious traditions; it is taking place in the actual transformation of human life, or transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness. This transformation takes place also in different ways, that is, there is a plurality of saving human responses to the ultimate divine Reality. It is rather clear to one that here speaking of salvation is restricted to actual human transformation. And perhaps salvation is understood only from a phenomenological sense of the word, and therefore the concern is more in terms of liberation or actual transformation.

3.3.2.3.3.2 Ways to Salvation are many and varied

When Hick suggests that by salvation or liberation we should understand the realisation of that limitlessly better quality of human existence which comes about in the transition from self-centredness to Reality-centredness, he also suggests that the ways to salvation or liberation are many and varied. These varied ways in religious practice or in the vision of reality are also not easily distinguished. Hick notes that there are mystical way of contemplation and knowledge, the practical way of action in the world, and the way of loving devotion to the Real experienced as personal. All

²⁸⁶ *Redemptor Hominis*, 14.

²⁸⁷ See J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 1985, p.33.

²⁸⁸ J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 1985, p.52. See also the earlier, more extended discussion on this subject in Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, pp.123ff. Here the reader more easily understands how Hick arrives at this judgement, because there his argument relates primarily to modern Roman Catholic revisions of the old principle of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.

these ways are not to be identified with different religions, for each of the great traditions includes all the three ways, although often in characteristically different proportions. And there, one must respect ways other than our own, whether or not we truly appreciate them.²⁸⁹ Since through these ways within each of the religious traditions the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness is manifestly taking place, these “great religious traditions are to be regarded as alternative soteriological ‘spaces’ within which, or ‘ways’ along which, men and women find salvation/liberation/enlightenment/fulfilment.”²⁹⁰ So from Hick’s pluralist perspective there are many ways to One God, and there are many saviours; Jesus is merely one among them, and all find salvation or transformation of human life through their own ways, and therefore not necessary to come through Jesus Christ.

3.3.2.4 From nature of religion and religious history

Hick utilises Smith’s thesis on the concept of religion for his Copernican revolution. Hick argues that Smith challenges our notion of “religions” as “mutually exclusive entities with their own characteristics and histories.” “Smith examines the development from the original religious event or idea, whether it be the life of Christ, or the teachings of Mohammed, or the insights of the Buddha, to a religion in the sense of a vast living organism with its creedal backbone and institutional skin. And he shows in each case that this development stands in questionable relation to that original event or idea.”²⁹¹

Hick divides the religious history of mankind into three periods: 1. “natural religions or religion without revelation”: This goes back to the third millennium BCE. This is a primitive age in which the divine “was reduced in human awareness to the dimensions of man’s own image” and thus Hick concludes that in this phase “there was more human projection than divine disclosure.”²⁹² 2. “axial period”: Hick says this stage between 800 and 200 BCE is a stage of a remarkable series of revelatory experiences. During this period the major religious options were identified and established. Therefore, Hick views Jesus, Mohammed and Mahayana Buddhism, for

²⁸⁹ See J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 1985, p.86.

²⁹⁰ J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 1985, p.36-37.

²⁹¹ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p. 101-03.

²⁹² J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1982, p. 44.

example, as important developments within the already existing traditions. This period is one of supernatural religion “in which outstanding individuals emerged and were able to be channels of new religious awareness and understanding – in theological terms, of divine revelation.”²⁹³ Hick argues a divine revelation intended for all humankind would have taken centuries to spread to other countries, and therefore it seems more plausible to see God’s revelatory activity as taking place in a number of diverse ways and at different times. This is also for the reason that for all practical purposes men inhabited different worlds.²⁹⁴ And therefore, Hick foresees the emergence of a third stage, a stage that would fit to his Copernican revolution. 3. “religious ethnicity”: The term “religious ethnicity” implies that religious adherence is more often a result of the society into which one is born. He says being a Christian rather than a Buddhist is finally a matter of “religious ethnicity.” He says: “if I had been born into a devout Hindu family in India and had studied philosophy at let us say, the university of Madras, I should have probably held a Ptolemaic Hindu theology...And if I had been born to Muslim parents say in Egypt or Pakistan, I should probably have held a Ptolemaic Muslim theology. And so on.”²⁹⁵

To support his argument Hick uses parable attributed to the Buddha: An elephant was brought to a group of blind men who had never encountered such an animal before. One felt a leg and reported that an elephant is a great living pillar. Another felt the trunk and reported that an elephant is a great snake...And so on. They all quarrelled together, each claiming that his own account was the truth and all the others false. In fact they were all true, but each referring to one aspect of the total reality, which they expressed in very imperfect analogies. Understanding through this analogy, according to Hick, we should consider that “many different accounts of the divine reality may be true, though all expressed in imperfect human analogies, but that none is ‘the truth’ the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”²⁹⁶

3.3.2.5 From Theological and practical benefits

Hick understands that his Copernican theology results in fruitful implications for dialogue and interreligious cooperation. There are theological as well as practical

²⁹³ J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1982, p. 47.

²⁹⁴ See J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p. 136.

²⁹⁵ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p. 132.

²⁹⁶ J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, p. 140.

benefits. Theologically, the Copernican revolution removes what Hick sees the “largest difficulty in the way of religious agreement.” He says, “[e]ach religion has its holy founder or scripture, or both, in which the divine reality has been revealed...And wherever the holy is revealed it claims an absolute response of faith and worship, which thus seems incompatible with a like response to any other disclosure of the holy.”²⁹⁷ In this way each partner is convinced that his or her faith “has absolute truth whilst his partner’s has only relative truth.”²⁹⁸

Hick affirms that those who accept the pluralist vision are free to benefit from the immense spiritual values and insights of other traditions. And perhaps this allows the Christian to abandon confessional dialogue and pursue what Hick calls “truth seeking dialogue,” where each partner “is conscious that the transcendent Being is infinitely greater than his own limited version of it, and in which they accordingly seek to share their visions in the hope that each may be helped towards a fuller awareness of the Divine Reality before which they both stand.”²⁹⁹ A Christian may see a practical danger to his Christian mission here. But Hick defends himself from the possible charge that his view invalidates mission. If the world religions are genuine encounters with God then it makes little sense to extinguish the richness of humankind’s testimony to the divine.

We may conclude that the main theological implications, which obviously has practical outcome, of the Copernican revolution are: the removal of a major obstacle to religious dialogue; providing the basis for global rather than sectional theology and the reconception of the task of mission in terms of service.³⁰⁰

3.3.2.6 From the Transcendental Real – The Eternal One

The tension between universality and diversity is at the heart of pluralist theology. The question which has to be asked is whether pluralism is any more successful than inclusivism in resolving this tension. The insistence on respecting diversity means that pluralist theologians must find some way to accommodate the conflicting truth claims made by the world’s religions. Their solution is to appeal to two factors: 1.

²⁹⁷ J. Hick (ed.), *Truth and Dialogue*, 1974, p. 154.

²⁹⁸ J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1980, p. 81.

²⁹⁹ J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1980, p. 81.

³⁰⁰ See G. D’Costa, *John Hick’s Theology of Religions: A Critical evaluation*, 1987, p. 67.

the ineffable character of all human experience, especially the experience of the transcendent; and 2. the historical and culturally-conditioned character of all human knowledge. Ultimately, the pluralists argue, we can make no definitive claims about the transcendent as ‘God’, since this would mean relying on Jewish Christian categories which are by definition limited. Hence Hick adopts the ‘neutral’ term, the Real.

Assuming the reality of the object of religious worship, religious meditation, religious experience, Hick proposes to use the term for that reality as “the Eternal One.” This deliberately draws upon two different sets of associations – on the one hand the ineffable One of the mystical traditions, whether it be the One of Plotinus or the One without a second of the Upanishads, and on the other hand the Holy One of the theistic experience, whether it be the Holy One of Israel or of Indian theistic worship. Hick assumes that it is the common ground to all the great religious traditions, that the divine reality, the Eternal One, is infinite and is in its fullness beyond the scope of human thought and language and experience; and yet that it impinges upon mankind and is encountered and conceptualised and expressed and responded to in the limited ways which are possible to our finite human nature.³⁰¹

It is in order to do justice to his understanding of the nature of religious language, Hick later shifted from speaking about God to speaking about the “(Ultimate) Reality.” For him this term is more flexible than the personal term God. For him, great religions of the world are different ways of approaching this reality, which exists beyond the human capacity of knowing. The Sanskrit term ‘*sat*’ and the Islamic term ‘*al-Haqq*’ are expressions of that reality, as is also Yahweh and the Christian term God.³⁰² In Hick’s view there is only one Reality, the Ultimate Divine. This he postulates mainly on the basis of astonishingly similar concepts of the divine in various religions. His reason to assume that the different world religions are referring, through their own concepts, to the same ultimate Reality is the striking similarity of the transformed human state described within the different traditions as saved, redeemed, enlightened, wise, awakened, or liberated. So there is one ultimate Reality which is a common source of salvific transformation.³⁰³

³⁰¹ See, J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1982, p. 42.

³⁰² See, J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, pp.10-11.

³⁰³ See, J. Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*, 1995, p.69.

The tendency among pluralist theologians to evacuate the idea of God of any distinctive content has been described as “transcendental agnosticism”, and is reflected in the interest among pluralist theologians in a radical form of apophatic theology.³⁰⁴ The problematic is: Is Christian God reduced to transcendental Real or Absolute? What is the personal character of God the Father-Son-Holy Spirit? Is God reduced of his real character? Does a ‘God with us’ remain a ‘God far from us.’ What is the role of immanence of God in the transcendental theory of pluralism?

3.3.2.7 Summing up the arguments for religious pluralism

At the heart of the pluralist theology of religions remains the conviction that there are a variety of equally legitimate ways of relating to God. This position is defended from three major arguments from pluralists. 1. The historical – cultural argument, namely, that all our knowledge, including our knowledge of God, is “relative”; 2. The theological - mystical argument, namely the mysterious character of God, the fact that God is always more than we can say about him; 3. The ethical - practical argument, namely, the urgent need to address the problem of injustice in the world, a need which is said to take precedence over any dispute about doctrinal claims. Concretely this means three things. First, every religion has a limited idea of God, and must therefore supplement its knowledge by the knowledge found elsewhere. Secondly, no religion can claim to say everything that can be said about God. Thirdly, all religions should set aside doctrinal disputes and concentrate on promoting justice and the well-being of humanity.³⁰⁵ Naturally these arguments for pluralism sideline the Christian truth of revelation, the final revelation in Jesus Christ, or Jesus Christ as the only Way, or the Saviour of the world. In *Dominus Iesus* this whole movement of religious pluralism is described as “relativism.”³⁰⁶ *Dominus Iesus* takes up this issue of religious pluralism and consequently relativism and focuses its concern on Church’s missionary calling, and insists that inter-religious dialogue can never be separated from evangelization.

³⁰⁴ Gavin D’Costa has described Hick’s position as issuing in “transcendental agnosticism.” See, G. D’Costa, “Taking Other Religions Seriously: Ironies in the Current debate on a Christian Theology of Religions,” in *The Thomist* 54, 1990, p.526. For a critical reflection on the legitimacy of the pluralist appeal to the ineffable character of God, see, K. Ward, “Divine Ineffability,” in A. Sharma (ed.), *God Truth and Reality: Essays in Honour of John Hick*, 1993, pp.210-220; see also, J. DiNoia, *The Diversity of religions: A Christian Perspective*, 1992, pp.141-154.

³⁰⁵ For these arguments I am indebted to T. Merrigan, “Religious Pluralism and the Vatican Document ‘*Dominus Iesus*.’” in *Sacred Heart University Review* 20, 1999-2000, pp.63-79. *Dominus Iesus* also refers to these all three arguments. It does not refer to these arguments in a systematic way, but it returns to them on various occasions throughout the document.

³⁰⁶ See, *Dominus Iesus*, 22.

3.3.3 Conclusion

It can be argued that pluralist theology issues in a radical contradiction of its own basic premise. It begins by insisting that religious pluralism takes each religion seriously in its particularity and ends by treating them all in terms of its own universalist vision. In other words, within pluralist theology, salvation history does not ultimately possess any particular content. Religious pluralism cannot yield any distinctive doctrine of God (since it cannot legitimately invoke any particular tradition). Moreover, Religious pluralism cannot provide any clearly defined goal which is able to motivate concrete religious practice (since it is unable to argue convincingly for any particular model of salvation).

In short, within pluralism, both salvation history, and the goal of salvation history become vague (or even vacuous) concepts. In this regard, pluralism is reminiscent of what David Tracy, quoting Simone de Beauvoir, has described as the “perfect ideology for the modern bourgeois mind,” namely, “a passive response to more and more possibilities, none of which shall ever be practiced.”³⁰⁷ Secondly, one may also ask, does pluralist theology consider the ‘otherness of the other’ seriously? Kajsa Ahlstrand is of the opinion, that one good thing about exclusivism is that it takes the otherness of the other seriously. It respects the integrity of the other religion, even though it might not agree with the other. He says, that pluralism, on the other hand, “may also respect the other as different from oneself, but it constantly runs the risk of smoothing out the contradictions.”³⁰⁸

The tendency to evacuate the idea of God of any distinctive content is rather not an acceptable position. Secondly, however one may use the language of divine incarnation and try to explain it, the divine incarnation of Jesus Christ being metaphorized or mythologized is a serious threat to Christian faith. Thirdly, the argument that there are holy and saintly people in other religions does not necessarily mean that the other faiths transform sinners as effectively as Jesus Christ. In this regard Clark Pinnock asks “[w]hat exactly is saintliness anyway? Is it a life of service to the poor or a life of other worldly-contemplation? Hick can be so

³⁰⁷ D. Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion and Hope*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987, p.90.

³⁰⁸ K. Ahlstrand, “What’s so special about Jesus?,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 21.

vague” and therefore Pinnock says, “[t]here is no need to rush to rash metaphysical conclusions on the basis of sanctity alone.”³⁰⁹ Fourthly, can we not have or work for interreligious dialogue and live peacefully side by side with other religions without losing our own Christian faith and at the same time without being “superior” to other religions? Fifthly to quote Cardinal Ratzinger, “[p]luralism in its radical form ultimately denies the unity of mankind and denies the dynamics of history, which is a process of various unions.”³¹⁰

We must indeed note that Hick’s theology of religions, has given a great impetus to understand the otherness of the other. He, very much looks, from the perspective of the other. He sympathises how the others in the past were not understood or ignored. And therefore his theology of religions does open our ears to listen to the other, it helps us to go a step forward and experience the marvellous deeds of the Lord in the universe.

3.4 Paul Knitter’s perspective of Christian Pluralism

3.4.1 About Paul Knitter

Paul Knitter, an American, a leading Catholic theologian of religions, is also a pronounced pluralist, whose thinking has undergone several serious turns like that of his protestant colleague John Hick. As a young missionary, Knitter looked at the other religions from an exclusivist standpoint. But it was the openness of Vatican II and Karl Rahner, whose student Knitter was at Rome, that first challenged Knitter’s exclusivism. Rahner’s inclusivism, as Knitter says, “turned out to be an opportunity for the religious Other to knock again on my door – or better, I on theirs.”³¹¹ His thinking on the ‘Other’ develops as he questions himself about Christian fulfilment theory in his encounter with his friend Rahim from Pakistan. He writes: “But if I were to speak about Rahim’s need of being ‘fulfilled’ through Christianity, it would have to be in the same sense that I needed fulfilment through Islam. Theologically, I could say that Rahim was saved; I could not call him an anonymous Christian.”³¹² With the influence of Raimond Panikkar and Thomas Merton, the latter of whom

³⁰⁹ D. L. Okholm and T. R. Philips (eds.), *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1996, p. 61-62.

³¹⁰ J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004, p. 81.

³¹¹ P. F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 6.

³¹² P. F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, 1996, p.8.

built bridges between Zen Buddhism and Christianity, and with a continued dialogue with Hindus and Buddhists, Knitter moves to a definite form of pluralism. It was in 1985 with his book “*No Other Name,*” that he proposed a theocentric Christology that was moving in the same direction as the thinking of Hick, in which God, rather than Christ, is the center. In 1987 with the publication of one of the most significant books on the topic of Christian theology of religions, namely, “*The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a pluralistic Theology of Religions,*” which Knitter coedited with Hick, Knitter completed his pluralistic turn by coming to a new appreciation of the topic of social justice and global responsibility as the leading criterion for religions.³¹³

The leading themes in Knitter’s theology and spiritual journey have been two “Others”: the religious Other and the suffering Other.³¹⁴ In his earlier career, Knitter focused on the challenge of other religions; but more recently, the vantage point from which he considers this topic is the issue of social justice and poverty. Liberation theology became for Knitter “not just a ‘new method’ but a matter of making sense of religion and of being a faithful disciple of Jesus.” He “experienced the fundamental option for the oppressed not simply as an option but a demand.”³¹⁵ Thus Knitter brings together these two disciplines - liberation theology and the theology of religions.

3.4.2 Non-normative Theocentric Christology

The first stage of Knitter’s pluralism as explicated in his book “*No Other Name?*” approves the theocentric mode of John Hick. He himself proposed a non-normative theocentric Christology. He means that this is needed on the way to “a more authentic dialogue.”³¹⁶ He focuses on the theocentric consciousness of Jesus Christ and his preaching of the coming of the kingdom of God.

³¹³ See V. Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 2003, p. 310.

³¹⁴ See P. F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, 1996, p.3, 15-20.

³¹⁵ P. F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, 1996, p. 10.

³¹⁶ P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 1985, p.169.

3.4.2.1 God consciousness of Jesus Christ

Jesus' baptism in the Jordan is an event where Jesus is affirmed as the "beloved son." At this moment the God consciousness of Jesus or Jesus' divine relationship or Father's special love to Jesus is made public. This experience of Father's special love becomes the essence of his mission. Schillebeeckx makes a convincing argument that Jesus' "original Abba-experience" provides the "source and secret of his being, message and manner of life." Jesus seemed to feel and claim a special intimacy with God, a special sonship.³¹⁷ His deep awareness of God as his Father does indicate uniqueness. At the same time, as Knitter reminds that Jesus in his awareness of himself remained profoundly theocentric, and whenever Christology forgets this, it opens Christian consciousness to a "myopic christocentrism," to a "jesusology," to a reductionism that absorbs God into Jesus. And this would mean that "Christocentrism without theocentrism easily becomes idolatry that violates not only Christian revelation but the revelation found in other faiths."³¹⁸ Therefore the move in Knitter's theology, is, to affirm the uniqueness of Jesus from a theocentric point of view. It is to bring out the reality of Jesus' unique relationship to God the Father. And therefore it is for us foremost important to understand Knitter's perspective of Jesus' uniqueness.

3.4.2.2 Jesus' uniqueness revised and reaffirmed

Just like John Hick, Knitter reinterprets the language of "uniqueness" in terms of that of lovers. A husband's confession to his wife that "you are the only one in the world" is a true statement, but it is not exclusive of other husbands confession of love. Similarly the statements about Jesus being "the only begotten Son" are not meant to be interpreted as exclusive of other "sons" of God, rather they should urge all hearers to take Jesus seriously, as authoritative.³¹⁹

We know that no Christian theology of other religions or no Christian attempt to dialogue with other religions, can avoid a serious confrontation with the issue, as Knitter asks, "[i]s Jesus unique among the religious figures of history? If so,

³¹⁷ See E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, 1979, p. 256-71.

³¹⁸ P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 1985, p. 175.

³¹⁹ See P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 1985, p. 185.

how?”³²⁰ The traditional Christian answer to this question, as from exclusive uniqueness or inclusive uniqueness of Jesus, Knitter says, is “insufficiently sensitive” and rather “impede authentic dialogue with believers of other faiths.” He would identify, with Schubert Ogden, both the exclusivist and the inclusivist models for a theology of religions as representing a salvific monism.³²¹ Not satisfied with traditional answers he proposes from the theocentric model a “relational uniqueness for Jesus,” which affirms that Jesus is unique, but this uniqueness is defined by its ability to relate to other unique religious figures. This understanding of Jesus views him not as exclusive or as normative but as theocentric, as a universally relevant manifestation of divine revelation and salvation.³²² Knitter says: “In the spirituality of a pluralist Christian, therefore, Jesus certainly remains unique,” and then citing Gabriel Moran he says, Jesus’ “uniqueness is not a matter of superiority or arrogation of privilege; rather a matter of distinctness, of specialness that will surely be different from but not necessarily better than others”.³²³

To understand the uniqueness of Jesus one also needs to interpret New Testament or dogmatic texts of Jesus to the context of new experiences. There is an evolution of human universe of new experiences, which bring forth new insights and call forth new judgements and decisions. One needs to continually hear again this text and its context in the newness of experiences and only then one can really hear what the text means.³²⁴ To understand who Jesus is or what his uniqueness means is to bring Jesus to today’s context, which in turn may give rise to a new Christology.

3.4.2.2.1 From the saving experience of Jesus

The development of New Testament Christology or the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah, Lord, Christ, Word, Saviour or Son of God need to be analysed again from

³²⁰ P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 1985, p. 171.

³²¹ See P. F. Knitter, “Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.5; See also for S. Ogden, *Is There Only One Religion or Are There Many?*, Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1992, pp. 27-32.

³²² See P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 1985, p. 171-72.

³²³ P. F. Knitter, „Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus,” in L. Swidler and P. Mojzes (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.16.

³²⁴ Referring to Raimond Panikkar’s “universal context” or the “texture” of the text, Knitter uses this concept of “text” and its “context” to understand properly the uniqueness of Jesus. See P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World religions*, 1985, p. 172.

a pluralistic view for the interreligious dialogue. The titles and proclamations about Jesus, according to Knitter, have their origin in the saving experience of Jesus by individuals and community. In their encounter with Jesus, they experience the power and the reality of God, a reality that enabled them to feel, understand, and act differently or in a changed manner. Because of this experience they have hope now, for this life and the next. Knitter says that such a saving experience of Jesus was an experience of revelation.³²⁵

From a saving experience of Jesus Knitter analyses the development of the Christological titles by contemporary New Testament scholars, and presents “with caution” four categories of “trajectories” to understand how the early Christians came to speak of Jesus. And they are, 1.Parousia Christology – envisioning Jesus as the Lord of the future and judge of the world, Jesus as bringing the approaching fullness of salvation, and the image of Jesus is seen predominantly on the future; 2.Divine Man Christology – presenting Jesus as a divine agent, able to perform wondrous deeds; 3.Logos Christology – stands for God’s activity in the world, creative, revelatory, and redemptive; 4.Easter Christology – stresses the reality of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, calling Jesus as Christ or Messiah.³²⁶

Knitter argues the New Testament Christology from the perspective of dialogue, plurality and process or a gradual unfolding. What is significant to reinterpret the uniqueness of Jesus, he says, is that Christology from its very beginning was diverse, in process and dialogical. The New Testament Christology was implicitly dialogical with the philosophical, religious thought and experience of the time. There were differences in understanding Christology. And the diversity was rather understood only as a part of process. And therefore the New Testament christological trajectories are not to be taken as definitions but rather as interpretations of who Jesus was. In his words the New Testament christological statements are “myth” rather than definitive or final statements of fact. They give us

³²⁵ See P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 1985, p. 175.

³²⁶ See P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 1985, p. 176-77; See also E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, 1979, p. 405-36.

access to the mystery of Christ in that they “must be understood ever anew.”³²⁷ One understands that in revising uniqueness of Jesus, Knitter keeps guard against absolutizing the entire New Testament witness about Jesus. The mystery of Christ unfolds in every new context and one experiences this saving experience of Jesus ever anew. The present multi-religious and –cultural situation of the world is itself a witness to God’s wonderful and everlasting love to the humanity, in which uniqueness of Jesus needs to be revised from its traditional limitations to a broader understanding of Christian mission and interreligious dialogue.

3.4.2.2.2. Salvation in terms of truly and not only

Knitter interprets the uniqueness of Jesus’ salvific role, in terms of truly but not only. In order to remain faithful to the New Testament witness and to nurture a true following of Jesus, says Knitter, “it is not necessary to proclaim God’s revelation in Jesus as full, definitive or unsurpassable,” but, “Christians must announce Jesus to all peoples as God’s universal, decisive, and indispensable manifestation of saving truth and grace.”³²⁸ He explains each of these terms. In his own words, “[i]n Jesus we do not possess a full revelation, as if he exhausted all the truth that God has to reveal,” or “no finite medium can exhaust the fullness of the infinite. To identify the Infinite with anything finite, to contain the Divine to any one human form or mediation- has biblically and traditionally been called idolatry.” Secondly, “to announce that we have the definitive divine truth is to imply that the Wisdom that surpasses all knowledge and the Love that is eternally creative have been deposited in a container to which nothing more can be added. Again, if that is what we mean when we say we have the definitive “deposit of faith,” then our “deposit” would seem to fit the definition of an idol.” Thirdly, quoting John’s gospel 16:12-13, “I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now....When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth,” Knitter says, “God’s saving word in Jesus cannot be extolled as unsurpassable, as if God could not reveal more of God’s fullness in other ways at other times.” God is an unsurpassable mystery, which can never be comprehended or contained in human thought or construct.

³²⁷ See P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 1985, p.177-81.

³²⁸ For the section on ‘salvation in terms of truly and not only’ see P. F. Knitter, “Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 7-11.

In contrast to proclaiming Jesus as the only, he says, we must continue to proclaim Jesus truly. He is truly God's universal, decisive and indispensable manifestation of saving truth and grace. God's word in Jesus is universal. He is to be experienced by all peoples of all times. The good news is for everyone. God's word is not limited to a particular group, to a particular culture; God's word is true and is universal. Jesus is for all. Secondly, the revelation given in Jesus is decisive. It challenges one to change one's perspective and conduct. Jesus has made a difference in one's life and he continues to make difference when one approaches him. In this sense of Jesus' being decisive means that he is normative. Thirdly, Knitter says, Christians continue to proclaim the truth made known in Jesus as indispensable. If I have experienced the truth made known in Jesus, and if I am enriched by this truth, and have transformed my life because of this truth, Jesus, then I must proclaim it as indispensable for others too. This Christian experience of the richness of the truth made known in Jesus must be made known to everyone as God-given truth. I feel if part of the world does not know this wonderful person of Jesus today, something must have gone wrong somewhere in our approach – either we have hidden him or we have given a narrow understanding of him to the world. Thus Knitter outlines the reinterpretation of Jesus' uniqueness as, "he is not God's total, definitive, unsurpassable truth, but he does bring a universal, decisive, indispensable message."³²⁹ That means, if we Christians are convinced that there is truth in other traditions which can be transformed and fulfilled in the Word, in Jesus, we must also be open to being transformed and fulfilled by the Word spoken to us in persons of other paths. And perhaps this is the right way for dialogue with other faiths, i.e. to recognise the truth in other traditions and also to be transformed by the Word spoken to us in other faiths.

3.4.3 The kingdom of God - perspective from liberation theology

Even if the New Testament scholars have divergent opinions on the uniqueness of Jesus, if we take a survey of contemporary works on the New Testament Christology, one of the issues on which they are in full agreement is that the focus

³²⁹ P. F. Knitter, "Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus," in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 10. Hick giving a critical evaluation on Knitter's five theses on Jesus' uniqueness, says that they are rather five misgivings, and says that the word "indispensable" is not the correct word. See J. Hick, "Five Misgivings," in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 81.

and core content of Jesus' original message was the "kingdom of God."³³⁰ Knitter, using the methodological criteria of the theology of liberation (option for the poor, orthopraxis), resolves to "go beyond theocentrism, towards soteriocentrism," so that "the primary concern of a theology of religions should not be "rightful belief" in the uniqueness of Christ, but "rightful practice" with other religions, of the "promotion of the Kingdom and of its soteria"; in other words: "This means that the foundation and main concern for any theological assessment of other religions is not their relatedness to the Church (ecclesiocentrism) or to Christ (christocentrism), or even to God (theocentrism), but how much they are promoting salvation - the welfare of humanity."³³¹ There is an interesting and appealing motive here of working for the goodness of people. Even though it is implicit that working for the well-being of the people has a relation to God, to speak religions only in terms of earthly human liberation is not without the danger to the essence of religions. Cardinal Tomko says this "well-being in which the Kingdom, the Reign of God, consists is the Reign of Justice and of love to be reached in collaboration or dialogue with all. Exalting interreligious dialogue, Knitter reduces faith in Christ to the level of earthly "well-being."³³²

3.4.4 Christian Mission revised and reaffirmed

3.4.4.1 Through the action of love and justice

In his fourth thesis on 'Jesus' uniqueness revised,' Knitter gives emphasis to Christian life and witness. It is through human actions of love and justice that the reign of God is realised. The uniqueness of Jesus reflected in this thesis is that of the meaningfulness of the message of Jesus as universal, decisive and indispensable. The uniqueness stands here at the heart of Jesus' message of love. For Jesus and for Christians the two commandments of love, love of God and neighbour, are inseparable. They are two aspects of the same experiential reality. Jesus is unique in his love for God and neighbour, which is reflected in Christian life and witness. One cannot truly experience God unless one is truly engaged in loving one's neighbour

³³⁰ The announcement of "the kingdom of God at hand" is found in five different New Testament traditions: that of Q, the Marcan tradition, the source peculiar to Mathew, that peculiar to Luke and in the Johanne tradition. See E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, 1979, p.140. See also N. Perrin, *The kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963, pp. 158-206.

³³¹ P. F. Knitter, "Catholic Theology of Religions," in H. Küng and J. Moltmann (eds.), *Concilium, Christianity Among World Religions*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1986, p.105.

³³² C. J. Tomko, "Missionary Challenger to the Theology of salvation?," in P. Mojzes and L. Swidler (eds.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p. 20.

and working for their betterment. Knitter says quoting Jon Sobrino, in Jesus' message "one thing is perfectly clear: it is impossible to profess God without working for God's reign... There is no spiritual life without actual, historical life. It is impossible to live with spirit unless the spirit becomes flesh."³³³ The God that one experiences in Christianity, in Jesus or in other traditions must be God who calls each one to transform this world from division and injustice into one of love and mutuality. Love brings union and transformation in the world. A world today facing religious conflicts must emphasise this uniqueness of Jesus' love for the world and thus should help to bring transformation of the world. Jesus is very unique in his salvific action that brings transformation through love. This transforming action of Jesus is the Christian uniqueness. In the words of Schillebeeckx, "[t]he transformation of the world to a higher humanity, to justice and peace, is therefore an essential part of the 'catholicity' or universality of Christian faith."³³⁴

On the other hand each religion may have its own unique ingredients, from which Christians can and must learn and perhaps be transformed. Christians may agree with and be challenged with the unique ingredients of other religions, without losing their commitment to a God of love in Jesus. Knitter proposes an interesting understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus here in this thesis of love and justice from exclusive, inclusive and pluralistic perspective. The exclusive perspective is that it challenges any religious belief or practice (not excluding Christianity) that does not promote transformation of the world through love and justice. Inclusive aspect is that it clarifies and fulfils the potential of other religions to promote the Reign of God, which Christianity proclaims. And from the pluralistic perspective it recognizes and finds fulfilment by new insights found in other traditions which can help humanity and the earth to have life more abundantly.³³⁵ The reflection of Jesus' unique love for the world, which springs from his union with God, from which follows his action of human liberation is emphasised in this thesis. The uniqueness of Jesus is the uniqueness of Christianity through the life and witness of love, which one experiences in Jesus, transformed by Jesus and which brings abundance of life to the world.

³³³ P. F. Knitter, "Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus," in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 12.

³³⁴ E. Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, New York: Crossroad, 1990, p. 171.

³³⁵ See P. F. Knitter, "Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus," in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 13.

3.4.4.2 Devotion to and following of Jesus

Knitter's fifth thesis that reinterprets the understanding of Jesus' uniqueness is reflected from a holistic Christian spirituality. Christian life is a life of devotion to and a following of Jesus. To support this thesis of devotion to and a following of Jesus, Knitter views (from thesis 1, from a pluralistic christological point of view) Jesus as truly but not solely God's universal saving Word. The question that he asks, how does a pluralist christology nourish such a devotion to Jesus the Christ? It does so insofar as Christians continue to experience that God has truly spoken a saving Word in Jesus, as decisive, universal and indispensable. It is through one's own experience of Jesus, through whom he encounters God and is transformed that sets a new direction to his life. For pluralist Christians too the story of Jesus becomes their own story. Jesus becomes for them the person of God's love, who empowers them to love. In breaking bread and in reading scriptures they feel the spirit of Christ alive in their communities and individual lives. It is Christ who lives in them. This brings one's fidelity to Jesus, and one's ability and decision to follow him as a disciple. Knitter says:

even though I do not feel it possible or necessary to affirm that Jesus is the only saviour, I still experience him to be so truly a Saviour that I feel impelled to cast my lot with him. What he reveals of God's Reign, his vision of humanity united in love and justice as children of a God of love and justice, and the power of this vision as it lives on in the community after his death – all these call me to believe in this Reign and to act for it, even if it should require of me what it required of him. a pluralist Christian has sufficient clarity about and commitment to the gospel values of justice and love to resist those who trample on these values. One does not have to affirm Jesus as the only Truth in order to die for the Truth that he does reveal.³³⁶

The pluralist Christians find in Jesus the way He reveals God and God's Reign to them, which leads them to expect that there are other ways and words. Knitter says, "the God whom I know in Jesus and whose reign I work for is a God of pure, unbounded love, a God who seeks to communicate with all persons and who wills to inspire all men and women to work for a world of love and justice. This is a God who cannot be confined, a God who, in speaking truly in Jesus, reveals that God cannot speak only in Jesus."³³⁷ To know this Jesus and to be devoted to him is to be called to a relationship not only with him but also with others. The more deeply one

³³⁶ P. F. Knitter, "Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus," in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.15.

³³⁷ P. F. Knitter, "Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus," in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.15.

enters into the Mystery of Christ, the more one feels the ability and the need to embrace that Mystery wherever it may manifest itself. A sincere and devoted relationship to Jesus must indeed carry on this experience to others, and that is coming in dialogue with all creatures of God.

3.4.4.3 Mission as dialogue

The prominent concern of the pluralist theologies is rather to promote interreligious dialogue. It is rather seen from the perspective of coming together of equals, working together for common cause, trying to understand common concerns, taking common adventures. Reading Knitter one understands from the perspective of his liberation theology that there is much to be done in the world to eradicate poverty and injustice. A Christian no more lives for himself or herself alone but also for the other. As Knitter has demonstrated beyond any doubt that the concern for the “suffering Other” and for the “religious Other” belong together.³³⁸ The concern of the “Other” is a matter of dialogue. Dialogue is a Christian mission. Revelation is God’s self communication. God communicates with humanity, God dialogues with humanity. God’s mission through Jesus Christ to the humanity was God’s dialogue through Jesus Christ with humanity.

One can not have a real conversation unless both sides are both listening and speaking. Knitter says, “[d]ialogue, as Vatican documents recognize, is not just listening authentically; it also requires speaking honestly. In interreligious dialogue we confront the other as someone we want not only to embrace but also to address.” “In dialogue, I not only want to understand you and possibly be changed through that understanding, but I also want you to understand me and be changed by the truth that I feel has enriched my life.” “Therefore, “to proclaim” and “to dialogue” are not two aspects of a broader, distinct activity; rather, dialogue is the broader activity that includes and is made up of proclaiming and listening.”³³⁹ But to say that Church’s mission as dialogue is not to reduce that mission to any particular activity, but to broaden this mission beyond traditional attitudes and practices. It is to give

³³⁸ P. F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, 1996, p.3, 15-20.

³³⁹ P. F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, 1996, p.143.

message of Jesus Christ to the other and same time to receive message from the other.

But this giving and receiving in dialogue must not lead to the judgement of another from one's exclusive perspective. The Christian mission as dialogue is to be seen from an acceptance of another and not from judgement of the other. The implication for interreligious dialogue, which Knitter wholeheartedly recommends to all, is that Christians, in their approach to persons of other faiths, need not insist that Jesus brings God's definitive, normative revelation. A confessional approach is a possible and preferred alternative. In encountering other religions, Christians can confess and witness to what they have experienced and come to know in Christ, and how they believe this truth can make a difference in the lives of all peoples, without making any judgements whether this revelation surpasses or fulfils other religions. In other words, the question concerning Jesus' finality or normativity can remain an open question.³⁴⁰

3.4.5 Some Responses to Paul Knitter

3.4.5.1 Problem oversimplified

In response to Paul Knitter's thesis on the uniqueness of Jesus, Michael Amaladoss in his contribution "A Simple solution" says, that Knitter has "oversimplified the problem itself." He says "Knitter also fights shy of mystery," "I do not know whether one can talk about Jesus in a Christian context without talking about the mysteries of the incarnation and the Trinity." Further Amaladoss says,

If God is the Trinity, however this is understood, and if the second Person of the Blessed Trinity became a human person, however this process is explained, then that person is not just unique as any other human person or spiritual leader is unique. To talk about the uniqueness of Jesus and not even mention these mysteries seems an oversimplification of the issues of the discussion. How can one talk about any religion while carefully avoiding any reference to its basic creed.³⁴¹

3.4.5.2 Inclusivistic structure

Michael von Brück understands that Paul Knitter cannot avoid an inclusivistic structure. Being cautious than Paul Knitter in reinterpreting Jesus' uniqueness, he says, that Jesus reveals truly God's saving presence can be established only if this "truly" implies that this revelation is also sufficient (*satis est*). If so, all other claims have to be interpreted again in the horizon of this sufficiency, and this is basically an

³⁴⁰ P. F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 1985, p. 205.

³⁴¹ M. Amaladoss, "A simple solution," in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 26.

inclusivistic model of understanding, which is rather unavoidable. “For if Jesus defines (not confines) God as a decisive and normative claim, this is challenged by counterclaims that are to be validated. And any such validation on a normative basis (Christ, in our case) calls for a certain type of inclusivism, particularly if the other tradition is being recognized as “resonating” with what Jesus is and says.”³⁴² Secondly, as John Hick points out that, Knitter’s Christian pluralism is at some crucial points is ambiguous and capable of being understood in both pluralist and inclusivist ways. Knitter defines pluralism as announcing “at least the possibility” of many true religions. But for Hick this is rather a misgiving account of pluralism. He says that we must affirm not merely the possibility or probability but actuality of religions being true and salvific.³⁴³

3.4.5.3 What about Christ’s divinity?

Presenting Jesus’ uniqueness from the perspective of his humanity is not the complete picture of Jesus. It is rather asked if Knitter’s theses take Christ’s divinity seriously, and it is also answered that Knitter does justice to the humanity of Jesus but not to his divinity.³⁴⁴ Retaining belief in Jesus the Christ, true God and truly human, is indeed essential to our Christian discipleship. Following Jesus and devoting oneself to Jesus, seen only from the humanity of Jesus, is to miss and ignore an essential part in one’s Christian faith. The humanity of Jesus in his uniqueness as presented by Knitter is indeed very helpful for interreligious dialogue and for liberation theology, but it is only a part of Jesus Christ’s whole picture. The Christian discipleship needs one’s confession in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour, a belief in his complete humanity as well as in his complete divinity. One also in this regard must see that Christians who think that Jesus was only a good man, an upright moral teacher, might well do less at worship and less for the poor than those who think that Jesus had unique words of eternal life, because he was uniquely God’s eternal Son.

³⁴² M. von Brück, “Identifying Constructively Our Interreligious Moment,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 43.

³⁴³ See J. Hick, “Five Misgivings,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 80.

³⁴⁴ See D. Carmody and J. Carmody, “Do Knitter’s Theses Take Christ’s Divinity Seriously?,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 46.

3.4.5.4 What about Christian Eschatology?

Even if there are many true revelations of God, one may question, are there also many “lives that kill death,” or many resurrected Lords who shall come again to judge the living and the dead? Is it only Jesus Christ or are there many “Returners”? The question on eschatology raises challenges to pluralist Christology. Kajsa Ahlstrand says, “[i]f Christian eschatology is reduced to an action program for the betterment of the world, a Christology that sees Jesus as example and inspirer is all right, but if a *lokuttara*³⁴⁵ dimension is allowed for, it becomes more difficult to maintain a pluralist Christology.” Kajsa asks is “pluralism provisional or ultimate.”³⁴⁶ If the reinterpretation of Jesus’ uniqueness is an appropriate way to understand other religions and to involve in many existential situations, it also need to be considered from Christian eschatological point of view, which would give a complete picture of Jesus Christ. The problem about pluralism is that it does not rise beyond the horizontal and phenomenological level. If one does not take seriously the basic creedal affirmations of any of the religions, one wonders, as Michael Amaladoss says, “whether the question of uniqueness can be raised meaningfully and solved at the phenomenological level, without moving to the level of faith.”³⁴⁷

3.4.6. Conclusion

The pluralistic approach by Knitter seems to be a fitting approach to the present multireligious context and particularly to interreligious dialogue. Knitter has carefully presented to other religions something that is best in Christianity. It also looks on the other hand as if Christianity is only the “uniqueness of Jesus revised.” The other side of Christianity, the normative Christianity from universal salvation of Jesus Christ, the mystery of Trinity in Jesus, the eschatological point of salvation, which also is indeed unique in Christianity is rather not underestimated and rather also not emphasized by Knitter but the uniqueness of Jesus is in a way reinterpreted. And it is done for interreligious dialogue, for a revised mission of Christianity with an emphasis on love and justice. “Knitter replaces doctrinal considerations with social and ecological criteria,” as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen says and questions,

³⁴⁵ *lokuttara* is a term from Buddhism, meaning transcendent, above and beyond the world, supermundane, or to be free of worldly conditions although living in the world. At the enlightenment, the Buddha stepped out of the worldly perspective and could see above the world – *lokuttara*.

³⁴⁶ K. Ahlstrand, “What’s so special about Jesus,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 24.

³⁴⁷ M. Amaladoss, “A Simple Solution,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p. 27.

If doctrinal formulations do not matter, what is the criterion for defining the “value” of religions? Is it rather more conducive to dialogue to explicitly define the contours of, say, justice, rather than to ignore them? Furthermore, how does Knitter’s idea of salvation as eco-social liberation relate to, on the one hand, classical Christianity’s idea of eschatological salvation and, on the other, to other religions’ quite different views of religious ends? Is Knitter guilty of imposing his particular view of the value of religions on the rest of religions and thus working against pluralism?³⁴⁸

We must note that in today’s multireligious context, what is appealing and meaningful to one’s religious existence is to speak in terms of how the other understands. It does not mean that we deny our doctrines, but we present them in such a way that we try to listen and understand the other. And this is what Paul Knitter does in his Christian pluralism to other religions. He tries to listen and understand the other by way of reinterpreting the traditional Christology, giving new meaning to it in the present context, and that indeed requires our attention and appreciation.

³⁴⁸ V. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 2003, p. 351.

Chapter Four

Interreligious Encounter in the Official Teaching of the Catholic Church

Theological Perspective of Christian Approach to Other Religions

4.1 Introduction to Vatican II and Post-conciliar Teaching

4.1.1 Situating Vatican II in the conciliar history of the Church

First of all we situate Vatican II in the conciliar history of the Church and this in regard to the relationship of the Church to other religions. Already the Council of Florence in 1442 had taken a rigid attitude concerning the salvation of all people, the “infidels” included, finding themselves outside the Church. But one century later, in 1547 the Council of Trent through its doctrine on “baptism of desire” solemnly stated the possibility of salvation for people who are outside the Church. Also the later Church documents reaffirmed, though not without a marked caution, the same possibility. But hardly ever did the Church documents through the centuries, whether conciliar or otherwise, pronounce on religions as such, or much less did they do so in any positive manner.³⁴⁹ We shall see below how Vatican II takes up this issue of salvation of all people and the role of other religions in it.

The Second Vatican Council did not intend to provide an elaborate theology of religions, but it clearly adopted a new attitude by stressing what Christians share with people of other religions, and thereby aimed at promoting unity among the followers of diverse religious traditions. In the context of new awareness of the reality of religious pluralism, the Council sought to understand Christian faith and doctrine in the light of the new realities and the changes in the modern world. For the Council was bound to establish a pastoral approach based on its doctrinal foundations. The ancient prejudices and negative assessments had to be done away

³⁴⁹ One may also note an exception in this regard that is, a negative statement made by the Decree for the Copts of the Council of Florence (1442), that is the abrogation of Jewish religious practices with the promulgation of the Gospel. Though tolerated at the beginning of the Church’s existence, the Jewish religion no longer had any place in the Christian economy of salvation and was called to disappear. As for Christians, though they could licitly observe Jewish practices in the earliest period, this concession had long been abrogated. See text in J. Neuner – J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001, 1003. Henceforth referred as ND and the corresponding number; see also in DS, 1348.

with. This could be done only by pointing out positive values and divine endowments contained in the other religions. Jacques Dupuis observes that “the council, therefore, could not be – nor was it – satisfied to talk about the non-Christian individuals to the Church; it had to speak – and did so in a positive manner for the first time in the conciliar history – about a relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions as such.”³⁵⁰

Second Vatican Council is regarded as an important beginning for the Catholic Church in contacting people of other faiths and their religious traditions. It has developed a positive approach towards the world religions, in its declaration, *Nostra Aetate*: on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions, as well as, in *Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in its decree, *Ad Gentes*: on the Church’s Missionary Activity and in *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. *Nostra Aetate* is the first conciliar document to deal with the Church’s relationship with other religions. The other Vatican documents like *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes* also make important references to the place of these religions in God’s plan of salvation. How far did the council go in its recognition of the positive values in the religious traditions themselves? What significance did it assign to them in God’s design for the salvation of humankind? How did it conceive the relationship of Christianity to other religions, as one-sidedly contributing to the salvation outside Christianity or as one, in encounter with other religious traditions, for a mutual interaction, enrichment and reciprocal advantage? The Council is merely an opening and pointer towards understanding the signs of our times. It invites us to revisit the theological parameters to understand them in the light of the new awareness of the reality of religious pluralism. This seems to be a new situation in theology – even though the reality of religious pluralism is as old as the religious traditions themselves – which, while analysing the doctrinal truths of Christian faith and traditions in the context of the reality of religious pluralism, opens the door for other religious traditions for mutual encounter, mutual interaction and mutual enrichment. Therefore, we analyse here in the first part of this chapter in the conciliar documents of the Church the theological parameters necessary for the interreligious relationship. But before that let us also introduce the post-conciliar teaching with regard to other religions.

³⁵⁰ J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001, p.160.

4.1.2 Post-conciliar Teaching

In the post-conciliar teaching we will examine the theological developments, after the Second Vatican Council, in the Catholic Church in its evaluation of world religions. We will glean through the post-conciliar documents and papal encyclicals and analyse those passages that deal with the Catholic Church's relationship with other religions. Our task consists in asking whether the Church's post-conciliar magisterium has thrown more light on the Council's teaching on other religions. While caught in the dilemma of maintaining a balance between the ecclesiocentric perspective of pre-conciliar magisterium and Christocentric perspective of the theologians surrounding the second Vatican Council, the Council chose to maintain silence regarding the theological value of other religious traditions. Does the post-conciliar magisterium adopt a positive appraisal of the religions themselves in proportion to the new awareness of the reality of religious pluralism and increasing religious encounter among the people? Eventually, has the post-conciliar magisterium given way to a broader outlook for a clearer recognition of the role of religious traditions in God's salvific design for humankind?

In the post-conciliar teaching of the Church on other religions, we study their relationship to the Christian faith and revelation and their theological significance in the economy of salvation. Here, we aim at formulating the suitable theological parameters, drawn from Christian faith and revelation, for a Christian theology of religions. Hence, we consider in the following section only those post conciliar documents of the Church, which throw some light on the post-conciliar position of the Church regarding its relationship with other religious traditions. Only key texts with significant doctrinal importance will be considered here. We will also analyse the documents of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions,³⁵¹ and the report of the International Theological Commission, namely, *Christianity and World Religions*.³⁵²

³⁵¹ It was Pope Paul VI in May 1964 who established the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue with the objective of searching for methods and ways of opening a suitable dialogue with people of other religions. Concerning the history of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions and the development of Catholic teaching on interreligious dialogue, see, P. Rossano, "The Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions from the Beginnings to the Present Day: History, Ideas, Problems," in *Bulletin*, 41-42, 1979, pp. 88-109; F. A. Arinze, "Prospects of Evangelisation with Reference to the Area of Non-Christian Religions," in *Bulletin*, 59, pp.111-140. The document, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), prepared jointly by the Secretariat for Non-Christian religions and the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, takes up the issue of the relationship between dialogue and mission, with a focus on the mediation of salvation in Jesus Christ. See, F. A. Arinze, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Two Aspects of the Evangelising Mission of the Church," in *Bulletin*, 77, 1991, pp. 201-202; For the analysis of the statements of this document see, J. Dupuis, "A

Finally to include in this introductory section we say how we go about this chapter. We present in a thematic way God's universal plan of salvation for all, Jesus Christ and other religions, Holy Spirit and Other religions, Catholic Church and other religions and finally a theological evaluation of other religions. Each of these themes will be analysed from both conciliar and post-conciliar teaching.

4.2 Unity of all People in God's plan of salvation

4.2.1 From Vatican II documents

4.2.1.1 God created all in his image

Christian attitudes to believers of other religions have changed radically from the second half of the last century. The Second Vatican Council has changed many of its traditional exclusivist attitudes towards other religions and opened for us the way to theological insights in the context of other religions and articulated Church's attitudes towards plurality of culture and religious traditions. The basic perspective of the Council has been the unity of the people of God. The entire humanity is the people of God and the Church is the sacrament of this theological reality.

This thought about the entire humanity as the people of God basically comes from the Scripture that God created all in His image. God has created all humankind in His own image and likeness and God's universal plan of salvation includes everyone, even though actual attainment will depend on God's providence and human response. *Nostra Aetate* speaking from universal fraternity says, we cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God's image.³⁵³ *Lumen Gentium* says, "[t]he eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world. His plan was to raise men to a participation of the divine life."³⁵⁴ The Council states that the plan of our Creator who formed man to His own image and likeness will be realized, when all who share one human nature, regenerated in Christ through the Holy Spirit and beholding the glory of God, will be able to say

Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation," in W. R. Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993, pp. 131-157.

³⁵² International Theological Commission, "Christianity and the World religions," in *Origins*, 27: No. 10, 1997, pp. 150 – 166.

³⁵³ See *Nostra Aetate*, 5. Unless otherwise mentioned conciliar, post-conciliar documents and the encyclicals are taken from www.vatican.va.

³⁵⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 2.

with one accord: Our Father.³⁵⁵ Since God has created all people in His likeness and image, He created them all for unity, and He included them all in His saving mission, He included all for participation in His divine life.

4.2.1.2 All have a common origin and destiny

The declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate*, stresses the common origin and destiny of all people: All people comprise a single community, and have a single origin, since God made the whole human race to dwell over the entire face of the earth. God' providence, His manifestation of goodness, and his saving designs extend to all human persons.³⁵⁶ *Lumen Gentium* affirms this common vision, when it asserts the unity of all humankind in their origin and in their final goal: "The eternal Father, in accordance with the utterly gratuitous and mysterious design of his wisdom and goodness, created the whole universe, and chose to raise up men to share in his own divine life and when they had fallen in Adam, He did not abandon them, but at all times held out to them the means of salvation bestowed in consideration of Christ, the Redeemer."³⁵⁷ The Holy Spirit offers to all people the possibility of becoming partakers of the paschal mystery, as the council asserts in *Gaudium et Spes*, "since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery."³⁵⁸ Thus, God calls all people to partake of his grace; because He created them in His image; and because all have the same origin and also the same theological destiny.

4.2.1.3 God offers salvation to all

All the religious traditions are included in God's saving design, as he offers to all a share in His universal plan of salvation. This truth has been clearly emphasised in *Lumen Gentium*: Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. The Jews, the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not

³⁵⁵ See *Ad Gentes*, 7.

³⁵⁶ See *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

³⁵⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

³⁵⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

repent of the gifts he makes nor of the calls he issues. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator: the Moslems, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God. The believers of other religions also can attain salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those [the atheists], who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with his grace strive to live a good life.³⁵⁹

Thus, the Second Vatican Council has positive approach towards the religious traditions, as it situates them in God's plan of salvation that includes all humankind. The Council affirms that God, who shows no partiality, has endowed the world religions with "elements, which are true and good."³⁶⁰ These elements are "precious things, both religious and human;"³⁶¹ they are "seeds of contemplation," "elements of truth and grace," "seeds of the Word,"³⁶² and "rays of that truth which illumines all humankind."³⁶³ However, the Council, with the aid of patristic language, confirms the traditional Christian teaching on the universal offer of grace and salvation: "God wills all to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4). Although the Council does not explain theologically the exact nature of the role the religious traditions play in the salvation of human kind, the Council does not look at these religious traditions as rivals, nor as historical movements wholly foreign to her, but as values intimately related to the universal plan of salvation.³⁶⁴

4.2.2 From Post-conciliar Teaching

4.2.2.1 The unity of humankind in God

The post-conciliar teaching of the Church continues to recognise the basic unity of the humankind in God. Hence the entire history of humanity has to be seen theologically from the perspective of one universal plan of salvation. "Though roots

³⁵⁹ See *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

³⁶⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

³⁶¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 92.

³⁶² *Ad Gentes*, 18, also 9, 11, 15.

³⁶³ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

³⁶⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 16; *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit, as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words, for the full meaning of human life.”³⁶⁵ However, God, who desires to call all peoples to Himself in Christ and to communicate to them the fullness of revelation and love, does not fail to make Himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches. Therefore the Church upholds the spiritual validity and the purpose of other religions and rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. The Church regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct of life, those precepts and teachings, which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of truth, which enlightens all people. Therefore “certainly, the various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God, and which are part of what the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions.”³⁶⁶

4.2.2.2 The image of God in all People

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that every human person is created by God. All are created in God's image and called to know and love Him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming to know him.³⁶⁷ The divine image is present in every man. It shines forth in the communion of persons, in the likeness of the union of the divine persons among themselves.³⁶⁸ There is one salvation history, starting from creation and it is not peculiar to one nation or one religion, but for the whole of humankind.³⁶⁹ The whole of humankind forms one family, due to the common origin of all men and women, created by God in his own image. Correspondingly, all are called to a common destiny, the fullness of life in God. Moreover, there is but one plan of salvation for humankind, with its centre in Jesus Christ, who in his incarnation has united himself in a certain manner to every person.³⁷⁰ The unity of the plan of salvation is found in the mystery “that all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of

³⁶⁵ *Redemptor Hominis*, 11.

³⁶⁶ *Dominus Iesus*, 21.

³⁶⁷ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 31.

³⁶⁸ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1702.

³⁶⁹ See, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 19.

³⁷⁰ See, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 28.

salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit. Christians know this through their faith, while others remain unaware that Jesus Christ is the source of their salvation.”³⁷¹

4.2.2.3 The universality of salvation

God’s saving work is not limited to a particular nation or race, and people or religion. The universality of salvation means that it is granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church, but also to those who do not know Christ and his Church by no fault of their own. Since salvation is offered to all, it must be concretely available to all. But it is clear today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the Gospel revelation or to enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions. For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace, which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. The mystery of salvation reaches out to them, in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ. Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their saviour. Nevertheless, the grace of salvation comes from Christ; it is the result of his Sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. It enables each person to attain salvation through his or her free co-operation.³⁷²

4.3 The Presence and Action of Jesus Christ in Other religions

4.3.1 From Vatican II documents

4.3.1.1 Jesus Christ and other believers

The document *Gaudium et Spes*, after having pointed out how Christians are associated with the mystery, namely, they are “conformed to the likeness of that Son” and “[t]hrough this Spirit, who is “the pledge of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14)” they are “renewed from within”; they achieve “the redemption of the body” (Rom. 8:23) being “linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ”;

³⁷¹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

³⁷² See, *Redemptoris Missio*, 10.

they “will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.” However, the believers of other religions are in the similar manner related to the person of Jesus Christ, who being present in them enables them to be associated with the event of Jesus Christ. Hence, “[a]ll this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.”³⁷³

4.3.1.2 Salvation to all in Jesus Christ

God has called everyone to the final destiny in his Son Jesus Christ, who wills all to be saved (cf. 1Tim 2:4). Christ lifted up from the earth, has drawn all people to himself (cf. Jn 12:23). Since the entire humanity is the people of God and the Christ event is the soteriological axis of it, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God, offers to every person the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery. Consequently, the followers of other religions too find salvation in Jesus Christ, ‘who is the way, the truth and life’ (Jn 14:6), who becomes a way for all to go to the Father, to share his gift of salvation. The Second Vatican Council, in its attitude to other religions, in matters of salvation, offers possibility of salvation to other religions. But, if asked how the other religions receive salvation, adds in its teaching, “in manner known only to God.”³⁷⁴ God has his own way to reach his salvation to all.

4.3.1.3 An inclusivistic approach to other religions

The universal significance of Jesus Christ has been expressed in different ways in the Church’s tradition from the earliest times. The Second Vatican Council takes recourse to the inclusivistic perspectives of the early Church Fathers. The ‘seeds of the Word,’ can be found outside the limits of the visible Church and especially in the different religions. The divine Logos, the principle of God’s self-expression, has been operative in the world from the beginning of creation, ‘for everything has been created in and through the Logos’ (cf. Jn. 1:3); since through the Logos all humankind received life and light (cf. Jn. 1:5), it has to be assumed that the Logos has been at work in the hearts of all human persons. The seeds of the Word lie

³⁷³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

³⁷⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

hidden in other religious traditions, which are understood as the “treasures, which a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth.”³⁷⁵ The truth and goodness, contained in other religions, is seen as a preparation for the proclamation of Jesus Christ. The eternal truth revealed in the person of Jesus Christ continues to be the norm to arrive at the truth found in other religions.

4.3.2 From Post-conciliar teaching

4.3.2.1. Jesus Christ and the role of other religions

In the circumstances of the new consciousness of religious pluralism of today, the question arises about the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ. In view of this strong emphasis on the unicity and universality of Jesus Christ, on the one hand and the pluralistic condition of the modern and post-modern world on the other hand, it is not surprising that a broad discussion on the very question of the unity and unicity of Jesus Christ would develop both inside the realm of theology and outside. However, the fundamental questions, that continue to be at the centre of the theology of religions are, whether the other religious traditions mediate salvation to their members? Whether other religions are salvific in themselves or do they possess salvific structures? If other religions are mediations of salvation, are such mediations of salvation autonomous or do they convey the salvation in the person of Jesus Christ? Here the question is not regarding the possibility of salvation of the believers of other religions but of the salvific mediation of other religions.³⁷⁶ How do the other religious traditions converge in the one mediator Jesus Christ, while their followers either do not know him or they do not commit themselves to him in faith? How are these religious traditions related to him? If these religious traditions are related to Jesus and the Spirit of Christ is present in them, why do they not become ways of salvation in Christ, for their followers? These are some of the basic questions that most of the present theologians are concerned about.

The apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, states that the religious traditions represent the living-expression of the spiritual lives of millions of peoples. They embody the human search for God for thousands of years and, although imperfect,

³⁷⁵ *Ad Gentes*, 11.

³⁷⁶ The official interpretation of the Catholic Church is that other religions are not salvific, but a minority speaks to the contrary. The reason for the division of opinions is that, at least in the judgement of most Catholic theologians, *Nostra Aetate* and other documents leave the question ‘are other religions salvific themselves’ open and hence, allow for various possible readings, see, V. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 2003, pp.115-17.

they do so with deep sincerity and righteousness. They have taught generations of people how to pray; they contain innumerable “seeds of the Word”; they constitute a true “preparation for the Gospel.”³⁷⁷ The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* points out how we should approach those religions. The world religions “are to be approached with great sensitivity on the account of the spiritual and human values enshrined in them.”³⁷⁸ The document moves on to explain the salvific role of other religious traditions for the salvation of their members, as it states: “Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s initiation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognise or acknowledge him as their saviour.”³⁷⁹ This statement indicates that the people of other faiths can attain salvation through Jesus Christ, not in spite of their religious traditions but in and through them. In the case of people of other religions, whose social and cultural conditions do not allow them to accept the Gospel message and become a visible member of the Church, salvation is available through the grace of Christ by the help of the Holy Spirit.

However, the Church acknowledges with respect the spiritual and moral values found in various religions and desires to join with them in promoting those values for the common good. Yet, the Church finds that,

it is obvious we cannot agree with various aspects of these religions, and that we cannot overlook differences and be uncovered with them, as if all religions had. Each in its own way, the same value, which would dispense those who follow them the need of enquiring whether God has revealed a way free from all error and certain, by which he desires to make himself known. Indeed honesty compels us to declare openly what we believe, namely that there is one true religion, and that that we hope that all who seek God and adore him will come to acknowledge him.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53.

³⁷⁸ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 14.

³⁷⁹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29. Dupuis makes here the following observation: This statement of *Dialogue and Proclamation* explicitly implies that the Roman Catholic Church went beyond the teaching of the Second Vatican Council by acknowledging non-Christian religions as bearers of the saving and enlightening Divine Spirit. As Dupuis rightly observes, this is “a weighty statement, not found before in official documents of the central teaching authority, and whose theological import must not be underestimated”, see, “A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation,” in W. R. Burrows (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue*, 1993, p. 137.

³⁸⁰ J. Neuner – J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001, 1029.

Therefore, “to say that other religious traditions include elements of grace does not imply that everything in them is good and is the result of grace, although it indicates that those religions embrace God’s grace and may bring their followers to salvation.”³⁸¹

4.3.2.2 Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the religious history of mankind

Redemptor Hominis states: “In Christ and through Christ God has revealed himself fully to humankind and has definitively drawn close to it; at the same time in Christ and through Christ humankind has acquired full awareness of its dignity and the meaning of its existence.”³⁸² Hence, it is in Jesus Christ that the Church experiences the fullness of the revelation of God and fulfilment of the religious history of all humankind. The Church firmly believes that it is in Jesus Christ that “God has revealed the perfect and definitive form in which he wishes to be known.”³⁸³ Jesus Christ is the “one saviour of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God,” because, “salvation can only come from” him.³⁸⁴ In other words, “Christ is the one mediator between God and humankind, and the sole redeemer of the world.”³⁸⁵ It is because, “[i]n Christ, God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love.”³⁸⁶

The general attitude in the post-conciliar documents regarding the significance of the mystery of Christ to the believers of other religions is that the other religions find their fulfilment in God’s plan of salvation and God has placed Jesus Christ at the centre of this plan of salvation. Therefore the mystery of Jesus Christ is constitutive for human salvation. The divine plan, unique and definitive, has its centre in Jesus Christ, God and Man, in whom men find fullness of their religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to himself. *Dominus Iesus* states: “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord and only Saviour, who through the event of his Incarnation, death and

³⁸¹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

³⁸² *Redemptor Hominis*, 11.

³⁸³ *Ecclesiam Suam*, 107.

³⁸⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, 5. By stressing this absoluteness of Jesus for salvation, as the document states, “whatever other ‘mediations’ of God’s love there may be in other religions, ‘they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.’” Paul Knitter clarifies that with this argument the document not only rejects “just parallel revelations that would be equalised, but also rejects complementary revelations that could learn from each other,” see P. F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, 1996, p. 133.

³⁸⁵ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 52.

³⁸⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

resurrection has brought the history of salvation to fulfilment.”³⁸⁷ The gift of salvation cannot be limited to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church. The way of salvation always passes through Jesus Christ, apart from whom there is no salvation. Hence, “the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation.”³⁸⁸

Jesus is the “new and definitive covenant for all people”³⁸⁹ and, thanks to him, “the fullness of revelation and salvation” is available in the world, and for these reasons “there is one plan of salvation for humankind, with its centre in Jesus Christ.”³⁹⁰ In the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, who is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14:6), the full revelation of divine truth is given. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation. Therefore, “the words and deeds, and entire historical event of Jesus, though limited as human realities, have nevertheless the divine person of the Incarnate Word, true God and true man as their subject. For this reason they possess in themselves the definitiveness and completeness of the revelation of God’s salvific ways, even if the depth of the divine mystery in itself remains transcendent and inexhaustible.”³⁹¹

The post-conciliar teaching of the Church continues to maintain a theological distinction between Christianity and other religions. They portray the other religions as incomplete search for God. They hold that the other religions cannot establish an authentic and living relationship with God because they do not have supernatural elements in them. On the contrary, “the Church finds support in the fact that the religion of Jesus, which she proclaims through evangelisation, objectively places man in relation to the plan of God, with his living presence and with his action.”³⁹² The other religious traditions are a response to the universal human search for God. They find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ and Christianity. The Incarnate Word is the fulfilment of the yearning present in all the religions of mankind. This fulfilment is brought about by God himself and transcends all human expectations. Christ is the

³⁸⁷ *Dominus Iesus*, 5 and 13, see also 5-8 and 13- 15.

³⁸⁸ *Domunus Iesus*, 20

³⁸⁹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 19.

³⁹⁰ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 22, 28.

³⁹¹ *Dominus Iesus*, 6, see also 5.

³⁹² *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53.

fulfilment of the yearning of all world religions, and as such, he is their sole and the definitive completion.³⁹³

4.3.2.3 A Christocentric approach to other religions

The post-conciliar teaching adopts a Christocentric approach towards the theological complexities of religious pluralism. It looks at other religions from the perspective of being fulfilled and completed in Christianity, in so far as it is not a human search for God but God in his only Son searches the humankind. Pope John Paul affirms this position in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*: “Christianity has its starting-point in the Incarnation of the Word. Here, it is not simply a case of man seeking God, but of God who comes in Person to speak to man of himself and to show him the path by which he may be reached. This is what is proclaimed in the Prologue of John's Gospel: “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (1:18).”³⁹⁴

What we understand and believe is that in Christ, religion is no longer a “blind search for God” (cf. Acts 17:27) but the response of faith to God who reveals himself. Jesus Christ is the new beginning of everything. In him all things come into their total dignity; they are taken up and given back to the Creator from whom they first came. Christ is thus the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion. Jesus Christ is the recapitulation of everything (cf. Eph 1:10) and at the same time the fulfilment of all things in God: a fulfilment, which is the glory of God. The religion founded upon Jesus Christ is a religion of glory; it is a newness of life for the praise of the glory of God (cf. Eph 1:12).³⁹⁵

4.4 The Presence and Action of the Holy Spirit in Other Religions

4.4.1 From Vatican II documents

4.4.1.1 The Holy Spirit is at work in the world

The Second Vatican Council recognises the universal presence and operation of the Holy Spirit in the believers of other religions and in their traditions themselves.³⁹⁶

³⁹³ See, F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, pp.108-109.

³⁹⁴ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 6.

³⁹⁵ See, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 6.

³⁹⁶ The Second Vatican Council stated that the Spirit is at work in the hearts of every person through the seeds of the Word to be found in human initiatives and in man's efforts to attain truth, goodness

The universal working of the Holy Spirit, who was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified, is understood from the very existence of the elements of truth and goodness in them. They contain treasures of ascetical and contemplative life whose seeds have been planted in human beings, through the work of God's Spirit before the preaching of the Gospel,³⁹⁷ hence in them is found the "seeds of the Word of God."³⁹⁸ Thus "whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations is a sort of secret presence of God, because it is doubtless that the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified."³⁹⁹ The Church firmly believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all (cf. 2 Cor. 5:15), can through his Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny.⁴⁰⁰

4.4.1.2 The Holy Spirit makes possible salvation to all

The other religions reflect "a ray of that truth, which enlightens all persons." This has been understood as due to the universal presence and operation of the Spirit, since it is "the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth."⁴⁰¹ Therefore, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.⁴⁰² However, "God's Spirit, who with a marvellous providence directs the unfolding of time and renews the face of the earth,"⁴⁰³ is not absent from the believers of other religions and their traditions. With this pneumatological perspective, the other religions are seen as part of God's salvific design for all humankind. The diversity of religious traditions have their Trinitarian origin, existence and orientation, since there is one salvation history of humankind, that is, God calling all humankind to its final destiny, in the only and universal mediation of his Son Jesus Christ and in and through the universal presence and operation of the Holy Spirit. "As a consequence, men throughout the world will be aroused to a lively hope – the gift of the Holy Spirit – that some day at

and God himself. For the conciliar documents see *Ad Gentes*, 3,11; *Gaudium et Spes*, 10-11, 22, 26, 38, 41 and 92-93.

³⁹⁷ See, *Ad Gentes*, 15, 18.

³⁹⁸ *Ad Gentes*, 11, 15.

³⁹⁹ *Ad Gentes*, 9, 4.

⁴⁰⁰ See, *Gaudium et Spes*, 10.

⁴⁰¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 11.

⁴⁰² See, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁴⁰³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.

last they will be caught up in peace and utter happiness in that fatherland radiant with the glory of the Lord.”⁴⁰⁴

4.4.2 From Post-conciliar Teaching

4.4.2.1 The presence of the Spirit in cultures and religions

The post-conciliar teaching of the Church adopts a pneumatological perspective towards the diversity of religious traditions. The Church recognises in them the working of the Spirit and accepts its duty to listen to the Spirit that blows where it wills. The Spirit of God is present and at work everywhere, limited by neither space nor time. He is active in the heart of every person who is ordered to what is true and good and who honestly seeks God. The Spirit gives light and strength to every person to respond to his or her highest calling and offers each person the possibility “of sharing in the paschal mystery in a manner known to God ... The Spirit therefore is at the very source of man's existential and religious questioning, a questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very structure of his being. The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only the individuals, but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.”⁴⁰⁵ The mysterious presence of the Spirit gives all the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery.⁴⁰⁶ Nevertheless, this work of the Spirit cannot be outside the universal action of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰⁷ Hence, the question of the salvific value of religions as such must be situated in the context of the universal active presence of the Spirit of Christ.⁴⁰⁸

The universality of God's plan of salvation and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ cannot be understood without the universal action of the Holy Spirit. The pneumatological perspective towards humanity's search for God in their diversity of religious traditions – that the one divine Spirit is transforming the lives of all humankind and guiding them to the divine Truth – opens a wide horizon for recognising God's universal plan of salvation, unfolded in the event of Jesus Christ, which includes the diversity of religions as a common pilgrimage of all to the Divine. The book of Genesis shows us how the Spirit of God was active at the work of creation: “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Gen. 1:2). The book

⁴⁰⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 93.

⁴⁰⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, 28.

⁴⁰⁶ See, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁴⁰⁷ See, *Redemptoris Missio*, 29.

⁴⁰⁸ See, International Theological Commission, “Christianity and the World Religions,” in *Origins*, 27: No.10, 1997, p. 157.

of Wisdom testifies to the universal presence of the Spirit: “the Spirit of the Lord fills the world, is all embracing and knows what man says” (Wis. 1:7). The Spirit of God is also present in the very creation of human beings, as God created them in his own image (cf. Gen 1: 26-27). The creation of the humankind in the image and likeness of God and the original friendship of God with humankind, and similarly, the friendship of humankind with God is seen as the fruit of the action of the Spirit.⁴⁰⁹ In the context of human beings as “image and likeness of God,” we can conceive of their capacity of a personal relationship with God.⁴¹⁰ The fundamental orientation of all humankind and their religious traditions towards God can be understood from the perspective of God’s presence in the whole of creation in and through his Spirit.

4.4.2.2. The possibility of salvation to other religions

The “interior and mysterious working of God’s Spirit is to be recognised in the great religious and sapiential traditions of East and West.”⁴¹¹ Christians are called upon to respect and esteem the spiritual values of other religious traditions, for the great spiritual values, indeed for the primacy of the spiritual, which in the life of humankind finds expression in religion and then in morality, with direct effects on the whole culture.⁴¹² The spiritual value and existence of truth in those religions are the result of the Spirit who is universally active in the world, and the truths of those religions, too, are “reflections of one Truth, ‘the seeds of the Word.’”⁴¹³

The Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, evaluates other religious traditions with esteem and respect because of the presence of the Spirit in them. The Church, through the medium of dialogue with believers of other religions, seeks to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ’s presence and the working of the Spirit in other religions.⁴¹⁴ However, Christians can find the “seeds of the Word” and “a ray of that truth which enlightens all” in their religions, which should be seen as positive challenges for the Church. Nevertheless, the truth and grace found in other religions is understood as concrete signs of the hidden presence of Christ and Holy Spirit in

⁴⁰⁹ See, *Dominum et Vivificantem* § 12, 34. Pope John Paul links here the creation of man in the image and likeness of God and in divine friendship to the communication of the Spirit.

⁴¹⁰ See, Gen 7:1ff; Ex 33:11; Ps 104: 29-30; Job 34:4-15; Eccl. 12:7.

⁴¹¹ *Veritatis Splendor*, 94.

⁴¹² See, *Redemptor Hominis*, 11.

⁴¹³ *Redemptor Hominis*, 11.

⁴¹⁴ See, *Redemptoris Missio*, 56.

them. The affirmation in the documents – *Redemptor Hominis* and *Redemptoris Missio* – of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the followers of other religions can be regarded as a positive development. The possibility of salvation to the followers of other religious traditions is the fruit of the hidden presence of Christ and the universal activity of the Holy Spirit in them.

4.4.2.3 Church's duty to listen to the Spirit

The Church, in the midst of diversity of religious traditions, accepts its duty to listen to the Spirit that blows where it wills, who is operating even outside its visible boundaries.⁴¹⁵ “The action of the Holy Spirit, who in every time and place has prepared the encounter with the living God in all souls and peoples, is still at work today in the hearts of human beings, in cultures and in religions ... Everyone's task is to discern and respond to the presence and activity of the Spirit.”⁴¹⁶ Hence, we should have a deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit. Hence the Church cannot disregard the working of the Spirit of God in all human persons, in other cultures and religious traditions. The document, *Dialogue and Proclamation* also advocates that the Holy Spirit is actively present in the life of the followers of other religions. It definitively affirms the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of everyone whether Christian or not. The document, further, maintains that this function of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people of other faiths can be regarded as a theological basis for the Church's positive approach to the other religions.⁴¹⁷

All humankind is conformed to the image of risen Christ through the action of the Spirit, because in Christ do they acquire the dignity to which they have been called from the beginning (cf. 2Cor 3:18). Human beings, who have been created in the image of God through the presence of the Spirit, are recreated in the image of Christ, through of the action of the Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit guides and leads all humankind to Christ. Jesus Christ, who is the way to the Father, in his turn directs all to the Father. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus because he is the way, the truth and life (Jn 14:6), but it is the Spirit, who guides everyone to the truth

⁴¹⁵ See, *Redemptor Hominis*, 6.

⁴¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, “To the Pontifical Urban University, Rome, 11th April 1991,” in F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p.453.

⁴¹⁷ See, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 17.

(Jn 16: 12-13). The Spirit will guide along the way that Jesus is, the way that leads to the Father. The Spirit, who is guiding and leading all humankind to “the complete truth,” “will not be speaking of his own accord, but will say only what he has been told” (Jn 16:13a); will bear witness to Jesus Christ, since all that the Spirit will reveal to us will be taken from what belongs to Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 16:14-15), who in his turn reveals the Father. Hence, no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except through the action of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:3).

The Spirit is the gift of Jesus: “When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness” (Jn 15: 26). The gift of the Spirit is, therefore, the gift of Jesus, whose resurrection itself is realised through the intervention of the Spirit.⁴¹⁸ The Holy Spirit is given to us as the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Son.⁴¹⁹ The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* confirms this unity in the salvific activity and says: “all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit. Christians know this through their faith, while others remain unaware that Jesus Christ is the source of their salvation. The mystery of salvation reaches out to them, in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ.”⁴²⁰ Hence, one cannot think about a universal action of the Holy Spirit, which is not related to a universal action of Jesus. John Paul II affirms this point in his document *Redemptoris Missio*, as he says,

This is the same Spirit, who was at work in the incarnation and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ nor does he fill a sort of void, which is sometimes suggested as existing between the Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation of the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ.⁴²¹

The report of the International Theological commission asserts the continuity in the universal salvific role of the Holy Spirit and that of Jesus Christ: There is no sense in affirming a universality of the action of the Spirit, which is not encountered in relationship with the meaning of Jesus, the incarnate Son, dead and risen. All by virtue of the work of the Spirit can enter into relationship with Jesus, who lived, died

⁴¹⁸ See, Rom 1:4, 8:11; cf. also, Acts 2:32; Jn 14:15, 26; 15:26, 16:7, 20:22.

⁴¹⁹ See, Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; Acts 16:7.

⁴²⁰ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

⁴²¹ *Redemptoris Missio*, 29.

and rose in a specific time. On the other hand the action of the Spirit is not limited to the intimate and personal aspects of man but embraces also the social dimensions.⁴²²

To conclude on the universal presence of the Spirit in other religions we say that the idea that there is revelation and salvation in other religions through God's acting in his Spirit independently of Christ seems far away from a genuine Catholic interpretation of other religions. The 'magisterium' clearly recognizes that there can be salvation in other religions through God's acting in the Spirit, but this Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and clearly does not work independent of Him.⁴²³ The duty to listen to the Spirit and His working in other religious traditions is a duty to listen to Jesus Christ and His working in them.

4.5 The Catholic Church and the Other Religions

4.5.1 From Vatican II documents

4.5.1.1 The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy

The missionary activities of the Catholic Church has been very effective and strong to spread the message of Jesus Christ throughout the world, but the fact is that a vast majority of population is still outside the visible boundaries of the Church. In the context of the affirmation of the necessity of the Church for salvation, the question is raised that if there is salvation for people of other faiths, without being visible members of the Church, what is the role of the Church as the mediator of salvation? How, those who attain salvation outside the visible boundaries of the Church are related to it? How do these people, who find themselves being outside the Church, can be seen as being saved in Christ through the mediation of the Church? These and many other questions have posed a challenge in the theology of religions.

It is the Second Vatican Council which comes to the aid and tries to answer some of these above mentioned questions or builds the relationship of the Catholic church to other religions as such. The Second Vatican Council adopts a positive outlook towards other religions and appeals to the Christians for a new attitude towards the religions of the world. The document *Nostra Aetate* points out in the opening words:

⁴²² See, International Theological Commission, "Christianity and the World Religions," in *Origins*, 27: No. 10, 1997, p. 159.

⁴²³ See Pope John Paul II, *Redemptorio Missio*, 10, 21, 29; *Gaudium et Spes*, 22; International Theological Commission, *Christianity and the Religions*, 81, 94; S. Karotemprel (ed.), *Following Christ in Mission*, Nairobi, 1995, p.73; *Dominus Iesus*, 12.

“In this age of ours, when people are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care the relation which she has to non-Christian religions.”⁴²⁴ The declaration, *Nostra Aetate* points out that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in other religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all people.”⁴²⁵ The Church considers with respect even those doctrines, which differ from her teaching but often contain a ray of the eternal truth.⁴²⁶ Whatever good or truth, found among them, the Church accepts it as “a preparation for the Gospel.”⁴²⁷ Therefore, the council invites Christians to acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods, which are found in other religions and their adherents through “collaboration with the followers of other religions.”⁴²⁸

4.5.1.2 The Church is the symbol of unity of all mankind

The interreligious encounter is aimed at promoting unity among all humankind as one people of God and in the context of the diversity of religions, the Church is the symbol of unity of all humankind, itself being united with the person of Christ. The Church is the mystical body of Christ and wherever Christ is present, there also the Church is present. In this sense the Church becomes a constitutive community, where the believers are drawn together share the gift of salvation, since it is the universal sacrament of salvation. Therefore, the Church promotes an interreligious encounter and “urges her children to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions while witnessing to their own faith and way of life.”⁴²⁹ Church has a special duty to promote the unity of humanity, as the document notes, “ever aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, she reflects at the outset on what men have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them.”⁴³⁰ The idea of promoting the unity among the representatives of diverse religious traditions is based on the original unity of all creation in God as their creator. Therefore the

⁴²⁴ *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

⁴²⁵ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁴²⁶ See, *Nostra Aetate*, 2; *Gaudium et Spes*, 57.

⁴²⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

⁴²⁸ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁴²⁹ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁴³⁰ *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

essential unity of the human race is based on the fact that all men and women have God as their creator and also as their ultimate Goal.

4.5.1.3 Church is the sacrament of salvation

The document, *Gaudium et Spes* notes the role of the Church as a sacrament of salvation. The Church, “coming forth from the eternal Father’s love, founded in time by Christ the Redeemer and made one in the Holy Spirit (cf Rom 13: 1-5), the Church has a saving and an eschatological purpose which can be fully attained only in the future world.”⁴³¹ *Gaudium et Spes* which is the theological constitution of the Church speaks of the Triune God who is the foundation of the Church. The presence of Christ and the universal operation of the Spirit is the work of God, which is both Trinitarian and ecclesiological: “It is Trinitarian in referring the activity of the Spirit to the paschal mystery of Christ and ecclesial in referring the paschal event to the constitutive community-creating force it has under the guidance of the Spirit.”⁴³²

The Church asserts her special role in dispensing grace and truth, particularly to those who are incorporated into the Body of Christ and also to all humankind. This is precisely in so far as she has been established by the risen Christ as the “universal sacrament of salvation.”⁴³³ The Church is, “thanks to her relationship with Christ, a sacramental sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of the whole human race.”⁴³⁴ In *Lumen Gentium*, the Church is seen as the necessary element for attaining salvation: This Sacred Council teaches that the Church, now pilgrim on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation. Christ, present to us in his Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and the unique way of salvation. In explicit terms he himself affirmed the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. Rom. 11, 28-29), and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through baptism as through a door through which men enter the Church. Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved.⁴³⁵

⁴³¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 40.

⁴³² G. D’Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions and The Trinity*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000, p. 110.

⁴³³ *Lumen Gentium*, 48. In the Second Vatican Council, Church is described as the universal sacrament of salvation and as a sign and instrument of unity. Also see *Lumen Gentium*, 1, 9, 48; *Gaudium et Spes*, 42, 45; *Ad Gentes*, 1, 5.

⁴³⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

⁴³⁵ See, *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

The fact that even the followers of other religious traditions are ordered to the people of God is rooted in the fact that the universal call to salvation includes the vocation to all people to the Catholic unity of the people of God.⁴³⁶ The Council holds that the close relationship between both vocations is rooted in the unique mediation of Christ, who in his body that is the Church makes himself present in our midst.⁴³⁷ The followers of the other religious traditions, justified by means of the grace of God, are associated with the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ and they are also associated with the mystery of his body, which is the Church. The mystery of Church in Christ is a dynamic reality in the Holy Spirit. Although the visible-expression of belonging to the Church is lacking to this spiritual union, the justified ‘others’ are included in the Church, “the mystical body of Christ” and a “spiritual community.”⁴³⁸ Thus the conciliar teaching continues to maintain that all, who are justified outside the visible boundaries of the Church, are oriented to the Mystical Body of Christ by a yearning and a desire, of which they may not be aware. In the case of invincible ignorance, the implicit desire of belonging to the Church suffices. This desire will always be present when a man aspires to conform his will to that of God. The Second Vatican Council maintains that the Church is a general help for salvation and it is also an ordinary means of salvation. The people of other faith, who do not know the necessity of the Church in the order of salvation, are ordered in various ways related to the people of God.⁴³⁹

While asserting the necessity of the Church for human salvation, the Second Vatican Council laid a special stress on the relatedness of the Church to the mystery of Jesus Christ when it defined the Church as the “sacrament” and a “sign and instrument of communion with God and the unity among all men”, adding that the Church is “the universal sacrament of salvation.” Here the Council consciously adopted the theological insight according to which Jesus Christ – who in His person is the mystery of salvation – is the “primordial sacrament” (*Ursakrament*) of humankind’s encounter with God, while the Church is derivatively the sacrament of the encounter with the risen Lord.⁴⁴⁰ Similarly, *International Theological Commission* notes in its

⁴³⁶ See, *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

⁴³⁷ See, *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

⁴³⁸ See, *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

⁴³⁹ See, *Lumen Gentium*, 16; see also, St. Thomas, *SummaTheologiae*, III, q. 8, a. 3, ad. 1.

⁴⁴⁰ See, J. Dupuis, *Who do you Say I AM? An Introduction to Christology*, 1994. p. 3.

document: “Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council” (1984), “since Christ himself be called “the sacrament of God,” the church, in an analogous way, may be called the “the sacrament of Christ,” ... it is self-evident that the church can only be a sacrament by way of total dependence on Christ who is intrinsically the primordial sacrament.”⁴⁴¹

4.5.1.4 Church’s dialogue with other religions

The theological basis for dialogue according to *Ad Gentes* is provided in the example of Christ who entered into dialogue with his disciples leading them to the divine truth. Christian missionaries should dialogue with those among whom they live so that they might “learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations.”⁴⁴² In this passage at least, dialogue is associated with belief that the “seeds of the Word” are already present in peoples and cultures prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries. Consequently, the first task of the missionary is to listen and discern. In this way, a genuine dialogue, built on a profound respect for the religious other, is at the heart of the Church's mission of inculturating the Gospel.

With regard to Church’s dialogue to other religions, we note the statement of the Second Vatican Council, which assesses positively the plurality of religions in the economy of salvation, as it declares: “[t]he Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all human persons.”⁴⁴³ Hence the Council admonishes: “[t]he Church has therefore this exhortation for the faithful: prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with followers of other religions and in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these people as well as the values in their society and culture.”⁴⁴⁴ The Second Vatican Council requires Christians not only to preserve but

⁴⁴¹ M. Sharkey, (ed.), *International Theological Commission, Texts and Documents 1969-1985*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989, p. 296.

⁴⁴² *Ad Gentes*, 11.

⁴⁴³ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁴⁴⁴ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

also to promote the Spirit-given values of truth and goodness in other religious communities. The culture of dialogue demands here that the Christians live “in esteem and love for believers of other religions, ‘share in their cultural and social life by various exchanges and enterprises of human living’ and get to familiarity with their national and religious traditions.”⁴⁴⁵ And in fact, “the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through such and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them.”⁴⁴⁶ The goal of this culture of dialogue, we may say, as the Council notes, is, to unify under one Spirit all human persons of whatever nation, race or culture; to receive the inspirations of the Spirit faithfully and to measure up to them energetically, in order to build up the world in genuine peace.⁴⁴⁷

Reading the documents of Second Vatican Council on the Church’s relationship to other religions, we may conclude that in fact Church looks for a peaceful co-existence in this world, and therefore promotes dialogue between the religions, affirming and recognizing the goodness in other religions.

4.5.2 From Post-conciliar Teaching

4.5.2.1 Church’s mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ to all

Post-Vatican theology of religions is faced with the theological problem regarding the necessity of the Church for salvation and the compatibility of this principle with the universal salvific will of God. The International Theological Commission maintains: it is not possible to develop a theology of religions without taking into account the universal salvific mission of the Church, attested to by the Holy Scripture and the tradition of Christian faith. A theological evaluation of the religions was impeded over a long time because of the axiom *extra ecclesia nulla salus*, understood in an exclusivist sense. With the doctrine about the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation or sacrament of the kingdom of God, theology seeks to respond to the problem.⁴⁴⁸ However, this response is well brought out in *Dialogue and Proclamation*:

⁴⁴⁵ *Ad Gentes*, 11.

⁴⁴⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, 28.

⁴⁴⁷ See, *Gaudium et Spes*, 92.

⁴⁴⁸ See, International Theological Commission, “Christianity and the World religions”, in *Origins*, 27: No.10, 1997, p. 159.

To the Church, as the sacrament in which the Kingdom of God is present “in mystery,” are related or oriented (*ordinantur*), the members of other religious traditions who, inasmuch as they respond to God’s calling as perceived by their conscience, are saved in Jesus Christ and thus already share in some way in the reality which is signified by the Kingdom. The Church's mission is to foster “the Kingdom of our Lord and his Christ” (Rev 11:15), at whose service she is placed. Part of her role consists in recognizing that the inchoate reality of this Kingdom can be found also beyond the confines of the Church, for example in the hearts of the followers of other religious traditions, insofar as they live evangelical values and are open to the action of the Spirit. It must be remembered nevertheless that this is indeed an inchoate reality, which needs to find completion through being related to the Kingdom of Christ already present in the Church yet realized fully only in the world to come.⁴⁴⁹

The Church, in accordance with the divine mandate continues to proclaim Jesus Christ to the followers of other religions. Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, stressing the work of evangelisation among the other religions, holds,

neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised is an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ. On the contrary the Church holds that these multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ (cf. Eph 3:8), ...the riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fullness, everything that it is gropingly searching for concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and truth. Even in the face of natural religious expressions most worthy of esteem, the Church finds support in the fact that the religion of Jesus, which she proclaims through evangelisation, objectively places man in relation with the plan of God, with His living presence and with His action; she thus causes an encounter with the mystery of divine paternity that bends over towards humanity. In other words, our religion effectively establishes with God an authentic and living relationship, which the other religions do not succeed in doing, even though they have, as it were, their arms stretched out towards heaven.⁴⁵⁰

4.5.2.2 Church is the necessary sacrament of salvation in Christ

Dominus Iesus, a declaration from the congregation for doctrine of the faith, asserts that the Church is the universal sacrament of Salvation, as it recounts:

The Lord Jesus, the only Saviour, did not only establish a simple community of disciples, but constituted the Church as a salvific mystery: he himself is the church and church is in him (cf. Jn 15:1ff; Gal 3:28; Eph 4:15-16; Acts 9:5). Therefore the fullness of Christ’s salvific mystery belongs to the Church, inseparably united with her Lord. Indeed Jesus Christ continues his presence and his work of salvation by means of the Church (cf. Col 1:24-27), which is his body. And thus, just as the head and the members of the living body, though

⁴⁴⁹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 35.

⁴⁵⁰ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53

not identical, are inseparable. So too Christ and the Church can neither be confused nor separated, they constitute a single ‘whole Christ’.⁴⁵¹

There is further emphasis on the necessity of the Church for the salvation of all mankind: “the Church, a pilgrim now on earth is necessary for salvation.”⁴⁵² *Dominus Iesus* emphasises that “it is necessary to keep these two truths together, namely, the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the Church for this salvation.”⁴⁵³ The declaration also indicates that we should not negotiate the irreplaceable role of the Church as the necessary sacrament of salvation in Christ⁴⁵⁴ and the obligation of the Church to evangelise the whole world in obedience to the universal mandate of the risen Lord.⁴⁵⁵ God brings about salvation in Christ only through the Church, the mystical body of Christ. All those who are being saved through the work of the Spirit are being saved through the grace of Christ operating through the Church. Apart from Christ there is no salvation. Believers of all religions are associated with the paschal mystery in a way that is known to God alone. Nevertheless, Church is the God-willed ordinary means of salvation and hence the true religion. In this sense, without the Church there is no salvation. Believers of all religions are implicitly oriented to the Church.

4.5.2.3 Church’s dialogue with other religions

4.5.2.3.1 Dialogue – a new way of being the Church

Dialogue is one of its major themes in the encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* that is directly concerned with the work of the Secretariat for Non-Christians.⁴⁵⁶ One of the things to note in this encyclical is that the Pope’s notion of dialogue includes any type of non-hostile encounter between Christians and men and women who are not members of the Church. In the encyclical the Pope divides humankind into a number of different groups, such as outer circle - comprising of non-believers, worshippers of God – Afro-Asian religions, Muslims and Jews, and finally the inner circle –

⁴⁵¹ *Dominus Iesus*, 16; see also 17-23; also 2Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-29; Rev 21:2, 9.

⁴⁵² *Dominus Iesus*, 20.

⁴⁵³ *Dominus Iesus*, 20; also see *Redemptoris Missio*, 9 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 846-47.

⁴⁵⁴ See Mt. 16:18; Mt 28:20; Jn 21:17; Mt 28:18ff; Acts 17:30-31.

⁴⁵⁵ See Mk 16:15-16; Mt 28: 18-20; Lk 24:46-48; Jn 17: 18-21; Acts 1:8; 1Cor 9:16.

⁴⁵⁶ Pietro Rossano, who was the first Under-Secretary of the Secretariat, commenting on the importance of this encyclical noted, that it could be considered the “*Magna Carta*” of the three Secretariats formed to promote dialogue. These were the Secretariat for Non-Christians, the Secretariat for Non-Believers, and the Secretariat for promoting Christian Unity. For Rossano’s remarks, see, “Il Segretariato per i non cristiani e la missione,” in *Euntes Docete* 19, 1966, p.267.

composed of Christians, Roman Catholics and those united with the Church of Rome forming the centre,⁴⁵⁷ each being a group with whom the Church wished to enter into friendly relations. The motivation for Church's desire to enter into dialogue with these groups is, as the Pope insists, the Church's love for all. Its origin lies in the divine loving activity which reaches out to all of humankind. The Pope describes this activity as that of a continual dialogue, a dialogue of salvation, in which God has been constantly throughout history calling men and women to a share in the divine life. It was God who initiated this dialogue, and the Church is called to continue.⁴⁵⁸

Dialogical relations among believers of various religions have "to be inspired by brotherly love and moved by the sincere desire to build a civilisation founded on world solidarity."⁴⁵⁹ The integral human liberation has to be the main concern of dialogue. And therefore interreligious collaboration is needed "in promoting common ideals of religious liberty, human brotherhood, good culture, social welfare and civil order."⁴⁶⁰ Pope Paul VI envisages a Church that enters into an ongoing and all-embracing process of dialogue with religions and cultures out of an authentic experience of God in Christ. He says, "[d]ialogue is the new way of being the Church,"⁴⁶¹ and in the words of Pope John Paul II, "dialogue with the others is a Christian work desired by God."⁴⁶²

4.5.2.3.2 Dialogue and proclamation in Christian mission

4.5.2.3.2.1 Christian mission in its totality

Evangelisation or the evangelising mission, "refers to the mission of the Church in its totality,"⁴⁶³ made up as it is of various elements. The Christian mission, the source of which is divine love revealed in Christ and present through the action of the Holy spirit, which is the mission of the Church is a "single but complex and articulated reality."⁴⁶⁴ In this single, complex and articulated reality of the mission we can enumerate a number of elements. Church's mission is a mission of presence

⁴⁵⁷ *Ecclesiam suam*, 93-113.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ecclesiam suam*, 70-72.

⁴⁵⁹ *Populorum Progressio*, 73.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ecclesiam suam*, 108.

⁴⁶¹ *Ecclesiam suam*, 63

⁴⁶² Pope John Paul II, "To the Plenary Session of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, Rome, April 28, 1987," in F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p.374.

⁴⁶³ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 8.

⁴⁶⁴ *Dialogue and Mission*, 13.

and witness. This is simply Christian life lived as a response in faith to God's love. Church's mission is spoken of service, as an imitation of God's love, especially for the poor, the lowly. It is a mission of liturgical life, prayer and contemplation. In other words, celebration of God's love as manifested in Jesus Christ, a celebration which necessarily takes on a communitarian dimension, which has its high point in the Eucharist, celebrating the total giving of God in Christ which invites a total return. Church's mission is a mission of interreligious dialogue, which is an imitation of God's love expressed in the patient attraction which is exerted. It can be defined as walking together toward the truth, and working together in projects of common concern. And finally, there is announcement and catechesis, or a proclamation of God's love as made manifest in Jesus Christ, couples with the invitation to enter the community of those who believe in Christ.

So the totality of Christian mission embraces presence, service, dialogue, proclamation and sacramentalization. While all these elements are aspects of the evangelising mission of the Church or of Christian mission, not all have the same place or meaning in the Church's mission. For example, as Jacques Dupuis notes, that interreligious dialogue precedes proclamation, and the former may or may not be followed by the latter, but the evangelising process is brought about to its climax if proclamation follows, and the proclamation and sacramentalization represent the culmination of the evangelising mission of the Church.⁴⁶⁵ Proclamation is the foundation, center, and the summit of evangelisation. In these five principal elements of Christian Mission as stated in the document *Dialogue and Mission*, dialogue, and proclamation are of interest to us here.

In the context of certain conflict or misunderstanding between dialogue and proclamation, we may note what John Paul II says: "dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity."⁴⁶⁶ "In the light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*. These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be confused,

⁴⁶⁵ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.363.

⁴⁶⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 56.

manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable.”⁴⁶⁷ We shall see then how dialogue is distinct and related to proclamation in the evangelising mission.

4.5.2.3.2.2 Mission of dialogue

Dialogue is “a manner of acting, an attitude, a spirit which guides one’s conduct. It implies concern, respect and hospitality toward the other. It leaves room for the other person’s identity, modes of expression, values.”⁴⁶⁸ Here with regard to dialogue, a distinction needs to be made between dialogue as an attitude or spirit, and dialogue as a distinct element, in its own right, of the evangelising mission of the Church. The “spirit of dialogue” refers to an “attitude of respect and friendship, which permeate all activities constituting the evangelising mission of the Church.”⁴⁶⁹ But dialogue as a specific integral element of evangelisation, means “all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and exploration of respective religious convictions.”⁴⁷⁰ This is the sense of the word ‘dialogue’ that we can find in the document *Dialogue and Proclamation*, as one of the integral elements of the Church’s evangelising mission. We may say then, “[d]ialogue is thus the norm and necessary means of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation. Any sense of mission is not permeated by such a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel.”⁴⁷¹

Interreligious dialogue, which finds its place in the great dynamism of the Church’s mission, can take several forms. There is the dialogue of life, open and accessible to all. There is the dialogue of a common commitment to the works of justice and human liberation. There is an intellectual dialogue in which scholars engage in an exchange at the level of their respective religious legacies, with a goal of promoting communion and fellowship. And finally, there is the sharing of religious

⁴⁶⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

⁴⁶⁸ *Dialogue and Mission*, 29.

⁴⁶⁹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 9.

⁴⁷⁰ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 9.

⁴⁷¹ *Dialogue and Mission*, 29.

experiences of prayer and contemplation, in a common search for the Absolute. All these forms of dialogue are in fact many opportunities of sharing with others the values of the Gospel in an existential way.⁴⁷²

Dialogue, as the Pope Paul VI in *Ecclesiam suam* understood it, has a definite character of proclamation rather than an exchange between equal partners. The Church has a message for the world, the Pope says, a message it feels to communicate. Dialogue is an excellent way to do this, so that while he insists that Catholics respect the freedom and integrity of those outside the Church, the Pope sees dialogue as a means of making them better disposed to the message of the Church and the good things that God has given it. “The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make.”⁴⁷³ The Pope recommends that the missionary task of the Church should be carried out in a dialogical way. Through dialogue Christians ought to share with the other religions its saving message. In *Redemptoris Missio* Pope John Paul II states that “[i]nterreligious dialogue is a part of Church’s evangelising mission,”⁴⁷⁴ because “dialogue is a path towards the kingdom of God.”⁴⁷⁵ It is really worth noting what the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* states with regard to our dialogical approach and sharing with others the joy of knowing and following Jesus Christ:

In dialogical approach, how could [Christians] not hope and desire to share with others their joy of knowing and following Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour? We are here at the heart of the mystery of love. Insofar as the Church and Christians have a deep love for the Lord Jesus, the desire to share him with others is motivated not merely by obedience to the Lord’s command, but by this love itself. It should not be surprising, but quite normal, that the followers of other religions should also desire sincerely to share their faith. All dialogue implies reciprocity and aims at banishing fear and aggressiveness.⁴⁷⁶

The Pope does not perceive any conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. He teaches that both must maintain their intimate

⁴⁷² See *Dialogue and Mission*, 30-35.

⁴⁷³ *Ecclesiam suam*, 65; also 79: “If, in our desire to respect a man’s freedom and dignity, his conversion to the true faith is not the immediate object of our dialogue with him, we nevertheless try to help him and to dispose him for a fuller sharing of ideas and convictions”, and 64: “The very nature of the gifts which Christ has given the Church demands they be extended to others and shared with others... To this internal drive of charity which seeks expression in the external gift of charity, we will apply the word ‘dialogue.’”

⁴⁷⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

⁴⁷⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, 57.

⁴⁷⁶ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 83.

connection and their distinctiveness.⁴⁷⁷ So dialogue or better said the mission of dialogue is a distinct but related element of the evangelising mission of the Church.

4.5.2.3.2.3 Mission of proclamation

As we have seen above in the document *Dialogue and Mission*, that proclamation too is an element of evangelising mission. Proclamation is the foundation, center and summit of evangelisation. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* defines proclamation as “the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realised by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ, to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church.”⁴⁷⁸ It will then be seen that “proclamation is a response to the human aspiration for salvation.”⁴⁷⁹ In learning how to proclaim the Church takes the lead from divine pedagogy. She takes the lead to learn from Jesus himself and to observe the times and seasons as prompted by the Spirit himself.⁴⁸⁰ Proclamation has therefore to be “progressive and patient, keeping pace with those who hear the message, respecting their freedom and even their “slowness to believe.””⁴⁸¹ Here we must keep in mind the respect for an active reception on the part of the hearer of the word. This may entail “a process of purification and enlightenment.” It will lead to an inculturation of the Christian message as it becomes incarnated in the culture and spiritual tradition of those addressed, so that the message is not only intelligible to them, but is conceived as responding to their deepest aspirations, as truly the Good News they have been longing for.⁴⁸²

In the definition of proclamation, as stated above from the document *Dialogue and Proclamation*, it can be said then that proclamation is really concerned with conversions to Christianity. The word “conversions” is used here in the plural, precisely as to say something that can be counted and registered statistically. Through proclaiming Jesus Christ, one is invited to join the community of believers which is the Church through baptism. On the other hand, interreligious dialogue is

⁴⁷⁷ See, *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

⁴⁷⁸ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 10.

⁴⁷⁹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 67.

⁴⁸⁰ See *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 69.

⁴⁸¹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 69; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 79.

⁴⁸² See *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 70; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20, 62.

not geared towards such conversions, implying a change of religious adherence. The term “conversion” has a much wider acceptance, as a “general movement toward God,”⁴⁸³ a “humble and penitent return of the heart to God, in the desire to submit one’s life more generously to him.”⁴⁸⁴ And in this sense one may say that interreligious dialogue is geared towards conversion. The proclamation in its relatedness to dialogue with other religions respects the freedom of religion, does not force Christian faith on the other,⁴⁸⁵ respects freedom of the individual, respects the moral and spiritual values and the goodness of the other. In proclamation one pours out God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ. But then in its relatedness to dialogue, one must proclaim Jesus Christ in a dialogical relationship. Here one may also note that to an extent that interreligious dialogue encourages the partners to open themselves up to God and in this way it can be truly considered a dialogue of salvation. By proclaiming Jesus Christ to the world, the salvation is made possible to all. And as John Paul II states that, “[i]nterreligious dialogue at its deepest level is a dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with mankind.”⁴⁸⁶ “The fruit of dialogue is union between people and union of people with God, who is the source and revealer of all truth and whose Spirit guides men in freedom only when they meet one another in all honesty and love. By dialogue, we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God.”⁴⁸⁷

4.5.2.3.2.4 Complimentarity of dialogue and proclamation

Interreligious dialogue does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations, it reaches a much deeper level, that of the spirit, where exchange and sharing consist in a mutual witness to one’s beliefs and a common exploration of one’s respective religious convictions. In dialogue Christians and others are invited

⁴⁸³ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 11.

⁴⁸⁴ *Dialogue and Mission*, 37.

⁴⁸⁵ The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference states: The Spirit calls all people to conversion which is primarily a free turning of the heart to God and his Kingdom in obedience to this word. Dialogue as a mutual challenge to growth toward fullness involves such a conversion. But, dialogue however, does not aim at conversion, understood as a change of religion. But proclamation includes a further call to discipleship to Jesus Christ in the Church. See “Thesis on Interreligious Dialogue,” in Theological Advisory Commission (FABC), *FABC Papers*, no. 48, Hong Kong, 1987.

⁴⁸⁶ Pope John Paul II, “To the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue, Rome, November 13th. 1992,” in F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p. 498.

⁴⁸⁷ Pope John Paul II, “To Representatives of the various Religions of India, Madras, February 5, 1986,” in F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p.326.

to deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God's personal call and gracious self-gift which, as our faith tells us, always passes through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the work of his Spirit.⁴⁸⁸ Pope John Paul II states,

Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelising mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable: true interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes that the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved, proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the Gospel spirit of dialogue.⁴⁸⁹

While it is necessary to understand the tensions, it is also important to avoid confusions and misgivings with regard to interrelationship of dialogue and proclamation.⁴⁹⁰ The Catholic theologian Paul Knitter, after having charged "*Dialogue and Proclamation*" with self-contradiction, proposes simply to identify mission with dialogue, from which proclamation must not be distinguished as a further element of mission. The received opinion according to which "dialogue is mission" – insofar as in itself it constitutes an intrinsic dimension, a genuine expression, of evangelisation – is being turned around to become: "mission is dialogue", whereby evangelisation is simply reduced to dialogue and the witness to one's faith dialogue implies.⁴⁹¹ Even though there are differing opinions from theologians, what we study here from the official teaching of Catholic Church is primarily, to see the complementarity between dialogue and proclamation. The spirit of dialogue must inform every aspect or element of the evangelising mission. And the proclamation of the Gospel, on the other hand, by which members of other

⁴⁸⁸ See *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 40.

⁴⁸⁹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 77.

⁴⁹⁰ For a critical evaluation on the relationship between dialogue and proclamation, see, J. Dupuis, "A Theological Commentary: Dialogue and Proclamation," in William R. Burrows (ed.), *Redemption and Dialogue*, 1993, pp.153ff. Dupuis writes there: "While, on the one hand, interreligious dialogue is said to be in itself an authentic form of evangelisation (DP 77), even, if circumstances are such, in the absence of proclamation (DP 76), on the other hand, following EN 27 and 22, evangelization is said to "always entail as simultaneous foundation" a clear proclamation of Jesus Christ (DP 75), which is the "central element" without which the others, "through in themselves genuine forms of the Church's mission, would lose their cohesion and vitality" (DP 76). If proclamation needs to be present always, is dialogue in itself a genuine form of evangelisation? And can it be maintained that both are "absolutely necessary" (DP 89)?" he further says, "it must be recognized that a certain tension remains and must remain, in the reality of the Church's evangelising mission, between dialogue and proclamation." Here dialogue and proclamation, in their relationship are reflected from the point of "tension" between the "already" and the "not yet" in the Church's evangelising mission. For more details see, *ibid.*, p.155.

⁴⁹¹ See P. F. Knitter, *Jesus and Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*, 1996, pp.142-47. Also see, J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, pp.372-74.

religious traditions are invited to become freely disciples of Jesus in the Church must be done in a spirit of dialogue. Dialogue, however, as a specific element of evangelisation, is distinct from proclamation. It does not, as Jacques Dupuis notes, “aim at the “conversion” of others to Christianity, while, of course, it necessarily implies, on the part of the evangelizer, the witness of life – without which no evangelising activity whatever can be either sincere or credible.”⁴⁹²

4.6 Theological Evaluation of Other Religions

4.6.1 Council’s Theological Evaluation

From the teaching of the Second Vatican Council above, so far we have considered the possibility of salvation of the members of other religious traditions and the dialogue with other religions. In this section we need to consider the Council’s assessment regarding significance of the salvific role of other religions. We may ask, has the Second Vatican Council gone beyond by affirming that salvation in Jesus Christ is available to persons outside the Church? Does it consider the other religious traditions as constituting valid ways of salvation for their followers? Certainly, the Second Vatican Council is the first Council in the long conciliar history to speak positively of the other religions. It recognises positive elements not only in individual persons belonging to those traditions, but also in the traditions themselves. It recognises that there are “elements of truth and grace”⁴⁹³ in other religions and “seeds of the Word,” and hold with respect for what God has implanted in them, that is, “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men”⁴⁹⁴ lying hidden in them. The council recognises the elements of truth, of grace and goodness not only in the hearts of ‘others’ but also in their rites, customs, cultures and traditions. These elements of truth and goodness must be “healed, ennobled and brought to perfection, for the glory of God, the confusion of the devil, and the happiness of human persons.”⁴⁹⁵

The Council, for the first time in the history of the Catholic Church, spoke about other religions as entities, which the Church should respect and with which we

⁴⁹² J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.360.

⁴⁹³ *Ad Gentes*, 9.

⁴⁹⁴ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁴⁹⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 17; *Ad Gentes*, 9.

should enter into dialogue. The Vatican document, *Ad Gentes*, directs how the Christians need to approach other religious traditions, as it notes,

just as Christ searched the hearts of people and led them to the divine by truly human contacts, so his disciples, deeply imbued with the Spirit of Christ, should know the human persons among whom they live and associate with them. In this way, through sincere and patient dialogue, they will learn what reassures the bountiful God has distributed among the nations. At the same time they should strive to illumine those riches with the light of the Gospel, to liberate them and bring them under the dominion of God the Saviour.⁴⁹⁶

The Council sought to establish its open pastoral approach on some doctrinal foundations and tried to eliminate the ancient prejudices and negative assessments regarding other religious traditions. In this task, the Council pointed out the positive values and divine endowments contained, not only in the followers of other religious traditions, but also in the religions themselves. Consequently, the attention began to shift from the salvation of the followers of other religions to the salvific value of the religious traditions themselves and the role that they play in the salvation of their members. The Council's doctrine on other religions has met with varying interpretations from minimal and maximal to a balanced critical praises.⁴⁹⁷ We consider below a few theologians in this regard.

4.6.1.1 Minimalist appraisal

4.6.1.1.1 Paul Hacker

In his work, *Theological Foundations of Evangelisation*, Paul Hacker, a distinguished Catholic missiologist from Münster, calls attention to the negative aspects of the Council's assessment of non-Christian religions. He distinguishes two aspects of religion, one human or anthropological, and the other theological and dogmatic. He concludes that just like Paul's discourse at Athens (Acts 17), so too the texts of the Council, if carefully analysed, are found to refer positively only to the "anthropological aspect of religion": "They describe religious efforts undertaken by men of various religions and they approve of the fact that men thus seek God; but they remain silent regarding the possibility of reaching the goal through these efforts, nor do they say anything about whether the myths contain truth or whether

⁴⁹⁶ *Ad Gentes*, 11.

⁴⁹⁷ For the present section on Minimalist, Maximalist and Balanced Critical Appraisal I have referred J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.165-70.

the rites and practices are in conformity with the will of God.”⁴⁹⁸ Accordingly, it makes rather impossible for the Council to say that “pagans are saved through their religions or that their religions as such have a salvific significance. The thesis of the ‘legitimacy’ of pagan religions has received no sanction or support by the Council.”⁴⁹⁹

4.6.1.1.2 Mikka Ruokanen

The Finnish Lutheran theologian Mikka Ruokanen is also equally negative regarding the Council’s appraisal of religions. In his viewpoint, in the Council, “a continuity seems to exist between non-Christian religions and the Christian truth. A possibility of the presence of God’s saving grace in other religions thus seems not to be totally excluded.” However, non-Christian religions “have no independent status as to revelation of the divine mystery; their religious truth must be related to the truth of Christianity.”⁵⁰⁰ Ruokanen understands that Council’s interpretation is in line with the “perfection or fulfilment theory so usual in postconciliar Catholic analysis of non-Christian religions.”⁵⁰¹ The theologian notes that the Council never speaks of “revelation” with reference to these religions. “In spite of nice positive formulations which seem to express respect towards various religious elements of non-Christian religions,” what is valued in them by the Council is, “their natural aspects, i.e., natural knowledge of the one personal Creator and natural law given by him.”⁵⁰² According to him, the Council fully acknowledges the moral good which can be found in the doctrinal concepts and moral practices of religions. But “in regard to *mysterium divinum*, non-Christian religions are still seekers of the truth.”⁵⁰³ Thus non-Christians “reflect the truth only insofar as their life is in accordance with natural knowledge of the one God and of natural moral law.” In other words, “non-

⁴⁹⁸ P. Hacker, *Theological Foundations of Evangelisation*, St. Augustin, Steyler Verlag, 1980, pp.73-75. For the present section on Minimalist, Maximalist and Balanced Critical Appraisal I have referred J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.165-70.

⁴⁹⁹ P. Hacker, *Theological Foundations of Evangelisation*, 1980, pp.72.

⁵⁰⁰ M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine on Non-Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council*, Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1992, p.61.

⁵⁰¹ M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine on Non-Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council*, 1992, p.61.

⁵⁰² M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine on Non-Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council*, 1992, p.68.

⁵⁰³ M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine on Non-Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council*, 1992, p.93.

Christian religions do not add any supernatural dimension of revelation or grace to the natural condition of man.”⁵⁰⁴

So the theological evaluation of Council’s teaching on other the religions is drawn to a conclusion, according to Ruokanen, by using a rather sympathetic language for the non-Christians. He says, the “important novelty of the Second Vatican Council in relation to non-Christians was the implementation of sympathetic language concerning them and the recognition of non-Christian religions as naturally good entities of human culture.”⁵⁰⁵ He says that the Council’s doctrine on non-Christian religions is “rather conservative and faithful to the accepted catholic dogma.”⁵⁰⁶

4.6.1.2 Maximalist appraisal

4.6.1.2.1 Pietro Rossano

The theologian P. Rossano (a native of Alba, Italy, a secretary of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christian religions), on the other hand, gives a very positive evaluation of Council’s doctrine on other religions. As early as 1965 he explains that, in the theology of religions, the question has to do with the value that belongs to the non-Christian religions as such. He asks, whether the complex socio-doctrinal realities of the religions can be considered as legitimate means of relating to God? Are they, then, providentially devised (*disposti*) by him as efficaciously promoting the salvation of their members?⁵⁰⁷ And later he does not hesitate to write, “[a]s for the salvific function of these religions, namely, whether they are or not paths of salvation, there is no doubt that “grace and truth” are given through Jesus Christ and by his Spirit (cf. John 1:17). Everything would lead to conclude, however, that gifts of “grace and truth” do reach or may reach the hearts of men and women through the

⁵⁰⁴ M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine on Non-Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council*, 1992, pp.99-100. However, as Jacques Dupuis notes, that Ruokanen’s interpretation of the Council is marred by a biased understanding of the working of divine grace. Ruokanen distinguishes between a “way of grace inherent in creation and in providence” and “the way of the universal supernatural grace, i.e., the specifically revealed Christological grace,” or equivalently, between “created common grace” and Christian grace. See, J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.166.

⁵⁰⁵ M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine on Non-Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council*, 1992, p.117.

⁵⁰⁶ M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic Doctrine on Non-Christian Religions according to the Second Vatican Council*, 1992, p.120.

⁵⁰⁷ See, P. Rossano, “Le religioni non cristiane nella storia della salvezza: Rassegna delle proposizioni teologiche attuali,” in *La scuola cattolica: Supplemento 2* 93, May-August, 1965, p.131.

visible, experiential signs of the various religions. Vatican II is explicit on this point.”⁵⁰⁸ Elsewhere Rossano writes,

It may be cautiously asserted that concrete elements of various religions or even, in the better cases, whole religious systems can be providential means and ways of salvation, to the extent that they reflect and give objective form to the light of the Word that enlightens every human being. It is clear, of course, that for a Christian Christ is the only way to salvation. The religions can be such a way to the extent that they receive and express the influence and enlightenment that come from Christ. This is the direction taken by the council in its statements on the matter (cf. AG 3, 11; NA 2; LG 16).⁵⁰⁹

4.6.1.2.2 Kurien Kunnumpuram

An Indian theologian, K. Kunnumpuram’s elaborate study on Council’s documents also goes in the same direction of Rossano. He points out that in view of its pastoral intent, the Council did not mean to pronounce on the debated question of the theological status of religions, but it does emphasize the existence of positive values in the traditions themselves, in their doctrines, their rites, their rules of life.⁵¹⁰ We may say that the Council never asks directly whether God makes use of the rites and doctrines of non-Christian religions for the salvation of their members and whether, consequently, they are “providential means of salvation” for them. But for the Council, God’s salvation of people is not a purely internal affair, for it says: “The universal design of God for the salvation of the human race is not carried out exclusively in the soul of people with a kind of secrecy.”⁵¹¹ Nor is salvation of people a purely private matter, for it always takes on a social form. That “seems to imply,” the author writes, that the members of other religious traditions “are, or can be, saved in and through their non-Christian religions. For them these religions are ways of salvation.”⁵¹² Kunnumpuram sums up,

The Second Vatican Council recognizes that non-Christian religions possess many positive values such as truth and goodness, grace and holiness. It regards these values as a sort of secret presence of God, as the seeds of the Word and the fruits of the Spirit. The council realises that these religions cannot be considered merely as natural religions, since they contain supernatural elements, even saving faith. Despite error, sin and human depravity, non-

⁵⁰⁸ P. Rossano, “Christ’s Lordship and Religious Pluralism in Roman Catholic Perspective,” in G. H. Anderson & T. F. Stransky (eds.), *Christ’s Lordship & Religious pluralism*, 1981, pp.102-3.

⁵⁰⁹ P. Rossano, “Theology and Religions: A Contemporary Problem,” in R. Latourelle and G. O’Collins (eds.), *Problems and Perspectives of Fundamental Theology*, NJ: Ramsey, 1982, p.305.

⁵¹⁰ See, K. Kunnumpuram, *Ways of Salvation: The Salvific Meaning of Non-Christian Religions according to the Teaching of Vatican II*, Poona: Pontifical Antheneum, 1971, p.66-68.

⁵¹¹ Ad Gentes, 3.

⁵¹² K. Kunnumpuram, *Ways of Salvation: The Salvific Meaning of Non-Christian Religions according to the Teaching of Vatican II*, 1971, pp.88-91.

Christian religions are a preparation for the Gospel, as they have an innate tendency, an inner dynamism towards Christ and his Church. For those who have not yet been existentially confronted with Christianity, non-Christian religions can be as ways of salvation, in the sense that God saves these men in and through the doctrines and practices of these religions.⁵¹³

4.6.1.3 A balanced critical appraisal

It is true that in the Council's teaching much of the terminology describing the Church's attitude towards other religions repeats terms familiar to the fulfilment theory: for example, to assume and to save, to heal and to restore, to ennoble and to bring to perfection. At the same time, the elements of truth and grace found as a sort of secret presence of God in the traditions themselves, or in their teachings, rites and ways of life, suggest that the Church moves towards the theory of the "presence of Christ's saving mystery." A balanced appraisal of the Council's doctrine on religions has to be at once positive and critical. We see here the balanced and critical position from two theologians Rahner and Maurier.

4.6.1.3.1 Karl Rahner

We have already stated earlier that the Council's teaching on other religions was primarily pastoral than doctrinal. The Council stated only the positive relationship that the other religions enjoy in God's universal plan of salvation, realised in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, through the universal action of the Holy Spirit. It did not explicitly state whether other religious traditions are ways of salvation and what kind of role they play in the salvation of other religious traditions. In Rahner's view, the Council's achievement consists of looking beyond the question of salvation of individual non-Christians to a positive relationship of the Church to the religions as such. However, while salvation in the actual self-gift of God for all people is looked upon with great optimism by the Council, the same optimism is not explicitly professed where religions are concerned. Therefore in the words of Rahner, "the essential problem for the theologian has been left open," and "the theological quality of non-Christian religions remains undefined." He asks, is salvation achieved by non-Christians outside the life of their religions as such, or within? Are the religions salvific in themselves or not. This question is not explicitly answered.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹³ K. Kunnumpuram, *Ways of Salvation: The Salvific Meaning of Non-Christian Religions according to the Teaching of Vatican II*, 1971, p.91.

⁵¹⁴ See, K. Rahner, "On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 18, 1984, p.290.

4.6.1.3.2 Henri Maurier

We also refer another theologian H. Maurier (a missionary in Africa) in this regard of the salvific role of the religions. He remarks that the Council's doctrine on religions in general are strongly "ecclesiocentric" and of *Nostra Aetate* in particular. The Church seems to recognize positive elements in other religions. But, are the "rays" of truth present in them necessarily be related to the fullness of it possessed by the Church? Or would the declaration be prepared to acknowledge in other religions the presence of rays of truth not found in the Church? The Church's way of thinking, as Maurier says, is "egocentric."⁵¹⁵ Such a perspective easily leads to the "fulfilment theory," according to which, insofar as the other religions represent the search of the human person for God, they become obsolete by the very fact of reaching their fulfilment.⁵¹⁶ In Maurier's opinion the Council wants to foster dialogue with other religions. But the question may be asked, whether the Council recognises, in this dialogue process, in other religions the authentic human values which Christianity does not possess. Only then is dialogue viable and meaningful. For, by definition, dialogue is a two-way process in which there is give-and-take. We need to ask if the Church from the teaching of the Council shows itself inclined to receive anything from other religions.⁵¹⁷

4.6.1.4. Conclusion on the Council's theological evaluation

The declaration *Nostra Aetate* places the meeting of the Church with the other religions in the broad context of the common origin and destiny of all people in God. There is a search, which is common to all religious traditions, to answer the ultimate questions that beset the human spirit, namely: "Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men."⁵¹⁸ Religions that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus, the great religious traditions of the world are portrayed as expressions of human longing to answer the most fundamental questions of human existence.

⁵¹⁵ H. Maurier, « Lecture de la Déclaration par un missionnaire d'Afrique, » in *Les relations de l'Eglise avec les religions non chrétiennes*, A.-M. Henry, Paris : Cerf, 1966, p.133-34.

⁵¹⁶ See, H. Maurier, « Lecture de la Déclaration par un missionnaire d'Afrique, » in *Les relations de l'Eglise avec les religions non chrétiennes*, A.-M. Henry, 1966, p.135.

⁵¹⁷ See, H. Maurier, « Lecture de la Déclaration par un missionnaire d'Afrique, » in *Les relations de l'Eglise avec les religions non chrétiennes*, A.-M. Henry, 1966, p.139-43.

⁵¹⁸ *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

The general assessment of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* regarding other religions and the subsequent attitude of the Church toward them is expressed as follows: The religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing “ways,” comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to himself (cf. 2Cor 5:18f). The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.⁵¹⁹

However, though the Council leaves unanswered the question regarding the manner in which the saving mystery of Jesus Christ operates in the other religious traditions, it accepts that it is through the operation of the Holy Spirit and without being separated from the action of Jesus Christ. And yet, it is clear to the Council that those traditions cannot be considered as channels of salvation for their followers without reference to the mystery of Jesus Christ, outside of whom there is no salvation. In short, the Council promoted a new attitude and a positive approach towards other religious traditions; but it did not commit itself to stating whether other religions can be means or ways of salvation for their followers. Thus, the Council left the question of the salvific significance of the other religious traditions unanswered. However, we need a correct theological evaluation of these traditions, in order to approach them with greater sensitivity and enrich ourselves from the spiritual and human values enshrined in them. The religious traditions, notwithstanding their positive values, reflect also the limitations of the human spirit, sometimes inclined to choose evil. An open and positive approach to other religious traditions cannot overlook the contradictions, which may exist between them and

⁵¹⁹ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

Christian revelation.⁵²⁰ Whether the religions as such can have salvific value is a matter open for our future theological investigation in the Christian theology of religions. We heartily accept Church's openness to dialogue with other religions and recognition of values and goodness in them.

4.6.2 Post-conciliar Theological Evaluation

4.6.2.1 Analysis on Pope Paul VI's dialogue and mission

The encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* marks the appearance of "dialogue" (here called colloquium) on the programme of the Church renewal intended by the Council. The Pope explains that the history of salvation is that of a continuous dialogue of God with humankind. And the Church finds itself in a privileged situation to enter into dialogue with the entire world – dialogue at a fourfold level – with the entire world, with other religions, with other Christian churches and within the Church. With regard to the dialogue with other religions or interreligious dialogue, the Pope is cautious in establishing the foundation and conditions of such dialogue on doctrinal considerations. He writes: "Obviously we cannot agree with these various forms of religions, nor can we adopt an indifferent or uncritical attitude toward them on the assumption that they are all to be regarded on an equal footing, and that there is no need for those who profess them to enquire whether or not God has Himself revealed definitively and infallibly how He wishes to be known, loved, and served."⁵²¹ We see that in spite of a rather positive evaluation of Non-Christian religions and positive and a cautious approach to dialogue in *Ecclesiam suam*, the Pope insists that Catholics must affirm theirs to be the one and only true religion. Not all religions are equal, he says, and he warns against any diminution of the principles of the Christian faith by attempting to create harmony among men and women of various religions through sacrificing the integrity of the Christian faith.⁵²² We may say, then, there is a "yes-no" stance towards Non-Christian religious traditions in this encyclical, a stance that will appear in the remarks coming from the Secretariat for Non-Christians.

⁵²⁰ See *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 31.

⁵²¹ *Ecclesiam suam*, 107.

⁵²² See *Ecclesiam suam*, 88. In number 107 the Pope comments "honesty compels us to declare openly our conviction that the Christian religion is the one and only true religion, and it is our hope that it will be acknowledged as such by all who look for God and worship him".

Secondly, the most influential Catholic document on mission after the council is *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Pope Paul VI. It has often been remarked that *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is the document that *Ad Gentes* was intended to have been. The Pope wondered what had happened to the “hidden energy” of the good news. He was convinced that the duty to evangelise is “incumbent by the command of the Lord Jesus, so that people can believe and be saved. This message is indeed necessary. It is unique. It cannot be replaced. It does not permit either indifference, syncretism or accommodation. It is a question of people’s salvation.... It is truth.”⁵²³ The Pope affirmed in bold terms the Christ-centered approach to evangelism: “There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed.”⁵²⁴ So on the one side we have respect for the moral and spiritual values of other religions and on the other side the exclusiveness of Christianity as the “one true religion.” Jacques Dupuis calls it “unequivocal.” He says that the refinements and nuances made by the Council do not soften Pope Paul VI’s affirmation of Christianity’s exclusive claims.⁵²⁵ He further notes that the images that other religions - stretch out their arms towards heaven while God bends towards humanity in Jesus Christ in response to human aspiration, and the distinction between the “highest forms of natural religions” and the religion of Jesus through which alone an “authentic and living relationship with God is truly established” – all this make it clear that the Pope is resuming here the “fulfilment theory” in its classical form.⁵²⁶ According to Dupuis, “Paul VI, who with the programmatic encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* had become the “pope of dialogue,” remains silent in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on the subject of interreligious dialogue.”⁵²⁷

⁵²³ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 5.

⁵²⁴ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22.

⁵²⁵ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.171.

⁵²⁶ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.172.

⁵²⁷ J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.173. For an assessment of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in the Asian context see Jacques Dupuis, “Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” in *Vidyajyothi*, 40, 1976, p.230, where he concludes: “The ‘fulfilment theory’ is thus exposed in its rigid form, without the refinements by which it has been softened in recent years thanks to much theological thinking. Members of non-Christian religions are mere ‘beneficiaries of evangelisation’, with nothing to communicate to Christians beyond the sincerity of their hearts. Such a stand is not without drawback; for in the present context of religious pluralism it makes dialogue rest on shaky ground and – more importantly still – establishes the Christian mission to non-Christians on a theological foundation which is no longer fully convincing. Thus is left undone the pressing task of explaining the mission, its need and urgency, in the context of a theology of non-Christian religions which for being more open would stand better the test of the encounter of religions and thereby gain more acceptance in mission lands.”

4.6.2.2 Analysis on Pope John Paul II's dialogue and mission

The singular contribution of Pope John Paul II to a “theology of religions” consists in his emphasis on the operative presence of the Spirit of God in the religious life of non-Christians and the religious traditions to which they belong. In his first encyclical letter, *Redemptor Hominis*, the Pope speaks of the “firm belief” of non-Christians as an “effect of the Spirit of truth,” and asks, “[d]oes it not sometimes happen that the firm belief of the followers of the non-Christian religions – a belief that is also an effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the mystical Body – can make Christians ashamed at often being themselves to disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church.”⁵²⁸ The encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, sees the presence of the Holy Spirit not only in people of good will but also in society and history, in peoples, in cultures and in religions. This universal action of the Holy Spirit that exist in other religious traditions cannot be separated from that of Jesus Christ or confused with the specific, peculiar action that develops in the body of Christ, which is the Church. It is the risen Christ who works in the hearts of the peoples through the Holy Spirit and it is same Spirit who distributes the seeds of word present in the religious rites and traditions.⁵²⁹ Given the action of the Spirit in and outside the Church, the Pope is able to show what unites all religions together, i.e. they are “so many reflections of the one truth.”⁵³⁰

Given this explicit recognition of the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the religions, the International Theological Commission states that one cannot exclude the possibility that they exercise as such a certain salvific function, that is, despite their ambiguity, they help men achieve their ultimate end. The relationship of man with the absolute, and with his transcendental dimension is explicitly thematised in the religions. It would be difficult to think what the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of men taken as individuals would have salvific value and not think that what the Holy Spirit works in the religions and cultures would not have such value.⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ *Redemptor Hominis*, 6.

⁵²⁹ See *Redemptoris Missio*, 28, 29.

⁵³⁰ *Redemptor Hominis*, 11.

⁵³¹ See International Theological Commission, “Christianity and the World Religions,” in *Origins*, 27: No.10, 1997, p. 161.

According to Pope John Paul II the Spirit unites all. It is the Spirit in John 3:8 (which “blows where he wills”) and the Holy Spirit in Rom 8:26 (the Holy Spirit who prays in us), that occurs often in the writings of Pope John Paul II. The Holy Spirit leads one to the authentic prayer. What brings together and unites the Christians and the believers of other religions is an acknowledgement of the need for prayer as an expression of human spirituality directed towards the Absolute.⁵³² Authentic prayer, human values and virtues, the treasures of wisdom hidden in the religious traditions, true dialogue and authentic encounter among their members, all these are many fruits of the active presence of the Spirit. We cannot forget the wonderful example that Pope John Paul II has given to us, as the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit, uniting all religions in prayer for peace at Assisi in 1986. In his opening words he says: “As religious leaders you have come here not for an interreligious conference on peace, where the emphasis would be on discussion or research for plans of action on a worldwide scale in favour of a common cause....It is the result of prayer, which, in the diversity of religions, expresses a relationship with a supreme power that surpasses our human capacities alone.”⁵³³ The Pope says, “[f]or the first time in history, we have come together from everywhere,” “[t]he form and content of our prayers are very different,” and yet, “in this very difference we have perhaps discovered anew that, regarding the problem of peace and its relation to religious commitment, there is something which binds us together.”⁵³⁴ In other words, here it is through prayer which is a working of the Spirit that the dialogue is promoted, the religions are brought together, that the need for repentance and interior transformation is required from all, and that the peace in the world is longed for.

While it is the working of the universal presence of the Holy Spirit that is significant in the teaching of Pope John Paul II with regard to other religions, it is also to be said that on the other hand that the Pope emphasises in his teaching on the mission of proclamation or evangelisation. There is a relationship of high esteem and respect to other religions, recognising elements of truth and grace not only in the individuals

⁵³² See Pope John Paul II, “The Message to the Peoples of Asia, Manila, February 21, 1981,” in F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p.239.

⁵³³ Pope John Paul II, “To Representatives of various Religions on the World Day of Prayer for Peace, Assisi, October 27, 1986,” in F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p.343.

⁵³⁴ Pope John Paul II, “To the Representatives of the Various Religions of the World at the Conclusion of the World Day of Peace, Assisi, October 27, 1986,” in F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, pp. 348-49.

of other religions but also in the religious tradition themselves, and that the world religions are all impregnated with innumerable “seeds of the Word” and can constitute a true “preparation for the Gospel,” but this does not mean that we sit quite and stop doing missionary work, for there is also a real command to proclaim Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world. The Pope reminds that “it is useful to point out once again that to proclaim the name of Jesus and to invite people to become his disciples in the Church is a sacred and major duty which the Church cannot neglect.”⁵³⁵ The encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, states: “In Christ God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love.”⁵³⁶

So in the teachings of Pope John Paul II there is an equal emphasis for both dialogue and proclamation, for he calls all Christians to be personally involved in these two ways of carrying out the one mission of the Church, namely proclamation and dialogue. To conclude we can say that there is an openness to other religious traditions and as well as reference to the “fulfilment theory” in Pope John Paul II’s teaching. In the apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, he states: “In Christ, religion is no longer a “blind search for God” (cf. Acts 17:27) but the response of faith to God who reveals himself...Christ is thus the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world’s religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion.”⁵³⁷ Jacques Dupuis comments that such a text visualises the fulfilment of the other religions in Jesus Christ and Christianity in terms of God’s self-communication in his Son incarnate in response to the universal human search for God expressed in the religious traditions, which seems to leave no room for recognizing in the other religious traditions themselves a divine initiative toward human beings, no matter how incomplete they are. But at the same time, as Dupuis notes, a door seems to be timidly opened in his teaching, for the first time, for the recognition on the part of the Church authority of a “participated mediation” of religious traditions in the salvation of their members. With such a statement we seem to be definitely moving from the “fulfilment theory” to that of an active presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ in the traditions themselves.⁵³⁸ The “participated mediation” of religious

⁵³⁵ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 76.

⁵³⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

⁵³⁷ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 6.

⁵³⁸ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.178-79. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* refers John Paul II’s emphasis to the mystery of unity which is

traditions which Dupuis refers here seems to be seen “in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious tradition and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their saviour.”⁵³⁹ So Pope John Paul II, principally with his emphasis on the universal active presence of the Spirit of God in the religious traditions themselves, is more positive and shows a greater disposition towards a broader perspective, without, however, clearly going beyond the preconciliar understanding of fulfilment.⁵⁴⁰

4.6.2.3 As Conclusion: Theological foundation for dialogue

To sum up this chapter, let us conclude with some thoughts on theological foundations for dialogue. There is only one God, who created all men and women, maker of heaven and earth. He is a God of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and all religions and peoples. There is unity of human nature, which is the same in all. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* recalls the “mystery of unity” based on the common origin and destiny of humankind in God, on universal salvation in Jesus Christ, and on the active presence of the Spirit in all.⁵⁴¹ All are saved or there is salvation to all in Jesus Christ through His Spirit. But the mystery of salvation reaches out to other religions in a way known to God, through the invisible action of the Spirit of Christ. Therefore it is very important for us to note for the theological foundation for the dialogue that there is salvation for all in the mystery of the unity, i.e. the unity of God with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to all mankind. And so all are included in God’s universal plan of salvation.

It is also important to note that the members of other religions are saved by Christ not in spite of or besides their own tradition but in it and in some mysterious way through it. *Dialogue and Proclamation* assigns a positive role to the traditions

brought about by the universal presence of the Holy Spirit: “every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person, Christian or otherwise,” see 27-29.

⁵³⁹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

⁵⁴⁰ See J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.178.

⁵⁴¹ See *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 28. Pope John Paul II speaks to the Roman Curia in 1986 after the Assisi-Prayer for peace event, about the mystery of unity in the relationship with Jews, Muslims and those who “Seek a God Unknown.” The “mystery of unity, (is) both the unity already attained in Christ through faith and Baptism and the unity which is expressed in the condition of being “oriented” toward the people of God and hence is still to be attained perfectly,” see F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p.363.

themselves in the salvation of their members. It states that it is “in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions” that they respond positively to God’s offer of grace.⁵⁴² That does not however mean that everything in the other religious traditions can be conducive to the salvation of their members. The same document further states that not everything in other religious traditions is the result of grace, nor do they contain only positive values, for sin has been at work in the world, and the traditions “reflect the limitations of the spirit, sometimes inclined to choose evil.”⁵⁴³ The Church is committed to interreligious dialogue, and extends her hand to all religions with respect and love.

⁵⁴² See *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29.

⁵⁴³ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 31.

Chapter Five

Praxis of Interreligious Dialogue

5.1 Introduction

Having analysed Christian exclusivistic, inclusivistic and pluralistic approaches from biblical, historical and theological perspective to other religions and having looked into the official teaching of the Catholic Church on other religions, we now examine the practicability of the relationship of Christians to other believers. We analyse the claims from exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism in view of Christian faith and religious life of other believers. We present this chapter in five sections: We look into the living of Christians and other believers or their religious perspective, the pastoral concern in encountering other religions; we analyse Christian exclusive, inclusive and pluralistic claims, the praxis of interreligious dialogue, and the pastoral criteria for interreligious dialogue.

5.2 Present Religious Perspective: The Christian and other believer

The Christian professes his faith in Jesus Christ, experiences Him in the sacraments through the Church, and further tries to witness Christ in his daily life and activities. He finds meaning in life because of his faith, and to a larger extent because of his faith in Jesus Christ he has that inner peace and meaning in life. It is his Christian faith that he believes Jesus Christ is the saviour and that he has salvation only in Him. He comes to this understanding and experience from the teachings in Bible, Traditions and from Church. These teachings help him to get closer to a more personal experience of Jesus, which again strengthens his faith in Jesus. A Christian looks at Christianity as one which is in great need of Christ's service to the world. And this is evident from Christianity's engagement in the field of dialogue and human development.

Today a Christian lives side by side with members of other religions. They also have to a certain extent a peaceful co-existence. When the Church bells are rung for spiritual duties, one also hears the bells in the Hindu temples and a call from the Mosques. When a Christian finds peace through his faith in Jesus Christ, he also

sees and experiences the peace and joy of a Hindu or Muslim in their respective faiths. A Christian and a believer from other religion are religious. Reality is experiential. God or divine experience is the aim of the religious person. As a result of modern communication and intercultural exchange and mobility the plurality of religions and cultures has become “an experiential reality to everybody.”⁵⁴⁴ Today every second person beside a Christian belongs to other religions. Besides Churches where a Christian finds his religious fulfilment, we have temples, Mosques, Gurudwaras and other religious meeting places where the members of their respective religions find meaning and religious fulfilment in life. And they are proud of their religious practices and duties. The present religious perspective of a believer is to seek answers to life and death. The answers are sought differently in different religions. We look into the section below a day-to-day reflection of the life of the Christian and the other believer and their relationship to each other.

5.2.1 The Christian and other believer as human persons

The Christian who enters into dialogue knows himself not only as a Christian but also as a human person. As a person he knows himself as God’s gift, a sign of God’s love in this world, limited in the life with which he is endowed, yet open to continual growth, destined to eternal life and called to communion with the infinite. Moreover, he knows that the promise of Infinity that his life holds will be frustrated if he does not relate himself to his immediately surrounding world, and above all to his brothers and sisters. His life is therefore essentially a gift to be shared, and it blossoms by giving. In fellowship alone does he become a person, and dialogue is therefore the law of his being, that Ineffable Mystery who is his final goal constantly beckons him to step outside of himself and meet Him in other persons. His call is therefore to live and grow in the community of men and women, in constant dialogue with them, and to build up with them a world of brotherhood and friendship. And he knows that he will fail in his vocation as a person if he consciously cuts off even a single individual from the embrace of his heart.⁵⁴⁵ As a person the Christian has a duty to relate himself to all, believers or non-believers. He has to be part of a community of love and brotherhood. Since he knows that he is

⁵⁴⁴ M. Seckler, “Theologie der Religionen mit Fragezeichen,” in *Theologische Quartierschrift* 166, 1986, p.168.

⁵⁴⁵ See, The Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, 1977, no. 8.

God's gift, a sign of God's love, he also ought to know that he has to share God's love with all the people in the community.

The World Council of Churches in its guidelines states,

The Christian community within the human community has a common heritage and a distinctive message to share; it needs therefore to reflect upon the nature of the community Christians seek together with others and upon the relation of dialogue to the life of the churches, as they ask themselves how they can be communities of service and witness without diluting their faith or compromising their commitment to the Triune God.⁵⁴⁶

As a human community or as human persons both the Christian and the other believer have in common one origin and one end. As human persons there is a longing to meet the human and as well as the divine. The human person is not an isolated person but is born in union – union with fellow being and with God. There is a longing for interrelatedness. And this inter-relatedness of human communities “brings with it many new challenges to mutual concern and pastoral care, the response to which, both individually and collectively as communities, will determine the character of the reality of “the community of humankind.”⁵⁴⁷

5.2.2 The Christian and other believer as spiritual persons

There is a search, which is common to all religious traditions, to answer the ultimate questions that beset the human spirit, namely, “[m]en expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men.”⁵⁴⁸ The religions try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing “ways,” comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The long existence of many religions even to this day is no doubt to answer the ultimate questions of life and death, and the meaning of existence here on earth.

The Christian knows that God desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (cf. 1 Tim 2: 4) and that in this effective will of God all men are called in Christ to become heirs to the Kingdom. He knows that God continually bears witness to His nature and love to all men (cf. Acts 14.17) in diverse ways and

⁵⁴⁶ *Guidelines on Dialogue*, WCC Publications, 1993, p.7.

⁵⁴⁷ *Guidelines on Dialogue*, WCC Publications, 1993, p.11.

⁵⁴⁸ *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

at various times (cf. Heb. 1.1). The Christian knows that God has revealed himself once and for all in Jesus Christ for all mankind. The Christian bears witness to this and indeed shares this message with all. But how in practice the revelation and grace of God has reached the individual partner of dialogue, how he understands himself and his relation to the God or the divine, what have been the steps along which this man has grown within his tradition in the knowledge and love of the Absolute or divine - the progressive discovery of all this will be one of the joys of the dialogue itself. The Christian will not impose pre-conceived patterns on any partner, but with sympathy and love will encourage him to describe his faith in his own words. In turn the Christian will be prepared to tell the other man the meaning and value he sets on his own Christian faith.⁵⁴⁹

It is believer's intimate relationship to God or Absolute, or the experience of prayer that must lead him to relationship with other believers. Prayer is one of the deepest experiences of the human heart. When we pray we open ourselves to the mysterious oneness not only with God but also with others. So prayer is the greatest binding force which unites us at the deepest level. Inter-religious dialogue is a work of the Spirit in all the participants. A deep experience of God is especially necessary if Christians are to enter into a truly fraternal relationship in the spirit with their fellowmen whose own religious traditions are also profoundly characterised by a sense of interiority and prayer which makes them keenly aware of the immanence of God in themselves and in all things.⁵⁵⁰ Mahatma Gandhi said: "Prayer is the greatest binding force, making for the solidarity and oneness of the human family. If a person realises his unity with God through prayer, he will look upon everybody as himself. There will be no high, no low no narrow provincialisms or petty rivalries... Above all, realisation of God must mean freedom from all earthly fear."⁵⁵¹

It is our experience that in religions believers come together and seek spiritual nourishment. Mahathma Gandhi said, "I believe that prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and, therefore, prayer must be the very core of the life of man,

⁵⁴⁹ See, The Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, 1977, no. 13.

⁵⁵⁰ See, The Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, 1977, no. 25.

⁵⁵¹ A. T. Hingorani (ed.), *Food For The Soul by M.K.Gandhi*, Ahamadabad: Navajivan Trust, 1998, fourth edition, p.70-71.

for no man can live without religion. There are some who, in the egotism of their reason, declare that they have nothing to do with religion. But it is like a man saying that he breathes, but that he has no nose.”⁵⁵²

The Christian must also be very humble, for he knows that, though graced with the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, his spiritual life is not perfect, his knowledge is incomplete, his union with God partial. He also ought to realise that he can constantly learn from others because the Spirit of God can speak to him through any of his brothers or sisters professing other religions. In this spirit of humility he enters into dialogue as a pilgrimage of hope, and so he will avoid claiming any position of superiority or special privilege, either for himself or for the Church.⁵⁵³ The Christian must always remember that Jesus Christ “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2.6-7). Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. These thoughts would encourage the Christian in his dialogue with the believers of other religions to present an approach of love, service, humility and dependence on God. The believer, whether Christian or not, looks at God or the divine through his religious activities and becomes aware of his own helplessness. The realisation that a man is imperfect, that he needs to depend on God, that he needs his fellow beings is indeed to realise that dialogue with one another as necessary and as promoting brotherhood.

5.2.3 The Christian and other believer in differences

The commonness of all people is seen in their origin as human beings, as children of God, in bearing the image of God, as imperfect beings and in need of God, as brothers and sisters trying to reach out one another in need. These and many other commonalities between believers of different religions do not and ought not take away the differences between them. The differences add to the beauty of the glory of God. In interreligious dialogue it is a responsibility to take seriously the religious differences. In an important study of religious tolerance, the philosopher Jay Newman writes: “The teachings of Judaism and Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, Catholicism and Methodism, are, though significantly similar in many areas, far

⁵⁵² A. T. Hingorani (ed.), *Food For The Soul by M.K.Gandhi*, 1998, fourth edition, p. 1.

⁵⁵³ See, The Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, 1977, no. 29.

from identical. If religious creeds are worth taking seriously, then the differences between one creed and another are worth taking seriously.’⁵⁵⁴

It is in faith through one’s religion a human being has always looked for an answer to his ultimate questions of life and death. Through one’s faith he experiences something which is otherwise rather not possible. One may call it a divine-experience or God-experience, or a saving experience. He moulds his life according to this religious experience, and in that he finds elements of truth, while the ultimate or the only truth is God himself. A religion, through the scriptures, traditions, and teachings strengthens further the divine experience. But perhaps the problems begin to arise in religions when various religions compete among themselves to own that ultimate truth and salvation for itself, and to dispose them from one religion or one religious point of view, thus claiming them totally for oneself. If we look into the history of religions in the past, there was always competition and struggle for superiority on the basis of different truth claims. And so in the plurality of religions and cultures it has been a subject matter of discussion as who is right and who is wrong, who has the truth and who doesn’t, what is good and what is bad. In the present world context, if a person rightly understands the true notion of religion as that of God-human relationship, he seeks sincerely through his religion that truth and defends it.

In the context of dialogue with other religions there are significant differences between religions, but dialogue is still possible with them. Judaism has a whole wealth of very ancient religious teaching and tradition over and above the books which Christians call the Old Testament. The Jews have had 2,000 years of history since the coming of Jesus. The notion of the Covenant (*berith*), or as special ‘chosen’ people is indeed very beloved for Christians. But that does not in itself take away the difference between Christians and Jews, for the Jews do not accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and still wait for his coming.

Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is probably the most difficult sphere of interreligious dialogue. Some of the difficulties spring from the memories of bitter wars and crusades. But the obstacles to dialogue are not just historical, political and

⁵⁵⁴ J. Newman, *Foundations of Religious Tolerance*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982, p.55.

cultural, they also arise from religious sphere. Both Christianity and Islam tend to be absolutist in their claims to possession of revealed truth.⁵⁵⁵ But this does not mean that dialogue is not possible. The word ‘Islam’ means ‘submission.’ At the heart of the Muslim faith lies the profound religious impulse of total surrender to the will of God. The strong sense of God’s total sovereignty, the utter conviction that all things are under God’s control, are also central to Christian belief.

In the Hindu and Buddhist traditions there is such an extraordinary richness and diversity that there can be no question of trying to encapsulate their teachings and values in a few paragraphs. It may not be easy at all to give universal response to such obvious questions as whether Hindus or Buddhists believe in a personal God or what priority they give to contemplation, or moral action, or religious devotions. The notion of ‘Karma’ or ‘enlightened person’ have their significant differences in these religions. Both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions have a strong emphasis on mysticism. Dialogue with the Hindu and Buddhist traditions can help us to listen to the inner voice which calls us to move inside, to sit still, to value meditation and the deep religious peace which it brings.⁵⁵⁶

The question that is often raised is that while we accept the commonness and differences between religions, do we really take the religious other seriously? J.N. Dinoa states that “recognising differences is not equivalent to promoting discord. It is a way of taking other religious people seriously.”⁵⁵⁷ If Christianity proclaims salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Buddhism the ‘nirvana’ through the eight-fold path, and Hinduism Dharma to its adherents, we do in fact have differences. Therefore the situation is that every religion proclaims to its adherents its understanding of truth and salvation. The result naturally is a variety and conflicting claims in religions.

The disorders and dangers in the world, the uncertainty of the future, the questions of the origin and goal, the sense and purpose of life, the yearning for peace, salvation, happiness and fulfilment – all these, each in its own way, bind together

⁵⁵⁵ For e.g. Koran’s rejection of the Trinity – Sura IV, 165 in A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, London: OUP, 1964, p. 97.

⁵⁵⁶ See D. Dorr, *Mission in Today’s World*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000, pp.32-33.

⁵⁵⁷ J. A. Dinoa, O.P., *The Diversity of Religions, A Christian Perspective*, Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992, p.169.

the men and women of all times and peoples in spite of their religious differences. These questions belong together to humanity, perhaps even to being human, but in any case to the concrete history of the world as far back as we can follow it as the history of humankind. In this all human beings are “on the way.” In the history of religion “way” has long been another name for “religion.”⁵⁵⁸ The characteristics of human life as being on the way can then also serve as a starting point of religious consciousness common to all religions. The human person is a pilgrim on earth and is on his way searching in the context of his religion happiness, fulfilment and meaning. But in his encounter with other religions he is aware of the differences of truth claims. In the conflicting truth claim situation, while it is important not to forget the differences, it is also rather extremely important to draw for a world of today the so called ‘commonness’ in the religions. It is not of synchronising of religions. It is not to lose one’s identity. It is in no way of reducing, for example, Christian’s faith in Jesus Christ. It is rather in faith and love coming closer to God and to his people. The desire to come to God and to experience him is something that which we can not miss in religions today. We witness this at great religious festivals. Experiencing God in diverse ways is the common element in religions today. It is in appreciating the religiosity and faith that should help us here to build a pastoral programme for inter-faith relationship and dialogue.

5.3 Present Pastoral concern

5.3.1 Official teaching of the Catholic Church in its pastoral concern: an overview

From the existence of many religions side by side, it is fitting to recall the document the Declaration on the Church’s Relations to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*. This document was a latecomer in the Council’s work. It appeared only during the third session of the Council (1964), in the third draft of a document to be appended to the Schema on the Church.⁵⁵⁹ Initially the Council, under the lead of Pope John XXIII, had only intended to append to the Decree on ecumenism a statement which would help create a new climate in the tense relations between Christians and Jews. But, because of the request made by some bishops from

⁵⁵⁸ See H. Waldenfels, „Heil/Heilsweg” I, pp.243 f., and „Weg,” p.698, as well as further discussion of Hans Waldenfels on pp.349-354, in H. Waldenfels, (ed.), *Lexikon der Religionen*, Freiburg, second edition, 1988.

⁵⁵⁹ For the history of the document *Nostra Aetate*, see G.M. Cottier, “L’historique de la declaration,” in *Les relations de l’Eglise avec les religions non chretiennes: Declaration Nostra Aetate*, ed. A. M. Henry, 1966, pp.37-78.

predominantly non-Christian countries, the scope of the document was broadened to include other religions, besides Judaism. This shows very much how the Fathers at the Council were concerned about the non-Christian countries. It was rather a pastoral concern, a relationship of Christians with other believers. The Council's intention in *Nostra Aetate* consists in exhorting all to overcome divisions and to foster friendly relation,⁵⁶⁰ be based on what all people "have in common, (which) tends to promote fellowship among them."⁵⁶¹ Thus the non-doctrinal, concrete, and pastoral intent of the document is clear. This does not mean that the Council's concern on religions is purely pragmatic and devoid of any doctrinal significance. For the Council was bound to establish its open pastoral approach on some doctrinal foundation. The ancient prejudices and negative assessments had to be destroyed, and this could be done only by pointing to positive values in the other religions. For the first time in the conciliar history, the Council had to speak and did so in a positive manner, about the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions as such.⁵⁶²

The same pastoral interest has continued throughout later documents as well, reminding that Christians should establish relationships of respect and love with members of other religions. Christians should bear witness to Christ and enter into dialogue with other religions.⁵⁶³ *Gaudium et Spes* called on the part of Church in her pastoral mission that Church must respect everything that is good, must have respect for those who profess other religions.⁵⁶⁴ In our interreligious relationship, *Dignitatis Humane* reminds that the Council declares the right to religious freedom, which is based in the very dignity of the human person.⁵⁶⁵

The recent encyclical, *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA) devotes its first chapter to an exploration of the concrete situation in contemporary Asia – her religious, cultural, economic, social, political, and historical realities. As EA notes, "Asia is the earth's largest continent and is home to nearly two-thirds of the world's population," its variety of peoples are "heirs to ancient cultures, religions and traditions." One is

⁵⁶⁰ *Nostra Aetate*, 5.

⁵⁶¹ *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

⁵⁶² J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.160.

⁵⁶³ See *Ad Gentes*, 11, 16.

⁵⁶⁴ See *Gaudium et Spes*, 73 and 42.

⁵⁶⁵ See *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.

amazed “at the sheer size of Asia’s population and at the intricate mosaic of its many cultures, languages, beliefs and traditions. Asia is “the cradle of the world’s major religions” and “the birthplace of many...spiritual traditions.”⁵⁶⁶ Economically, socially, and politically, “situations on the Asian continent are very diverse, defying any simple classification.”⁵⁶⁷ EA highlights various concrete pastoral concerns: rapid change, migration, nuclear power, tourism, population growth, poverty, women, and a host of additional challenges. In this complex situation, the Church’s one ambition is to continue Christ’s mission of service and love.⁵⁶⁸ Her approach is that of mutual exchange and enrichment; thus EA confirms “the importance of dialogue as a characteristic mode of the Church’s life in Asia.”⁵⁶⁹ Mother Teresa of Calcutta is proposed as “an icon of the service to life which the Church is offering in Asia... [because of] her loving and selfless care of the poorest of the poor.”⁵⁷⁰ Three chapters in EA, focussing on Jesus and the Spirit, describe the “doctrinal” orientation of the Church’s Asian mission. Yet, the manner of presentation is decidedly “pastoral” in style and focus. It blends theologies “from below” and “from above.” It reads easily; the language flow is smooth; inclusive expression is partially employed. Some insights even enjoy poetic expression: “Contemplating Jesus in his human nature, the peoples of Asia find their deepest questions answered, their hopes fulfilled, their dignity uplifted and their despair conquered.”⁵⁷¹

Therefore we say that the official teaching of the Catholic Church so far has promoted a very positive relationship to other religions, or interreligious relationship has taken a more pastoral approach than a doctrinal thesis.⁵⁷² It is a relationship of love, respect and friendship. It is a relationship where Christians may share their joys and sorrows with others, giving witness to Christian life, a life that is of service and love. To grow in that relationship we shall see from an Indian context in the sub-section below, how a Christian is to a large extent situated amidst other religions.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 6.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 7.

⁵⁶⁸ See *Ecclesia in Asia*, 50.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 3.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 7.

⁵⁷¹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, 14.

⁵⁷² See the interview of Ilaria Morali with Zenith, titled as “Misunderstandings about Interreligious dialogue,” where he speaks of the teachings of Vatican II on Dialogue in terms of rather pastoral in nature, Rome, Jan. 14, 2005, at zenith.org, (access 15.01.2005) and Jan.16, 2005, at zenith.org, (access 17.05.2005). Ilaria Morali is a specialist in Theology of Grace at Gregorian University in Rome.

5.3.2 Christians amidst other religions: the Indian context

India is religiously and culturally a fertile field. In India Christianity is just 2.2% whereas 82% Hinduism and 11% Islam, 1.5% Buddhism, 0.5% Jainism and Sikhism, and there are also other minor religions. The Churches exist alongside Temples, Mosques, Gurudwaras and other worshipping places. It is a fact today that we live in the pluralistic world. There is a plurality of religions and cultures. To a certain extent there is a peaceful co-existence. There are religious provocations, tensions and bitterness based on the past injuries but there is also tolerance.

Over the last few decades, the religious existence in India has also shown a tremendous improvement in their co-existence. There are many interreligious centres, movements, and projects. Academic studies in interreligious field are growing. People look for a broader perspective in religions than to limit oneself to an individual religion. People like one another and love one another. They undertake common projects and work for the betterment of the society. They cherish their moral and spiritual values and work for peace. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and corruption being some of the significant preoccupations, the interreligious centres see the urgent need to work together. In the context of growing secularisation, these centres see the need for spiritual upliftment of the people. That is a general picture of religious existence of present day in India.

Along with religious co-existence there is a big gap between the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate. While the rich grow in their richness, the poor remain poor or destined to living in utter humiliating situations. It is a question of survival of the poor. There is the problem of caste system, social injustices such as gender discrimination and selective abortions, the burning of widows in some cases (sati system in Hindu tradition) exist today. The Church is aware today more than ever that the “joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”⁵⁷³ The call to follow Christ is directly linked to the life-situation of the people. To follow Jesus is to enter into the life-situation of people. Jesus’ becoming flesh or ‘one among us’ needs to be

⁵⁷³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

realised in the concrete living of a Christian, in his relation to other religious members and to their religious traditions.

The pastoral situation very often encounters not only members of other religions, but also Christians in seeking faith and in great need of help. As a result of the encountering of other religions, more and more Christians take challenge to experience the truth and goodness of other religions. In this context we very often come across Christians who already experience some sort of satisfaction and joy in other ways of the religions, and overwhelmed by these experiences they are also at stake in their own Christian faith. Thus in the context of cherishing relationship with other religions, it is also very important for the working of the practical theology to cherish and nourish the Christian faith amidst its relationship and dialogue with other religions. We may ask here, how can I be a true Christian if I can not protect and live my own Christian faith? And therefore it is my first duty to live my Christian faith to the full and then seek relationship and dialogue with other religions.

5.4 Practical analysis of exclusive, inclusive and pluralistic claims

5.4.1 Exclusivism in practical Christian life

No doubt, exclusivist approach has defended Christian faith to the full. But it has condemned other religions. This approach does not fit in with present pastoral situation. We say that it is not pastoral to approach other religions as unbelief, or to say that their culture, their religious statues connected to evil, thus making them guilty of their life condemned to fire and hell, and working with them as inferiors or strangers. It may not be totally wrong to say that the exclusivist approach to Christian attitude to other religions suits rather to colonial power. As Stanley Samartha says, the unanswered question in colonialism is “about the enduring power of this illusion that enables one religion or one culture or one ideology to make exclusive claims on its behalf, thus condemning other peoples, cultures and religions to an inferior status to be humiliated, dominated, exploited, and conquered, not just physically, but spiritually as well.”⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷⁴ S. J. Samartha, *One Christ - Many Religions*, New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1991, p.3.

5.4.1.1 Christian mission in the context of exclusivism

The “World Mission Conference of Edinburgh” of 1910 desired definite and practical results, and was concerned with the following eight points: to bring the Good News to the whole non-Christian world; the Church as sacrament in which this mission is realised; the training relating to the christianisation of national life; the importance of Mission for non-Christians; the training of Missionaries; the native foundation of missions; the relation of missions to the Governments; and the co-ordination and promotion of unity. The Conference directed its main attention to the “Church in the field of Missions.” As most of the commentators of this Conference state that theologically speaking this Conference had a great world vision: “The whole world is a missionary field and there is no Church, which is not in the field of Missions.”⁵⁷⁵

The missionary zeal- the Proclamation of the Gospel – in the twentieth century resulted great fruits and expansion of the Church. But it was confronted with many challenges, like social, political, religious, cultural systems of each place. The missionary work was appreciated for its great job of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, but was not appreciated for its cultural alienation and colonial system of the West. The expansion of Christianity coincided with the European Colonialism and the missionary set out from Europe with a sense of superiority in culture, religion, education, technique; he was the all-giver and had nothing to receive. The success of the Church was measured in terms of non-Christians baptized. Church life and its structure as it had developed in Europe was transplanted root and branch to the lives of people of distant lands.⁵⁷⁶

Christian missions engaged themselves in an impressive variety of works like orphanages, hospitals, dispensaries, homes for the widows and the aged, leper asylums, schools for the blind and the deaf. The mission conducted hostels, technical, agricultural and industrial schools. The mission has brought to the people a great human awareness. The Church owes praises to the great good works of the missionaries. Their life was a witness to the Gospel, was a witness to the words of Jesus: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and

⁵⁷⁵ C. Colaco, *25 Years „Ad Gentes“ In India*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1991, pp.5-7.

⁵⁷⁶ See C. Colaco, *25 Years „Ad Gentes“ In India*, 1991, pp.13-14.

recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk.4:18-19).

Today in a multi-religious and cultural world, the exclusive mission of proclaiming Salvation only through the Church, poses rather a problematic situation. All other religions or all other ways of following God would naturally be a wrong way to the person who thinks that only through the visible Church one can be saved. The problems remain unsolved if I go on saying that my own religion is true and all others are not true, or I alone am right and all others are wrong, or if I say that I alone enter heaven while I am a Christian or Catholic and all others perish into eternal fire while they haven’t entered the visible Church or they haven’t known Jesus Christ. Analysing the ‘Lineamenta for the Asian Synod’ where the mission is presented as leading all people to Jesus Christ, Kuncheria Pathil asks:

What is the meaning of leading all people to Jesus Christ? Should it necessarily mean that Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims are asked to renounce their religion and accept Christianity? Or, could it mean a purification of all faiths in an encounter with Christ and His Gospel? What is the meaning and message of Jesus Christ in a religiously pluralistic world? What is the meaning of leading people to Jesus Christ? Should it mean that people of all religions have to accept Him as the One and Only Saviour? All these questions have to be investigated.⁵⁷⁷

5.4.1.2 Exclusive claims and Inter-religious Dialogue

The exclusivist theology of religions has come to represent the most definitive of all the theories in this field. It appeals to what for many is a self-evident biblical witness. It gives a central function to the person of Jesus Christ. The question remains however for our consideration: is the exclusivist theory an appropriate response to the knowledge that we have about the world religions? Alan Race says, ultimately it is possible to claim that the exclusivist theory functions independently of the knowledge of other faiths. If Christianity rests on true Revelation, it argues, then by logical inference the other faiths of mankind must be false or illusory. But is it permissible in theological argument to deal with the mystery of God and man’s relationship to him in so hasty a manner?⁵⁷⁸ We state here some opinions of different authors in this regard.

⁵⁷⁷ K. Pathil, “Lineamenta for the Asian Synod: Some Observations and Comments,” in *Jeevadhara – a Journal of Christian Interpretation*, K. Pathil (ed.), Vol. XXVII No.160, July 1997, p.254.

⁵⁷⁸ See A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 1983, p.25.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith has made an interesting comment on this application from logical inference: “It is too far sweeping to condemn the greater majority of mankind to lives of utter meaninglessness and perhaps to Hell, simply on the basis of what seems to some individuals the force of logic.”⁵⁷⁹

With regard to the axiom, ‘Outside the Church no Salvation’, Hans Küng made an important observation that “whenever this axiom in its negative formulation has been taken in the absolutely literal sense of the words it has led to heresy.”⁵⁸⁰

Pope Pius IX was the first to state positively and officially that ignorance of the Gospel does not place a person outside the divine gifts of grace: “The gifts of heavenly grace will assuredly not be denied to those who sincerely want and pray for refreshment by the divine light.”⁵⁸¹

Lesslie Newbegin says that the Christian theology of religions requires Christians to be prepared to learn from other faiths and ideologies as they encounter each other in dialogue: “The whole Church itself is only learning, and it has to learn through open and humble dialogue with men and women who do not acknowledge him.”⁵⁸²

The exclusivist theory, as we have considered from Karl Barth and Leonard Leeney see the declaration of the absoluteness of Jesus Christ and salvation through the Church. All that we have considered in Christian exclusivism is Jesus Christ and Christianity, outside of which no one is saved. We ask a few questions here, can man not in some of his experiences and aspirations approach God without explicitly knowing Jesus Christ and his Church? Does man outside the Church have faith, hope and love? Does man explicitly require baptism of water to enter heaven? When exclusivists answer that without explicit faith in Christ and baptism in the Church there is no salvation, we have a difficulty in inter religious dialogue, or a difficulty to dialogue with exclusivists.

Dialogue might indeed have a value in removing grounds for mutual suspicion and hostility that often arise through ignorance and misunderstanding of each other’s traditions. For so many centuries, to much extent, exclusivist theory was the only theory that has led Christianity to all the corners of the world. But today in the

⁵⁷⁹ W. C. Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, 1972, p.134.

⁵⁸⁰ H. Küng, “The world religions in God’s Plan of Salvation,” in J. Neuner (ed.), *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, 1967, p.31.

⁵⁸¹ Cited by H. küng, *ibid.*, pp.32f.

⁵⁸² L. Newbegin, *Christian Witness in a Plural Society*, BCC, 1977, p.9.

reawakening of the knowledge of different faith experiences in the world, how do we go about with exclusivist theory? John Taylor in his paper on ‘The Theological Basis of interfaith dialogue’ brings out clearly what is bound to be a central issue for anyone who has a deep commitment both to his or her own faith and to dialogue with others. He speaks of that which is “common to us all”, he means those points in every religion concerning which the believers are inwardly compelled to claim a universal significance and finality, and he goes on to plead with those who are looking for a quick reconciliation between different faiths: ‘leave us at least our capacity for categorical assertion, for that is what we have in common.’⁵⁸³ The conflicting ‘categorical assertions’ to which each attaches ‘a universal significance and finality’ are not about different realities but about the same reality. Therefore in the exclusivist approach to the interreligious dialogue, what is clearly called for, first of all, is a dialogue between religions which make conflicting categorical assertions. Secondly it is important to note here that this should not lead to faith being levelled down to an indifference in which anything worthy to be called a faith-commitment has been silently suppressed. And thirdly, dialogue here has to be one which involves a process of mutual learning and self-correction. It may not be totally wrong to say that all religions are exclusive in themselves. J. A. Dinoia views both the uniqueness of Christianity and as well of Buddhism in ‘*The Diversity of religions.*’ Both have their own categorical assertions. If Christianity has Jesus Christ and the Church as a door to Salvation, Buddhism has its eight fold path and Dharma as unique and absolute to its religion. The Dharma, writes the Mahayana Buddhist scholar Sangharakshita, is not “just one more path to Nirvana, but the underlying principle, the rationale, of all paths... Outside the dharma it is impossible to go, for it presents in their most universal, and hence in their most individual aspect, those teachings which in other religions are more often found in fragmentary and distorted forms.”⁵⁸⁴

5.4.1.3 Pastoral suggestions to the exclusivist approach

5.4.1.3.1 Seeing beyond oneself - beyond the visible Church

Jesus Christ whom we encounter in the Bible is a person of love and compassion. The whole picture of Jesus in the Bible is nothing but God’s love in flesh. He shows

⁵⁸³ See J. Taylor, “The Theological Basis of Interfaith Dialogue,” in J. Hick and B. Hebblethwaite (ed.), *Christianity and Other Religions*, Collins, 1980, pp.224-6.

⁵⁸⁴ Cited in J. A. Dinoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 1992, p.65.

overflowing mercy and compassion of God. He goes beyond himself not to condemn but to love and heal. Seeing Jesus Christ as model for everyone, in compassion and love, in an exclusive approach of Christianity to other religions, it would be rather proper and fit to see beyond oneself and try to experience also the other. In “self-emptying” God took the form of man, in self-giving a Christian can also experience the goodness of others. There is much to discover and to experience in life, and more of it is the goodness of the other person. The Christian must take a challenge to go beyond himself, enter into the other and experience the other. And it will be more pastoral if we Christians also listen to their stories of faith and life, while at the same time inviting them to listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What inter-religious dialogue would aim at in one’s exclusive religious position is to ask oneself to look outside, to open one’s eyes towards other faiths, traditions, cultures, and then from this perspective to look at oneself again. One ought to learn not just from a priori principle but also from a posteriori experiences.

5.4.1.3.2 Proclamation not as monologue but as dialogue

In a world that is increasingly interdependent there is a great need for dialogue and cooperation among believers. In the context of exclusivism proclaiming Salvation is a matter of giving, is a subject of monologue. Where only one religion is true, where the truth is only my truth or at least Christian truth, it seems to violate, as Raimundo Panikkar says, “the common human experience of the diversity of races, peoples, cultures, and ways of thinking, and tends to reduce everything to manageable parameters. It is a closed position.”⁵⁸⁵ Keeping in mind the Asian context of religious pluralism the Asian Bishops situate “the proclamation of Jesus Christ through dialogue and deeds.” At the meeting at Manila in 1970, the Bishops pledged to “an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that they may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development.”⁵⁸⁶ Dialogue is a broader activity that includes proclaiming and listening. From his longstanding and successful experience of dialogue in Varanasi, the holy city of Hinduism, Ignatius Puthiadam says, “If proclamation is

⁵⁸⁵ R. Panikkar, “Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge,” in *Religious Pluralism*, Leroy S. Rouser (ed.), 1984, p.102.

⁵⁸⁶ J. Kavunkal, “Local Church in the FABC Statements,” in *Jeevadhara – A Journal of Christian Interpretation*, K. Pathil (ed.), Vol.XXVII No.160, July 1997, p.264.

not dialogical it degenerates into a meaningless monologue where no response is expected. Dialogue is not the denial of proclamation but its affirmation in a genuine Christian sense...” “Dialogue is by its nature an “announcing,” a “proclamation,” a “witnessing,” a “giving the reason for our hope.” From our Christian angle, every Christian dialogue partner is invited and invites the other to be converted... Dialogue is a “mutual proclamation” – it is a “mutual witnessing.” It is a mutual call to conversion.”⁵⁸⁷

5.4.2 Practical Analysis of inclusivist approach

Continuing from the pastoral analysis of the exclusive claims where we saw that exclusivist approach to a certain extent is a closed position to other religions, which may bring rather a negative feeling to other religions, we see in the inclusivist approach a certain openness to other religions, and rather a positive feeling towards them. Even though evidences existed in the Bible and the traditions for an inclusivist position, only in Vatican II one could say that this approach came to the limelight in the Christian understanding of other religions. If the exclusivist approach was a very clear approach to other religions in which no hurdle to the Christian mission and evangelisation existed (in a sense “no” to other religions), a series of questions do exist for the inclusivist position with regard to Christian mission and evangelisation. We shall analyse the pastoral perspective of the inclusivist approach with regard to Christian mission, working for the kingdom of God, spiritual experiences in religions and an openness to dialogue. Inclusivist approach is in a way a Catholic approach and can be traced from the official Catholic documents since Vatican II.

5.4.2.1 Christian Mission from the inclusivist perspective

Is Christian mission threatened? This was and is a natural question for this approach. This question was an immediate reaction to Karl Rahner’s “anonymous Christianity.” If other religions have elements of truth in them, if Christ is present in other religions, if their life is seen as authentic in their own religions, if their culture and art reflect certain values, if there is goodness above all, if the individuals in other religions stand in a positive and salvific relationship to God, and not least if there is divine experience, why do we need to evangelise them? One may say that the difference lies in that, that other religions do not have Christ as the only

⁵⁸⁷ I. Puthiadam, “Dialogue and Proclamation? Problem? Challenge? Grace-filled Dialectic?,” in *Vidyajyothi* 56, 1992, pp.306-7.

revelation of God. The other religions may not recognize Christ as the only revelation of God, but a Christian may see in other religions the mystery of Christ present in them. To put it in Rahner's words, the individual of other religion "who is justified even though he is a non-Christian is justified through the grace of Christ and through a faith, hope and love for God and mankind which are to be qualified as specifically Christian in a special sense."⁵⁸⁸ This statement from Rahner makes clear that in Christ one is saved, or Christ is the only revelation of God. The statement also makes clear that there is the presence of Christ in other religions too. From the Christian perspective of the mission one sees here in other religions only elements of truth. The mission of Jesus Christ is never threatened in this context, rather the salvation of Christ which was thought only within the Church, is also opened to everyone outside the Church too. This seeing of positive elements outside the boundary of the Church is to recognize Christ's presence and working in creation.

There is every reason for preaching the Gospel even when there is 'anonymous Christianity,' and precisely because of an 'anonymous Christian' there is all the more reason to preach the Gospel. The fullness of truth, the goodness of God is always to be evangelised. It is the command of Jesus Christ to proclaim the Gospel, to proclaim the kingdom of God. In a world of darkness, it is the duty of the Christian to bring light to the world, to make explicit what is implicit, to preach good news to all, including the Christians who may profess to be Christians but do not live it. The mission in an inclusivist approach may be twofold: recognizing the presence of Christ in Christians and in other religions, and secondly proclaiming the Gospel to all. The proclamation of the Gospel, again in Rahner's words, in the context of other religions, is to speak "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."⁵⁸⁹ Another area where pastoral mission of evangelisation can be realized is to see all men and women who are affected by grace in God's love. That means going beyond Christianity to the adherents of other religions and tracing in them God's love. As Rahner says, "perhaps we may only have looked too superficially and with too little love at non-Christian religions and

⁵⁸⁸ K. Rahner, "Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian,'" in *Theological Investigations*, Vol.14, 1976, p.282.

⁵⁸⁹ K. Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol.5, 1966, p.124.

so have not really seen them.”⁵⁹⁰ So understanding from the inclusivist position, the Christian mission is to enter into the person and community of other religions in order to experience in them God’s love, to recognize them as children of one God, to listen to their stories and finally to preach to them the kingdom of God’s love. The Christian mission is still very much needed as Rahner says, “it is nevertheless absolutely permissible for the Christian himself to interpret this non-Christianity as Christianity of an anonymous kind which he does always go out to meet as a missionary, seeing it as a world which is to be brought to the explicit consciousness of what already belongs to it as a divine offer ... accepted unreflectedly and implicitly.”⁵⁹¹ Finally, evangelisation is necessary to bring the whole humanity into unified truth or as to say in line with Pannenberg to bring the whole of humanity into a union of mankind at the ‘eschaton’.

5.4.2.2 Working for the kingdom of God

The second contribution of this inclusivist approach in the practical field of theology is to be seen from working for the kingdom of God. The mission of Christianity is to proclaim the kingdom of God. But kingdom of God is a reality that can not be restricted to particular religions or identified only with the Church. The Asian Bishops understand the kingdom of God as the “salvific reality unto which the entire history is moving and in which all religions meet.”⁵⁹² Christian openness to other religions is necessarily seen today from the collaboration of different religions. There is a difference between Christians themselves as a community working for the kingdom of God and Christians working along with other religions for the kingdom of God. God’s love is being experienced today in every person regardless of caste and creed. It is a witness to God’s love in a wider sense. Acceptance as the children of one God and the hope that all have destiny in one God helps one to go ahead courageously to work for the kingdom of God. The core of Christ’s proclamation is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is being witnessed in terms of Jesus’ proclamation of it, “to preach the good news to the poor”, “to proclaim release to the captives and recovering sight to the blind, to set liberty to those who are oppressed”

⁵⁹⁰ K. Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol.5, 1966, p.133.

⁵⁹¹ K. Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol.5, 1966, p.133.

⁵⁹² S. Painadath, “Theological Perspectives of FABC on Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XXVII, No.160, pp.278-79.

(Lk.4:18). This message of Jesus is the core of many religions, to work for the good of people and thus to establish the kingdom of God. In the words of St. Paul, the kingdom of God is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Rom. 14:17-19). Today we can not close our eyes to the injustices and oppressions in the world, we can not be blind to the poverty – both spiritual and material. Liberation is a key word for the social actions today. The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are very few, and therefore it is necessary for inter-religious undertakings to work together for peace and justice in the world, and thus to establish the kingdom of God. One instance of this is the Tsunami incident. We see these days how people all over the world have come together to help those who are in great need, who have lost everything, who are suffering enormously. Religions have come together to work for the kingdom of God in love and in peace. Mosques, Churches, and Temples have become shelters for everyone who are affected in this incident. Many religions together have held prayer services, and experienced God’s helping hand in this situation.

5.4.2.3 The Spiritual experience

The practical applications of dogmatic theology to the concrete situations of daily Christian life gives a further experience that sometimes goes beyond the doctrinal statements. No doubt that it is from the experiences that the dogmatic theological statements often emerge, but when one enters into the field of experience it is something more than mere statements. It is also true that the experiences vary and it is difficult to form dogmatic statements out of these experiences. However that may be, the role of spiritual experience in other religions does need emphasis.

We have already seen the operation of grace in creation, the working of the Spirit in mankind and the presence of Christ in humanity. We also know from our own experience that the adherents of other religions have a divine or a spiritual experience. Spiritual experience can be termed as an experience in the Holy Spirit. Reading *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, we can note how Ignatius underscores the crucial role of spiritual experience in two little sentences which contain the very marrow of his spiritual pedagogy: “It is not much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but the inner experience and relish of reality” (*Sp. Exs.*2/5), and again, “if

in any point I find what I desire, there I will remain quietly, without any eagerness to go on till I have been satisfied” (*Sp. Exs.* 76/3). The author Herbert Alphonso who quotes this in his article on “Authentic Spiritual Experience” says that here “satisfied” must be understood as “fills and satisfies”. Ignatius focuses on “inner experience.” Here “interior knowledge” is “felt or experiential knowledge,” a “knowledge of the heart.”⁵⁹³ When it comes to their religious experience, the adherents of other religions may not in their religions explicitly profess Christ or speak in terms of Holy Spirit as from biblical point of view, but they certainly experience something that of Christ or of Holy Spirit as an inclusivist Christian sees it. It is a divine experience from which they draw strength for their life, in which they feel that they are satisfied, they feel that they experience something of God. There are many examples to this spiritual experience of Christ or the Holy Spirit in other religions, as witnessed by many Christian Sadhus and Sanyasins (disciples) for instance: life of Roberto De Nobili (1577-1656), Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907), Sadhu Sundhar Singh (1889-1929?), Julius Monchanin (Swami Param Arubi Anandam) (1895-1957), Henri Le Saux (Swami Abishiktananda) (1910-), Bede Griffiths (Swami Dayananda) (1906-),⁵⁹⁴ to name only a few great ones. They have given a great witness to Christian discipleship in the context of other religions. They have experienced the Christian God in other religions too. Every person who visits a mosque, temple or Church or one’s respective worshipping place has to an extent a desire for spiritual experience and from which he seeks guidance for a good life.

Since Vatican Council II there has been enormous literature on dialogue with other religions. And significantly it is referred from spiritual experiences in other religions. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* states the richness of spiritual experience: “persons, rooted in their own traditions share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.”⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹³ H. Alphonso, S.J., “Authentic Spiritual Experience,” in *Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jaques Dupuis*, D. Kendall and G. O’Collins (eds.), 2003, p.120

⁵⁹⁴ For details on these spiritual men read, J. Rajan, *Bede Griffiths and Sanyasa*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997 second edition, pp.70-104.

⁵⁹⁵ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 42

5.4.2.4 Christian openness to dialogue

Christianity looks positively at other religions, which implies that Christianity is in communion with the person of other religion. It enters into the life and mystery of human person of other religion. It enters into other person not just at the religious level, meaning to differentiate religions, but at the human level meaning to discover richness of human person. Here one begins to respect the God-given dignity of the human person. There is much to discover in the human person. There is much to learn from one another through a sincere dialogue. An inclusivist approach to other religions, to a certain extent, has made this dream a possibility by first of all acknowledging the positive elements in other religions.

Indeed, in the last few decades, much has been spoken and written on interreligious dialogue and Christian mission. People have been looking for the proper role of Christian mission in interreligious relationship. There is a kind of a 'misunderstanding' or a 'fear' of losing one's faith in interreligious dialogue. What has often been emphasized is that Christianity must proclaim its conviction of truth that Jesus Christ is the saviour of the world. It is indeed necessary and fitting that the Church must hold its distinct mission and only then come to interreligious relationship, activities, dialogue etc. But to lose one's identity in his religion, or one's faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God in order to dialogue with other religions would lead one nowhere. Christian dialogue with other religions basically requires acceptance and proclamation of Christian faith. In this regard states Paul Mojzes: "If the Church holds no distinct, worthwhile message and cause, it need not bother enter into dialogue, because it will have nothing to give in the give-and-take of dialogue." Further, he gives an example of the great Czech Marxist philosopher, Milan Machovec, who once wrote that he does not want to dialogue with a Christian who does not want to convert him, namely, with one who holds that the Christian truths have only subjective and thus limited validity, a mere personal preference. Machovec wanted to dialogue with a Christian who is persuaded that the Christian truth has a general validity. He was saying that he would rather meet in dialogue a Christian who was hot than one who is lukewarm.⁵⁹⁶ Understanding this example what is indeed required for an interreligious dialogue is to give witness to Christian faith. But sharing of this valid truth or Christian faith and experience need not be

⁵⁹⁶ See P. Mojzes, "The Problem: Mission and/or Dialogue?," in P. Mojzes and L. Swidler (eds.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lampeter, U.K., 1990, p.8.

done triumphalistically, intolerantly, and exclusivistically. Dialogue has been the central word now for many decades for many reasons, and precisely for harmonious relationship with other religions. But in this Christian openness to dialogue with other religions, as Cardinal Josef Tomko says, “Christians must have a clear awareness of their own identity and of the role of the Christian faith in the divine plan of salvation.”⁵⁹⁷ Pope Paul VI, wrote: “Dialogue is the new way of being Church,”⁵⁹⁸ and Pope John Paul II said, “dialogue with others is a Christian work desired by God.”⁵⁹⁹

5.4.3 Practical analysis of pluralistic claims

5.4.3.1 Pastoral difficulties from religious pluralism

The document, *Dominus Iesus*, which was promulgated on August 6, 2000, has generated considerable controversy for religious pluralism. It is clear from the document that its main purpose is “theological.” This means that it is especially interested in the doctrinal issues. For example in paragraph three we read that it aims “to set forth again the doctrine of the Catholic faith”⁶⁰⁰ regarding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his role as the universal saviour, i.e., Jesus Christ as saviour of the world. The concern is “to recall to bishops, theologians and all the Catholic faithful, certain indispensable elements of Christian doctrine,” “certain truths that are part of the Church’s faith.” And the hope is that this might help theological reflection to address the contemporary problems. The document perceives more fundamentally that the conviction that the Gospel needs to be proclaimed to the whole world is at stake.⁶⁰¹

In this section we shall analyse certain pastoral concerns that arise from the claims of religious pluralism. Existence of different religions, or Christianity as one among other religions is a fact. But how does Christianity exist amidst other religions is a matter not only of producing theories but also a matter of daily living. Pastoral theology is a subject of Christian living to the practice. And in this regard can a Christian afford to reduce the content of faith that one professes in Jesus Christ for

⁵⁹⁷ J. Cardinal Tomko, “Missionary Challenges to the Theology of Salvation,” in P. Mojzes and L. Swidler (eds.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p.14.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ecclesiam Suam*, 63.

⁵⁹⁹ Pope John Paul II, “Address to the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, 28th April, 1987,” in F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p.374.

⁶⁰⁰ *Dominus Iesus*, 3; See also 23.

⁶⁰¹ See, *Dominus Iesus*, 22, 23

the sake of its existence amidst different religions? The basic difficulty in a pluralistic context for a practical Christian living arises if one does not confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God, as the Messiah, as the Saviour of the world. Christian living has to begin from confessing that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, that in Him divine incarnation is manifested, that in Him there is the fullness of truth.

One of the strongest fear in the pluralistic approach is that one may lose his faith in his religion. When one is born and grown up in a community of faith where his or her faith has become very dear to him or her, in which he or she has a certain religious knowledge that guides the day-to-day life, does religious pluralism in a sense of reinterpreting or misinterpreting the traditional faith bring any fruit to the faithful is a very discussed question and may cause the loss of faith in one's religion.

Proclamation of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of the world and there is salvation only in Him and no one else, or to preach that in Jesus Christ there is the fullness of truth or absolute truth will be difficult from the perspective of religious pluralism. The Christian faith is that in Jesus Christ the fullness of truth is revealed. In religious pluralism one is still on the way in search of the fullness of truth, along with all the religions, in order that they all may exist peacefully, in order that they all be working together for liberation of humanity and for the Kingdom of God. From the perspective of religious pluralism it appears that what I have in Jesus Christ or what I experience in Jesus Christ, is still insufficient. The Christian faith is that in Jesus Christ there is fullness and everything that is needed not only for my life alone but also for the whole of humanity. Hick speaks of God in terms of the Transcendental Real or unknown real. Clark Pinnok, an inclusivist evangelical theologian asks, "how does Hick know that the Real exists and that it is unknowable? Has this been revealed to him?" and "even if there exists a Real, we have no idea what it might be like. Does it love us or hate us, or is it sleeping? It strikes me as a bad deal to trade in the God of Jesus for an unknown God."⁶⁰² As Christians it is of prime importance for us to experience that fullness of truth or God in Jesus Christ.

A Christian has to confess that in Jesus Christ the Word became flesh. A theory that ignores or mythologizes divine incarnation would indeed bring confusions in Christian faith and consequently in Christian living. Therefore my Christian living

⁶⁰² D. L. Okholm and Timothy R. Philips (eds.), *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 1996, p.62.

has to spring primarily from the understanding that Jesus Christ is God, or he is the divine incarnation of God, or the second person of the Trinity. And from this understanding, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed to the people at large. Responding to Hick's mythological perspective of divine incarnation, Clark Pinnock says, "[a]fter all, the Incarnation is a gift of the divine freedom" and to his own question, "does the doctrine of Incarnation possess clear meaning?" Clark says, the "answer partly depends on how far one expects human reason to go in explaining the mystery of God incarnate."⁶⁰³ Moreover when we argue rationally this doctrine of divine incarnation we do need to take caution not to ignore the faith dimension as handed to us from generations. The faith in Jesus Christ gives meaning to the day-to-day Christian living, and living it to the full.

Clark Pinnock says, if we follow Hick, people will no longer be told about the light of the world. "They will not know that, although no one has seen God, the only Son of the Father has made him known (John 1:18). They will not learn of a new creation or of God reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:17, 19). The Christian should not make people feel superior – it should make them feel happiness for the nations because now there is hope and a knowledge of salvation."⁶⁰⁴ That is to say Christian mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world in his fullness or in his totality.

5.4.3.2 Positive aspects of religious pluralism

We shall see here that how the pluralist approach positively helps the present pastoral engagement with other religions. These elements are rather common to all the religions and also may support one another in one's effort to come closer to God and to people. These observations apply also to the inclusivist approach, and are not exclusive to pluralist approach.

5.4.3.2.1 Adherents of all religions are pilgrims on earth

It pertains to the essence of world religions that they proclaim salvation fundamentally for all human beings. This claim first of all is not concerned with

⁶⁰³ D. L. Okholm and Timothy R. Philips (eds.), *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 1996, p. 63-64.

⁶⁰⁴ D. L. Okholm and Timothy R. Philips (eds.), *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 1996, p. 64.

whether or not men and women accept this promise for themselves, but rather with the fact of a promise which has all humanity, indeed the entire world, as its addressee. Now this is true for Christianity. It proclaims God's salvation for all human beings and the entire creation. Today, however, it finds alliance partners for this pledge of universal salvation in other religions which from their side are also convinced of a possibility of salvation which is fundamentally open to all humankind. Regardless of how irritating it was to Christian preachers over a long period, the fact that other religions also were convinced of the same matter - the possibility of salvation for everyone does not in principle disavow the Christian message. Instead, as Hans Waldenfels says, Christians should much rather rejoice that fundamental conviction is effective beyond the borders of the Christian community of believers.⁶⁰⁵ So one must accept that there is a conviction that other religions do have a message for all, perhaps a message that all are children of one God. And from this perspective we indeed rejoice that the adherents of all religions are indeed pilgrims on earth. This is certainly evidenced in the religious festivals in the present age than ever before, where millions of people come together to fulfil their religious duties in different religions. Religion directs our lives to God, and at the same time religion is concerned with humanity to the point that our religion becomes our life. The world's religions are an age-old search for God. In them the believers find God leading humankind from the unreal to the real, from the darkness to the light and from death to immortality.⁶⁰⁶

After much discussions and reluctance the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Geneva in 1979 came to the grip of dialogue with other religions as they stated,

Thus, to the member churches of the World Council of Churches we feel able with integrity to commend the way of dialogue as one in which Jesus Christ can be confessed in the world today; at the same time we feel able with integrity to assure our partners in dialogue that we come not as manipulators but as genuine fellow pilgrims, to speak with them what we believe in God to have done in

⁶⁰⁵ See H. Waldenfels, "Mission and Interreligious Dialogue: What is at stake?," in P. Mojzes, and L. Swidler (eds.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p.156.

⁶⁰⁶ The idea of the orientation of all humankind to the Divine as a common pilgrimage is well reflected in the age old pilgrim song in Indian spiritual traditions. It is understood as a "Yatra" towards "Satchitananda." In humankind's quest for the Divine, the religious traditions are ways of pilgrimage and the goal is the Absolute, Supreme and Ultimate Reality: *Satchitananda*. This meaning implied in the Anthem, the *Mukti Mantra* or *Yatra Mantra*: "Asathoma Sdgamyaya, Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya, Mrtyorma Amrtamgamaya." It is often translated into English as: Lead me from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light and from death to immortality. See *Swami Amalorananda, Atma Purna Anubhva: An Experience of Indian Christian Spirituality*, Mysore (India), Anjali Ashram, 2000, p. 5.

Jesus Christ who has gone before us, but whom we seek to meet anew in dialogue.⁶⁰⁷

As co-pilgrims on this earth we journey together to our goal. Our ways are indeed different here on earth, but we travel together to one end. We differ very much here but when we look beyond this earthly life we have a certain goal, the union with one God.

5.4.3.2.2 Common search for truth

The believers of different religious traditions come close to one another in their common search for the Divine. Even though with a distinct faith response, or in a trusting submission to the divine law, they look to religions for answers to the great problems which confront humankind, and they find in them their strength and hope. Christianity proclaims that in Jesus Christ the fullness of truth is revealed. We accept this fundamental conviction of our Christian faith. That does not mean that we remain seated comfortably and commanding other religions to follow our guidance or principles. Beyond the Christian fundamental conviction in the Christian faith in the fullness of truth in Jesus Christ, Christians and the adherents of other religions also have a religious value in searching for that eternal truth or God in their own capacity and in their own religions and experiencing that Divine, and thus a common search for that truth would indeed bring closer all the religions to know that we are pilgrims on earth and we look forward for a life of union with God. All religions ought to work together or as individual religion for a life on earth that corresponds to the divine life or to the truth.

The search for truth aims at mutual enrichment and edification as the dialogue partners share their respective insights into the nature of reality. It is a dialogue which goes beyond the mere understanding of the views of the religious partner. Insofar as the Secretariat for Non-Christians is concerned, this type of dialogue rests first of all on the recognition of the natural goodness and virtue which are present in creation and in the religious traditions. The dialogue partners can come to a fuller understanding of this natural goodness through their dialogue. God has revealed himself and is salvifically present everywhere, even in religions. Christians may

⁶⁰⁷ *Guideline on Dialogue*, Geneva, WCC, 1979, p.11, cited in D. L. Okholm and T. R. Philips (eds.), *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 1996, p. 33.

discover through dialogue something of this “ubiquitous presence and activity and thus discover something more fully about God and the divine dealings with humankind.”⁶⁰⁸ And on the part of the other believers, this type of dialogue involves a coming to the awareness of the truth that has been revealed in Jesus Christ.

5.4.3.2.3 Goodness and values in every religion

Indeed it is a fact that there are good and holy people in other religions. The teachings of Vatican II also say that the “Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions.”⁶⁰⁹ This is rather an inclusive approach. But pluralists do employ the holy people of other religions for a pluralistic approach. We accept that there are good and holy people in other religions, and that there is a value and meaning in their religions. This recognition of goodness and values in other religions has indeed given a great impetus for pastoral theology. The Christian ought not to see other religions as totally strange or as having no relationship to Christianity. Christianity recognizes the truth, value and goodness in other religions, and promotes these essential elements of other religions for a common existence.

Secondly in modern society when human and religious values are being suppressed in many area of life, it is indeed the duty of all religions to fight against such distortion. Together we need to promote truth and values such as respect for human person, justice, peace and freedom both human and religious.

5.4.3.2.4 Christian Mission – proclamation of the Kingdom of God

In the pluralist theology of religions what appears more and more frequently is the theme of the centrality of the Reign of God. The Reign of God is also the cornerstone of the more recent reflections of Asian theologians, who were influenced by their experiences of direct contact with the great ancient religions and cultures. Indeed, one of them, M. Amaladoss, sees “a Copernican revolution of the theology of evangelisation” in the fact that “the centre of the approach moves from the Church to the Kingdom.”⁶¹⁰ He aims at an evangelisation in the global sense in

⁶⁰⁸ R. B. Sheard, *Interreligious Dialogue in the Catholic Church Since Vatican II*, Canada: The Erwin Mellen Press, 1987, p.279.

⁶⁰⁹ *Nostra Aetate*, 5.

⁶¹⁰ M. Amaladoss, S.J., “Faith Meets Faith,” in Vidyajyothi, 49, 1985, pp.109-117; “Dialogue and Mission: Conflict or Convergence?,” in *Vidyajyothi*, 50, 1986, p.63.

which “the new focal point”⁶¹¹ is the Reign of God, i.e., the building up of a new humanity that will unite all people in a community of love, justice and peace. This is the mission in which the Church must collaborate in dialogue, with the process of inculturation and liberation. Strangely, but significantly, proclamation is omitted. The explanation is found, perhaps, in his extremely radical doubt: “In this context of religious pluralism does it still make sense to proclaim Christ as the only Name in which all people find salvation and call them to be disciples through baptism and to enter the Church?”⁶¹²

Another Indian theologian Jacob Kavunkal concludes that “the Church’s mission is not so much to bring salvation as to bring the manifestation, not to obtain the conversion to the Church as the necessary means of salvation, but to help in the realization of the broader Kingdom of God as it develops in history. This includes the effort to help followers of other religions to follow those religions in a better manner.”⁶¹³ These thoughts are already widespread and are beginning to bear fruit in the practical field. One pastoral magazine presented the following program of a missionary institute: “We go out on the missions not so much to plant the Church or to bring the faith, but rather to discover a faith and a goodness that already exist there.”⁶¹⁴ The theology has given rise to many wonderful concepts like ecclesiocentrism, christo- and theocentrism, soterio- and regnocentrism. The radical position that reduces the Church’s mission to human promotion is expressed by G. Davies in one concise sentence: “The purpose of mission is not to make Christians, but to help peoples to become men.”⁶¹⁵

The above thoughts from different theologians seem practical in our relationship to other religions, and the last quotation to some extent may be described as “radical.” They are sensitive issues because they may directly or indirectly affect the traditional Christian mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ. As Christians we believe that in Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God is realised. That also means that we work in

⁶¹¹ A. Amaladoss, “Evangelisation in Asia: A New Focus?,” in *Vidyajyothi*, 51, 2 1987, pp.7-28.

⁶¹² A. Amaladoss, “Faith Meets Faith,” in *Vidyajyothi*, 49, 1985, p. 110.

⁶¹³ J. Kavunkal, “The ‘Abba Experience’ of Jesus: The Model and Motive for Mission Today,” in *FABC Papers*, 43, 1986, p. 14.

⁶¹⁴ See the article “Maryknoll’s Changing Concepts of Mission,” in *Tripod*, Spring, 1988, p.65.

⁶¹⁵ G. Davies, *Dialogue with the World*, 1968, ch.4; This is mentioned in J. Lopez-Gay, *Missiologica Contemporanea*, in AA.VV., *Missiologia Oggi*, Rome, Urbana University Press, 1985, p.114. Today one speaks of evangelisation and liberation more in terms of human promotion priority, for example, “first make men, then Christians”, or “first feed the hungry, then speak of God.”

the different religious contexts, in the context of poverty and injustice for human development, justice and peace.

5.4.3.2.5 Necessity of interreligious Dialogue

It may not be wrong to say that interreligious dialogue is a necessary aim of pluralistic approach to religions. As we have seen in Chapter three (3.3.2.5) that one of Hick's argument for Copernican theology is seen from the practical benefits, i.e. the Copernican theology results in fruitful implications for dialogue and interreligious cooperation. In Christian mission dialogue was rather not a subject to be seriously considered. But today, interreligious dialogue is definitely a matter of daily living. Paul Knitter giving prime importance to dialogue states: "Rather than trying to include dialogue in mission, it would make more sense to include mission in dialogue – or to see mission as dialogue. Mission can best be understood and practiced today as dialogue."⁶¹⁶ Does interreligious dialogue give to Christians a broader understanding of Christian mission? In the words of Michael von Brück, "[i]s interreligious dialogue a means to exploit non-European and non-American cultures in a spiritual way insofar as their religious traditions are being made "available" to us? This is a tremendous danger indeed and can be avoided only when we are, as partners in dialogue, ready to move so that partners in other religions are not objects of our mission or even subjects of our enrichment, but real partners."⁶¹⁷ According to Knitter the best way for the Church to serve the Kingdom of God in today's religiously plural and globally threatened world is through dialogue.⁶¹⁸

5.5 The praxis of interreligious dialogue

The praxis of interreligious dialogue comes forth as a need to love and understand other believers. We shall analyse in the present section Christian attitude, commitment, concern and mission in the relationship to other believers.

5.5.1 Christian attitude to other religions and adherents

5.5.1.1 Respect for God-given dignity of the human person

⁶¹⁶ P. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 1996, p.142.

⁶¹⁷ M. von Brück, "Identifying Constructively Our Interreligious Moment," in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.40.

⁶¹⁸ See P. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 1996, p.142-43.

The documents of Vatican II indeed hinge on, are built around, one central conviction: the profound awareness of the God-given dignity of the human person. For example, after scrutinizing the signs of the times in its introductory statement on “The Situation of Men and Women in the Modern World”, *Gaudium et Spes* dedicates its entire first chapter precisely to “The Dignity of the Human Person,” as though this pastoral constitution of Vatican II wanted to spotlight the God-given dignity of the human person as the sign of our times. No wonder, that the very opening words of the far-reaching “Declaration on Religious Freedom” singles out the same awareness as peculiarly characteristic of modern person’s sharpened sensibilities: “A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man and woman.”⁶¹⁹ In our interreligious dialogue in the practical field this God given dignity comes first. In our daily encounter at the level of dialogue of life, this respect for human dignity as God’s precious gift is a must for every human person. This is the basics of all our relationships. We would like to focus, for instance, on the insatiable need for dialogue: “Is it not in the mutual recognition by people of their God given dignity as humans that the genuine theological basis for dialogue actually lies?”⁶²⁰ And when we know that God dwells in the heart of the person, which is a temple of the Spirit, it is there that a person whether Christian, Hindu, Muslim or of any member of a religion that he cherishes his spiritual values. Therefore giving respect to the human dignity of the person is to enter into a spiritual dialogue with other person. It is a dialogue of life and of spiritual experience.

We should not forget how the Christian mission in the past dealt with human dignity. The European conquest of the world and the Christian world mission had very close ties. For the missionary the Christianisation of the peoples meant at the same time their humanization. But often only those who were baptized, and thereby became Christian, were likewise considered full human beings. One of the terrible discoveries made in the literature on the mission work in Latin America today, five hundred years after its beginning, is that often enough in this mission process the humanity of the Latin Americans was denied because they were not Europeans and

⁶¹⁹ *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1.

⁶²⁰ H. Alphonso, “Authentic Spiritual Experience,” in D. Kendall and G. O’Collins (eds.), *In many and Diverse Ways*, 2003, P.125.

Christians and their dignity was trampled down.⁶²¹ Remembering the history of Christian mission and looking forward for a renewed Christian mission through an interreligious dialogue necessarily means respecting God given dignity of the human person, which also necessarily means respect for the freedom of the person and freedom of religion.

5.5.1.2 Respect for the freedom of religion

In centuries past, moral and physical force was sometimes used to induce people to accept the Christian faith. The new evangelisation since Vatican II by contrast, presupposes full acceptance of Vatican II's Declaration on Religious freedom, which taught that people should be encouraged to follow their free and responsible judgement, without external pressure. The council declares that "the right to religious freedom is based in the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself".⁶²² Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* taught that the Church should propose the truth of the Gospel without seeking to impose anything on the consciences of the hearers.⁶²³ Echoing this thought, John Paul II declares: "The Church proposes; she imposes nothing."⁶²⁴ Recognizing that the assent of faith must by its very nature be free, the Church avoids offensive proselytization. It ought to proclaim the Gospel in a way that honours the sanctuary of every human conscience.⁶²⁵

Frans Wijsen in his article on Christian – Muslim relationship in Tanzania, taking the advice from the Kenyan theologian Samuel Kibocho, says, that "each religion must evangelise as if it is the only carrier of the only fully-saving revelation and that every religion must acknowledge and accept the claim of uniqueness and ultimacy or finality in every other religion as a normative reference."⁶²⁶ When we look deep into the world religions, this seems to be true, that the spreading of the religions

⁶²¹ Concerning this see the various works by M.Sievernich, including „Theologie der Befreiung' im interkulturellen Gespräch," in *Theologie und Philosophie*, 61 (1986), pp.336-358, and M. Sievernich (ed.), *Impulse der Befreiungstheologie für Europa*, 1988, pp.15-43. See also H. Waldenfels, "Mission and Interreligious Dialogue: What is at stake?," in P. Mojzes and L. Swidler (ed.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p.142.

⁶²² *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2, see also 1.

⁶²³ See *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80.

⁶²⁴ *Redemptoris Missio*, 39.

⁶²⁵ *Redemptoris Missio*, 8, 39.

⁶²⁶ F. Wijsen, "When two elephants fight the grass gets hurt" – Muslim-Christian Relationships in Upcountry Tanzania," in F. Wijsen and P. Nissen (eds.), *Mission is a Must*, Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2002, p.244.

seems to be inevitable. Speaking from a Christian point of view it is the basic right of a Christian to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. But this proclaiming Jesus Christ should in no way hinder the freedom of religion of the other person. The report of the Layman's Missionary Movement of North America, for example, says: "It is clearly not the duty of the Christian Missionary to attack other faiths The Christian will regard himself as a co-worker with the forces within each religious system which are making for righteousness."⁶²⁷ Only then we can say that the proclamation is authentic, otherwise it goes against the religious freedom.

According to the science of religion, religion is not a word with one fixed meaning. Rather, it falls into the category of so-called equivocal words. In one sense, religion is what we are "born to"; in the other, it is what we are "reborn to," Religion by birth and religion by conviction may be described as "religion by clan solidarity" and "religion as life-vision." They are not only very different from each other, they are also poles apart from each other. It is only the second that is religion proper. The first type is a religion of a cultural form, has still a great value of its own. The second type, religion as life-vision answers quite another need of the human beings. The purpose of the "religion as life-vision" is purely and simply to make a person grow into full mental adulthood, is to be re-born again. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again" (Jn. 3:3). In the life-vision form of religion, it is this adulthood that is referred to as being a child of God, as living in the Spirit, or as being submissive to the commandment to "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). Having seen a difference in the understanding of 'religion', we may ask what the distinctive Christian mission among other religions is. In the opinion of Anthony Fernando, what is needed is the missionary work from the perspective of a life-vision religion. And that is the right form of missionary work, which liberates people from their inner misery and restlessness by awakening them to the life-ideals that make them adult. This missionary work motivated by a right life-vision mentality does not feel threatened by other religions. Other religions do not become opponents of this mission, but join hands and collaborate in the missionary work.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁷ W. E. Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions*, New York: Harper and Row, 1932, p.327.

⁶²⁸ See A. Fernando, "An Asian's View of Jesus' Uniqueness," in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.70-73.

5.5.1.3 Reverence for other religions

In our deep respect for other religions a positive and well articulated theological statement deserves to be mentioned here. Archbishop Angelo Fernandes of Delhi (India) expressed himself as follows:

A theology of world religions requires of us...full recognition of the fact that God has in the past dealt with diverse peoples in diverse ways, and he continues to do so today. It is an urgent beckoning to us to frame a theology of the living religious traditions of the world and of their significance today in God's universal plan of salvation....To affirm that the religious practices of others, their sacred books and their sacramental practices, provide a channel through which the Risen Christ reaches out to them, in no way threatens the uniqueness of Christ and his message. Rather, our theology will make clear that the uniqueness of Christianity lies in this: It excludes no religion; it embraces them all. These other religions, in which Christ is present but hidden, his Spirit secretly at work within them, are destined to find their fulfilment in the explicit recognition of him who is the Lord of history. It is from within, not without, that the members of these religious traditions are being challenged by the mystery of Jesus Christ.⁶²⁹

It is through our deep respect for the religious traditions and their religious practices that we can further better our relationship with other religions. Just as we deeply respect and revere our own religiosity, the sacred books, sacramental practices and expect the same from others, so also are we obliged to do the same for other religions. The reverence given to other religions is in the spirit of love and service, which we receive from Jesus Christ.

Speaking of the Asian religious traditions, *The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference* (FABC) said: "we (Asian Bishops) accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation," and they asked: "How can we not give them reverence and honour? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to himself through them?"⁶³⁰ The statement made here by FABC is very much of practical significance. It is the fruit of Christian living amidst other religions. This requires a Christian to learn to respect and accept other religions as God's diverse ways of dealing with mankind, and as cited earlier "in manner known to Him alone."

⁶²⁹ D. S. Amalorpavadass (ed.), *Evangelization in the Modern World*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1975, pp.130-31.

⁶³⁰ See "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia (1974)," in G. Rosales and C. G. Arevalo (eds.), *For all the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992, p.14.

5.5.2 Christian commitment to interreligious dialogue

5.5.2.1 Praxis of interreligious dialogue: Interreligious learning - “What” and “Why”

Our ways of acting and living were and are diverse. It may be that we have come to realise the fact of diversity of cultures and religions rather late. The fact is that the people have always lived differently, and they have cherished their differences. The talk of interreligious dialogue rather comes into existence in the differences of people, cultures and religions. Interreligious learning is a learning from affectedness, a learning from meeting and a learning through a living dialogue.⁶³¹ It is learning about religions through dialogue. Surely, not only Christians but also all the religions are affected deeply without dialogue today. We need collaboration, we need to learn from one another, we need to listen to one another. In the sub-section below we continue basically what it means to dialogue with other religions, or the essence, necessity, aims and objectives, and the fruits of interreligious dialogue.

5.5.2.1.1 Essence and forms of interreligious dialogue

Cardinal Francis Arinze, the former president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome, defines interreligious dialogue as,

a meeting of people of differing religions, in an atmosphere of freedom and openness, in order to listen to the other, to try to understand that person's religion, and hopefully to seek possibilities of collaboration. It is hoped that the other partner will reciprocate, because dialogue should be marked by a two-way and not a one-way movement. Reciprocity is in the nature of dialogue. There is give and take. Dialogue implies both receptivity and active communication.⁶³²

There is much to learn in this definition. The essential characteristics here concern both the parties in the dialogue. An atmosphere of freedom and openness or reciprocity are required from both partners.

The English missiologist Aylward Shorter (a missionary working in Africa) insists that, “true dialogue excludes ‘deduction’, the desire to deduce truth exclusively from one's own tradition. It also excludes ‘reduction,’ the desire to reduce the plurality of religions to a meaningless common denominator. It has, instead, to be ‘induction,’ a process by which our own tradition being authentically reinterpreted as a result of

⁶³¹ See S. Leimgruber, *Interreligiöses Lernen*, München: Kösel – Verlag GMBH & Co., 1995, p.13, - „*Interreligiöses Lernen ist Lernen aus Betroffenheit, ein Lernen in der Begegnung, ein Lernen durch den gelebten Dialog.*“

⁶³² See F. Cardinal Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers*, 1998, p.5.

the exchange with other traditions. This is another way of saying that dialogue leads to conversion.”⁶³³ Shorter goes on to point out that “dialogue is primarily experiential. It involves sharing life, and to some extent the worship, of people in other religious traditions. It also indicates a habit of mind, an openness of flexibility, which is able to interiorize experience and to grow through relationships, rather than to struggle to conform to a static and preconceived model.”⁶³⁴

We see generally four forms of inter-religious dialogue in the documents produced by the Vatican offices. They are: 1. The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. When neighbours of differing religions are open to one another, when they share their projects and hopes, concerns and sorrows, they are engaging in dialogue of life. 2. The dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. 3. The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values. They listen to one another in an effort to understand the religion of others at a deeper level. Together they try to see what beliefs and practices they share and where they differ, and try to face modern problems and challenges in the light of their differing religions. 4. The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share with others their spiritual riches with regard to prayer, contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.⁶³⁵ These various forms of interreligious dialogue are of great help to the relationship of Christians to other believers.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) in the *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue* presents, for example, certain subjects for the discussion at interreligious dialogue. Representatives of the different religions and indeed if possible all the participants should be given an opportunity to express their views and feelings on the particular subject of the dialogue. It can be a particular religious reality like prayer, religious experience, ritual, God, revelation, authority in religion, methods of spiritual progress, basic beliefs like the future life, the soul, sin, morality,

⁶³³ A. Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, p.41.

⁶³⁴ A. Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, 1994, p.41.

⁶³⁵ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 42.

truthfulness, fellowship, or some topic of common interest and concern such as death, justice, peace, the rights of man, socialism, but these latter subjects must be approached, from the angle of religious conviction, and the participants must bring to it their own deeply personal insights, questionings and anxieties.⁶³⁶

Having seen to some extent what interreligious dialogue means and its various forms and the subject matter to be discussed in dialogue, we may say, first of all, for a Christian in the dialogue with other religions, requires the knowledge of and commitment to his own religion. The Christian commitment to his faith in Jesus Christ has to be total. It is the love of the Father through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit which a Christian confesses in his Church that ought to be the essence of Christian faith. Having faith in his religion and a commitment to it, he must be open to dialogue with other religions. It is the overflowing love of Jesus Christ in him that seeks to dialogue with others. It is love, friendship and need for communication which directs him to the other to listen and learn, to give and take, and to glorify the God of heaven and earth.

5.5.2.1.2 Necessity of interreligious dialogue

In the world of today the reality of religious plurality is being more increasingly brought to our notice. The world is more colourful with many religions. Of the total world population Christians form 33%, Muslims form 17%, Hindus 13%, Buddhists 7% and Jews 0.5%. There are also other Traditional Religionists, Sikhs, Jainists, Zoroastrians, Baha'i, Shintoists, and others.⁶³⁷ Religions are the ways of life of a greater part of humanity. They are the living expressions of the souls of vast groups of people. These religions have taught generations of people how to pray, how to live, how to die and how to look after their deceased ones.⁶³⁸ It is quite fitting here to quote Monika Hellwig as she speaks of other religions, that,

there are many paths of salvation, many ways of naming and worshipping the same ultimate, transcendent reality, many languages and rituals by which peoples search for communion with the divine and respond to the outreach of the divine in creation. If there are many such ways, then it is of overwhelming interest to know more about them, to see what we as Christians can learn from

⁶³⁶ See, The Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, Revised draft, 1977, no. 54.

⁶³⁷ See D. Barret, *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, Nairobi, 1982, p. 6.

⁶³⁸ See *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53.

them, and to offer them a respectful exchange of all that makes up our faith-tradition and theirs.⁶³⁹

So it would be unrealistic to ignore all this and live as if there were only one religion in the world.

We all desire interaction between us. The worldwide travel opportunities and the easy access to media has brought to our awareness that world is no longer a strange one, but one that can be easily reached at and interacted with. The economic and political interactions between the countries has also effected religious interaction. It is a fact that no one can live today in isolation. When God speaks to mankind through Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, through religions, through his people, and in many ways, it will be meaningless if people and religions do not dialogue between themselves. Interreligious dialogue is necessary for mutual enrichment of people and their religions. Cardinal Francis Arinze says, that through “interreligious contacts, for example, Christianity can contribute to other religions’ elevation, inspiration and universality.” “Christianity also receives from the other religionsthe cultural patterns in which they flourish: languages, philosophical categories, ritual expressions and local styles proper to peoples. They can enrich the expression and practice of Christianity with these gifts.”⁶⁴⁰ Dialogue is necessary between religions for harmony and peace in the world. The motto ‘religions for peace’ is ever growing in the world today. It is because of the unity of human nature and the recognition that we all are children of same God that we strive to live in peace and love. We have seen and experienced enough violence and terrorism. And often the religious extremism seems to be the cause for this violence and terrorism. Religious extremists are trampling on the rights of others, violating the principles of religious freedom. Besides, moral and spiritual values are also on the decline. The poor are ever knocking at the door of the rich countries for justice and peace. And we can’t be blind to these realities. Interreligious dialogue certainly promotes these causes, and should counter religious extremism.

⁶³⁹ M. K. Hellwig, “The Thrust and Tenor of Our Conversations,” in L. Swidler, J. B. Cobb, Jr., P. F. Knitter, and M. Hellwig (eds.), *Death or Dialogue?: From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue*, London: SCM Press, 1990, p.51.

⁶⁴⁰ F. Cardinal Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers*, 1998, pp.10-11.

The CBCI in its concern for the necessity of interreligious dialogue states: The new appreciation of human values, such as human dignity, the equality of all men, the concern for justice and social welfare - inspire the rejection of any religion which imposes or legitimizes unjust structures, does not promote social concern, and leads to communal divisions. The values of rationality, sincerity and authenticity are opposed to naive credulity, erotic mythology, religious hypocrisy, the separation of religion from life, ritualism, superstition and a self-centred religion.⁶⁴¹ To counter a religiosity that bases itself on false and inhuman values interreligious dialogue is necessary today.

5.5.2.1.3 Aims and objectives of interreligious dialogue

The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* in stating the place of interreligious dialogue in the evangelising mission of the Church states regarding the aim of interreligious dialogue that it does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations, rather in it Christians and others are invited to “deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God’s personal call and gracious self-gift which, as our faith tells us, always passes through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit.”⁶⁴² Thus, the aim of interreligious dialogue is “a deeper conversion of all towards God,” and “[s]incere dialogue implies, on the one hand, mutual acceptance of differences, or even of contradictions, and on the other, respect for the free decision of persons taken according to the dictate of their conscience.”⁶⁴³

We saw earlier in the fourth chapter that interreligious dialogue does not aim at conversion of other religions into Christianity or to the Church in the sense of adding numbers to the Church, and at the same time we saw that Proclamation does aim at the baptism of others into the Church. Two things are clear from the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* that interreligious dialogue aims at a conversion of all towards God, and that in the mutual acceptance of the differences the respect for the free decision of persons are highly counted. Interreligious dialogue aims at a deeper conversion of all towards God. All people are included in

⁶⁴¹ See, The Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, Revised draft, 1977, no. 85.

⁶⁴² *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 40.

⁶⁴³ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 41.

the God's universal plan of salvation. Therefore it is dialogue that brings all closer to God. It aims at spiritual benefits for all. It is dialogue that brings all, not just closer to God, but also closer to one another. It aims at mutual enrichment, mutual harmony, peace and justice for all. It aims at the establishment or realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Thus the aim of interreligious dialogue is the exchange of the knowledge and ideas that contribute to a better knowledge of history and civilisation between the participants of the two religions, in order to clarify the convergence and differences sincerely and objectively, allowing each party to cling to its beliefs, its obligations and its commitments in a spirit of concord and mutual respect.⁶⁴⁴ The objectives of inter-religious dialogue, according to the founding vision of the secretariat for non-Christian religions, are as follows: To improve and promote friendly relations between the adherents of different religions by breaking down hostilities and prejudices through personal meetings; to develop the idea of a common humanity between participants in dialogue; and to prepare the way through which the Gospel can be proclaimed to all people.⁶⁴⁵

5.5.2.1.4 Fruits of interreligious dialogue

Before we see the fruits of dialogue, we ask ourselves what are some of the requirements for dialogue to be fruitful.⁶⁴⁶ If we want that interreligious dialogue to grow and bear fruit, we must foremost give our attention to the freedom of religion. The individuals should be free from compulsion in matters of conscience and religion, both in their practice and in sharing them with others. What makes difficult for interreligious contacts and in bearing good fruits is religious intolerance and extremism. The partners in interreligious dialogue should have a clear religious identity, they should be convinced of the value of dialogue, they need to be open – towards God, towards other believers, they require love, esteem and respect for other religions, knowledge of other religions, and most important, keeping in mind the

⁶⁴⁴ “Text of the final declaration of the Tripoli Seminar,” in *Bulletin* 31, 1976, p. 14

⁶⁴⁵ See *Meeting the African Religions*, The Secretariat For Non-Christian Religions, Rome, 1969, pp. 124-125; See also *Towards the Meetings of Religions: Suggestions for Dialogue*, General Section, The Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions, Vatican City: Polyglot, 1967; The Secretariat For Non-Christian Religions, *Guidelines for a Dialogue between Muslims and Christians*, Rome, 1969.

⁶⁴⁶ See F. Cardinal Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers*, 1998, p.55-60.

historical memories, they require healing of historical memories⁶⁴⁷ or hearts ready for truth and reconciliation.

According to Panikkar, the partners in dialogue will be able to contribute mutually to a deeper self-understanding.⁶⁴⁸ The Christian partners not only give but receive as well. According to Dupuis: “The “fullness” of revelation in Jesus Christ does not dispense them [Christians] from listening. They do not possess a monopoly of truth. They must rather allow themselves to be possessed by it.”⁶⁴⁹ The members of other religions even without having heard God’s revelation in Jesus Christ may be more deeply submitted to this truth that they yet seek and to the Spirit of Christ that spreads rays of that truth in them. One can in all certainty say that by dialogue, Christians and others “walk together towards truth.”⁶⁵⁰ In this walking towards the truth in dialogue the Christians as well as others will enrich their own faith. It is through the sharing of the experience and the testimony of the other, that the Christians will be able to discover at greater depth certain aspects, certain dimensions, of the Divine Mystery that they had perceived less clearly or that they have been communicated less clearly. And at the same time they will achieve purification of their faith.

In the encounter of dialogue there will arise questions about one’s own religious tradition, and one will have to destroy deep rooted prejudices over other religions, or overthrow certain narrow conceptions. Thus the benefits of the dialogue constitute a challenge to the Christian partner at the same time.⁶⁵¹ Thus dialogue here, can effect a deeper openness to God through the other, a more profound conversion to God.

Dupuis says that the

proper end of interreligious dialogue is, in the last analysis, the common conversion of Christians and the members of other religious traditions to the same God – the God of Jesus Christ – who calls them together by challenging the ones through the others. This reciprocal call, a sign of the call of God, is

⁶⁴⁷ *Nostra Aetate*, 3 states: “this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.”

⁶⁴⁸ See R. Panikkar, “Foreword: The Ongoing Dialogue,” in H. Coward (ed.), *Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, ix-xviii, 1990. I have referred it here from J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.382.

⁶⁴⁹ J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.382.

⁶⁵⁰ *Dialogue and Mission*, 13.

⁶⁵¹ See P. J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study of the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue*, 1991. The reference I have given here is from J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p. 382.

surely mutual evangelisation. It builds up, between members of various religious traditions, the universal communion which marks the advent of the Reign of God.⁶⁵²

Further, the benefit of dialogue, seen from the Christian theology which ought to be built on the praxis of interreligious dialogue, is also to adopt a “dialogical theology,” in which it is not that different religious traditions giving different answers to the same questions, but also asking different questions and perceiving the world through different lenses. According to Whaling: “To understand others it is necessary in some degree to see the world through their eyes, in the light of their questions as they emerged in their history,” and this will give an opportunity for Christian theology to renew itself through its encounter with other religions.⁶⁵³ By it we do not mean that Christianity is in need of further “Revelation,” for we have in Jesus Christ the fullness of revelation. The renewal is required for all. And more profoundly in encounter one learns how good (or not good) the other is, and that is an experience of many who have entered into the field of interreligious dialogue.

From the experience of interreligious contacts Cardinal Francis Arinze speaks:

I shall never forget when I met a Muslim holy man who lived on his own outside Faisalabad in Pakistan in 1988, or when I met a Tendai Buddhist Abbot in Kyoto in 1987 and 1992. They spoke words of wisdom. They dressed simply. They lived frugally. They radiated love of others. The Muslim showed great attention to God. The Buddhist manifested admiration for the Pope and the Catholic Church and a desire to work with Catholics to make this world a better place for all. I praised God for the workings of His grace.⁶⁵⁴

In the practice of theology the interreligious dialogue is certainly to be cherished. In today’s pastoral situation evangelisation requires closer and intense relationship with the people of other religions. A better knowledge of other religions is a must. The Christian can

learn very much from other religions: profound respect and worship of God the Mystery, respect for the elders in the family, value of renunciation and asceticism, compassion and kindness to all beings, contemplation and prayer, and oneness with the whole nature. In turn the church can offer the values of love of neighbour, justice, which are central to the mystery of Christ. It is here and in this manner that we offer Jesus Christ as God’s good news, and it is here

⁶⁵² J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p.383.

⁶⁵³ See F. Whaling, *Christian Theology and World Religions: A Global Approach*, London: Marshal Pickering, 1986, p. 29, see also p. 65.

⁶⁵⁴ F. Cardinal Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers*, 1998, p.51.

that we explain to others the role of the church in bringing unity and mutual respect, as the instrument of unity and community.⁶⁵⁵

5.5.2.2 Praxis of interreligious dialogue: Interreligious action - “How”

The word “how” here refers to the way we go about doing interreligious dialogue. It refers to the means that I use in my pastoral mission to other religions, or how do I arrive at it. We may refer to either interreligious acting or living. In the present section we see, how in our Christian dialogue with other religions, we commit ourselves to be interreligious. Secondly, we see the praxis of interreligious dialogue at academic, spiritual and social level.

5.5.2.2.1 Interreligious dialogue through preaching and teaching

Churches and Christian schools are two of the important means for us where we can bring up Christians in a Christian way. Christian preaching and teaching has always been seen as primary means of communicating Good News. Primarily it is through the preaching the Gospel in the Church that most of the Christians are aware of the Gospel and its implication to life. The Christian charity is a response to the preaching on Christian love and service. So also conversions to Christianity or increase in the ‘baptisms’ is a direct effect of Christian proclamation. On the other hand, the history itself is a witness to the hostile relationship with other religions to some extent through the preaching and teaching. In the past we have preached and taught in terms of ‘heaven for Christians and hell for others.’ And to an extent this has contributed to unpleasant and non-friendly or hostile relationship with members of other religions. But with Vatican II and post-conciliar teaching on other religions, we have begun to preach in a positive manner about other religions.

While it is important to proclaim or teach that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world or all must come through him alone, it is also not less important to preach and teach that Christians build up a positive and non-hostile relationship with members of other religions. Basically this has to be done in our preaching and teaching by removing prejudices about other religions, teaching that the members of other religions are also included in God’s plan of salvation, Christ has died and risen for all, the Spirit of God is ever active in all religions, and finally the Church wants

⁶⁵⁵ K. Pathil, “Lineamenta for the Asian Synod: Some Observations and Comments,” in *Jeevadhara – a Journal of Christian interpretation*, Vol. XXVII No.160, July 1997, p.254.

dialogue with other religions. In Christian preaching and teaching, we need to safeguard the freedom of religion, respect, acknowledge, preserve moral and spiritual values of other religions, and esteem the dignity of human person.

In utmost care and love for the religious sentiments one must avoid hostile attitude to religions. The recent terrorist attacks in New York and Washington – September 11, in Madrid – March 12, and in London – July 7, a few to name, which outraged the world against terrorism, where thousands had to suffer as innocent victims of violence, have given rise to sensitive issues in religions. It may be true that the terrorists are members of a particular religion, or they may be financially and otherwise supported by a religion as an institution. But in the above cases of terrorist attacks, it was often referred to words like ‘Muslim-Terrorists.’ Certainly a religion is and ought to be against terrorism and it can not be a religion if it caters to terrorism. But using such words as Muslim-terrorists has provoked Muslim community. No religion will like to associate itself to something like terrorism, killing and murdering. And particularly no believer in a religion will like to hear that his religion is used as a religion of terrorists.

Therefore in our preaching and teaching we require an approach of friendliness and of non-hostility. The attitude to others should cater to a positive relationship as that of God’s relationship to his children, where we respect and recognise other religious practices and ways of living, their culture, and where we also learn from their ways of living.

5.5.2.2.2 Interreligious dialogue through academic – spiritual – social centres

5.5.2.2.2.1 Academic activity

What we intend here first of all is to establish Christian academic centres for interreligious working. It is a Christian centre working with representatives of other religions. It may consist of a group of representatives from different religions, coming together, holding meetings and conferences on different matters on religions and their implication to the people. The third form of dialogue in the document Dialogue and Proclamation is dialogue of theological exchanges, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values. They listen to one another in an effort to

understand the religion of others at a deeper level. Together they try to see what beliefs and practices they share and where they differ, and try to face modern problems and challenges in the light of their differing religions.⁶⁵⁶ The aim and objective of these centres is to give an opportunity and invitation for members of other religions to learn more about themselves and others. Establishing such interreligious centres and working for theological concerns of different religions would further renew and enrich all religions. This has been a reality in many parts of the world today, where interreligious academic centres are established, where studies on comparative religions, theology of religions, or religions for peace etc., are taking place. Today the people are interested in other religions. There are also many people without a deep conviction about their own religions; many are in confusion about the truth of religions, aims and objectives in life; spiritual meaning is also on the decrease – in all these situations the interreligious academic centres may play an important role to guide these people in their religious life.

This interreligious academic life belongs to the intellectual field, but in the praxis very much it applies to the concrete interreligious problems or common concerns of all religions. The intellectual study is not done in a vacuum. It has a deep bearing on the life of the people. In her study on 'Relevance of Panikkar's Intercultural challenge' Clemens Mendonca brings our attention to the many social and spiritual problems of India in the context of symbols of interreligious dialogue in India. Referring to Panikkar, she names three diabolical forces operative in our times: the instrumentalisation of the world, the fragmentation of humans and the irrelevance of the divine. The first includes nuclear arms race, pollution of air, water, soil and sound, deforestation and drastic climatic changes, endangered wild life; the second includes mass poverty, Casteism, institutionalised inequality – the situation of women; and the third includes hindutva ideology – the Ayodya episode of 1993.⁶⁵⁷ These are major concerns of all religions in India. In contrast to diabolic forces Mendonca also studies symbolic forces operative in our times such as campaign against diabolic forces and movements towards communion and peace, human rights issues, awareness of interdependence on other humans, and a search for the

⁶⁵⁶ See *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 42.

⁶⁵⁷ See C. Mendonca, *Dynamics of Symbol and Dialogue: Interreligious Education in India*, Münster-Hamburg – London: Lit Verlag, 2002, pp. 93-135.

meaning of life in the divine.⁶⁵⁸ The interreligious studies, in its effort to understand the social and spiritual concern of the people, can contribute enormously to the human and spiritual well-being of the people.

5.5.2.2.2 Spiritual activity: Interreligious prayer

Four days before the world day of prayer for peace which was held at Assisi on October 27, 1986, Pope John Paul II explained the significance, importance and procedure of it:

What is going to happen at Assisi will not be some kind of religious syncretism, but a sincere attitude of prayer to God in mutual respect. This is why the motto chosen for the Assisi gathering is: “being together to pray.” Praying together, that is saying a common prayer, is out of the question, but it is possible to be present when others are praying; in this manner we manifest our respect for the prayer of the others and for the stance of the others toward the divinity; at the same time, we offer them the humble and sincere testimony of our faith in Christ, Lord of the Universe.

That is what will be done in Assisi, where at one point in the day, there will be separate prayers by the different religious representatives in different places. But in the square of the lower Basilica of St. Francis, there will follow, at suitable intervals, one after the other, the prayers of the representatives of each religion, while all others will attend with a respectful internal and external attitude, attesting to the supreme effort of other men and women who seek God. ...This “being together to pray” takes on a particularly deep and eloquent meaning insofar as all will be the ones next to the others to implore God for the gift that all of humankind most needs today in order to survive: peace.⁶⁵⁹

In the above statement of the Pope it is to understand that the believers of different religions at Assisi came together for prayer and not to pray together. *L'Osservatore Romano* had published a number of articles and spelled out various theological reasons why a common prayer between Christians and members of other religions is not theologically acceptable.⁶⁶⁰ Cardinal Ratzinger in this regard states, “we can pray with each other only if we are agreed who or what God is and if there is therefore basic agreement as to what praying is: a process of dialogue in which I talk to God who is able to hear and take notice. To put it another way: shared prayer presumes an understanding of the addressee and thus likewise of the inner action

⁶⁵⁸ See C. Mendonca, *Dynamics of Symbol and Dialogue: Interreligious Education in India*, 2002, pp. 135-68.

⁶⁵⁹ Pontifical Commission “Justitia et Pax,” *Assise: Journée mondiale de prière pour la paix*, October 27, 1986, pp.25-26, See J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions : From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 2002, p.236.

⁶⁶⁰ See especially the presentation by Archbishop Jorge Mejia, “Réflexion théologique sur la journée mondiale de prière pour la paix,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 17, 1986.

directed toward him.”⁶⁶¹ However, Father Marcello Zago, former Secretary of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, while justifying the procedure at Assisi, confirmed the possibility of common prayer by Christians and members of other religious traditions, as he wrote: “There have been experiences of common prayer and religious sharing. In most cases they are carried out prudently, and syncretism is avoided. Sharing an experience of meditation is the most common. There are serious theological reasons for this... Being together to pray, and sometimes to pray together, is a recognition of this essential fact of the relationship of all human beings with God.”⁶⁶² In any case Pope’s words “being together to pray and not to pray together” is seen from the danger of doctrinal and practical relativism and syncretism. That such a danger must clearly be avoided is beyond discussion. But that does not mean that prayer in common must be regarded as something that can not be done.⁶⁶³ In this regard we also refer to what the “*Guidelines for Interreligious dialogue*” of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) states:

A third form of dialogue goes to the deepest levels of religious life and consists in sharing in prayer and contemplation. The purpose of such common prayer is primarily the corporate worship of the God of all who has created us to be one large family. We are called to worship God not only individually but also in community, and since in a very real and fundamental manner we are one with the whole of humanity, it is not only our right but our duty to worship him together with others.⁶⁶⁴

At the same time the *Guidelines* explain that it be done correctly, the discernment is required, and the preparation is required on the part of the participants and gives specific directives for prayer gatherings.⁶⁶⁵

In the faith crisis of religions what is required is a dialogue through prayer, an example shown by Pope John Paul II at Assisi. What seems to gather and unite

⁶⁶¹ J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 2004, p.108. Making a distinction between multireligious and interreligious prayer, Cardinal Ratzinger doubts the possibility of interreligious prayer, as he states: “While in multireligious prayer this is done in fact within the same context, yet separately, interreligious prayer means people or groups of various religious allegiances praying together. Is that, in all the truth and in all honesty, possible at all? I doubt it,” P. 108. On distinguishing what is Christian in interreligious dialogue, see *ibid.*, p.99-105.

⁶⁶² M. Zago, “Les religions pour la paix,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, October 15, 1986, See J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions : From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 2002, p.237.

⁶⁶³ For more details on Interreligious Prayer, praying together: why and how, and common prayers between Christians and Jews, Muslims, Others - see J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions, From Confrontation to Dialogue*, 2002, pp. 236-52.

⁶⁶⁴ CBCI Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, second revised edition, 1989, 82.

⁶⁶⁵ See CBCI Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, 1989, 84-86.

Christians and believers of other religions in a special way is the recognition of the need of prayer. The Pope expresses his conviction that the Spirit of God is present in the prayer of every person who prays, Christian or otherwise.⁶⁶⁶ The prayer unites us to God. In prayer there is a real dialogue between God and man. The Pope says: “All Christians must, therefore, be committed to dialogue with the believers of all religions, so that the mutual understanding and collaboration may grow, so that moral values be strengthened; so that God may be praised in all creation. Ways must be developed to make this dialogue become a reality everywhere, but especially in Asia, the continent that is the cradle of ancient cultures and religions.”⁶⁶⁷

Christians today practice Zen, Yoga, Sufi paths, and other spiritual techniques. This is certainly a great chance for deepening the Christian experience. Michael von Brück says,

I can boldly say that today our own experience is that God does not speak to us only in books and through the great teachers of the tradition but also through other religions and their teachers. Practicing the spiritual paths of other religions enables one to gain a new look into one’s own tradition. What happens at these times of interreligious encounter is precisely that Christian mysticism is newly discovered, and this is certainly one of the best fruits of the encounter over the last few decades. This, however, is not sufficient. It is important to walk together in spiritual experience in order to shape life of all religions to make life on earth more just, more peaceful, and more sustainable in the future.⁶⁶⁸

In a secularised world of today, the moral and spiritual values are being rather ignored. The person is burdened so much commercially that he finds little time for moral and spiritual values. If today we close our eyes to this situation, it may be difficult later to see the moral and spiritual values in our daily life, or we may be led to live without moral and spiritual values. The interreligious encounter can rightly now enter into this situation of the human person in a commercialised and secularised world and safeguard the moral and spiritual values. Thus coming together to pray in an interreligious encounter would certainly promote moral and spiritual values in the society.

⁶⁶⁶ See Pope John Paul II, “The Message to the Peoples of Asia, Manila, February 21, 1981,” in F. Gioia, (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p.239.

⁶⁶⁷ Pope John Paul II, “The Message to the Peoples of Asia, Manila, February 21, 1981,” in F. Gioia, (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p.240.

⁶⁶⁸ See M. von Brück, “Identifying Constructively Our Interreligious Moment,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.40.

5.5.2.2.3 Social activity: Mission of justice and peace, love and service

The document *Dialogue and Mission* describes the dialogue of action in a liberation perspective as “the concrete commitment to the service of humankind and all forms of activity for social development and for the struggle against poverty and the structures which produce it,”⁶⁶⁹ and the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* urges the importance of this form of dialogue as: “The importance of dialogue for integral development, social justice and human liberation needs to be stressed.... There is need to stand up for human rights, proclaim the demands of justice, and denounce injustice..., independently of the religious allegiance of the victims. There is need also to join together in trying to solve the great problems facing society and the world, as well as education for justice and peace.”⁶⁷⁰ The great event of Incarnation of Jesus Christ was an event for the mission of justice and peace, mission of love and service. It was to give back the dignity of human person which was lost, to raise the poor and downtrodden ones, to serve them in love that Jesus became one among us. Today in the context especially of the third world countries the need to work for human liberation is growing.

In the Asian context, Aloysius Pieris, who calls to unite the praxis of human liberation and interreligious dialogue into one concern, warns that the Church in Asia cannot hope to become the Church of Asia unless, after Jesus’ example, it first immerses itself in the twofold reality of Asian poverty and religiosity. To the local churches in Asia he makes this “final appeal”: “Enter into the stream at the point where the religiousness of the Asian poor...and the poverty of the religious Asians...meet to form the ideal community of total sharing.”⁶⁷¹

In the context of sharing God’s love and service to all people, and specially the poor ones amidst other religions and amidst communism, I give here two examples, that of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Madeleine Delbrel of France. No doubt it was this poverty that Mother Teresa experienced in Calcutta which drew her to go out to all peoples without any discrimination of caste, creed or religion.. The greatest love that she experienced in Jesus Christ had no way out other than to share it with the poor and the downtrodden ones. Her witness to Christ was through love and service to the

⁶⁶⁹ *Dialogue and Mission*, 13.

⁶⁷⁰ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 44.

⁶⁷¹ A. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988, p.50.

poor of India. Her life is itself a proclamation of the Gospel in the context of other religions. Her institutions, home for the aged, home for the stranded children, home for the sick etc. where she and her sisters welcomed all without any discrimination of caste and creed is itself a witness to human and spiritual liberation of the people. To extend the love of God there was no barrier to her. One event from her life is, her reaching out to a Muslim woman. An old and sick Muslim lady to whom Mother Teresa gave some medicine felt that a miracle had taken place. She said to Mother Teresa: “After so many years of suffering, this was the first day I am feeling no pain. Allah sent you to me.” And later on Mother Teresa says, at Motijhil an old Muslim woman came to me and said: “I want you to promise me something,” “When you hear that I am sick and dying, please come. I want to die with God.”⁶⁷²

The second example refers to the witness to evangelisation from Madeleine Delbrel, born on 24th October, 1904, in the Southern French city of Mussidan. Her life can be divided into different stages. Prior to her conversion to the Christian faith, she had contacts with communists and was indeed a strict advocate of atheism. Her relationship with Jean Maydiou and his affection brought about outstanding changes in her life. Her years as a student of philosophy, history and art at the university of Sorbonne exposed her to further experiences that aided her conversion. She was later converted (on the 29th March 1924), a conversion that marked a turning point in her life.⁶⁷³ She embraced a modest life of social service and witnessed to true Christian life in the midst of the socially deprived, and especially within the communist milieu of Ivry, in spite of the scorn of her colleagues. Schleinzer describes her new life aptly:

*Sie versteht sich als ‘verborgene Zeugin,’ die weiß: ihr Zeugnis ist an einen Hauch des Geistes gebunden, sein Weg ist eng mit dem Schweigen verbunden. Man hat es oft mit dem Sauerteig verglichen. Der Sauerteig arbeitet geräuschlos..... Die Zeugen werden durch den, der in ihnen wohnt, zu Zeugen. Sie machen sich nicht selbst zu Zeugen – in einer Art von höherem Komödiantentum. Der Platz dieses Leben ist der letzte und der am tiefsten vergrabene. Das ist die wichtigste Bedingung dafür, dass es keimt und Frucht bringt.*⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷² N. Chawla, *Mother Teresa*, (Revised and updated edition), India: Penguin Books, 2002, p.45.

⁶⁷³ See K. Boehme, „Nichts soll uns profan sein“ Das geistliche Profil Madeleine Delbrel,“ in G. Fuchs (ed.), *Mystik und Verantwortung: Madeleine Delbrel*, Frankfurt a. M., 1995, p.42-43.

⁶⁷⁴ A. Schleinzer, *Die Liebe ist unsere einzige Aufgabe. Das Lebenszeugnis von Madeleine Delbrel*, Ostfildern, 1994, p. 193-94.

Madeleine was a strong supporter of the priest workers' movement in France in 1950s. Her idea of evangelisation was based on being Presence and incarnate in non-Christian milieus and simply witnessing to the love of the neighbour, instead of preaching and conversion.⁶⁷⁵ Evangelisation, for her, does not mean going to the people like justified person in the midst of sinners, or like educated people in the midst of the non-educated. She made it clear that we go to them in order to speak with them about our common father, who is known to some people and unknown to others; we go to them like people who have been forgiven and not like people who have not committed any sin.⁶⁷⁶ Reacting to those who criticised her attention to communists, she replied in biblical terms, God did not say: love your neighbours like yourself – with the exception of the communists.⁶⁷⁷ She maintained firmly that the Church is indebted to communists, and she has to evangelise them and live the Gospel with them without discrimination. In this way through witness to Christ, Church's missionary activity consists primarily in personal encounter, using the language of the heart (love) and the goodness which is the language of Christ. This also implies penetrating people's hearts with one's heart, listening to their hopes, strengthening them and working towards the establishment of a dignified human life.

The World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago in 1893, could be considered as the genesis of interfaith dialogue, which has come also to "symbolize the aspirations of all who believe that religious people should be friendly and cooperative to each other and work together for human welfare and peace."⁶⁷⁸ Today the caritas agencies around the world are increasing enormously to come to the aid of the poor. Christianity is not the sole religion, there are also many other religions working for peace and justice, helping the poor people of the world in their struggle against poverty. Through interreligious encounters people have become aware of the need to come to the aid of those who struggle against poverty. Every Christian is called to

⁶⁷⁵ See A. Schleinzer, *Die Liebe ist unsere einzige Aufgabe. Das Lebenszeugnis von Madeleine Delbrel*, 1994, p. 205.

⁶⁷⁶ See A. Schleinzer, *Die Liebe ist unsere einzige Aufgabe. Das Lebenszeugnis von Madeleine Delbrel*, 1994, p. 268.

⁶⁷⁷ See A. Schleinzer, *Die Liebe ist unsere einzige Aufgabe. Das Lebenszeugnis von Madeleine Delbrel*, 1994, p. 146.

⁶⁷⁸ M. Bray Brooke, "The Interfaith Movement: The Present Reality," in *Vidyajyoti – Journal of Theological Reflection*, 56, 1992, p. 182, 181-193.

give a sincere witness to Jesus Christ through his love and service assisting in the human liberation of people without discrimination of caste, creed or religion.

Today theologians, in particular liberation theology, speak in terms of working for the kingdom of God, and in terms of justice, peace and service. There is a working for the Kingdom of God – a tendency which stresses justice and well-being of humanity, which does not refer to Jesus Christ. The document *Dominus Iesus* is an answer to the context of religious pluralism. Where the link with Jesus is absent or obscured, there can be no unequivocal affirmation of the salvific value of any religious institution, any religious or ethical practice or any religious or humanistic aspiration. And for this reason, *Dominus Iesus* rejects the suggestion that a concern for social justice, in and of itself, is equivalent to the concern for the Kingdom. The Kingdom cannot be “separated” from Jesus who, in turn, cannot be separated from the Church. The document acknowledges that these three – Jesus, the Kingdom, and the Church – are not identical with one another, but it categorically refuses to speak of one without the others.⁶⁷⁹ Through dialogue with other religions, we need to work for the mission of justice and peace, love and service as Jesus himself proclaimed to the world. The reformed Dutch theologian and missionary J.C. Hoekendijk asserts that mission is realised with the proclamation of “*shalom*” in hope; so the “*missio*” is “pro-mission” in the service of the world, building up peace-“*shalom*,” that leads to intercommunion and participation. Also for the Catholic theologian L. Rütli, mission is the responsibility of Christians before a world in the hope of transforming it, in order to create a new world.⁶⁸⁰ Paul Knitter proposes also a “liberation-centered” model of theology of religions, where he advocates a “globally responsible” dialogue between the various religious traditions for a universal “eco-human well being.”⁶⁸¹ Human liberation as well as the well-being of creation require today the shared commitment of members of all the religious traditions. Social injustice and ecological abuse are intertwined, both must be overcome together, through a global responsibility and through dialogue between religions for justice and peace, for love and service of mankind. By all means as Christians we must note that our social

⁶⁷⁹ See, T. Merrigan, “Religious Pluralism and the Vatican Document ‘*Dominus Iesus*,’” in *Sacred Heart University Review* 20, 1999-2000, pp.63-79; See also *Dominus Iesus*, 18.

⁶⁸⁰ See, J. Cardinal Tomko, “Missionary Challenges to the Theology of Salvation,” in P. Mojzes and L. Swidler (eds.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p.21-22.

⁶⁸¹ See P. Knitter, *Jesus and Other Names: Christian Mission and Global responsibility*, 1996, p. 284.

engagement ought to be a Christian social work.⁶⁸² Our work ought to give witness to Jesus Christ.

5.5.3 Some practical questions and risks from interreligious dialogue

5.5.3.1 Question on the significance of other religions

In practicing interreligious dialogue, can a Christian, in his visit to the temples, mosques, or in other worshipping places participate in their rituals or religious practices? And to what extent? What is the significance of other religious traditions for others and for Christians? On the other hand, with regard to Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of the world, can I openly and sincerely say to the members of other religions, that all that you (other religions) have is only 'a ray of truth,' but the fullness is in Jesus Christ and with his Church and Christians? Or in not saying that Jesus is the only Saviour in the interreligious context, do I fail in my commitment to Christian faith? Or in interreligious dialogue, how do I maintain harmony? Is it a matter of compromising my faith in order that there be a dialogue with other religions? Can I be a sincere Christian, a true follower of Jesus Christ and his Church and at the same time have an open and sincere dialogue? In all these and many other questions, what we arrive at ultimately is about the question of salvation of members of other religions and the significance of other religious traditions. For us as Christians we say that Jesus Christ is the saviour of the world and there is no salvation without Jesus Christ. This is the faith that we profess, and we see it from our Christian perspective. But in dialogue questions are raised from both perspectives of Christians and non-Christians, and looked for answers, and that is why the basic need of all in dialogue is the research of theological foundations.

Regarding the challenges of dialogue Jacques Dupuis says,

Dialogue, it is observed, can only be sincere if it takes place on an equal footing between partners. Can, then, the Church and Christians be sincere in their professed will to enter into dialogue if they are not prepared to revoke the traditional claims about Jesus as "constitutive" Saviour of humankind? The problem of religious identity in general, and of the Christian identity in

⁶⁸² Ludwig Mödl writes: „Dennoch ist immer zu fragen: Was macht das christliche Spezifikum kirchlicher Sozialarbeit und Caritas arbeit aus?“ According to Mödl, it is through the love of God and solidarity to people that we can engage ourselves in Christian work. See L. Mödl, "Pastorale Schwerpunkte für heute und ihre spirituelle Basis," in *Geist und Leben*, Heft 4, Juli/August, 2002, p.278.

particular, is involved in this question, together with that of the openness to the others that dialogue requires.⁶⁸³

One question that we often ask is that can Christians sincerely enter into dialogue, and if so to what extent? The repeated question: when we say that only in Jesus Christ there is salvation, even if it is an inclusive method, does it not imply that other religions in dialogue are already looked down, at least when it comes to the matter of salvation only in Jesus Christ? Can we then sincerely enter into dialogue with other religions at least to the matter of salvation claim? It is true that our Christian answer is from our faith in Jesus Christ as the and only Saviour of the world. But does our faith respect and understand the faith/beliefs of others in dialogue? Humanly speaking the faith of the other also has a say in dialogue, if it is an open and sincere dialogue. But the problem seems to remain unsolved, at least with regard to salvation or Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of the world, for this particular matter in interreligious dialogue occupies the minds and hearts of many religions and theologians. Other matters in interreligious dialogue, for example, working for peace, recognising the moral and spiritual values in other religions, cooperation or interaction for a just society etc may easily be dealt with.

In the words of Hans Waldenfels,

It pertains to the essence of world religions that they proclaim salvation fundamentally for all human beings. This claim first of all is not concerned with whether or not men and women accept this promise for themselves, but rather with the fact of a promise which has all humanity, indeed the entire world, as its addressee. Now this is true for Christianity. It is undeniable that it proclaims God's salvation for all human beings and the entire creation. Today, however, it finds alliance partners for this pledge of universal salvation in other religions which from their side are also convinced of a possibility of salvation which is fundamentally open to all humankind.⁶⁸⁴

That all religions try to spread themselves, their convictions about their religions and their messages is a fact today. In other words, different religions aim to bring people to distinct goals, not merely as intermediate ends, but for their final destination. Thus, as Mark Heim says, it would be legitimate to speak about salvations in the

⁶⁸³ J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, p. 377-78.

⁶⁸⁴ H. Waldenfels, "Mission and Interreligious Dialogue: What is at stake?," in P. Mojzes, and L. Swidler (ed.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p.156.

plural.⁶⁸⁵ But it would be difficult to accept this. Surely from the Christian point of view, there can be salvation only in Jesus Christ. We understand and believe that it is Jesus who is the Way. We may ask at this point, how then can other religions play any role in the way to salvation? According to our Christian faith, Jesus is certainly the Way, and the way he has followed himself leads through the narrow gate of death to resurrection to new life. The human person is invited to enter, with the assistance of divine grace, into this way of dying and rising. Different religions can help in this process, for they contain elements that are true and holy. They enshrine precepts and doctrines which “often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”

So the concern over the significance of other religions may be spoken in terms of their manner or conduct of life, their spiritual activity or prayer, and in their service of fellow human beings. Pope Paul VI said that the religions possess “a splendid patrimony of religious writings” and they “have taught generations of men how to pray.”⁶⁸⁶ This is one of the elements which allow the followers of different religions to enter into the paschal mystery. It may be by turning the mind away from self and directing it towards God in prayer. Secondly, because they “reflect the ray of that truth which enlightens all men,” their life is an exemplary one for others too. It is through their right thinking and right speaking, through the moral values and teaching and further giving witness to these moral teachings, etc. that the adherents of other religions may reflect that truth. As St. Paul says, to fill their minds with “everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise” (Phil 4:8), that we can see in all religions that goodness and love. While it is from God that we receive the life, that we are being transformed into new persons, it is duty in our interreligious relationship to “acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral good found among non-Christians, as well as their social and cultural values.” Thirdly, in the service of one’s fellow human beings, the

⁶⁸⁵ See S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, 1995, referred by M. Fitzgerald, “Religious Pluralism – A Theological Consideration,” in *VI Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation*, Lebanon, 7 September 2002, at www.c-b-f.org/start.php?, (access 12.10.2005).

⁶⁸⁶ *Evangelii Nunciandi*, 53

religions provide the possibility for developing a life of friendship with God, though they themselves would not necessarily express what they are doing in these terms.⁶⁸⁷

5.5.3.2 Question on superiority

If we may ask, are other religious traditions unique in themselves? What does it mean or does it threaten the Christian uniqueness? The phrase ‘Christian uniqueness’ has been much used to describe the stand and the role of Christianity in the world. Principally it refers to Jesus Christ as the only saviour of the world. It also refers to Jesus Christ and Christianity as unique in the sense that there can not be any comparison with other religions or so called saviour-figures. And so Christianity has taken the credit of having absoluteness⁶⁸⁸ in the whole matter of truth and salvation of mankind. On the other hand, no religion may exist without having to give to the world its own unique message. While we accept Jesus Christ as very unique to us, and Christianity as unique religion to us, and from which we have our religious identity, for Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists their scriptures are unique to them.

In interreligious encounter pluralism and identity are sometimes experienced as contradictions. Pluralism is the equality of different claims and identity is the search for continuity in the midst of our constructed borderlines, so that identity turns often into the denigration of the other or the stranger. Each tradition forms a unique identity and still can integrate others.⁶⁸⁹ But in integration one must also be careful not to syncretize one’s faith or to relativise one’s uniqueness in the religions. To hold on to one’s uniqueness and to respect that uniqueness is not to be meant to condemn other religions. As human being is created unique, only in respecting that uniqueness one can enrich self and the other. All religions face the question of what

⁶⁸⁷ See M. Fitzgerald, “Religious Pluralism – A Theological Consideration,” in *VI Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation*, Lebanon, 7 September 2002, at www.c-b-f.org/start.php?, (access 12.10.2005).

⁶⁸⁸ Regarding Christian absoluteness, Claude Geffre says, “our principal concern must always be to show clearly that one does not confuse the universality of the right of Christ as Word made flesh with the universality of Christianity as a historical religion. We must guard against making Christianity as absolute religion that includes all that is good in the other religions. Neither historical Christianity nor the Church that people see is absolute. The only absolute is the “Reign,” of which Jesus Christ is at the same time both the messenger and the future”, “Christian Uniqueness and Interreligious Dialogue,” in P. Mojzes, and L. Swidler (ed.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p. 68.

⁶⁸⁹ See M. von Brück, “Identifying Constructively Our Interreligious Moment,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.41.

their unique and important contribution to humankind is. They are called not just to legitimise or strengthen their religious institutions but to offer selfless service to human beings. If Christian identity, at the doctrinal level, has remained dominant to state that only in Jesus Christ there is the fullness of truth or salvation, there is also, at the level of Christian practical living, selfless service and love to be shown to the entire world. Cardinal Tomko writes: “The uniqueness, absoluteness and universal significance of the revelation-salvation in Jesus Christ gives no real ground for human pride, arrogance, superiority, boasting or intolerance, for it is a call to total “kenosis,” self-emptying, letting God’s rule take hold of the human heart and mind. It is to share in the “humiliation” even to the cross (Phil 2:5-11) and to become alive to God with a new life that looks to God.”⁶⁹⁰

Von Brück says, “clinging to traditional forms or rigid institutions or certain dogmatic formulations is an attitude of weakness. To speak with Paul: Those whom nothing can separate from the love of God (Rom 8:38ff.) do not need delimitation and demarcation due to a fear of losing identity.”⁶⁹¹ If the faith in God is strong enough, there is less fear of losing one’s religious identity. But on the other side, a confessional identity, which is important and may demarcate the context of a specific religion, may also lose ground and importance in the horizon of encounter with other religions. This is an interesting experience in interreligious dialogue not only for Christians but also for Buddhists and others. The danger seems to be, that in emphasizing or stating one important thing, you forget the other important things. Therefore in confessing one’s true religious faith, should one forget that there are other religious identities in this pluralistic world? The answer is naturally negative. Thus while we remain true to our faith in our religion we have no ground to condemn, exclude, reject other religions or show negative feelings towards them.

5.5.3.3 Practical risks in interreligious dialogue

There is a fear that in interreligious dialogue we may meet other believers who are theologically better prepared than ourselves, more sophisticated and better able to

⁶⁹⁰ J. Cardinal Tomko, “Christian Mission Today,” in P. Mojzes and L. Swidler, (eds.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, pp. 249-50; Tomko writes further in this regard of the attitude of superiority: “Far from generating an attitude of superiority, Christians are called to make the unique self-surrender of Jesus to God and his self-giving to others, their own as individuals and as Church, and thus become a sacrament of true religion to all others,” *ibid.* p.250.

⁶⁹¹ M. von Brück, “Identifying Constructively Our Interreligious Moment,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.42.

articulate their religious beliefs and practices. Some religions may be better structured and personal than others. The great risk seems to be that the ‘weaker’ partner in dialogue may become confused, may be theologically overpowered, and may be imperceptibly wheeled into religious doubt, or into abandoning his or her religion and embracing that of the more ‘powerful’ dialogue partner.⁶⁹²

Others fear that in interreligious dialogue there is a risk of religious relativism. Religious relativism here is to be understood in the sense that all religions are equally true and propose one universal religion for the whole of mankind.⁶⁹³ To quote Mahatma Gandhi: “The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the different religions... Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, etc., is not only bound to fail, but is a sacrilege. The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time... Truth is exclusive property of no single religion.”⁶⁹⁴ He further says, “[m]y position is that all the great religions are fundamentally equal,”⁶⁹⁵ and “I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mahomed or Zoroaster.”⁶⁹⁶ Regarding the risk and error of religious relativism we quote here Cardinal Arinze:

we therefore reply that one religion is not as good as another, that the religions are not all saying the same thing on every point at issue, and that every individual has personal responsibility, and therefore freedom, to look for objective religious truth. This clear mind about the existence of objective truth, allied with respect for everyone’s religion even when one disagrees with some aspects of it, is a necessary requirement for safe and fruitful interreligious dialogue.⁶⁹⁷

Another risk in interreligious dialogue is that of fear of syncretism. Syncretism is the effort to put several religions together and carve a new religion out of them. This may be guided by the desire to preserve all the factors which seem common to all the religions. It may be the desire not to offend any of the believers but rather to work out a pattern in which none of them feel threatened. Syncretism may often appear in particular practices such as interreligious prayer, when it does not respect

⁶⁹² See F. Cardinal Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers*, 1998, p.17.

⁶⁹³ On different types of relativism, see M. Dhavamony S.J., “Absoluteness of Jesus Christ and of Christianity,” in *New Evangelization in the Third Millennium, Studia Missionalia*, Vol.48, 1999, pp.73-77.

⁶⁹⁴ M. K.Gandhi, *Christian Missions*, Ahmedabad, 1941, p.34.

⁶⁹⁵ M. K.Gandhi, *Christian Missions*, 1941, p. 210.

⁶⁹⁶ M. K.Gandhi, *Christian Missions*, 1941, p. 170.

⁶⁹⁷ F. Cardinal Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers*, 1998, p.18.

the religious identity of the participants but presents them as members of one religious community of faith. Syncretism is a danger which has to be watched in interreligious relations, and no attempt should be made to nibble at the religious identity of any of the participants.⁶⁹⁸ Each religious tradition can form a unique identity and still integrate others. But in this integration one must also be careful not to syncretize one's faith and to relativise one's uniqueness.

A further risk of interreligious dialogue is a danger of religious indifferentism. As a result of the frequent contact with the members of other religions and with their religious convictions, one may also lose belief in his or her religion. When one finds no difference in the religions or finds all religions essentially equal, then there may be the risk of losing faith in his or her religion, and may lead to religious relativism.

One thing that we must keep in mind, is, that all these risks and dangers in interreligious dialogue can be avoided if the participants are well grounded in their own religions, if they live their religions with sincerity and authenticity, if they are committed to their religions and if their religious community takes an interest in their interreligious contacts.⁶⁹⁹ Therefore it is the basic need for a Christian in interreligious dialogue to remain faithful to his faith.

5.5.4 Christian mission of interreligious dialogue

In recent decades dialogue has been spoken more loudly, and consequently mission more softly. Christian mission had its stronghold in its traditional understanding of conversion into Christianity. Today, for many, dialogue appears to have taken the place of mission. For many others dialogue is nothing other than a new tactic of mission. There are also others who wish to accord both mission and dialogue their rightful place because for the two are not congruent.⁷⁰⁰ The document *Dominus Iesus* sees the recognition that interreligious dialogue is desirable and must be linked to the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel,⁷⁰¹ the claim that Christ is God's "definitive and complete revelation" is juxtaposed with the recognition that "the

⁶⁹⁸ See F. Cardinal Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers*, 1998, p.19.

⁶⁹⁹ See F. Cardinal Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers*, 1998, p.21.

⁷⁰⁰ See H. Waldenfels, "Mission and Interreligious Dialogue: What is at stake?," in P. Mojzes, and L. Swidler (ed.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p.141.

⁷⁰¹ See *Dominus Iesus*, 1-2.

depth of the divine mystery in itself remains transcendent and inexhaustible,”⁷⁰² the willingness to acknowledge the non-Christian religious traditions may de facto serve God’s salvific will is immediately qualified by the insistence on the unique role of Christianity.⁷⁰³

So the primary aspect of Christian mission in interreligious dialogue is that a Christian can not be silent regarding the message of Jesus Christ. A Christian in interreligious dialogue must be a true witness to Jesus Christ. How? The answer is found in the concern of the document *Dominus Iesus*, which reaffirms uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the universal salvific will of God through the incarnation, Church and the Sacraments. It reiterates the traditional faith in Jesus’ unique divine Sonship, which qualifies him as the unique and universal revealer and executor of God’s eternal will to save all humankind.⁷⁰⁴ It also maintains that the faith in this doctrine cannot be equated with the convictions that are the fruits of religious experience in general.⁷⁰⁵ What we just said is the faith in Jesus Christ at the doctrinal level, but living of that faith is also very important amidst other religions, where the message of Jesus Christ is lived fully in Christ’s love and service, in accepting all in God’s kingdom, in giving hope to everyone that all are included in God’s universal plan of salvation.

Another aspect of Christian mission in interreligious dialogue is related to the question of the possibility of salvation. We have earlier mentioned that today other religions also claim salvation for their adherents in their religions. In this context the Christian mission here is very clearly expressed and promoted in the words of Hans Waldenfels, as “[r]egardless of how irritating it was to Christian preachers over a long period, the fact that other religions also were convinced of the same matter—the possibility of salvation for everyone, does not in principle disavow the Christian message. Instead, Christians should much rather rejoice that fundamental conviction is effective beyond the borders of the Christian community of believers.”⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰² See *Dominus Iesus*, 6.

⁷⁰³ See *Dominus Iesus*, 8, 14, 17, 21.

⁷⁰⁴ See, *Dominus Iesus*, 6, 9, 14.

⁷⁰⁵ See, *Dominus Iesus*, 7.

⁷⁰⁶ H. Waldenfels, “Mission and Interreligious Dialogue: What is at stake?,” in P. Mojzes, and L. Swidler (ed.), *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, 1990, p.156.

To sum up this section on Christian mission we refer to the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* where we have a series of references regarding our Christian mission in interreligious dialogue. Through the various stages of dialogue, in fact, “the partners will feel a great need both to impart and to receive information, to give and receive explanations, to ask questions to each other. Christians in dialogue have the duty of responding to their partner’s expectation regarding the contents of the Christian faith, of bearing witness to this faith, when this is called for, of giving an account of the hope that is in them (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).”⁷⁰⁷ In this dialogical situation Christians will hope and desire to share with others their joy in knowing and following Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour – a desire which, insofar as they have a deep love for the Lord Jesus, will be motivated not merely by obedience to the Lord’s command but by their love for him. But it should be found normal that the followers of other religions are animated by a similar desire to share their own faith; “all dialogue implies reciprocity and aims at banishing fear and aggressiveness.”⁷⁰⁸ In all this Christians must “be prepared to follow wherever in God’s providence and design the Spirit is leading them.” “It is the Spirit who is guiding the evangelising mission of the Church”; to us it belongs to be attentive to its promptings. But “whether proclamation be possible or not, the Church pursues her mission...through interreligious dialogue witnessing to and sharing Gospel values.”⁷⁰⁹

5.6 Pastoral Criteria for Interreligious Dialogue

5.6.1 Pastoral exposure and immersion: Be open to others

For interreligious dialogue, the first stage in the pastoral cycle, is an exposure-immersion programme. By ‘immersion’ we mean “to be rooted in a context or in a place with its people, and to be aware of the movement of the Spirit of God and listen to him in that context.”⁷¹⁰ The inspiration and foundation for this exposure-immersion programme is the mystery of the Incarnation. By Incarnation Jesus Christ becomes one among us, one of mankind. This is God’s exposure and immersion into mankind. Being one of us Jesus experiences mankind. This mystery demands the Christians to pitch their tent in the midst of the people, “workers, farmers, slum dwellers, minority groups, political prisoners, representatives of other religions and

⁷⁰⁷ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 82.

⁷⁰⁸ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 83.

⁷⁰⁹ *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 84.

⁷¹⁰ A. Alangaram S.J., *Christ of the Asian peoples: Towards an Asian Contextual Christology*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2001 edition, p.7.

government officials”⁷¹¹ to dialogue with them and to hear their problems, hopes and aspirations. Such a participation in the lives and struggles of the people leads us to question the existing situation of the poor, of the oppressed, and of the ‘religious other.’

In the exposure-immersion stage the Christian enters into the context of the ‘religious other.’ In this programme, first of all, there is an unquenching need of the person for human interrelatedness. And the

experience of human inter-relatedness in different local situations deepens awareness of the richness of the diversity of the community of humankind which Christians believe to be created and sustained by God in His love for all people. They marvel and give thanks for this richness, acknowledging that to have experienced it has given many of them an enriched appreciation of the deeper values in their own traditions - and in some cases has enabled them to rediscover them. But at the same time they feel sharply conscious of the way in which diversity can be, and too often has been, abused: the temptation to regard one's own community as the best; to attribute to one's own religious and cultural identity an absolute authority; the temptation to exclude from it, and to isolate it from others.⁷¹²

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) in the *Guidelines for interreligious dialogue* states in the introduction: we want these guidelines “to be an invitation to all to open their hearts and minds for a brotherly relationship in depth with the believers of other religions and even with those who profess no religion at all.”⁷¹³ Similarly the World Council of Churches in its *Guidelines for Dialogue* states in the introduction: “Dialogue begins with a single act — the decision taken by one person to take the first step to be open to another person of a different religious tradition.”⁷¹⁴ It is in the interest of both Christians and other religions and particularly to their relationship that these guidelines are helpful to a large extent. These opening words in the introduction themselves present to us the need for the Christian openness to other believers for a brotherly relationship, which we all, Christians and believers of other religions would joyfully foster.

⁷¹¹ G. B. Rosales and C. G. Arevalo, (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 1992, p.211.

⁷¹² *Guidelines on Dialogue*, WCC Publications, 1993, No. 7, p. 12.

⁷¹³ The Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, 1977, p.1.

⁷¹⁴ *Guidelines on Dialogue*, WCC Publications, 1993, p.7.

But what does in concrete ‘being open to others’ mean? Are we to remain dumb hearers or listeners? As Christian theologians, we are expected to speak out the Christian story, the Christian truth without destroying the otherness of the other. The task here is to be respectful of the otherness without slipping into the relativism of incommensurability. The practice of interreligious dialogue is not an attempt to cut off from the mainstream of Christian theological reflection, but, on the contrary, to recognize that dialogue is first and foremost a practice of faith, which naturally for us Christians, springs from Church’s liturgy, the story which Christians seek to tell. It is our faith experience that we seek to share with others. It is God’s Word – Jesus Christ – that gives Christians their identity as people called to speak of what they know in Christ to be true. But at the same time, it is in listening for the ‘seeds of the Word’ that Christians learn to practice interreligious dialogue.

Pastoral exposure and immersion into the religious context of today demands a reflection, whereby we come to know the need to listen to the other, to understand him, to accept the other in love and tolerance. It is this programme of exposure, immersion and reflection that opens our heart and mind and we begin to see how far we are behind in recognizing truly the religious identity of the other. It is indeed a pastoral need today to go out in our mission to all believers and accept them as God’s beloved children.

5.6.2 Listening to the ‘religious other’

Cardinal Francis Arinze, in defining interreligious dialogue, mentions listening as one of the first acts of dialogue. He says it is important to stress this, because more and more people are finding it difficult to listen to others. Willingness to listen implies appreciation of what the other person is, believes, prays or lives, together with a conviction that is worthwhile sacrificing some time to be informed about all that. The person who is very willing to talk but not so prepared to listen is not likely to be a good dialogue partner. Sometimes the most direct road to a person’s heart and trust is simply the willingness to listen, to ask questions for clarification and to seek to understand.⁷¹⁵ Michael Barnes focuses on the fact that we are becoming more aware of the ‘other,’ from all points of view, religious included. We are beginning to take the differences seriously. The existence of the other can no longer

⁷¹⁵ See F. Cardinal Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers*, 1998, p.5.

continue to be peripheral to our faith. We have to exist and coexist in a pluralistic religious context.⁷¹⁶

The words of the psalmist, “Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people” (Ps. 85:8), “Make me know thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths” (Ps. 25:4), “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105) teach us to seek the source of listening to one another in the scripture. God listens patiently to mankind. And naturally we ask, are we patient enough to listen to the ‘religious other?’ If we listen to God carefully we listen to one another carefully. It is a pastoral need today to go beyond the Christian boundaries and to come closer to all believers of other religions in the process of pastoral care and counselling. In his intercultural approach to pastoral care and counselling, Emmanuel Lartey defines care as the expression of spirituality in relation to self, others, God, and creation. For those who are Christians, such an understanding of care has universal implications for our relationship with all people, all cultures and all religions.⁷¹⁷

5.6.2.1 Through the Spirit: a Pentecostal experience

The Spirit promised by Jesus, the Spirit who will ‘lead you into all the truth,’ continues his work of pointing the way to the Father. No one can know the ways of the Spirit, just as Jesus said of the wind that ‘you do not know whence it comes or whither it blows’ (Jn 3:8). The words of Pope John Paul II regarding the action of the Holy Spirit encourage us to dialogue with believers of other religions precisely from a spirit-filled action, as he says: “The action of the Holy Spirit, who in every time and place has prepared the encounter with the living God in all souls and peoples, is still at work today in the hearts of human beings, in cultures and in religions ... Everyone’s task is to discern and respond to the presence and activity of the Spirit”.⁷¹⁸

The early Church prospered ‘in the comfort of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:11). Christians themselves are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), which is now

⁷¹⁶ See M. Barnes, “On Not Including Everything: Christ, the Spirit and the Other,” in *The Way Supplement* 78, Autumn, 1993, pp. 3-4.

⁷¹⁷ E. Y. Lartey, *In Living Color : An intercultural approach to pastoral care and counselling*, second edition, London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003, p.11

⁷¹⁸ Pope John Paul II “To the Pontifical Urban University, Rome, 11th April 1991,” in F. Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, 1997, p.453.

being poured out ‘even on the Gentiles’ (Acts 11:45). It is a powerful metaphor in the New Testament that the Spirit enables the apostles to communicate, so that people from all over the world can understand ‘the mighty works of God’ (Acts 2:11). The Pentecost enables people to experience God and to articulate their experience of him in different ways and in languages. The Spirit is the power which enables the Church to proclaim the risen Lord. It is not that the Spirit replaces the absent Jesus but the Spirit is the way in which Jesus continues to be present. He will not leave them as orphans but will return (see Jn 14:18).

Jacques Dupuis writes, “the Holy Spirit is God’s “point of entry” wherever and whenever God reveals and communicates himself to people is certain.”⁷¹⁹ When God communicates through his Spirit to all the people, when God is present in all peoples through his Spirit, it is the duty of the Christian to discern the Spirit in all circumstances, in all religions, in all believers, in all cultures, in all peoples. Our religiosity demands us today to be aware of the ‘signs of the Spirit’ in all religions. Listen to the Spirit, the Spirit speaks to us, He will lead us all into the truth. He will lead us to the brothers and sisters of other religions to experience their understanding of God, to their understanding of love and peace. What we need is to listen to the Spirit.

5.6.2.2 Through an experience: richness in diversity

In her dialogue approach Monika Hellwig shares her experience with believers of other religions:

I find it important not only to read about other faiths but to encounter their practitioners face to face, to listen to their voices and look at their gestures and facial expressions to notice what excites their enthusiasm and inspires their reverence. I do this to learn both about their religious experience and to learn something about mine from the encounter. I find it important to pray or meditate with people of other traditions so long as the prayer does not deny my own faith. I like to visit temples and shrines of other traditions to experience the atmosphere, the symbolism, and their approach to the sacred. I like to learn about their mystical and ascetical traditions, about the devotional practices of popular piety. I have found all of this immensely enriching, and have acquired great admiration, respect, and friendship for certain members of other traditions whom I have met often and come to know well.

⁷¹⁹ J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002, p.83.

I have never found that others held back because I profess faith in Christ as universal savior. On the contrary, it is my impression that they would suspect me of not engaging seriously in dialogue if I were to deny it, because I would not be showing them my tradition as it really is in my community's own consciousness. I have never found that the others expected me to distance myself from the beliefs and sensitivities and piety of my own community in order to come into dialogue with them. If I were to do that, I should be useless as a dialogue partner, because I would no longer represent my tradition.⁷²⁰

In this experience of Monika Hellwig we see her conviction in faith in Jesus Christ and her love to experience what the religious other has to say about his or her experience of the divine. I may say that I have everything what I need in my religion, in my faith, but I also say that by entering into the field of the religious other, I do experience the richness, the beauty, and the greatness of God from other perspective. By recognizing the richness, beauty and goodness of God in other religions we can come closer to one another and give glory to God's marvellous works in the rich diversity of all people.

5.6.2.3 Through pastoral care: pastoral need to listen

In an interesting interview between Fred Bratman and Henri Nouwen, Fred being a Jew and living in a secularised life without much interest in religious life, requests Nouwen, a Catholic priest and professor: "*Meine Welt und deine Welt sind sich näher, als du glaubst. Besuch mich öfter, unterhalte dich mit meinen Freunden. Sieh sie dir genau an, paß gut auf, was sie sagen. Du wirst bald entdecken, daß aus der Tiefe der Menschenherzen ein Schrei kommt, den nur noch niemand gehört hat, weil keiner darauf achtet.*"⁷²¹ These thoughts of the Jew are very meaningful to the present pastoral context, where the present secular life is considered as religious, and the so called traditional religious life is being rejected. It is the pastoral duty to enter into this situation and pick up the goodness or values from today's secular world, or to bring back the religious awareness. The 'harvest is plentiful,' but we need the insight and courage to enter into the context of all believers, to listen to them. In listening we may at least try to solve most of the existing problems.

⁷²⁰ M. K. Hellwig, "Rethinking Uniqueness," in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.77.

⁷²¹ H. J. M. Nouwen, *Du bist der geliebte Mensch: Religiöses Leben in einer säkularen Welt*, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 15. Auflage, 1993, p.20-21.

The Christian role of a shepherd in its care for the sheep is often referred to that of psalm 23 where the psalmist brings out wonderful characteristics of God's care. One of the characteristics is that the Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. Jesus says: "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me...I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd." (Jn. 10:14-16). Pastoral care and pastoral listening go hand in hand. My own experience of listening in the pastoral ministry in the parish of St. Dominic's, Mangalore has given me cherishing moments. I have seen the changes in the people. The hidden love for one another has sprung out just because there is someone to listen to their problems. Through listening we bring healing. God's care is that of healing the wounds. Paul Wadell writes that one of the graces of good friendship is to help people with the wounds and brokenness of their lives through the steadfast love and care of another. Part of the realism of good friendship is realising that the wounds and brokenness are there and must be dealt with lest a person's life shuts down in fear, hurt, anger, resentment, and bitterness.⁷²²

At the very heart of pastoral counselling or all forms of counselling lies the ability to listen. Listening has been described as being silent with another person in an active way, silently receiving what another human person has to say. A true listener is quiet and yet sensitive, open, receptive and alive to the one listened to.⁷²³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote: "It is his work we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people are looking for an ear that will listen."⁷²⁴ Today's pluralistic religious context demands from Christians not just to listen to a theological debate, but also to listen to the concrete, day to day living situation of every brother and sister around us. Because of the poverty the social needs are on the increase. People look for a decent living, look for basic needs - food, clothing and shelter. The sickness in its various forms demand health care of particularly the poor. Illiteracy and unemployment lead

⁷²² P. Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, Brazo Press, 2002, p. 52.

⁷²³ For two books offering exercises in listening skills see Michael Jacobs' *Still Small Voice: An Introduction to Pastoral Counselling*, London: SPCK, 1982 and *Swift To Hear*, London: SPCK, 1985.

⁷²⁴ D. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, London: SCM, 1954, pp.87-88.

people to a devastation. The modern high-tech world has little time to uphold spiritual values. In all these circumstances the Christian needs to be aware, listen to the context and give Christian witness through the mission of love, which is to listen to the religious other.

We must not be totally prejudiced to say that we have nothing to learn from the religious other. Certainly there is something to learn from each other. Listening to the other helps us to learn. CBCI states:

[T]he use of readings and prayers from other religions should not remain at the level of external expression. Christian should in their contemplation allow themselves to be taken by the spirit of God into the deepest religious experience of their brethren, which we believe, is moving towards its final consummation in the profession of conscious faith in Jesus Christ. The use of methods of prayer such as those popularised by Yoga, Zen and Satti Patthana, and of traditional religious symbols, may lead religious-minded people to very deep levels of prayer. The values of *bhakti*, of interiority, of the sovereignty of the Lord, his transcendence and immanence, man's obedience, service, etc., should be fully accepted and allowed to shape our own religious attitudes.⁷²⁵

This love to learn from others comes from the pastoral care through listening. The religions in themselves may not be completely pure in the sense that they contain elements which need to be purified. At the same time the religions are not totally evil, for they have values and goodness, for there are 'seeds of the word'. It is amazing today to see the people from west looking in the eastern religions to discover in them values and goodness, ways of meditations, spiritual experiences, interest in culture or art. It is amazing to see the structural designs of Hindu temples for example, the art in them, a symbolic expression of the divine. We do not say that everything in them is symbolic expression of the divine. Through these symbolic expression of the divine in other religions we Christians may enhance our appreciation of the divine, even though they may be only 'seeds of the word.' The Christian paintings or art has a particular meaning and it portrays the Christian story. Through the Christian symbols – religious paintings and art, the Christian comes closer to God. In the words of Prof. Ludwig Mödl, the flame symbolises love, and the anchor hope, the chalice symbolises the Christian faith. Through the paintings

⁷²⁵ The Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, 1977, No. 46.

we remember the theological content of it.⁷²⁶ The Christian learns from these religious paintings and comes to the knowledge of God. The believer too in his religious context through his religious art learns something of the divine, perhaps only as part of the total truth, but he learns and lives his life. Our pastoral concern in this religious context is to be sensitive to the religious expressions of the religious other. And that is with responsibility we need to listen to the other and learn from each other.

5.6.2.4 Listening as an interreligious mission

We emphasize the theme of listening for the reason, that today this wonderful word 'listen' is being replaced with 'talk, or hear.' The activities are too hectic that there is less time just to pause a moment and to reflect and to listen to self, God and others. Without words one can listen deep in his heart what God speaks to him. Listening to the other is a Christian mission and an interreligious mission, a mission of sharing God's care, a mission of sharing hope and love to other believers. Francis D'sa says,

In dialogue we can hear also (that is, only if we have ears to hear) the echo of our proclamation and come to know how our proclamation sounds. In dialogue we are made aware of how the dialogue partners understand (misunderstand) what we proclaim. That is why, in dialogue all of us can learn – through trial and error – how to speak and communicate in a way that our partners can really understand us and we them.⁷²⁷

In her reflections for cultivating a spiritual practice in *'The Sacred Art of Listening'* Kay Lindahl, founder of The Listening Center in Laguna Niguel, California, states that listening is a creative force and something quite wonderful occurs when we are listened to fully. She states:

The way we listen can actually allow the other person to bring forth what is true and alive to them. Sometimes we have to do a lot of listening before the fountain is replenished. Have you ever noticed how some people seem to need to talk? They go on and on, usually in a very superficial, nervous manner. This is often because they have not been truly listened to. Patience is required to listen to such person long enough for them to get to their center point of

⁷²⁶ See L. Mödl, "Frömmigkeit und Schauen. Pastoraltheologische Aspekte zum Umgang mit Kunst und Kirche," in L. Mödl und H. Ramisch, *Spiegel des Heiligen*, Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2003, p.37. For more details on 'Spitualität des Schauens' see the first three chapters by Prof. Mödl in the same book.

⁷²⁷ F. D'sa, "Religion, Relevance and Interreligious Education," as Preface to C. Mendonca's, *Dynamics of Symbol and Dialogue: Interreligious Education in India*, 2002, p.viii.

tranquillity and peace. The result of such listening are extraordinary. Some would call them miracles.⁷²⁸

For the principles of dialogue Lay Lindahl gives some guidelines: when you are listening, suspend assumptions; when you are speaking, express your personal response; listen without judgement; honor confidentiality; suspend status; listen for understanding and not to agree with or believe.⁷²⁹

One of the important discoveries of listening is that we come to know the ‘otherness of the other.’ We come to experience and learn that the other is not myself and I am not the other, even though there is a relationship. We come to know that we have a religious identity which is different from the identity of the religious other. In the following section we reflect on the religious identity of the other.

5.6.3 Religious Identity of the Other

Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, opened the conference (Sept. 25-28, 2005) at Gregorian University, Rome, saying that dialogue helps individuals and religions clarify their own identities as they explore similarities and differences with others. Archbishop Fitzgerald said one obvious change in the Catholic Church is reflected in the fact that the name of the office has undergone changes from being the Secretariat for Non-Christians to being the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He said that the change is “based on the understanding that one feature of the relationship envisaged is respect for the identity of all engaged in the dialogue. Our partners are not just non-Christians, they have their own identity as Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists or Sikhs.”⁷³⁰ For our purpose here, the notion of religious identity means belonging (not belonging) to a religious community. It is thus a matter of relationship among individuals and groups within society. It is an experience of social bond, and in this sense, religious identity is linked with a number of roles that religion plays within society.⁷³¹

⁷²⁸ K. Lindahl, *The Sacred Art of Listening*, Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002, pp. 11-12.

⁷²⁹ See K. Lindahl, *The Sacred Art of Listening*, 2002, pp. 134-135.

⁷³⁰ See C. Wooden, “Speakers say Interreligious dialogue changes faith communities,” in *Catholic News Service*, Rome, at www.catholicnews.com, (access 28.10.2005)

⁷³¹ Here one can imagine a religious individual, whose religious identity is defined by adherence to a set of beliefs that he accepts as individual and as an adherence of that religious community. See K. Daniel and W. Cole Durham, “Religious Identity as a Component of National Identity: Implications

5.6.3.1 Religion as form of identity

Hans Küng states, “religion is a conscious-unconscious believing view of life, attitude towards life, way of living life,” it “concretely mediates a pervasive sense of life, guarantees ultimate values and unconditioned standards, creates a spiritual community and homeland.”⁷³² This sense of life, community and homeland are concerns of religion. Religion is both personal and social, individual and cultural. The concept of identity seems to provide a bridge between the private and public realms in religion, as an appropriate locus for that which connects the individual personality and the cultural matrix. An individual identity is made up of several sub-identities, and the religious sub-identity may be one of those. In his article ‘Religion as Art and Identity’ Benjamine Beit-Hallahmi notes that the “theoretical sources for understanding religion as a form of identity and as a way of attachment come from social psychology and anthropology. Identity and subidentity are useful social-psychological concepts which provide a bridge between individual personality and social tradition. The psychology of identity, as a social psychological concept, should contribute to understanding the ‘persistence of religion.’”⁷³³

Even though the Revelation of Jesus Christ is above religion, the fact that Christianity as a religion also exists in its structural, institutional, cultural and social forms. Christianity has an identity which is specific to Christian faith, from the revelation of Jesus Christ. As a religion Christianity has an identity which has in it personal and social, individual and cultural forms. Similarly every religion has an identity in its own terms and categories. It is a religious identity, and in this sense we may call them as having Jewish, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist identity, which are specific to their religions.

For most individuals, religion exists as part of their identity. They are members of a religious group. The choice most individuals make, if they can make a choice at all regarding the dominant religious belief system in their group, is whether they will follow group tradition. Most individuals don’t choose a religion, they are simply

for emerging Church-State Relations in the Former Socialist Bloc,” in A. Sajo and S. Avineri (eds.), *The Law of Religious Identity: Models for Post-Communism*, The Hague, Netherlands: Kluwer Law International, 1999, p. 118.

⁷³² H. Küng, “Introduction: The Debate on the Word ‘Religion,’” in *Concilium, Christianity Among World Religions*, H. Küng and J. Moltmann (eds.), 1986, p.xiv.

⁷³³ B. Beit-Hallahmi, “Religion as Art and Identity,” in *Religion*, Vol. 16, No.1, January, 1986, p.12.

born into one. They learn their religion in the same way they learn other aspects of their social identity. Thus religion is a part of social and cultural identity, and most people simply follow the religion they have learned, and only a few people adopt a religion as a result of conscientious quest. Benjamine Beit-Hallahmi states, “[f]or 99% of religious people all over the world, religion is a conventional identity.”⁷³⁴

5.6.3.2 Religious identity: as belonging

The people of Israel, being called a ‘chosen people,’ having a ‘land’ of their own, felt the greatness of belonging to a land and to a particular race. Their identity, even though an individual identity, belonged to and recognized in the community. Their identity was marked by their religious existence. In the same way we can speak of all religions as identity-based religions. One identifies within a religious group in order to belong to that group, to that home. In *The Homeless Mind*, Peter Berger describes the religious crisis in terms of ‘homelessness’ in the modern society in the following way:

The “homelessness” of modern social life has found its most devastating expression in the area of religion. The general uncertainty, both cognitive and normative, brought about by the pluralization of everyday life and of biography in modern society, has brought religion into a serious crisis of plausibility. The age-old function of religion – to provide ultimate certainty amid the exigencies of the human condition – has been severely shaken. Because of the religious crisis in modern society, social “homelessness” has become metaphysical – that is, it has been “homelessness” in the cosmos. This is very difficult to bear.⁷³⁵

‘To be at home’ or ‘to belong to somewhere’ is a socio-psychological need of a person. Religion fulfils this need of the individual to a large extent. Religion in the strict sense exists for relationship with the divine or God. Basically religion with its founders give a meaning to its adherents about the ultimate concerns, such as life and death. The believer, in soul and body, relates himself to his religion with a sense of belonging.

Religious identity, as belonging to a community, is related to historical experience in religions, or may be formed in the face of problems newly encountered, or it may express itself in communal traditions and rituals shaped through centuries. Religions and ideologies have also been shaped by other elements of the culture of which they

⁷³⁴ B. Beit-Hallahmi, “Religion as Art and Identity,” in *Religion*, Vol. 16, No.1, January, 1986, p.14.

⁷³⁵ P. Berger, *The Homeless Mind: Modernisation and Consciousness*, Random House, Vintage Books, 1974, pp. 184f.

are part - language, ethnic loyalty, social strata, caste. In all these elements of culture we notice that there is a sense of belonging to a group, family or community. 'Home-sickness' is a often used term when we are away from the family or a community. Religious identity protects the believer to distinguish from other religions, and gives a particularity to the believer. The World Council of Churches states: "Within each particular community to which people may belong they are held together with others by the values they share in common. At the deepest level these have to do with their identity, which gives them a sense of being "at home" in the groups to which they belong."⁷³⁶

We feel very much comforted with the biblical references, 'I have called you by name,' 'you are my people' (cf. Is. 43:1; 48:1; 49:1; Hos. 2:23; Jn. 10:3). These words say something of my identity in the Christian faith. I know that I belong not just to the structural or institutional part of the Catholic Church as a religion, but I understand further that I belong to God. God is my stronghold, in Him I have a community, in Him I feel comforted. In a similar way we could also speak of the members of other faiths. All through their life they seek answers for life and death in their spiritual experiences. They may feel comforted in the divine interpretations that they experience, they may feel they belong there, for they have a religious identity through their religions.

5.6.3.3 Christian approaches and religious identity

5.6.3.3.1 Christian exclusivism and 'religious other'

Christian exclusivism is a tendency to form an exclusive identity, with the help of an exclusive self-image that attempts to define one's own religion as a unique phenomenon, absolutely different from and superior to all others. In such an exclusivistic attitude to other religions we tend to extremise our position of religious identity to the extent that we may not respect the 'religious other.' From the point of religious pluralism, John Hick emphasises that the Copernican revolution does not dissolve commitment to one's own religion, but only exclusive claims arising from that commitment.⁷³⁷ We may say that while religious identity is very necessary for the existence of the religious being, the exclusive and superior claim of a particular religion may cause religious fanaticism. This is because we tend in our exclusivist

⁷³⁶ *Guidelines on Dialogue*, WCC Publications, 1993, No. 3, p.11.

⁷³⁷ See J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1977, pp. 106-107.

approach to present ourselves as the only legitimate or rightful or absolute religion to an extent to absolutize ourselves which may cause suppression of other religions. In our understanding of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world one must keep in mind that He became human to restore the identity which was lost. He restored individual identity including his or her social, cultural and religious one.

5.6.3.3.2 Christian inclusivism and the 'religious other'

Referring to 'anonymous Christian' thesis Hans Waldenfels says that anonymity is a negative and respectively private reference. To the question of what is 'Being,' he says, we need to give a name and not look for the constitution of anonymity.⁷³⁸ In Christian inclusivistic approach to other religions we tend to include the believers of other religions to Christian terms or we give an anonymous Christian identity to the 'religious other.' The inclusivistic approach does not necessarily deny the religious identity of the other. It only understands the 'religious other' from Christian doctrine of Salvation in Jesus Christ for the mankind, which does not take away the identity of the 'religious other,' but sees in the 'religious other' that goodness and values, which God has bestowed on all. This leads as to affirm that other believers are in a way part of Christian identity or 'anonymous Christian identities.' Michael Barnes states: "The Anonymous Christianity thesis is the best way forward. But in a multi-faith world the most powerful argument against it is that it does not take other religions seriously and therefore ignores the force of the new problematic." And in this sense we give, as he says, the "impression that these religions are 'really' Christian in all but name."⁷³⁹ This may sound good for Christians, but in the practice of dialogue this may cause unrest among other believers, and we may ask whether it really gives room to recognize the 'otherness of the other?' How then is the religious identity of the other to be understood from inclusive perspective?

The 'other' is understood basically from his or her difference. Accepting the difference, or taking others seriously, may not be easy. There is a basic feeling of fear of the 'other,' which needs to be overcome. We are, in fact, always inclined to reduce the unknown to the known, the unfamiliar to the familiar, distorting in this

⁷³⁸ H. Waldenfels, *Begegnung der Religionen*, Bonn: Borengässer, 1990, p.65 – "Sodann ist "Anonymität" eine Negative – bzw. Privathievsbezeichnung. Folglich ist bei der Frage nach ihrem Wesen nicht nach der Konstitution der Anonymität, sondern der Namensgebung zu fragen."

⁷³⁹ M. Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, London: SPCK, 1989, p. 141.

way, consciously or not, the image of the other. In all human beings there is a basic human 'inclusive instinct.'⁷⁴⁰ We make the mistake of reducing the 'other' to our own terms. This attitude is not infrequent in our theological readings of the other faiths.⁷⁴¹ In approaching the other, one has to come to terms first of all with the 'other in its otherness,' taking the differences seriously.⁷⁴² In other words, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists etc. are not just non-Christians, they are also not just invisible Christians or anonymous Christians, but they are primarily what they are - Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists or believers in their religions. They have a name and an identity and they are at home in their religions.

5.6.3.3.3 Christian pluralism and the 'religious other'

In our analysis of Christian pluralism from John Hick and Paul Knitter's point of view we presented both positive and negative side of this approach. We said that there is a goodness of treating all believers equal in their relationship to God or Absolute. Positively seen religious pluralist emphasises the 'nature of otherness.' The religious other is as important and as equal as religious myself. But as Michael Barnes states, "in suggesting that the 'problem of religious pluralism' lies in the nature of otherness I hope I do not appear to emphasize the new at the expense of the old."⁷⁴³ Religious pluralism is a reality in the sense that there are different religions existing, having their own rites and rituals, scriptures, their own ways of relating to God or the divine, and their own specific or unique contribution to peace in the world. The 'religious other' is a reality and different from 'religious myself.' Christian pluralism is a commitment to Christian faith or Christian identity and at the same time recognizing the identity of the 'religious other.' There exists 'religious myself' and 'religious other'. But in religious pluralism, whether the 'difference' of the religious other is safeguarded, is still a debatable matter.

⁷⁴⁰ See M. Barnes, "On Not Including Everything: Christ, the Spirit and the Other," in *The Way Supplement* 78, Autumn, 1993, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁴¹ Compare the reading of the Hindu concept of 'saccidananda' in W. Teasdale, "The Mystical Meeting Point between East and West," in *Mysticism: Medieval and Modern*, V. M. Ligorio (ed.), Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1996, pp. 109-117, with the understanding of the same concept in J. Dupuis, *Towards a Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 2001 edition, pp. 274-79.

⁷⁴² See J. J. Lipner, "The 'Inter' in Interfaith Spirituality," in *The Way Supplement* 78, Autumn, 1993, pp.64-70; also see J. J. Lipner, "Seeking Others in Their Otherness," in *New Blackfriars* 74, March 1983, pp. 152-165.

⁷⁴³ M. Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, 1989, p.135.

5.6.3.3.4 Christian identity and the 'religious other'

Christian approach to other religions ought to recognize the differences between Christianity and other religions. Christianity is different from other religions, it has a unique identity different from other religions in matters of content of faith or revelation. The Christian confesses that Jesus Christ is the only saviour of the world. Jesus Christ is the revealed Word of God. The Christian life is bound by this confession to Jesus Christ: 'You are the Son of the living God' or 'You are the Saviour.' This confession of the Christian is presented in many ways: through its liturgy, proclamation and dialogue, witness and love. The Christian identity comes from the mission proclaimed by Prophet Isaiah, and the mission of Jesus: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty to those who are oppressed" (Lk 4:18).

In the religious pluralistic context it is a Christian concern to proclaim the mission of Jesus Christ and how to proclaim it. In his doctoral dissertation '*Shipwreck and Providence: The mission Programme of Acts 27-28*' Dominic Mendonca makes two important observations: "the absence of preaching Jesus Christ throughout the voyage narrative and the emphasis on kindness and mutual help between Paul and the pagans." He says further:

Not once in the whole of the voyage narrative the name of Jesus is mentioned. Certainly Paul did have occasions on which he could have proclaimed the Gospel. When he was telling to his companions about his angelic vision, Paul could have used Christ-language. Before he encouraged them to eat the meal of salvation, Paul could have introduced the pagans to the event of the Last Supper and the ministry and the passion of Jesus. On the island of Malta Paul heals by prayer and by laying the hands on the sick. This healing action of Paul does remind the reader of the healing activity of Jesus, and particularly the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Even here Paul has abstained from proclaiming directly the message of Jesus. Certainly Paul has not changed his loyalty to Jesus and his Gospel.⁷⁴⁴

The study emphasizes the dialogue of compassion, kindness and mutual help. Today in the society we need a mission of compassion. There may be situations where we may not be able to preach in the name of Jesus Christ openly. But we can always be true witnesses to Jesus Christ through a dialogue of love and compassion. And that

⁷⁴⁴ D. Mendonca, *Shipwreck and Providence: The Mission Programme of Acts 27 – 28*, Inauguraldissertation der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 2004, unpublished, doctoral dissertation, p.343.

will be also a witness to our Christian identity. In the language of liberation theology the Christian identity will be to reach out to the poor and the underprivileged as a witness to Jesus Christ the poor.

Another aspect of our Christian identity, rather primary to Christian faith, is to speak of the truth. The truth is that Jesus Christ is the saviour of the world. Christian religion is often referred to (positively or negatively) as ‘possessing the ultimate truth.’ The truth that the Christian professes is that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, that He came to save mankind. When we preach this truth and from which we derive our Christian identity, we ought not to forget the truth of the other, however it may be defined, articulated, or interpreted. In our interreligious dialogue we need to understand the truth of the other. As David Tracy puts it: “To understand at all is to understand for and within genuine dialogue allowing real manifestations of the other’s truth and thereby mutual transformation.”⁷⁴⁵

According to Michael Barnes that between all dominating exclusivism and a vapid relativism we need a theology which is rooted in the themes of welcome and hospitality. He argues for a vision of Christianity as a ‘school of faith,’ a community called not just to teach others but to learn from them as well.⁷⁴⁶ The other is as important to me as myself. To give a complete and nourishing witness to my Christian identity I need the other. In our theology of religions we need to work with themes of ‘welcome and hospitality’ and that is to say to be pastoral in our approach to other believers. We may develop this ‘welcome and hospitality’ aspect in our relationship by being patient and tolerant to each other. Christian and other religious identity necessarily depict differences. One of the ways to hold us together in our differences is to tolerate each other.

5.6.4 Tolerance of the ‘religious other’

Referring to the missionary attitude, Pope John Paul II admonished in *Redemptoris Missio* those taking part in the dialogue to be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be ready to understand those of the other party without pretence or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness,

⁷⁴⁵ D. Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990, p.44.

⁷⁴⁶ See M. Barnes S.J., *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002, - the reference is from the back cover page.

knowing that dialogue can enrich each side. “There must be no abandonment of principles or false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same time for the elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings.”⁷⁴⁷

Existence of different religions side by side is a fact that nobody can deny. Traditionally religions have been moats of separation rather than bridges of understanding between people. Recognising this, S.J.Samartha asks, “how can men and women, committed to different faiths, live together in multi-religious societies? In a world that is becoming a smaller and smaller neighbourhood, what are the alternatives between shallow friendliness and intolerant fanaticism? What is the Christian obligation in the quest for human community in pluralist situation?”⁷⁴⁸ Before we speak of the Christian obligation in the world of religious pluralism, we see briefly biblical examples for tolerance.

5.6.4.1 Biblical examples for tolerance

5.6.4.1.1 The Old Testament and tolerance

According to H. R. Schlette in Old Testament one does not find explicit references to the theme of tolerance.⁷⁴⁹ Yet, some observations can be made to the theme tolerance. In his words: “Israel hat das Fremde prinzipiell abgelehnt, den Fremden aber nicht aus seiner Gemeinschaft ausgeschlossen!“ In his article, „*Toleranz im Alten Testament? Ergebnisse einer Suchbewegung*,“ Heinz-Josef Fabry in his search for tolerance in Old Testament looks it essentially from pragmatic perspective of tolerance.⁷⁵⁰ The history of Israel is itself a witness to the great wars fought between Israel and Nations. And Yahweh has been on the side of Israel. Monotheism or Yahweh as the only God of Israel is unquestioned, or when it was a matter of other gods there was certainly intolerance. But as such racial tolerance has been there in the Old Testament.⁷⁵¹ In the words of Hermann, “*Toleranz wird im Alten Testament*

⁷⁴⁷ *Redemptoris Missio*, 56.

⁷⁴⁸ S. J. Samartha, “Religious Pluralism and the Quest for Human Community,” in *No Man is Alien. Essays on the Unity of Mankind*, J. Robert Nelson (Ed.), Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971, p. 129.

⁷⁴⁹ H. R. Schlette, „Tolerance“, in *HThG* 2, pp. 679-686, 680.

⁷⁵⁰ H. Josef Fabry, „Toleranz im Alten Testament? Ergebnisse einer Suchbewegung,“ in I. Broer and R. Schlüter (eds.), *Christentum und Toleranz*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996, p. 13.

⁷⁵¹ As examples to the racial tolerance, Dt. 23:6-8 - Do not regard the Edomite as abhorrent, because he is your brother; do not regard Egyptian as detestable, because you were once a foreigner in his country; their descendants, after three generations, may be admitted to the congregation of Yahweh.

*allenfalls dort möglich, wo sie Gott gewährt, wo das, was wir gern die 'Alternative' nennen, der göttlichen Setzung oder Bestimmung nicht widerspricht.*⁷⁵²

The Babylonian exile gives a new experience to Israel. The deported people of Israel were offered by the foreign King new perspective to life and religious experience. In Ezra 7:12-26 we read Persian King's instructions to Ezra the priest to allow Jews, their priests or Levites to go back to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices to their God. The King recognizes the need of the people of Israel to offer sacrifices to their God. Israel also integrates in to the Babylonian society. The Persian King or the enemy of Israel becomes their friend. The foreign King Cyrus becomes the mediator for salvation of Israel. The Jews and the non-Jews come closer to each other in Babylonian exile. This results later in social and cultural exchanges.

The book of Ruth is set in the latter days of Judges and revolves around a Moabite woman of that name who married a Jew. Upon the death of her husband, Ruth was brought under the protection of Boaz, a kinsman of her husband, who eventually married her. Ruth, being a foreigner, was shown as a gentle person and as an ancestor of David. By showing that a foreigner could be the descendent of the greatest king of Israel the book is an early argument for inter-racial tolerance. Another clear regulation for tolerance sees Heinz-Josef in Deuteronomy 16:11, 14 and 26: 11, where the participation of the sojourner, fatherless, widow at the cult-feast is rejoiced.⁷⁵³ The sojourner also may hear and learn to fear the Lord, and be careful to do according to the words of the law (Dt. 31:12). God "executes justice for the fatherless, and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Dt.10:18-19). One would certainly say that the love of neighbour (Lev.19:18) is the condition for tolerance.

God of Israel is the God and there is no other is the central theme of the history of Israel. God as the Creator of all, takes responsibility for all and invites all people to Him: "Assemble yourselves and come, draw near together, you survivors of the

⁷⁵² S. Hermann, „grenzen der Toleranz im Alten Testament. Die Bücher Deuteronomium, Jeremia und Hiob,“ in T. Rendtorff (ed.), *Glaube und Toleranz. Das theologische Erbe der Aufklärung*, Gütersloh, 1982, pp. 180-190, 181.

⁷⁵³ See H. Josef Fabry, „Toleranz im Alten Testament? Ergebnisse einer Suchbewegung,“ in I. Broer and R. Schlüter (eds.), *Christentum und Toleranz*, 1996, p. 29-30.

nations!” (Isaiah 45:20). Heinz-Josef states that in Prophet Micah 4:5 one reaches the highpoint to look for tolerance in Old Testament,⁷⁵⁴ “[f]or all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.” The tolerance of God in the Old Testament may also be read from the fact that he invites all to Him and offers salvation to all, despite their being non-Israelites. In Isaiah 25: 6ff. we understand that all people participate in an eschatological feast which God prepares for all people. This is the short story of the God of Israel who invites all people to him, and we understand tolerance here only from a pragmatic perspective and not in its totality. It is true that in the Old Testament we have very many examples of intolerance, but it is certainly not right to state that God of Israel was through and through or totally an intolerant God.

5.6.4.1.2 Jesus Christ and tolerance

The event of Incarnation is an event of the abundance of life. Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10). There is not an aspect of life – the interior life, familial life, the common life of the society – that would be untouched by the Incarnation. The new life offered by the person and work of Jesus Christ has been opposed by humanity in a variety of ways, personal and collective. And yet through Jesus Christ the life in abundance comes to the people. The event of Incarnation was not only for Jews or non-Jews but for the whole of humanity.

Jesus’ teaching on toleration is subtle but complex. He urges his listeners, “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt 22:39) and “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). Jesus’ rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees as “whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean” (Mt 23: 27), has resulted in self-awareness and self-criticism. And such self-awareness and self-criticism has amounted to important Christian contributions to toleration.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵⁴ See H. Josef Fabry, „Toleranz im Alten Testament? Ergebnisse einer Suchbewegung,“ in I. Broer and R. Schlüter (eds.), *Christentum und Toleranz*, 1996, p. 25.

⁷⁵⁵ B. Stetson and J. G. Conti, *The Truth about Tolerance: Pluralism, Diversity and Culture Wars*, Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005, p.40.

“God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). ‘Truth and love are identical’ says Pope Benedict XVI and when this statement is understood in its totality, it is the highest guarantee of tolerance.⁷⁵⁶ Jesus is truth and love. In love he communicates the truth. His love goes beyond race and religions. His love is for the whole of mankind. In his mission he proclaimed the Kingdom of God, that is the Kingdom of love to all. Jesus loved not only the Jews but also Samaritans, not only the privileged but also the underprivileged, not only the righteous but also the sinners, not only the rich and the educated but also the poor and the uneducated, he restored the lost human dignity of the person. And that is the tolerance that Jesus has taught us. The tolerance is not that you let the other live in his human tragedies and sinfulness, it is to reach out to the other as Jesus reached out to all in their sinfulness and human tragedies, and restore to them the God-given human dignity.

5.6.4.1.3 Paul: welcome one another

Carl Schneider contends that the major factor for Christian intolerance was the influence of Paul. Paul’s letter to the Galatians is, in his view, “an explicit document of religious intolerance” in which he utters the “anathema, ...the strongest term for a total accursedness.”⁷⁵⁷ Paul’s mystical identification of himself with Christ produced radical intolerance, in Schneider’s view, because Paul placed himself in the judgement seat of God. He concludes that “intolerance belongs not to the essence of Christianity but to the essence of Paul.”⁷⁵⁸ Although traditional interpretation of Paul sustains Schneider’s conclusion, Robert Jewett says, that recent advances in the understanding of the Pauline letters and the situations in his Churches, show Paul as an advocate of an active form of tolerance.⁷⁵⁹

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, the most influential theological writing in early Christianity, there is a systematic argument in favour of tolerantly accepting competing groups within the Church. The key statement of this tolerant ethic is in Rom.15:7: “Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the

⁷⁵⁶ J. Kardinal Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz*, second edition, Freiburg: Herder, 2003, p.186.

⁷⁵⁷ C. Schneider, “Ursprung und Ursachen der christlichen Intoleranz,” in *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, Vol. 30, 1978, p.203.

⁷⁵⁸ C. Schneider, “Ursprung und Ursachen der christlichen Intoleranz,” in *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, Vol. 30, 1978, p.211.

⁷⁵⁹ See R. Jewett, *Christian Tolerance: Paul’s Message to the Modern Church*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982, p.14.

glory of God.” The context of this tolerant ethic is that there existed within the Church groups like Jews and Greeks. The effect of this tolerant ethic of mutual acceptance is to show how both Jews and Gentiles come in the gospel to praise God, thus fulfilling their destiny and confirming the promises made to Israel that all peoples will unite under God’s rule.

To “welcome one another” in the Jewish-Gentile context was to accept others into full fellowship, to put an end to the hostile competition, and to admit the basic legitimacy of the other sides.⁷⁶⁰ Robert Jewett states that Paul’s tolerance ethic is an “actual positive tolerance” or “intrinsic tolerance” such as that found in some of the mystical religious traditions. It is the willingness to acknowledge that the other person has convictions derived from genuine encounters with the sacred. In this case the basis of tolerance is the transcendent sphere which no system of dogmas can describe.⁷⁶¹ It is from the God experience or from a transcendental or mystical experience that one begins to realise the need for mutual acceptance. Therefore to “welcome one another” means to reach out actively to include others in one’s circle, and not simply to respect them and allow them to stand on the outside. Thus the “full significance of tolerance becomes apparent only when it is seen as openness between persons, readiness for relationships.”⁷⁶² And this readiness for relationship between persons does indeed bear fruit in the relationship to the divine.

Paul does not approach tolerance in Romans as an end in itself. It serves the larger purpose of world mission. The verse “Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7) leads into an exposition of the relationship between mutual acceptance and the hope of the Christian mission to all nations (Rom. 15:8-13). Paul’s thesis in Romans about the Gospel as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16) achieves its goal at the conclusion of the discussion of tolerance in Romans 15: 7-13.

⁷⁶⁰ For details on Paul’s advice to welcome one another in Jewish-Gentile context, or the riots that broke out in Jewish synagogues, see R. Jewett, *Christian Tolerance: Paul’s message to the Modern Church*, 1982, p. 27-29.

⁷⁶¹ See R. Jewett, *Christian Tolerance: Paul’s message to the Modern Church*, 1982, p. 35.

⁷⁶² Glen Tinder, *Tolerance: Toward a New Civility*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1976, p. 81.

Paul's approach to tolerance in Romans has a particular bearing. It counters a tendency to identify the cause of tolerance with either the conservatives or the liberals. His counsel to the competing factions in Rome was for each to admit the legitimacy of the other side and to take responsibility for the other's edification. By focussing on their relation with the Lord who stands above every party and race, they would find a new basis of unity and mission. Rather than devoting their energies to destroy each other, they should unite in the praise of God, in which they will one day be joined by all the nations on earth.⁷⁶³

5.6.4.2 Liberty of conscience as source of tolerance

One of the primary sources of the tolerance doctrine in Western culture is the idea of liberty of conscience. The medieval assumption that conscience should be viewed as legitimate only if it was grounded in dogmatic truth as officially defined, was in contrast to the idea of an autonomous conscience which began to emerge in the so-called "left wing" of the Protestant Reformation. It was formulated in classical form by Sebastian Castellio (1515 –1563, a French Protestant theologian), the polemicist whose writings were provoked by the burning of Servetus in Geneva on October 27, 1553, by the decree of the Geneva Council which was instigated by Calvin himself. Of all the people who took the side of Servetus, not with his doctrine but with the concept of freedom of religion and conscience and with the idea that it was not right to kill people because they err in doctrinal interpretation, nobody was more influential and effective than Sebastian Castellio. He was the first one who developed a concept of freedom of conscience.⁷⁶⁴ According to Roland Bainton, Castellio "defined conscience as loyalty to that which one believes to be right, even though objectively one may be error." In Castellio's view, says Bainton, "Servetus was put to death for telling the truth. Had he been willing to recant and speak against his conscience, he might have escaped. He was executed because he would not lie." Bainton goes on to observe that "scarcely anything in the teaching of Castellio was more radical than this. He relativised conscience." Although Castellio's dictum, "[t]o force conscience is worse than cruelly to kill a man," was understood and

⁷⁶³ See R. Jewett, *Christian Tolerance: Paul's message to the Modern Church*, 1982, p. 144.

⁷⁶⁴ See M. Hillar, "Sebastian Castellio and the Struggle for the Freedom of Conscience," in D. R. Finch and M. Hillar (eds.), *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism*, Vol. 10, 2002, pp.31-56, at <http://www.socinian.org/castellio.html>, (access 18.12.2005).

accepted only after the passage of more than a century,⁷⁶⁵ it eventually became one of the foundations of the liberal doctrine of tolerance.⁷⁶⁶ And we know since Second Vatican Council there is a positive look to the religions and religious freedom. According to G.J.Dalcourt, “Vatican Council II gave the theory and practice of tolerance a meaning quite different from that of the formerly common Catholic position. In its *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, the Council explicitly acknowledged it to be a natural right that as rational and free agents all men should be able to respond, freely and responsibly, to the truth as each perceives it.”⁷⁶⁷

5.6.4.3 Religious tolerance proper: as a balanced strategy

Religious tolerance is allowing the other to be what he is, or while I have a right for my religious existence, the other too has a right for his religious existence, ideas and convictions. “[T]olerance means allowing, without intending either to approve or to encourage, what one holds to be an evil or a questionable good. It implies at least interior reprobation of the evil and a refusal to use force to repress it.”⁷⁶⁸ But one’s right for religious ideas and convictions can also lead to religious fanaticism, and in turn religious intolerance, and this is the negative side of religious tolerance. Leading scholars such as Robert Paul Wolff and Herbert Marcuse have argued that tolerance is repressive because it allows evil to stand.⁷⁶⁹ John Murray Cuddihy has contended that tolerance is nothing more than a polite acknowledgement of our inability to convert the erroneous, a sign of the lack of religious depth of contemporary religionists.⁷⁷⁰

Tolerance, however, “is often used in a more positive, maximal sense to refer to respect, sympathy, and charity for persons holding views different from one’s own.”⁷⁷¹ Positively religious tolerance is respecting the religious ideas and convictions of the other. Every person has a right for his religious freedom, religious ideas and convictions. No one ought to take away this right of the person. Positively

⁷⁶⁵ See R. H. Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty: Nine Biographical Studies*, Westminster Press, 1951, pp. 119f.

⁷⁶⁶ See R. Jewett, *Christian Tolerance: Paul’s message to the Modern Church*, 1982, p. 43.

⁷⁶⁷ G. J. Dalcourt, “Tolerance”, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, second edition, Vol. 14, 2003, p. 103; see also *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2-4.

⁷⁶⁸ G. J. Dalcourt, “Tolerance”, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, second edition, Vol. 14, 2003, p. 102.

⁷⁶⁹ See R. P. Wolff, *The Poverty of Liberalism*, Beacon Press, 1968; R. P. Wolff, B. Moore, Jr., and H. Marcuse (eds.), *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, Beacon Press, 1965.

⁷⁷⁰ See J. M. Cuddihy, *No Offence: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste*, Seabury Press, A Crossroad Book, 1978.

⁷⁷¹ G. J. Dalcourt, “Tolerance,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, second edition, Vol. 14, 2003, p. 102.

this also may lead to a peaceful existence of all believers and encourage all believers to work for the common good. Religious tolerance today is spoken of more positively, i.e. respecting the other religions, their right for existence, religious ideas and convictions, worship, and religious values. ‘Live and let other live’ ought not to be understood to live evil and encourage evil, but to be understood as live good and encourage good in others, or be perfect and help others to be perfect, or “love God and love others as you love yourself.” Glen Tinder in his discussion of “Tolerance as suffering” says: “One of the main reasons for tolerance is to permit the other to be present as he really is, veraciously and responsibly.... A tolerant person ‘puts up with’ others, but he does so attentively and thus upholds them.”⁷⁷²

Religious tolerance, when it is understood properly or understood from the positive implications, seems to be an acceptable strategy for most of us. It is a middle path between conservatives and liberals. It is not a strategy that compromises faith, rather it is a way to understand the ‘religious other,’ whereby there is no danger of losing one’s faith, but positively looking at, it is a way of religious existence today. Robert Jewett argues that the faith results in tolerance on the basis of first two commandments. The first commandment, that one should have no other gods, preserves the relation to transcendence from the dangers of relativism. The second commandment, that one should refrain from worshipping graven images, guards the transcendent from idolatrous human depictions and definitions. He argues that tolerance requires that tension between these two commandments be preserved. Faith without tolerance violates the second commandment, making a graven image out of some finite definition of the transcendent, and tolerance without faith violates the first commandment, refusing to choose the God who stands transcendent above all lesser realities. Healthy tolerance is the social corollary of a faith that retains the discipline of both the first and the second commandments. Robert Jewett states: “To give up the First Commandment is to fall into relativism and malaise, while to eliminate the Second is to end up in zealotism. It is only when the tension between the First and the Second Commandment is preserved and celebrated that faith results in tolerance. ...[and] that tolerance itself remains healthy.”⁷⁷³

⁷⁷² G. Tinder, *Tolerance: Toward a New Civility*, 1976, p. 139.

⁷⁷³ R. Jewett, *Christian Tolerance: Paul’s message to the Modern Church*, 1982, pp. 69-73.

The eternal heritage that St. Thomas Aquinas has given to us is the golden ‘middle way,’ which we must always cherish. Problems arise when we interpret the faith in extreme terms giving rise to religious extremism. In most of the religions today there are so called conservatives and liberals. There are so called religious extremists who follow the dictates of faith word by word and there are followers, to whom religion is no more a reality or follow their own conscience, or to whom faith is of no importance at all. To a certain extent we can say that religious extremism in the history has given a negative understanding of religions in general. And in this context when we say religious tolerance as a balanced strategy for all religions we mean that we profess our unique faith and at the same time we do not hinder our neighbours to give witness to their unique faith. Thus religious tolerance gives witness to the human and divine relationship in their diversities. As Robert Jewett says: “Tolerance is the expression of authentic faith in the God who transcends race and creed, but who calls conservatives and liberals, Jews and Greeks, men and women into the service of righteousness.”⁷⁷⁴

5.6.4.4 Religious tolerance: as a responsibility

The word ‘responsibility,’ may it be in political, social or in religious field, we counter it often and everywhere. The following example is what I experienced: The situation is that I am in the University library doing my studies and around me many other students doing studies where silence is to be maintained. But now and then this silence was interrupted or not maintained by many who hardly bothered that there are others in the study hall who require silence. This situation brought to my attention of the irresponsibility of some students. Surely those who maintained silence tolerated those who did disturb, but the question is should my freedom disturb the life of the neighbour? This gives rise to the responsibility in religious freedom, or to put in the form of a question, what is freedom without responsibility? If religious freedom and as a result religious tolerance is the one side of the coin, the other side should be responsibility. Cardinal Ratzinger states: “freedom is good, but it is only good in association with other good things, with which it constitutes an indissoluble whole. ...people have narrowed down the concept of freedom to individual rights and freedoms and have thus robbed it of its human verity.”⁷⁷⁵ The good of all and freedom are indissolubly related to each other. In religious freedom

⁷⁷⁴ R. Jewett, *Christian Tolerance: Paul’s message to the Modern Church*, 1982, p. 11.

⁷⁷⁵ J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 2004, p.245.

we are bound by a responsibility to take care of the religious good of each other. Religious tolerance is not religious fanaticism. It respects life and the religious life of the other. In the words of Cardinal Ratzinger: “Responsibility would then mean living our existence as a response – as a response to what we are in truth.”⁷⁷⁶ And the truth will in no way destroy the good in another. It works for the good of another. It takes responsibility to take the religious other seriously.

5.6.4.5 Christian tolerance of the religious other: a need of the hour

Just as in the letter to the Romans 15:7-13 by transcending the tensions between the Greeks and the Jews, the gospel reaches out to include the entire human race, so too today in our own pluralistic religious context, we can be witnesses to the message of Christ’s love and service to the human race by transcending the existing tensions between religions, specially those tensions of truth claims, religious superiority, and revengeful actions for the past wrong deeds. We know from experience of the intolerant deeds in the recent past specially in India where Hindu – Muslim tensions have caused enormous damage to both sides, killing and burning not only their worshipping shrines but also each other. In this multi-religious context Christian tolerance of the religious other is the need of the hour.

Christian tolerance of the religious other is indeed the result of God’s love for mankind. The Holy Scripture being the source of our Christian faith teaches us repeatedly to love our fellow beings. We should be proud to say that certain important teachings, specially on loving one another, are found in all religions. For example, the injunction to love one’s fellow men echoes throughout all the Holy Writings. The Old Testament enjoins: “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lev. 19:18). The Bhagavad-Gita (12:13) instructs: “A man should not hate any living creature. Let him be friendly and compassionate to all.” These words sound not so different from “love your enemies, bless them that curse you” as uttered by Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:44). Compassion, loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity are described by Buddhist scriptures to be divine conditions of the mind. “Do you love your creator? Love your fellow-beings first,” reads a well-known Islamic tradition. And Bahá’u’lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá’í Faith writes: “ye were created to show love to one another and not perversity and rancour. Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for all

⁷⁷⁶ J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 2004, p.254.

mankind” (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, 136). So prominent is the teaching of universal love among all religions that it could be viewed as a goal common to them all. That the basic human virtues - kindness, generosity, humility, trustworthiness - are taught by all religions would also suggest a common origin.⁷⁷⁷ In the words of Michael von Brück: “In the Qur’an it is said in a similar way: God created human beings in their differences so that they may learn to love each other in their otherness. Love works on the basis of difference and celebrates unity. But, I could also say, it lives on the basis of unity and celebrates difference.”⁷⁷⁸ God’s love as the source of interreligious existence ought to be contemplated in all religions in their commonness and differences. In the Christian tolerance God not only opens a way to all but also shows that way and guides all men and women to himself, to glorify him. To some this way is definitely known, but to others it may be still unknown. In the words of Paul Minear: “All the walls of human separateness and seclusion, of pride and righteousness, of wisdom and power, were forever levelled... Thus the breaking down of all distinctions among men was the manner in which God opened the kingdom to all men.”⁷⁷⁹

The criterion for Christians is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ in his totality, as divine and as human, is to be witnessed by Christians. Overemphasizing one at the expense of the other is certainly not the correct method. We require a methodology in our theology based on trust, love and mutual respect. Christians are to accept all human beings as having equal dignity precisely in their religious distinctiveness. We can love them precisely in their otherness. This is how Christians may witness to their trust in the unconditional and prior love of the one God, who wants to be close to all creatures without exception.

5.6.5 Commitment to faith and religious openness

St. Paul gives us a true picture of the attitude of man for a religious dialogue when he says, “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does

⁷⁷⁷ *Promoting Religious Tolerance*, United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Geneva, Switzerland, 10th January 1995, at <http://www.bic-un.bahai.org/95-0110.htm>, (access 7.11.2005).

⁷⁷⁸ M. von Brück, “Identifying Constructively our Interreligious Moment,” in L. Swidler, and P. Mojzes, (eds.), *The Uniqueness of Jesus – a Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, 1997, p.37.

⁷⁷⁹ P. S. Minear, *The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans*, London: SCM Press, 1971, p. 96.

not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13.4-7). In interreligious dialogue there must be a pervading atmosphere of a deep love of God and love of the other partners. Dialogue can be genuine and profitable only if it is the expression of love. The commitment to each other begins in God’s love for mankind.

Openness to others is an obvious requirement for dialogue. This means, an ability to tune in and listen to a different wavelength in the approach to God and to Reality. This does not mean that the Christian (or anybody else) must suspend his faith or put it in brackets. On the contrary, honesty and sincerity in dialogue require various partners to enter in it and commit themselves to it in the integrity of their faith. The Christian must surely have the ability to enter into the spirit and mind of another person, to feel with that person, and to allow the full impact of his or her spirituality to reach him. He will therefore avoid interpreting the others words too superficially in terms of his own Christian faith, but will always remain open to the unexpected. He will be vulnerable, so to speak, in his own understanding of reality. On the other hand, a Christian may allow his heart to vibrate with memories of his own spiritual experiences which are evoked when listening to the spiritual self-manifestation of another.⁷⁸⁰

Often we come across in the scripture “in the depth of my heart I hear a voice.” This is a spiritual experience of the Psalmist that in the depth of his heart he hears God’s voice. In religions there are so called symbolic dimensions of reality. In religions and in the depth of his heart a believer experiences the mysteriousness, religiosity, or divine transcendence. The experience of the believer in itself carries the symbolic dimension of one reality, of God. Writing a preface to Clemens Mendonca’s *Dynamics of Symbols and Dialogue*, Francis D’sa says,

Mendonca, following Panikkar, draws our attention to the fact that there is a realm to which reason has no access, namely, the realm of consciousness. This is the realm to which reason can lead but where reason is helpless. It is the sphere that is beyond all human making and manipulation. Awareness of this dimension of reality produces openness and acceptance. Only openness and acceptance can make one discover the riches that are awaiting those who assimilate this attitude. The diverse methods of interreligious education will

⁷⁸⁰ See The Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, 1977, no. 31.

pass muster if only they are able to lead to such an awareness which in the last instance deepens sensitivity to the symbolic dimension of reality.⁷⁸¹

The commitment to religious openness is also to be viewed from new perspectives to life and its complete meaning, where we need to foster the good of humanity and creation, continuing to respect life in its totality. Life is God's greatest gift to man and this is to be in no way endangered through religious conflicts. There is required an openness to life which the religions need to work for. We receive the courage for the total respect for human life in faith.

Thus in Christian relationship to other believers an emphasis must be given to experience and understand the religious other in his totality. We need to create an attitude for openness to other believers, a commitment to the Christian faith, and an atmosphere of love and service for partners in dialogue. We follow the admonition of St. Paul in our interreligious dialogue: "love one another with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honour. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality....Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited" (Rom. 12-10-16).

5.7 Conclusion

In the final chapter we have looked into some of the important aspects of interreligious dialogue. The need for Christian openness or exposure to other believers, a commitment to listen to the religious other, respecting and recognising the religious identity of the other, the Christian tolerance of the religious other, commitment to live the truth of the Gospel, Commitment to the Christian faith – we refer them as pastoral criteria for interreligious dialogue. We said that there should be a commitment to Christian faith, and that is very essential to interreligious dialogue. It is faith in Jesus Christ from where we begin our dialogue. As Cardinal Ratzinger referring to the teaching of the Roman Canon says, that Christ is the criterion for the inward contact between religions and making distinctions between

⁷⁸¹ F. D'sa, "Religion, Relevance and Interreligious Education," as Preface to C. Mendonca's *Dynamics of Symbol and Dialogue: Interreligious Education in India*, 2002, p.xii.

them.⁷⁸² Christian faith is spoken in terms of Christian truth, and is also spoken in terms of the ultimate truth. The truth is that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world. So the fundamental criterion, we may say for interreligious dialogue is the 'Truth' criterion. But how or what way this truth relates in praxis to the believers of other religions and what other religions have to say on their part are concerns of Christian interreligious dialogue. In our final chapter we have tried to sketch out some of the ways as criteria for the dialogue with other believers.

If we are looking for a theory for the practice of the dialogue, it has to be one which is dialogic, which involves knowledge (truth) and practice (experience). There are 'universal' or common elements in religions, but religions also begin from different premises and emphasize different values.⁷⁸³ Our basis to formulate a theory for the practice of interreligious dialogue is Christian and pastoral. It will be helpful to us here to recall two models for the relationship between religions, when we try to sketch some sort of theory for the practice, as described by George Lindbeck, the American neo-orthodox or, to give him his own title, 'postliberal theologian.' The models are intellectualist and experiential model. The intellectualist theory emphasizes the cognitive aspect of religion, sees religion as primarily concerned with informative propositions or truth-claims about objective realities. Dialogue is aimed here at reconciling truth claims and at arriving at objective truth. The weak side is that the more one emphasizes the significance of truth-claims, the less one is concerned for the symbolic, the ritual and the experiential side of religion. The danger is that if this model of religion becomes too intellectual we reduce our theology to an exercise of comparative system-building. On the other hand, in the experiential model, dialogue is seen primarily as an attempt to discover and share what is common to all religious experience. This model of dialogue demands more than an encounter at the level of truth and meaning. There is a common search to discover those concepts or symbols which prefigure or find their fulfilment in the Christian mystery. But this model too has its limitations. It presumes a common core experience which is inevitably difficult to describe except in the broadest terms. And in this process perhaps one risks losing that specific element which makes a religion unique. Moreover the question is can one experience something without knowing it,

⁷⁸² See J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 2004, p.99.

⁷⁸³ See M. Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, p.94.

or can one know something without being able to name it?⁷⁸⁴ In a similar way, referring to liberation theology or orthodoxy and orthopraxy of Paul Knitter, Cardinal Ratzinger says: “This giving practice superior rank over knowledge is also bequeathed from good Marxism, [But] [t]he collapse of the communist regimes resulted directly from the fact that they had changed the world without knowing what was good for the world and what was not; without knowing in what direction it must be changed so as to be better. Mere praxis gives no light.”⁷⁸⁵ We may say then both knowledge and praxis (experience) need each other. Overemphasizing one at the expense of the other may lead to imbalance in our theology.

We have reflected throughout our work, i.e. in making absolute any position there is a danger to forget the other side of the coin. Merely inductive or merely deductive methods of theology will not be too helpful, we need a combination of both. We need our Christian identity or the truth that Jesus Christ is the saviour of the world. But we also need the religious other for our dialogue and mission. We ought to see how other believers experience God or the divine, and we need to relate with them through our experience of Jesus Christ. Therefore for the practice of interreligious dialogue we need both ‘me’ and the ‘other.’ I refer ‘me’ to my faith, my religion, my culture, my living, my context, and I refer the ‘other’ to his faith, his religion, his culture, his living and his context. There ought to be a dialogue – a dialogue for the glory of God and his people on earth.

⁷⁸⁴ See G. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine, Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, London: SPCK, 1984; George Lindbeck dismisses these intellectualist and experiential models and proposes his version which he calls the ‘cultural-linguistic’: “It makes religion something like a cultural framework or language which shapes the life and thought of a particular people.” I have taken this reference from M. Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, pp.94-95.

⁷⁸⁵ J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 2004, pp. 123-24.

General Conclusion

Through interreligious dialogue we aim harmony between believers, peace, equality, respect, and recognition. In the conflict of religious plurality, there is a strong desire for interaction, for mutual enrichment, for mutual learning, for promotion of moral values, for solutions to religious extremism, for development, justice and peace, and a unity of human nature.

In recent decades a number of methods have been formulated to address issues associated with Christian theology of religions that attempt to articulate an understanding of other religions while maintaining the integrity of Christian claims. Interreligious dialogue is a prominent issue in the Christian theology of religions. The prominence of the interreligious dialogue is also seen from the perspective that is considered in the dialogue process. One could, for example, consider liberation (social, political, or spiritual) as the core biblical message, and it functions as the *litmus* test for the validity or invalidity of dialogue. If one considers salvation by Christ as the singular ultimate objective of Christianity, then the concern for salvation overrides all other considerations in dialogue. If one considers methodological neutrality is essential, then theological certainty is avoided. If one considers equality an absolute value, then judgements of other religions as better or worse are avoided, and concerns to treat everyone as equal.⁷⁸⁶

We dealt with exclusivist approach to other religions from the perspective of salvation in Christ alone and that too through the Church. We have considered rather a traditional or exclusivist approach giving sufficient evidences from biblical, patristic studies and from Karl Barth and Leonard Feeney. Exclusivism is the position that only Christians are eligible for salvation, or Salvation is possible only through Christ and His Church. As we have seen in the introduction to the first chapter, Christian exclusivism counts the revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole criterion by which all religions, including Christianity, can be understood and evaluated. Christian religion becomes a true religion, only as a work of faith in and

⁷⁸⁶ See C. Gillis, "Christian Approaches to Inter-religious Dialogue," in *Louvain Studies* 22, 1977, pp.15-16.

obedience to the divine revelation of Jesus Christ. Other religions are often seen here as cultural realities than religious realities. To the exclusivist position the believers of other religions need to be visible Christians or need to be baptized in order to be saved. At the same time, it is not to mean that exclusivists underestimated the love of God and Jesus Christ to other believers. Jesus' very concern and compassion for all - for sick, for downtrodden ones, Jesus' love and justice, care for the poor, His wonderful teaching on beatitudes, His giving hope and courage, His suffering for the people – all this also had concrete meaning for the exclusivists. What the pluralists speak today more in terms of liberation, justice and righteousness, was also present in exclusivists. They are also aware of Jesus' down to earth life. But all that the exclusivists do is that they see the concrete living of Jesus Christ in the world from their point of view of salvation in Christ through the Church. We say that in exclusivist approach we do not see an openness to other religions or do not see a positive approach to other religions. This leads to religious fanaticism and may result in violence between religions or lead to religious intolerance. The theological methodology used in this approach is that of deductive, i.e. revelation in Jesus Christ as the starting and end point of this approach.

Christian inclusivists emphasize that there is salvation for all, even to those who are outside the Church, but through Jesus Christ. They see the greatness of Jesus Christ in His unlimited love for everyone. Even though they proclaim that through Christ one is saved, they spell out the nature of this approach as that, that Jesus Christ is present everywhere through goodness, values and love. It is the universal presence of God or his Word that inclusivists take it seriously and emphasize in their approach. They come to this understanding of Jesus' universal presence also in other religions through the experience of other religions. Therefore they in fact search for goodness in others – a positive approach – seeing the love of God through Jesus Christ in every human being. This is rather an open or positive approach to other religions. The methodology here used is that of both deductive and inductive, from revelation to experience and experience to revelation, or the theology of above and theology of below, both are important to this approach.

Christian pluralists give importance to the religious experience in the context of world religions. When they say that all religions are equal, all require justice and

righteousness, or all religions have a right for their views on salvation, all will be saved in their own religions, or when they come to this understanding of pluralist approach from a phenomenological perspective, they still do not simply underestimate the real value or essence of each particular religion. They also emphasize certain aspects, in which they seem to tell others that they undervalue other aspects, or other basic elements of Christian truth. To be concrete, they may overemphasize the phenomenological aspects of total religious experience to undervalue the traditional Christian teachings, and so in the bargain at the end one loses something in the real sense. It may be not at all right to say that the pluralists are enemies of the uniqueness of religions, even though it seems to suggest that they undervalue it, in order to give equal status to all religions in their relationship to God or the divine or absolute. Pluralists see the religions from their perspective. They emphasize the present religious experience of believers of other religions. This approach presents an open and positive approach to other religions, but also poses the danger to traditional Christianity. The methodology they use is rather inductive, i.e. from religious experience.

There is much to learn from all these approaches to the religions, the most of all is that one comes to know the goodness of God in a wider sense. All these approaches have in their root the teachings of the Catholic Church. In the fourth chapter we have seen Christianity's relationship with other religions from the official Catholic teaching. We have looked into the position of the Catholic Church with other religions. Since Second Vatican Council we see a clear position of the Catholic Church to other religions as one which basically wants a positive relationship with other religions. The Catholic Church teaches that God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit is universally present in all religions. One may also say that this is a Christian inclusivist approach to other religions. There is an openness to other religions. Other religions do have moral and spiritual values. God saves all people in a manner known to Him alone. The Catholic Church looks for dialogue with other religions.

In the concluding chapter we analysed the claims of exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist approaches to the practical field of Christian mission and dialogue. We have seen to a certain extent pros and cons of these claims and teaching. We have

seen the difficulties involved in each of the approaches, particularly in the practice of them. Having analysed commonness and difference between religions, having seen the pastoral concern for dialogue, we worked for the praxis of interreligious dialogue. In the praxis of dialogue we considered human and religious person. As Christians we have a Christian identity. Similarly as believers of other religions, they have their religious identity. The criterion for interreligious dialogue is truth that Jesus Christ is the saviour. In preaching this truth to other believers it is very important to understand how other believers understand this truth. In dialogue with other believers the Christian does not ignore this fundamental criterion of truth, but pastorally he gives importance also to the human and religious aspects of other believers. The human and religious identity, the belief in the religious traditions and the religious recognition are of prime importance to a believer. A Christian ought to remain faithful to his faith in Jesus Christ but he also needs to respect and recognise other believers. And that is done through a careful listening to other believers, to their stories. Through listening we learn. We ought not to be prejudiced to say that we have everything or need nothing to learn from other believers. The diversity of religions and religious experiences provide richness and variety. There is goodness in others and we need to open ourselves and help others to open themselves to see it and value it. In the conflicts of differences we need to tolerate each other. Live and let other live ought to be understood to live and help others to live with responsibility, in love and service to each other.

In theology of religions the question often asked is the question of salvation for other believers, or the significance of other religions. The question as of who has salvation and who does not have, or which religion is right and which one is false, or who is right and who is wrong, is of an unending discussion. Raimond Panikkar speaks from the partial justification of all religions being ultimately true and all religions being ultimately false, says:

In fact, I am prepared to believe that most of the discrepancies among religions are complementary and supplementary views coming from a multiperspectival approach. The best thinkers of the world have been well aware that the context determines our perspective and that a problem can be seen from many angles. Yet when all is said and done there still remain irreducible aspects that force us to say that we are right and they are wrong.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸⁷ R. Panikkar, "Religious Pluralism: The Metaphysical Challenge," in L. S. Rouner (ed.), *Religious Pluralism*, 1984, p.109.

Perhaps it is the same case for the adherents of every religion to insist that they are right. And perhaps as a Christian when I say that my religion is the best religion for me and I have the most meaningful life because of my faith in Jesus Christ, then that begins to work effectively. And it is at this juncture that we begin to work on the pastoral analysis of approaches to other religions. It is not in explicitly presenting someone absolutely right and the other absolutely wrong, it is not in contesting the absolute truth⁷⁸⁸ of one religion and falsity of the other religion that ultimately concerns us in our pastoral concern and care of other religions. It is in fact in living our Christian faith to the full in love of God and mankind, it is in living our faith in Jesus Christ that we want to see a difference in our approach to other religions, not in condemning or judging the truth of the other, but in practicing love and compassion of Jesus Christ.

In our Christian approach to interreligious dialogue we emphasize a divine-human relationship to other believers. It is a relationship of faith or of religious nature without delimiting the human person. To specify it in concrete: Faith is very important for dialogue, but faith ought to relate and promote human goodness. And that is to be done through respect and recognition of other believers, through a mission of love and service. Today the Christian witness in interreligious context ought to be seen in cherishing dialogue. Through dialogue between believers we need to look into the goodness and failures of dialogue partners but aim at peace and harmony. The dialogue with other believers brings reconciliation and unity. Reconciliation is a process in which there is a restoration of good relationships between individuals and groups of believers. Reconciliation is a grace.⁷⁸⁹ History is a witness to the enmity between religions. But Christian mission is a mission of reconciliation through dialogue. Our mission is a mission of listening and understanding other believers, respecting and recognising them. We aim reconciliation, unity and goodness of all believers through dialogue.

To conclude our work on 'Christian Witness in Interreligious Context: Approaches to Interreligious Dialogue' we say : Christian approach to other believers in interreligious dialogue ought to be an approach based on divine-human relationship,

⁷⁸⁸ For the philosophical and theological understanding of "Truth," see A. Kreiner, *Ende der Wahrheit? Zum Wahrheitsverständnis in Philosophie und Theologie*, Freiburg: Herder, 1992.

⁷⁸⁹ On Mission as Reconciliation, see D. Dorr, *Mission in Today's World*, 200, pp. 128-43, 131.

which respects and recognizes the religious life of other believers in truth, love and service. It is the duty of the Christian to understand these terms and live them in the spirit of mission and dialogue, for which Jesus Christ was born, died and resurrected, for which He lives in and through His Spirit, and accordingly we have a commitment to carry out that mission of love and service for all people.

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