Zhihe Wang

Process and Pluralism

Chinese Thought on the Harmony of Diversity

P R O C E S S T H O U G H T

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Volume 23

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ontos verlag

Frankfurt | Paris | Lancaster | New Brunswick

Bibliographic information published by Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the Internet at http://dnb.ddb.de

North and South America by
Transaction Books
Rutgers University
Piscataway, NJ 08854-8042
trans@transactionpub.com

United Kingdom, Eire, Iceland, Turkey, Malta, Portugal by
Gazelle Books Services Limited
White Cross Mills
Hightown
LANCASTER, LA1 4XS
sales@gazellebooks.co.uk

Livraison pour la France et la Belgique:
Librairie Philosophique J.Vrin
6, place de la Sorbonne ; F-75005 PARIS
Tel. +33 (0)1 43 54 03 47 ; Fax +33 (0)1 43 54 48 18
www.vrin.fr

P.O. Box 15 41, D-63133 Heusenstamm
www.ontosverlag.com

ISBN 978-386838-150-4
2012

Printed on acid-free paper
ISO-Norm 970-6
FSC-certified (Forest Stewardship Council)
This hardcover binding meets the International Library standard

Printed in Germany
by CPI buch bücher.de

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FOREWORD

Dr. John B. Cobb, Jr.

Chinese religion has not played much of a role in discussions of religious diversity and how this is to be viewed from the perspective of the Abrahamic traditions. Because of the deeply entrenched habit of thinking of different traditions in their separate distinctiveness, when Chinese religion comes into the discussion, it is usually in terms of Taoism, or Confucianism, or Buddhism. Buddhism, of course, is taken very seriously in all such discussions, but Chinese Buddhism is only one of its forms and not the original one. Confucianism is viewed as hardly a religion at all. And Taoism, while its original writings are admired, is not often taken seriously as a living religion.

Yet the Chinese culture is a great one, and religion has played an important role within it throughout history. Maoism, in an important sense, became the official religion or substitute for religion, and it was quite effective in this role for a few decades. But as it faded from relevance and effectiveness, other aspects of Chinese religious culture resurfaced to contest the field with a newly important form of basically Western, or post-Christian, secularism. Christianity, which had previously been seen generally as a foreign religion, reappeared in a more indigenous, or at least, independent form, ready to assume a larger, but still minor role. Nevertheless, it became clear that the dominant religiousness of China was what it had been for many centuries. As the religiousness, if not the religion, of hundreds of millions of people, it can no longer be ignored in interreligious discussion.

Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism all make their contributions to this Chinese religiousness, but its roots are still broader and deeper in the culture. It was those deeper roots, still expressed in popular religiousness, that have enabled these three great traditions to live together, in relative harmony, through most of their history without forcing choices on most of the Chinese people. The deepest values of this religiousness are inclusiveness, tolerance, and harmony. Any religion that can accept these values and contribute to the well-being of individuals and/or communities is welcomed.

This Chinese harmonism offers an alternative to all of the options that have arisen out of the Western traditions. It allows but does not demand syn-

cretism. It places first the well-being of human beings, and it recognizes that many ideas and communities can contribute to this in diverse ways.

Its ability to deal with the broader challenges that elsewhere have led to conflict between religion and the state and among the religions, has not yet been fully demonstrated. Religion, broadly speaking, tends to make claims to an ultimate reality the importance of which transcends that of particular human authorities and cultures. This is, of course, true especially of all the Abrahamic traditions. Can they be embraced by harmonism?

In practice the answer seems to be affirmative as long as the structures of human authority are internal to China. They can be fully tolerated even if they stand apart from the harmonious relations among Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. The spirit of harmonism can give them space. This works today for Muslims, for most Protestant Christians, and even for some Roman Catholics.

On the other hand, the Chinese state is less able to deal with those for whom authority is humanly, as well as transcendently, beyond the Chinese government. In this respect the Chinese government is currently less tolerant than those in the West that have long dealt with such problems. Roman Catholics who are obedient to the Pope are not free to act on their beliefs. Tibetan Buddhists, loyal to the Dalai Lama, and members of Falun Gong, who look to a leader outside of China, despite the affinities of the teaching and practice to traditional Chinese harmonism, are not tolerated.

To evaluate harmonism as an ideal that would solve the problem of interreligious conflict, we must ask whether its current limitations in China are simply the result of contingent political situations that are fully separable from its religious meaning. Can harmonism include toleration of religious beliefs and activities that limit the authority of the state? Or would the acceptance of harmonism as the ideal toward which all traditions move involve abandoning claims to extra-national authority? Is it possible only in a context in which the deepest loyalty is to the nation?

I do not know the answer to this question. For Christians, and many others, this answer is crucial to how they respond to Zhihe Wang's important proposals for the way forward. Our belief in God necessarily recognizes, but also relativizes, the importance of local communities and of nations as well as the authority of states. Whitehead speaks of world loyalty. Although this does not prevent one from loving one's nation and giving provisional loyalty

to its leaders, it also allows one to give a considerable measure of loyalty to other groupings of people and to other leaders. Is this compatible with the deepest values of harmonism?

I am writing as a foreword what perhaps should be an afterword. It expresses my own response to the work of Zhihe Wang. I experience his proposal as a serious challenge to my own thinking about the problem of religious diversity and an inspiration to think further. For this I am truly grateful to Dr. Wang. I hope that many other Western thinkers will also experience both this challenge and this inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would have been impossible without the love and support of many people. First and foremost, I would like to express my great appreciation to my Ph.D Supervisor, David R. Griffin, whose invaluable insights and suggestions have shaped the book in many important ways. I am also sincerely grateful to Prof. Karen Torjesen and Prof. Philip Clayton for offering constructive comments and encouragement. For taking valuable time away from their extremely busy schedules, I am most appreciative. Special thanks are due to Dr. John B. Cobb for his loving care and direction. He was always available whenever I needed help.

I am also especially indebted to Prof. Jay McDaniel, who has graciously encouraged this project and voluntarily offered his selfless assistance in preparing it in final form by dialogue and personal correspondence. I would also like to thank Ms. Joan Schwerin for her selfless assistance in editing the work. Whenever I needed assistance, she was ready to help. For the selfless help I received from both of them, I am extremely grateful.

My gratitude also extends to Mr. Cliff Cobb, Dr. George Derfer, Dr. David Schwerin, Dr. John Buchanan, Ron and Pam Phipps, Prof. Yih-hsien Yu, Prof. Les Murray, Dr. Ken Dale, and Chris Arthur for their caring and their untiring help in many ways. They can always be counted on to lend a helping hand. For their love and abiding friendship I am more grateful than words can express.

Thanks to Dr. Michel Weber and Dr. Rafael Huentelmann at Ontos Verlag for providing guidance and editorial help. Dr. Johanna Seibt played a crucial role in the development of this book by providing constructive criticism and enthusiastic encouragement as well, for her I am most thankful.

I am also indebeted to Roger Gathman, who reworked the manuscript stylistically, also offered a host of valuable substantive comments.

All of these friends, Chinese and non-Chinese, not only provided living proof that there is no self apart from others, but also proved a truth I sensed many years ago: it is that beautiful souls are drawn to one another, forming special friendships.

My deepest gratitude is reserved for my parents, Yinxuan Wang and Jianying Wen, for their selfless love and unwavering support. To them I owe

much more than these scant lines can say. I am also truly grateful to the supportive and affirmative love of my son, Alex Binghung Wang, whose curiosity and sense of humor are sources of grace in my life. He embodies the spirit of consciousness of others that is at the heart of this work.

My final word of appreciation goes to my cherished wife, Meijun Fan, who has been my companion on this project. Without her sacrifice, boundless love and selfless support, this project, as well as many others, would have been insurmountable. It is to her and my parents that I dedicate this work.

Claremont, CA April 18, 2012

INTRODUCTION

This book has two purposes. The first is to show how, using the resources of Whiteheadian Pluralism, we can both critique and correct the contemporary Western discussion concerning religious universalism and pluralism. The second is to offer a uniquely Chinese contribution to those discussions that builds upon an emerging school of thought among Chinese thinkers that presents us with a characteristically Chinese variant of Process Thought. These two purposes converge in this book, especially at the end, as I offer a process-oriented perspective which I am going to called harmonism. Although the concept of harmony has had a long and illustrious career in Western literature, it has not gained footing in Western philosophy. Still, the literary tradition is certainly worth noting. The Horatian phrase that entitles this book has been appropriated and used by many authors, moving from its citation by Montaigne and its elaboration in a famous passage in Wordsworth's The Prelude:

> Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
> Like harmony in music; there is a dark
> Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
> Discordant elements, makes them cling together
> In one society.

Yet, the dialectic between harmony and discord never achieved any programmatic expression in the Western philosophical tradition. In order to give it force not only as a concept but a programmatic concept, we need to return to the position of harmony in traditional Chinese ways of thinking, and then instill these insights into our discussion of Whiteheadian process. In the remainder of this introduction I will explain aspects of the concept of harmony in Chinese thought, discuss the more general importance of addressing issues of pluralism today, and outline the contents of the book.

One of the greatest challenges facing humanity today is the task of resolving the conflict among religions. Today, "finding a viable way of accepting and appreciating religious diversity" is regarded as "one of the great mor-

al issues of our time."[1] My suggestion that we should look at this discussion from a point of view shaped, in part, by the long tradition of Chinese reflection on harmony represents a distinctively Chinese contribution to the question of how to maintain the coexistence of discordant religious points of view on the global stage. Given the revitalized role of China in world affairs today, and given the probability that, over time, religion will reclaim its role as an important influence within China itself, it is important that Chinese voices to be included in these global conversations.

Chinese traditions can enrich such pluralism by offering a model of creative relationships among religions modeled after those existing among Taoism**,** Confucianism**,** and Buddhism**.** The heart of these creative relationships is a way of living and thinking I am going to call "Harmonism." The key features of the Chinese tradition of harmonic thought are: peaceful co-existence, mutual transformation, and openness to change. I have sought to use these rudiments from the Chinese tradition to mediate a dialogue with Whiteheadian process thought, with the aim of providing a middle way between particularism and universalism, showing how diversity can exist within unity. While harmonism is open to similarities among religions, it is not a call for some kind of syncretism. Rather, under this concept I will attempt to show that differences among religions can ultimately be complementary rather than contradictory.

Thus, harmonism takes from Chinese thought the possibility of complementarity and develops an attitude of respect for others and a willingness to learn from others without losing one's own identity; that is, without reducing difference to uniformity. A process-oriented harmonism tries to deconstruct the dichotomy between universalism and particularism that has shaped the idea of pluralism. In this book, I have used John Hick to represent the Western notion of universalism (with its neglect of the uniqueness of the particular) and S. Mark Heim as the advocate of particularism (with its failure to understand the historical process encoded in any particular religion and their historically demonstrated capacity for learning and borrowing from other traditions). My harmonism offers a third and more promising alternative by showing how constructive relationships can be built in the course of dialogue. Ultimately, the practical goal is to get people from different religious tradi-

[1] Rita M. Gross & Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation*. London: Continuum, 2001, 7.

tions to begin to recognize in dialogue each with the other that the difference in their points of view may be treated as complementary, and that in each religion there are resources that can be called upon to adapt an attitude of coexistence, posited rather than different but contradictory. The philosophy of Whitehead shows how such complementariness is possible, because it speaks of different kinds of ultimate realities, to which different religions may be attuned, and because it also points to different ways of living in the world, each of which can have its own kind of beauty.

A uniquely Chinese approach to religious pluralism contravenes one of the common Western pluralist assumptions about religion, which reveals a bias shaped by Christianity. It is that religion is primarily about beliefs that can be verbalized and defended against alternatives. In the Chinese context religion pertains more to attitudes and behavior than to formalized beliefs. Thus, a person's religion, for the Chinese, is understood through how he or she feels and acts, not simply what he or she believes. While beliefs are important, they are not central. Accordingly, in a Chinese context, an encounter with religious diversity requires that we are attuned to the feelings, actions and customs of people, not simply their doctrines. This means that when a Taoist enters into dialogue with a Buddhist, the Taoist will not engage simply with what the Buddhist believes, but in the Buddhist's attitudes and feelings; that is, in how the Buddhist is present in the dialogue. The spirit, in which the Buddhist engages in dialogue, as expressed in a generosity of the heart and an openness of the mind, will be what is most important. The Taoist will meet Buddhism in this spirit. And, of course, the Buddhist will be equally interested in how the Taoist approaches the dialogue. A Whiteheadian approach helps us recognize the importance of feelings and attitudes by giving us a vocabulary for affirming them. In Whiteheadian terms, the Taoist and Buddhist are interested in the "subjective forms" and "subjective aims**"** of the participants in dialogues, and also in the "past actual worlds" that are carried with them in their discussions. These three realities are just as important, sometimes more important, than the intellectual positions they espouse.

Another frequent Western assumption is that religions, understood as social realities, are self-contained and permanent. In the Chinese context social realities are not self-contained. They emerge in relation to other social realities; they can exhibit common patterns over time, but they are also subject to alteration. According to *Yi Jing,* it is change that leads to be open to others

and communicate with others, and it is this openness and communication that leads to permanent prosperity."[2] Such a perspective tells us that reality is made up not simply of what already is, but of what is not yet actual. It allows us, therefore, to see that this world, as given, can change over time and become a different world. That is, we can mold our own future. Accordingly, an encounter with religious diversity from the perspective of Chinese tradition allows us to understand religions as shaped things, perpetually involved in modifying their beliefs and practices through the influence of other schemas of thought, religions, cultures, etc. When, for example, a Buddhist enters into dialogue with a Confucian, the result may be that the Buddhist understands Buddhism differently, and that the difference he takes away he may impart to the Buddhist tradition of which he or she is a part, so that it, too, quietly, in small increments, also changes.

A third assumption often made by Western theologians and philosophers is that if one religion contains insights and practices conducive to human fulfillment, its insights and practices must be superior to those of other religions. However, the Chinese perspective takes it for granted that different religions can contain different insights and practices, each of which serves different human needs, the sum total of which can be conducive to human fulfillment or "salvation." The point is put succinctly by Zhuang Zi**,** the cofounder of Taoism:

> *To love people and benefit all things means humanity (jen).*
> *To identify with all without losing one's own identity means greatness.*
> *To behave without purposely showing any superiority means broadness.*
> *To possess an infinite variety means richness.*[3]

Following this train of thought, the Chinese tradition encourages people to uncover and explore the commonalities of experience that underlie different points of view while respecting those differences. "In Chinese thought, harmony does not signify the imposition of uniformity, but rather the emergence of concord out of the allowance of discord. This creates a new set of

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[2] The Appended Remarks on *Yi Jing.* In *Selected Readings from Famous Chinese Philosophers*. (Vol.1) Ed. Shi Jun. Beijing: People's University of China Press, 1996, 198.

[3] Zhuang Zi, *Zhuang Zi • Tian Di.* In *The Current Note and Translation on Zhuang Zi*. ed. Chen Guying. China Publishing House, 1983*, 298.*

tacit assumptions for dialogue. Thus, when a Taoist and a Confucian speak to each other, they need not assume that, if one is "right" about some important matters, then the other must be "wrong." Instead they can assume that being "right" is a matter of dimensions, degrees, nuances and contexts.

A Chinese approach to religious diversity will, therefore, have a different tone than a Western approach. My hope is that the perspective can help increase the openness of participants in inter-religious dialogue. Rather than a set of doctrines, my proposed harmonism takes an open attitude and mindset toward other traditions. It is an attitude of respecting others and of being willing to learn from others without reducing the other to one's own identity; that is, to uniformity. It also encourages participants in different religions to learn from others while they value what is important in their own. This work is not written as a defense of any particular faith, but rather as an exploration of religion from a process perspective that is enriched by a Chinese tradition that has historically developed a sophisticated set of philosophical assumptions that recognize not only the ethos of the harmonic co-existence of religions, but, as well, the historical fact that different religious traditions borrow from each other and change over time. Harmonism seeks to leverage this historical fact into a morally significant insight on the global scale: it is possible to imagine a world in which religions are open to and enrich each other.

Many people say "religious pluralism is a special challenge facing the world religions today."[4] From the Chinese perspective developed in this work, there is something lacking in the word **"**challenge," which speaks only to religion as a problem. In this sense I prefer the Chinese term "Weiji**,**" which means both crisis and opportunity. Religious pluralism is not only a crisis for traditional forms of religion, it also provides an opportunity to learn something new from other traditions, to reorient or transform them into more creative ways of living in the world, which in turn contribute to the common good of the world. My hope is that taking seriously the Chinese philosophical concept of harmony will facilitate a genuine openness and do justice to the culturally and religiously "other." Thus, it will offer a way beyond current religious clashes.

Chapter one examines the developmental history of religious pluralism in the modern Western world and provides a background for understanding

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[4] Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1985, 94.

the contemporary discussion on pluralism. I briefly introduce four philosophers of religion in the nineteenth century: Schleiermacher**,** Hegel, Troeltsch, and Toynbee**,** each of whom had enormous influence in shaping the pluralistic mentality**.** In this chapter, I also briefly present new developments since the 1960s.

Chapter two offers an appreciation and assessment of Hick's point of view, leading to the problem of overcoming the limitations of Hicksian pluralism. My thesis is that Hick's limitations can be transcended using some of Whitehead's processional notions. This, in turn, prepares us for the turn to harmonism. For Hick, religious universalism is an antidote to forms of religious particularism that disguise an **exclusivist** attitude. Hick is right to urge us to go beyond religious exclusivism and embrace interfaith dialogue. However, as I indicate in a later chapter, he fails to appreciate the concrete and genuine differences among religions.

Chapter three presents and evaluates the views of S. Mark Heim – particularistic pluralism. Heim disagrees with Hick's claim that there can be only one religious object, which Hick calls **"**the Real." Heim recommends a more pluralistic approach, emphasizing that "there can be a variety of actual but different religious fulfillments, salvations."[5] As I explain, Heim's intention is to move beyond the limits of the pluralistic agenda, but in so doing he overshoots. He fails to resolve the problem at the heart of the pluralism debate: the conflicts that arise when religious institutions are so constituted that the believers of a given religion assume that their religion is superior to the others. And he does not allow for the possibility of mutually fruitful interaction among the religions. Thus the impasse between Hick's universalistic religious pluralism and Heim's particularistic religious pluralism calls for a new approach, which can transcend both universalistic emphasis on a substantial common essence of all religions and particularistic emphasis on the superiority of each religion. I propose that a Whiteheadian Religious Pluralism, the features of which mesh with a harmonism derived from the Chinese tradition of religious thought, gives us our best candidate.

Chapter four suggests a Religious Pluralism based on Whiteheadian process philosophy**,** which serves as corrections to their approaches. The version I advocate is indebted to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, as

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[5] S. Mark Heim, *Salvations—Truth and Difference in Religion*, Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1995, 131.

developed by John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin**.** We have seen that Hick's pluralism is only partly pluralistic because, although he affirms generic pluralism, his specific version of pluralism argues that all the post-axial religions share a core of beliefs**.** Unlike Hick and Heim, the approach advocated by Cobb and Griffin is an attempt to fulfill the promise of pluralism by going beyond the mere formal disjunctions characteristic of religions: preserving a sense of the uniqueness of different traditions, Cobb and Griffin show how participants in a given tradition can be thoroughly open to other religions, allowing themselves to be creatively transformed by insights from traditions other than their own. This openness is possible because the distinctive insights of different religions are often complementary rather than contradictory. This means that, in affirming the wisdom of another religion, one need not deny the wisdom of one's own.

Chapter five presents a Chinese approach to religious diversity, taken broadly from the Chinese religious tradition. The approach based on harmony is based on key features of the Chinese religious imagination, realized in practices that have developed in Chinese society: peaceful co-existence, mutual transformation, openness to change. My aim is to show how harmonism provides a uniquely pragmatic pluralistic point of view, which is rooted in distinctly Chinese insights and yet easily interpreted within the scope of Whiteheadian ideas. From an organic Chinese point of view, essentialist universalism and isolating particularism both rely on dualistic or either/or thinking. Harmony is beyond this dualism. Thus a Chinese Harmonism complements the Western Whiteheadian pluralistic perspectives developed by John Cobb and David Ray Griffin.

Chapter six further develops seven key ideas that inform meeting points for process philosophy and the philosophically rich idea of harmony within the Chinese tradition: the notion of process, that of openness, the primacy of *yin-yang* thinking, the concept of harmony, the unity of transcendence and immanence**,** the appreciative consciousness of others, and the doctrine of following two courses at the same time.

I conclude by pointing out that harmonism is not a dead tradition from the past, but is still a vital element in Chinese culture and, in as much as the idea of that discord and harmony are not opposites, in the larger world as well. As the Chinese recover their cultural and religious heritages, the concept of harmony can guide the encounter between Confucians, Buddhists, and Taoists

as they recall their parts in panorama of Chinese history. At the same time the concept has resonances with a persistent element in the way Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu**,** and other religions have been shaped and reflect upon themselves and their relations with others, even if this element has been historically submerged in the institutions into which beliefs and practices flow. Even in cases such as that of Christians and Muslims in China, harmonism can guide a fruitful rapprochement. Indeed, the virtues that are encoded in harmonism can add to the perspectives of people outside organized religion, enabling them to appreciate the value of many religions. My hope is that the provisional formulation of a philosophy of harmonism I offer here will be a starting point for its development in the community of Chinese scholars seeking a mode to identify and promote a uniquely Chinese philosophy that can help China and, as importantly the larger world.

Chapter 1

The Road toward Religious Pluralism: A Historical Survey

The Place Where We Are Right
From the Place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.
The Place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.
But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined House once stood.
---Yehuda Amichai [1]

While religious exclusivism has continued to be dominant over the past hundred years, it has also been contested by a pluralistic trend, advocated at first by only a few theologians and philosophers and gradually becoming more widespread.

There are social reasons for the rise of the pluralistic attitude: advances in mass communication, increased opportunities for travel, the emergence of economic inter-dependence, and the dynamics of immigration that have increased the average person's awareness of religious diversity more than at any previous time in world history. The diversity has always has been present, but the awareness has increased, and this awareness has given rise to a trend

[1]Adam B. Seligman, *Modest Claims: Dialogues and Essays on Tolerance and Tradition*. Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004, v.

among religious thinkers to develop theologies and philosophies of pluralism. This work seeks to contribute to this development.

It is important to distinguish diversity and pluralism. David Ray Griffin puts the point clearly: "Whereas 'religious diversity' refers to a simple sociological fact that there are many religious traditions, often within a single country, 'religious pluralism' refers to beliefs and attitudes."[2] Religious pluralists do not believe that their religion is the only legitimate one. They believe that other religions can provide positive values and truths, even salvation – however defined – to their adherents.

Exclusivism, then, is the view that one religion contains all the truth relevant to salvation or genuine human fulfillment. In this view, people are excluded from this fulfillment unless they belong to one particular religion and adhere to its truth. By contrast, pluralism is the view that many traditions contain truth or truths relevant to salvation.

As we will see, there are many kinds of pluralism. Some philosophers and theologians of pluralism believe that there is only one kind of salvation or truth to which all religions point, but that there are many paths toward this one kind of salvation or truth. Their pluralism is of a limited nature, because they typically model it on some central vision of salvation or truth that is easily identified with the religious tradition they come from, even as they seek to include others in an non-exclusivist way. Others propose that there are different forms of salvation that come from different truths that people have encountered, and that these forms of salvation and truth are complementary rather than contradictory. This pluralism is of a broader nature. David Ray Griffin calls it "deep religious pluralism;"[3] and it is this kind of pluralism that I will be defending in this work.

Whether one's pluralism is deep or shallow, though, the embrace of pluralism illustrates a trend in world history toward affirming religious diversity as something desirable and good, rather than as an obstacle to the advent of one particular global faith. Paul Knitter is one of the leading Christian proponents of pluralism, and he describes it as "a new turn" in world history.[4]

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[2] David R. Griffin, "Preface." *Deep Religious Pluralism*. Ed. David Griffin. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, xiii.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Paul F. Knitter, "Preface." In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter, New York: Orbis Books, 1987, vii.

As Knitter makes clear, this new turn, while it is occurring all over the world, is especially evident in the West because the dominant religious culture there, Christianity, is now thrust into the encounter with other religions on a daily basis, as compared to the situation a hundred or even fifty years ago, when, outside of the choice of a radical secularism, the diversity of faiths was less obvious.

Another proponent of pluralism, Chris Arthur, describes the situation thus:

> Would an individual in 1899 have had any real concept of the number or diversity of human religions? Would he or she have routinely encountered representatives of the different world faiths? Imagine travelers between continents before the relative ease of modern aircraft, would their traveling companions have believed and practiced significantly different faiths? Could they have hoped to find members of every major faith living in virtually every city on earth?[5]

Arthur's point here, of course, is that travelers from the West experience religious diversity today in ways that would not have been known in 1899. This is not simply because they travel so much and to new lands, where the diversity is apparent, but also because in most developed countries there are now growing enclaves of other religions, started and maintained by growing numbers of immigrants, who may be their traveling companions on the plane bringing them to formerly 'exotic' countries. The diversity is also obvious to students in universities, readers of the newspaper, and users of the Internet, who experience this diversity, even if they cannot travel the world:

> Think of the syllabus of subjects covered by a university only fifty years ago. Would students routinely have had on their shelves copies of a selection of the world's scriptures—informed, undogmatic treatments of Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism, Islam, guides to Zen meditation, Sufi mysticism, New Age philosophy, Christian spirituality? Consider the range of religious reporting in newspapers today and in the 1920s; examine the ways in which television's religious content has changed over a much shorter time span; be amazed at the exuberant growth of diverse religious groups which is evidenced so richly on the Internet.[6]

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[5] Chris Arthur, *Religious Pluralism: A Metaphorical Approach*, The Davies Group, Aurora CO: 2000, p.7.

[6] Ibid.

Chris Arthur further points out that people experience the diversity among their neighbors in ways their grandparents might never have imagined: "How many of our parents or grandparents would have dreamed of visiting Benares, of having friends, colleagues and neighbors who observe Ramadan and go on hajj, of seeing a new Hindu temple built amidst the glass and concrete of a Western city, of learning how to meditate from a Buddhist teacher?"[7] He quotes the words of Diana L. Eck**,** Project Director of Harvard University Committee on the Study of Religion, which points to the enormous sea change in diversity of faiths that occurred in America between the beginning and end of the 20th century: "There are Islamic centers and mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples and meditation centers in virtually every major American city. The encounter between people of very different religious traditions takes place in the proximity of our own cities and neighborhoods."[8]

Arthur's point is simple: in the twenty-first century, especially but not exclusively in the West, religious diversity cannot be avoided.

This does not mean that the encounter with diversity will be pleasant or harmonious. The rise of fundamentalism, and exclusivism, tracks the trend toward pluralism. This second trend does not emerge in a vacuum; it builds upon the histories of religions themselves. Nowhere is this as apparent as in Christianity, which has the longest and clearest history of exclusivism, and which is now the religion in which, more than any of the other axial religions, the strongest attempt to articulate pluralistic alternatives to exclusivism is being staged. In the remainder of this opening chapter, I will present some of this history.

1. The Exclusivist Past

In many ways, the appearance of pluralistic theologies is new in the Christian West. Marjorie Suchocki, a leading proponent of deep religious pluralism, explains that the issue of religious diversity was not much of a problem for Christians in past centuries. Christianity was regarded as the unique vessel of religious truth; religions such as Islam, Judaism, Buddhism,

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Diana L. Eck, "Challenge of Pluralism." Cited in Chris Arthur, *Religious Pluralism,* 7.

and Hinduism were generally regarded as "strange and dark residues of paganism, utterly inferior to Christianity and proper targets of the churches' missionary zeal."[9] For example, when Buddhism first began to dawn on the Western consciousness, it appeared as a "monstrous religion," an "abominable sect" founded by a "very wicked man." Therefore it was ridiculed and rejected as a plague, "a gangrene," "a ridiculous doctrine."[10]

Accordingly, the relation to other religious traditions was dictated by the rule that any religion that did not accept the core teachings of Christianity (for instance, salvation being a matter of believing that Jesus was God's only son) was, by definition, wrong. The task of Christian theologians was thus apologetic: the endless exhibition of the belief that Christianity was the matchless and solely legitimate religion – that it "preserved everything good in the religions and quasi-religions of their time, and that it also contained excellences not found in them."[11] This exclusivist attitude was reflected not only in the teachings of early Christian intellectuals like Justin Martyr**,** Clement of Alexandra**,** and Origen**,**[12] but also in missiology. As late as 1913, Julius Richter defined his subject of missiology as "that branch of the 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."[13] Likewise, when Bartholomew Ziegenbalg**,** a pioneer of India's missions sent his book on Hinduism and its relations to Christianity to Europe for publication, the response he received was, in effect: "You were not sent to India to study Hinduism, but to preach the Gospel."[14] The standard assumption was that all knowledge of heathenism is worse than useless—unless it was used for the missionary task.

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[9] John Hick, *God has Many Names*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982, 7.

[10] John Hick, "The non-Absoluteness of Christianity." in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter, New York: Orbis Books, 1987, 10.

[11] Paul J. Griffiths, "Beyond Pluralism." *First Things* (January 1996), 1.

[12] Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions.*, 21.

[13] Julius Richter, "Missionary Apologetics: its Problems and its Methods." *International Review of Missions* 2 (1913), 17.

[14] Frank F. Ellinwood, *Oriental Religions and Christianity*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892, 4.

As Frank Ellinwood, the author of *Oriental Religions and Christianity*, put it: Good men are asking, "Is not such a study a waste of energy, when we are charged with proclaiming the only saving truth?"[15] His answer was that there was one good reason for a missionary to study other faiths – to be ready to fight with "weapons of precision."[16] Ellinwood emphasized the unique supremacy of Christianity over other faiths. The reasons he offered were twofold. First, only Christianity "offers a real salvation."[17] Other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism have "no salvation, no scheme of grace." They lack "every element of divine salvation."[18] Second, he believed that Christianity is the universal religion of humankind. Only Christ belongs to all ages and all races. On the contrary, Buddha is but an Asiatic, Mohammed is an Arab and belongs only to the East, the religion of Confucius belongs only to the Mongolian races.[19] His conclusion was that Christianity is the only True Religion; "there can be no diversity."[20]

The heyday of missiology was also the heyday of European imperialism. Today, however, Western Christianity finds itself in a new post-imperialist environment, in which many so called Third World regions are on the rise. Without the enormous force of the imperialist political machinery behind its back, Christianity is just one religion in the midst of a religious diversity that is apparent everywhere, even in the heartland of the former Christian West – in cities in the U.S. and Europe, for instance. The positive value of other religions is difficult to ignore. Even among more ecumenically minded Christians, there is a turn to pluralism. One of the best surveys of contemporary Christian approaches to other religions is Paul Knitter's *Introducing Theologies of Religion*. Among Christians, says Knitter, four general approaches to religious diversity have emerged: the Replacement Approach, the Fulfillment Approach, the Dialogue Approach, and the Acceptance Approach. The *replacement* approach, embraced by many evangelicals, emphasizes that there is no revelation conducive to salvation outside Christianity. It holds, therefore, that Christianity should replace all other religions. This would mean that

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[15] Ibid., 5-6.
[16] Ibid., 20.
[17] Ibid., 340.
[18] Ibid., 346.
[19] Ibid., 378.
[20] Ibid., 338.

Buddhists, for example, abandon their Buddhism and become Christians. The replacement approach is, therefore, the contemporary expression of traditional Christian exclusivism.

Knitter's other three categories, however, seem pluralistic, to some degree or other. The *fulfillment* approach is characteristic of Roman Catholic Christians. It says that there is revelation in other religions and that this revelation may even be saving, but that it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This would mean that Buddhists may be saved as Buddhists, but that they would be more completely saved by becoming Christians who bring the wisdom of Buddhism into their Christianity.

The *acceptance* model says that the many world religions are truly different in their doctrines, and that many of these differences are irreconcilable, but that we must simply accept the differences, because there can be no communication across cultural-linguistic lines. This would mean that Buddhists remain Buddhists and Christians remain Christians, arguing with one another about which religion has the genuine power to lead to salvation, but that they also work together, where possible, on common projects aimed toward common ends. One of the authors whom I treat later, S. Mark Heim, adopts this approach.

The *dialogue* approach emphasizes that all religions contain truths relevant to salvation, but that these truths may be different; however, these differences are not so irreconcilable that people of different religions cannot learn from one another. This would mean that Buddhists and Christians may remain Buddhist and Christians, but also that the dialogue in which they are involved can transform each of those categories.

The dialogue approach, which is the most fully pluralistic approach, is now adopted by many Christians, although some people who advocate "dialogue" do not necessarily hold a pluralistic view. The dialogue approach seeks to affirm a certain kind of pluralism that emerges within the acceptance approach, as represented chiefly in the thought of Heim.

What is clear, though, is that Christians in outside of the replacement approach – that is, those who take the Fulfillment, Acceptance, or Dialogue approaches – embody a new historical epoch, where Christianity is not seen as the one-and-only but "as one-among-several."[21] Thus, we might distinguish between a pluralistic *attitude*, which seeks to welcome religious diversity, and

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[21] John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985, 101.

a pluralistic *theology*, which seeks to articulate a theology that is conducive to that welcoming spirit. The pluralistic attitude has been accepted by more and more people, who are attracted to an approach that emphasizes the appreciation of other religions rather than their condemnation. As Cobb puts it, "Appreciative understanding of other traditions has become relatively widespread, and criticism of Christian arrogance and imperialism is commonplace." [22]

This turn to pluralism did not emerge in a vacuum not only because of the sociological circumstances we briefly referenced above, but also from the intellectual labor of many thinkers whose contribution must be appreciated. As Griffin rightly points out, "It is important to emphasize that the cultural move from absolutism to pluralism is the most important issue. Ernst Troeltsch**,** John Hick**,** Cantwell Smith**,** and the others who have pioneered and popularized this move in the Christian West are to be commended and honored for their service."[23] In the remainder of this chapter, then, I will present some of those whose works were crucial to the philosophical foundation of the turn to pluralism among Western Christians. Of course, a detailed history of religious pluralism is beyond the scope of the present chapter that will selectively survey the movement. This survey is divided into two parts. In the first part, I focus on four philosophers of religion in the nineteenth century, important because of their enormous influence in shaping the pluralistic mentality: Schleiermacher, Hegel, Troeltsch, and Toynbee.[24] In part two, I take this narrative through new developments since the 1960s.

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[22] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipe and Stock, 1998, vii.

[23] Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Differential." *Deep Religious Pluralism*, Louisville Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 2005, 37.

[24] Fiorenza prefers to call their work "as attempts to deal with pluralism." (See Fiorenza, Francis Schussler. "Pluralism: A Western Commodity or Justice for the Other?" In *Ethical Monotheism, Past and Present*. Ed. Theodore M. Vial and Mark A. Hadley, Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2001, 289.

2. Religious Pluralism Prior to the 1960s

Friedrich Schleiermacher

The rise of pluralism defines the theological and philosophical agenda for many thinkers today. As Griffin explains, "one of the central tasks of a philosophy of religion" is to "suggest a framework for understanding the relations of the various religions to one another."[25] This was not the case in Schleiermacher's day. In his time traditions other than Christianity were still beyond the horizon of most European scholars. By the end of the eighteenth century, the comparative study of religion as a separate discipline had not yet been established. Non-Christian religions were viewed as "living museums of strange customs and beliefs to be visited occasionally by the curious or the dilettante."[26] The theme of the relationship between Christianity and other religions was still not considered in European scholarship. The notion that only Christianity is the true, superior religion, with all other religions being "false and inferior religions," was still dominant as to be assumed as part of the doctrine of the religion. Paul Tillich suggested that the superiority-inferiority view was held even by Schleiermacher as well as Hegel, saying: "Hegel considers it [Christianity], in spite of Islam, as the fulfillment of all that is positive in the other religions and cultures; Schleiermacher gives a construction of the history of religions in which Christianity takes the highest place in the highest type of religion."[27] However, in saying this, Tillich fails to pay credit another, more constructive, aspect of Schleiermacher's view of the relationship between Christianity and other religions.

Tillich is right that Schleiermacher holds Christianity supreme. On the one hand, he says that each religion in its place and time is good. On the other hand, he also says that the essence of all religion is present in Christianity because "the original intuition of Christianity is more glorious, more sublime, more worthy of adult humanity, more deeply penetrating into the spirit of sys-

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[25] Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001, 247.

[26] *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, Vol.1. ed by Ninian Smart. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 12.

[27] Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963, 42-43.

tematic religion, and extending farther over the whole universe."[28] Thus, for Schleiermacher, Christianity is *among* the other religions as well as above them. Like them, it is an institutionalized expression of the omnipresent common religious feeling, centered in a particular intuition of the Infinite**.** Unlike the other religions, though, it is built around the constructive intuition of the very essence of religion.[29] This allows Christianity to be the possessor of "a higher power,"[30] something that makes it "most perfect."

For pluralists, however, the value of Schleiermacher's approach lies in his claim that no historical religion, not even Christianity, can exhaust all possible religious feelings.[31] Thus, even as it is the best religion, is it not absolute. As one among many religions, none of them absolute, Christianity has a kind of equality with other religions. Tillich's assessment failed to bring out this point.

This point can be put more positively. For Schleiermacher, the essence of religion is contained in every religion, and in this respect all religions are valuable, even though some may be better than others. As the product of its historical situation, each religion has its eternality and necessity. Religion in its completeness exists in the whole series of actual religions, so that each particular faith has permanent value.[32] Moreover, every religion has its unique vantage point from which it views the universe. It is these different perspectives that constitute the richness of the world of faith. In this sense, Schleiermacher rejects the viewpoint that "sees other religions as fragmentary and preliminary to one's own."[33] In Schleiermacher's eyes, "all is one."[34]

Schleiermacher asks his audience not to be affected by "two hostile principles that have sought to distort and conceal the spirit of each religion

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[28] Friedrich Schleiermacher *On Religion*. tran. Richard Crouter. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 213.
[29] Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937, 57.
[30] Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 214.
[31] Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, 57.
[32] Ibid., 58.
[33] C. W. Christian, Friedrich *Schleiermacher*. Waca: Word Books, 1979, 67.
[34] Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*. Dietrich Ritschl, ed. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982, 250.

everywhere."[35] With a tolerant spirit, he embraces every religion, no matter how old or how primitive. As he tells his audience, "However fortunate you may be at deciphering the crude and undeveloped religions of distant peoples or at sorting out the many types of individual religions that lie enclosed in the beautiful mythology of the Greeks and Romans is all the same to me; may their gods guide you."[36] For Schleiermacher, "innumerable forms of religion are possible." If it is necessary that each should be actualized in its own time, it is understandable that every historical period should have many expressions of religion. For Schleiermacher, religions are necessarily diverse; multiplicity is necessary for religion. In the end of *On Religion,* he writes*,* "nothing is more unchristian than to seek uniformity in religion,"[37] just as nothing is more irreligious than to demand uniformity in humanity generally. So he rejects a rationalism that advocates such uniformity and insists: "I have at all times presupposed the plurality of religions and their most distinct diversity as something necessary and unavoidable."[38] Ultimately, for Schleiermacher, the multiplicity of religions is based on the essence of religions, which is emotional rather than rational. The plurality of religions is a necessary outcome of the fact that different souls conceive of and react to the Universe in different ways. Given this point of departure, Schleiermacher can expressly argue against the notion that there can be a single natural religion, and, in particular, against such slogans as "everyone believes the same thing, after all" and that "only one religion is correct."[39] What he promotes, as Richard Crouter states, is "an open, non-privileged perspective on religion."[40]

Without a doubt, such "an open, non-privileged perspective on religion" can be regarded as a basic expression of Schleiermacher's form of religious pluralism, grounded in his notion that "intuition and feeling" constitute the essence of religion.[41] In concrete terms, the form taken by individual intuitions and feelings differ from one religion to another.

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[35] Schleiermacher. *On Religion*. 210.
[36] Ibid., 211.
[37] Ibid.,
[38] Ibid., 190.
[39] Ibid., 49.
[40] Ibid., 51.
[41] Ibid., 102.

In conclusion, there is a tension in Schleiermacher's approach to religion: on the one hand he he emphasizes the equality of Christianity with other religions and extols the difference between 'positive' religions; on the other hand, he claims that Christianity is, after all, the best. He attempts to give a positive and sympathetic account of the development by which religions arise, seeking those common elements that bind all religious communities together. At the same time, he hopes to "defend the uniqueness and superiority of Christianity."[42] Though he promotes methodological neutrality, he confesses that he cannot wholly keep a neutral stance. As C.W. Christian puts it, "Thus there appears within the speeches a tension between the stance of the scientific phenomenologist of religion and that of the believing advocate."[43] This same tension appears in Hegel.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

When pluralists seek philosophical support for their points of view, they do not often mention Hegel, due to the fact that there are well known aspects of his thought that lean towards monism, exclusivism, or inclusivism. Monism overemphasizes unity at the expense of diversity; exclusivism rejects the wisdom of other traditions; and inclusivism seeks to include all other religions into its own more inclusive perspective, thus subsuming their uniqueness. Certainly, this assessment is not inaccurate. According to Hegel, in essence, "the nature of world spirit is always one and the same."[44] Christianity expresses this spirit most profoundly and is indeed the superior religion. Other religions – Chinese Taoism, for example – may not even be true religions, because they fail to resemble Christian ways of being religious.

But it is not sufficient to leave Hegel there, for he still has much to offer. One finds in Hegel's thought another, inner tendency to pluralism, which has been influential in much Western philosophy that came after him. Maurice Merleau-Ponty has said "Hegel is at the origin of everything great in philosophy for the last century." Whether or not that is true, it is certainly true that Hegel influenced the move toward religious pluralism. Hegel's tendency toward pluralism is rooted in his dialectic.

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[42] Christian*, Friedrich Schleiermacher*, 66.

[43] Ibid., 67.

[44] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *The Philosophy of History*. With prefaces by Charles Hegel and the translator, J. Sibree, M.A . New York: Willey Book Co., 1944, 10.

Hegel's Dialectic

According to Hegel, dialectic is the fundamental principle of all reality: "the principle of all life, all movement and all activity in the actual world."[45] Dialectic is the very nature and essence of everything. On the one hand, dialectic is an imminent movement within the universe by which individual entities and objects of knowledge both depend on their opposites for their identity and are simultaneously negated by their opposites, such that movement and self-differentiation emerge in history. In this sense it is objective. But there is another, less logically rigid sense in which dialectic is a way of looking at things, or a way of thinking. It tells us how to look at things not as self-enclosed, timeless and essentially unrelated to their circumstances, but to look at them in their own being and movement. It thereby helps to "reveal the finitude or limits of the partial categories of understanding."[46] In this sense it is subjective, existing in our minds. We understand it best if we identify four central aspects.

The first basic character and category of Hegel's dialectic is movement or process. For Hegel, what he calls the "idea" is central, and the "idea is essentially process" insofar as it is absolute negativity and therefore dialectical.[47] This is why he often describes the "Spirit" and the "Idea" as "restless process."[48] Not only consciousness and ideas, but also nature and history, are in process. Thus he rejects any way of thinking that views things as being motionless. That is to say, anything static, in Hegel, has no truth.

The second basic character and category of Hegel's dialectic is the "unity of opposites" or "synthesis of opposites**."** This way of thinking of unity rejects the traditional notion of identity, which is defined in terms of mere self-sameness; in this non-dialectical view, an entity consists of an "inside" that is identical to itself, and an "outside" – an appearance – that is external to it. Thus, the identity of something excludes what is other to it, and the other

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[45] Hegel, *Encyclopedia,* Quoted in *Hegel and Whitehead—Contemporary Perspective on Systematic Philosophy*, ed. George R. Lucas, Jr. State University of New York Press, 1986, 18.

[46] Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel*. Tran. William Wallace. Oxford University Press, 1959, 149.

[47] Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel*, 357.

[48] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press, 1977, 323.

plays no constructive role in the formation of its identity. For Hegel, this misrepresents the way things are. A given entity exists in an essential relationship to what is other to it; it does not simply exclude it but, relating itself to it, includes it in some way. The human self, for example, includes what is other than it, such that we cannot speak of a "pure" self, because the self contains the other, which in some ways as an other logically contradicts it. In the case of abstract ideas, the same situation holds. In Hegel's own words: "how impossible, how abstract, and how absurd it is to equate one opposite, such as the one, with reality, and the other with illusion, since it is precisely the synthesis of opposites which constitutes reality."[49] Everything has its opposite; every basic principle has its own contradictions. To make the other disappear means to make myself disappear. The other is a central element of "self." There is no "self" without the other.

The third central element of Hegel's dialectic is the notion of the "organic whole**.**" Hegel's tendency to think in terms of organic wholes is, according to Klaus Hartmann**,** apparent in "all his systematic writings," including *Phenomenology of Spirit, Science of Logic,* and *Encyclopedia*.[50] The aim of those works is to construct an organic philosophy**.** This means that, for Hegel, the truth is the whole. Parts or elements are meaningful only in the context of the whole. "Everything that exists stands in correlation, and this correlation in the veritable nature of every existence."[51] The particular living being exists within relations to other living beings. The true natures of elements are solely determined by their place in the whole. No partial and provisional element, therefore, can maintain itself in isolation, because its true and only nature is as a moment in the whole, "so that it demands and goes over into its other to unite with it and to constitute a more complete and adequate exemplification of the ultimate universal principle of wholeness."[52]

The fourth central category is the conception of "concrete universal" or "concreteness." Hegel's philosophy places great emphasis on concreteness.

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[49] Henry Alonza Myers, *Systematic Pluralism: A Study in Metaphysics*. Cornell University Press, 1961, 95.

[50] Klaus Hartmann, "Types of Explanation in Hegel and Whitehead." *Lucas, Hegel and Whitehead*. 62.

[51] Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel*, 245.

[52] Errol E. Harris, "The Contemporary Significance of Hegel and Whitehead." *Lucas, Hegel and Whitehead*. 23.

"What philosophy has to do," for Hegel, is "always something concrete."[53] Concreteness in Hegel is not self-sameness. Something is not concrete because it has an inside essence separated from what is outside it. On the contrary, something is concrete because it includes what is other than itself in its very nature. Concreteness is the unity of opposites. In this sense he calls it "the speculative concrete" or "concrete universal," a universal that contains the particular within itself.

This fourth idea leads Hegel to reject the concrete existence of anything that is entirely pure: "pure insight," "pure consciousness," "the pure thing," "pure thought" and "pure notion." To Hegel, pure being as such exists only in thought; pure nothingness exists only in thought, as abstractions. Ironically, then, while Hegel is often criticized as being too abstract, Hegel thought of his dialectic as an antidote to abstract conception and abstract thinking. Abstractions have their meaning in context. Accordingly, Hegel rejects such abstract assertions as "Everyone must tell the truth" or "Love your neighbor as yourself." In Hegel's judgment, these assertions prove inadequate to the necessity that they claim to express and are, therefore, arbitrary. "Yes, we must tell the truth," but from Hegel's point of view, in doing so, we need to know the circumstances and individual convictions on which the truth and that knowledge depends. Similarly, we should "love our neighbor," but if our love is not informed by wisdom of a person's particular situation, it might harm that person even more than hatred.

It goes without saying that the four central categories of Hegel's dialectic are closely interrelated. The unity of opposites, the principle of the organic whole, and the concrete universal are not static categorical statements but approaches to a real dynamic in the subjective and objective world. In turn, the process or movement is motivated by differences and contradictions. According to Hegel's dialectic, the history of the world is a "rational process."[54] The opposites are really moments or constituents in the dialectic process. It is a process that develops from lower to higher, from simpler to more complex, from abstract to concrete. In other words, it is an organic process of unfolding and progressing.

From the perspective of Hegel's dialectic, solipsism or self-centrism is untenable. In the domain of human life, self-consciousness comes about not

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[53] Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel*, 175.
[54] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. 9.

through some primary act of introspection, but when one consciousness faces another consciousness. This has important implications for religious diversity and religious pluralism, as we can infer that one person's religious point of view will depend on other points of view for its very existence. And, aside from the question of consciousness, it also means that people are existentially dependent one upon the other. Hegel has convincingly shown that "consciousness" is not a self-closed, self-illuminated sphere that must be linked with the world in some metaphysical fashion. Otherness, therefore, becomes an intrinsic element of the self. Hegel's emphasis on otherness and on mutual recognition between self-consciousness and other consciousness not only constitutes an important element of his dialectic, but also lays a foundation for his religious pluralism. Discounting for the moment the exclusivism that was dominant in his day and influenced his output, but the central message of his own thought, embodied in the four pillars of dialectical method we have outlined, make a positive contribution to contemporary discussions.

Hegel's Pluralist Thought

Let's apply these formal characteristics, now, to religion. First, Hegel helps us recognize that religion is a developmental process that includes the other. Through his dialectic**,** Hegel regarded religion as a process that moves forward from stage to stage by the development and reconciliation of opposites. As Peter Hodgson puts it, "Hegel was the first to articulate a history of religions based on the principle of development."[55] The twofold insight into religion as a developmental phenomenon, which by its nature includes and requires diversity, creates a foundation for a sophisticated version of pluralism even today. The idea of development keeps us from imagining that religions must be defined by their pasts and are incapable of change over time, and the idea of development through an encounter with others suggests that a change in religion today requires an encounter with people of other religions. Indeed, Hegel's notion of religion as a developing phenomenon means that each stage of development can and must include positive traces from earlier encounters at earlier stages. There is no need to demean earlier periods in re-

[55] Peter C. Hodgson. "George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel." *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, Vol. I. ed. Ninian Smart. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 94.

ligious history; their best, which came out of change, can be included in what comes later and used as a model for other changes. For Hegel, what he called "absolute religion" does not exclude other religions, but includes them. "The essential moments of the notion or conception of religion show themselves and make their appearance at every stage in which religion exists at all."[56]

Second, from the perspective of Hegel's dialectic, truth is always concrete. Since the concept of religion is abstract, it must seek concreteness. Hegel's emphasis on concreteness contributes to pluralism by helping us attend to the particularity of given traditions: to the religions as they actually exist in historical situations. Other religions in the world are religion in its objective form. Religion**,** in so far as it is definite, and has not as yet completed the circle of its determinateness – so far that is as it is finite religion, and exists as finite – is historical religion, or a particular form of religion. Its principle moments and also the manner in which they exist historically, being exhibited in the progress of religion from stage to stage, and in its development, there thus arises a series of religions, or a history of religion."[57] Thus, other religions constitute a necessary element, a requisite step in the transition to true religion or absolute religion (the concept of religion).

Third, Hegel contributes to the idea, important to pluralists that all religions are within the pale of sympathetic consideration in so far as they all contain truth and rationality. According to Hegel, all religions contain something in common, and all share the concept of religion. In this sense, they are the same. In *Philosophy of History*, he writes, "However erroneous a religion may be, it possesses truth, although in a mutilated phase. In every religion there is a divine presence, a divine relation; and a philosophy of History has to seek out the spiritual element even in the most imperfect forms."[58]

Fourth, Hegel, at least to some extent, promotes a spirit of tolerance. Hegel says, "it is easier to discover a deficiency in individuals, in states, and in Providence**,** than to see their real import and value."[59] He is critical of monotheistic views that claim God to be only the God of a particular people, because he thinks that their views lead to intolerance. For him, it is better to

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[56] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Vol. I, Humanities Press, 1968, 76.
[57] Ibid., 76
[58] Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 195-96.
[59] Ibid., 37.

recognize that the divine reality manifests itself in differences, such that no one group can claim exclusive possession of revelation.

Hegel's Dialectic and its Relevance to Contemporary Discussion on Pluralism

The four points just made can be combined to form a certain philosophy of pluralism in Hegel's spirit. Hegel's dialectic is helpful in undermining a static understanding of religion, in undermining exclusivism and absolutism**,** and in showing the necessity of otherness for the religious self-consciousness. Static perspectives misconstrue the essence of reality, which is that it is, as a whole, in process. Religious traditions, like civilizations, are always on the way toward wholes not yet realized, and they can never remain frozen in their pasts. Exclusivism and absolutism are problematic because they fail to recognize the interaction between identity and difference. There will be no identity without difference and no difference without identity. In Hegel's words, "Each is, only insofar as the other is; it is what it is through the other, through its own non-being."[60] And self-sameness is rejected, because otherness is internal to identity. "That each is solely through the other, and what each thus is it immediately no longer is, since it is the other."[61] Otherness is never simply external but is always already within.[62] That means that otherness is not something indifferent from and outside the self, but "a function proper to it."[63]

There is little doubt that Hegel's dialectic has its limitations. These include its linear notion of development, which, besides opening the door for a dynamic view of religious history, lends itself to subordinating early religions to later ones. Hegel succumbed to this temptation by declaring Christianity the final religion. Nevertheless it is hard to deny that Hegel "opened up whole

[60] Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 425.
[61] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 86.
[62] Mark C. Taylor. *Erring: a Postmodern Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 140.
[63] Hegel, *The Logics of Hegel*, 172.

new vistas for thinking about the religions"[64] and helped to pave the road to pluralism. Those vistas were entered by Ernst Troeltsch**.**

Ernst Troeltsch

Ernst Troeltsch is sometimes called the "Heraclitus of historiography."[65] Although he was not the first to raise the possibility that Christianity is but one of many equal religions, it is safe to say that he was the first to present compelling arguments from within the Christian mainstream that this might be so. In the words of John Cobb, it is Troeltsch who first "introduced what today we call a pluralistic view of the great religious traditions of the world."[66]

The greatest contribution Troeltsch made to religious pluralism was his rejection of the absoluteness of Christianity, to which Schleiermacher and, to an extent, Hegel still clung. Absoluteness in Troeltsch's mind has a precise meaning. It means that Christianity alone contains absolute truth, so that all other religions contain merely relative truth. This way of thinking had animated the missiological phase of Western imperialism in the 19th and early 20th century. It was assumed by many philosophers of religion, and by most theologians, that Christianity is absolute, unique, final, normative, ultimate and decisively superior to all other religious traditions. Troeltsch challenged that assumption on two fronts: he rejected the thesis that Christianity was especially absolute; and he rejected the idea that is it normative for all people, or that it ever will be. He believed it possible that "there is an element of truth in every religion."[67]

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[64] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way beyond Absolutism and Relativism*. Edited and Introduced by Paul F. Knitter. Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1999, 22.

[65] Ernst Troeltsch. *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions*. Introduction by James Adams, Richmond: John Knox, 1971, 10.

[66] John B. Cobb, Jr., "Christianity and Eastern Wisdom. *"Japanese Journal of Religious Studies,"* 5/4 (December 1978): 287.

[67] Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity among the World Religions." In *Christianity and Other Religions*. ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, 18.

The weapon with which Troeltsch rejected Christianity's claim to absoluteness was his "historical way of thinking." His historicism recognized the contingent and singular character of the events of history. According to him, historicism is revolutionary and inescapable: "one of the most important characteristics of this new world is the development of an unreservedly historical view of human affairs."[68] Applied to Christianity, historicism radically contested the claim that it somehow, even if only in theory, possessed absolute authority and its claim to have reached **"**absolute norm;" i.e., the complete and exhaustive realization of its principle.

More specifically, using his historical method, Troeltsch rejected two theories that underlie assumptions concerning Christianity's absoluteness**.** The first theory was that external events and internal conversions are the result of supernatural activity or miracles. He argued against this in *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions,* insisting instead that all events, subjective or objective, emerge from antecedent causes. For Troeltsch, then, these alleged miracles are not historical events, and there was nothing supernatural embodied in history. Thus to Troeltsch, Christianity is a historical rather than a supernatural phenomenon. This means Christianity and Jesus are part of history; neither of them can be exempt from historical investigation. He remarks, "Nowhere is Christianity the absolute religion, an utterly unique species free of the historical conditions that comprise its environment at any given time. Nowhere is it the changeless, exhaustive, and unconditioned realization of that which is conceived as the universal principle of religion."[69]

For Troeltsch, it is evident that the attempt to present Christianity as the absolute religion "is untenable."[70] Because there is no place in history for absolute religions or absolute personalities, to wish to possess the absolute at a particular point in history is a delusion. "Such terms are self-contradictory."[71] Christianity, in Troeltsch's eyes, is a historical phenomenon and is profoundly conditioned by its historical situation and environment.

The second theory Troeltsch rejected was Hegel's speculative philosophy as an accurate heuristic through which history could be understood; this

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[68] Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions*. 45.
[69] Ibid.,71.
[70] Ibid.,76.
[71] Ibid.,78.

view undervalued the contingency and relativity of concepts and ideas that historicism puts in the forefront. Troeltsch rejected Hegel's view that the development of religion had reached its climax in Christianity, so that Christianity was the highest and final stage of religion. Although Troeltsch admired Hegel's effort to provide a philosophy of history, Troeltsch severely criticized him for his reversion to a language of absolutes, which he injected into his own historical method. Troeltsch thereby argued against Hegel's definition of Christianity as "the absolute religion." Troeltsch argued against the "evolutionary apologetic" that treats history "causally and teleologically as a single whole."[72] According to Troeltsch, even if Hegel's evolutionary approach were correct, it would require waiting until the end of history to discover the absolute religion. In fact, though, there will be no telos in history and no moment in which absolute religion is revealed.

From Troeltsch's point of view, Hegel made two mistakes in claiming the absoluteness of Christianity. First, from Troeltsch's point of view, Hegel wrongly subordinated history to the concept of a universal principle. Hegel advocated what might be called speculative evolutionism**.** The conception of absolute religion was taken not from history, but imposed on religious history by the philosopher's construction of the concept of the Absolute itself. Second, Hegel elevated a supposedly universal principle to a norm that has permanent value for all events.

Troeltsch's objection to these two ideas is twofold. First, Troeltsch believes that the modern idea of history necessarily denies any universal principle. Knowledge consists of concrete and individual phenomena that are conditioned by context. Second, Troeltsch believed Hegel should not speak of an absolute religion at the current stage, but instead should wait for the end of history. It is apparent that Hegel manipulated and distorted the historical data in order to make them to fit into his Procrustean framework**.** History is falsely regarded by Hegel as a linear development. Troeltsch points out that Hegel isolated Christianity from its connection with its environment and from the rest of history.

The upshot for Troeltsch is simple: "The Christian religion is in every moment a purely historical phenomenon." Thus it is "subject to all the limitations to which any individual historical phenomenon is exposed, just like the

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[72] Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge to Theology*. Fortress Press, 2006, 60.

other great religions."[73] From Troeltsch's perspective, all religions are products of particular historical events that gave them their unique substance and form; therefore, none could claim absolute legitimacy. It is very possible that other religious groups may experience their contact with the Divine Life in a quite different way, and may possess genuine religious feelings, practices and beliefs in their community that they cannot sever themselves from so long as they remain in that community. The question Troeltsch faces is: "Can the Christian faith really permit itself to embrace historical thinking without nullifying its many universal values?"[74] Troeltsch was persuaded that if Christianity fails to face this challenge, it would have to retreat into the cave of obscurantism.

In response to anxiety from Christians about the radical leveling of their religion in relation to any other, Troeltsch emphasizes that members of the Christian community will lose nothing from abandoning the traditionally exclusive way of thinking. His concept not only "releases men from the narrowness, pettiness, and intolerance"[75] and "frees men from the know-it-all attitudes and resultant conflicts,"[76] but also helps to restore harmony and allow life to become richer, finer, and more just. Here we can clearly see Troeltsch's "profound global pluralism", which led Garrett Paul to regard him as "the first theologian of the 20th century — or perhaps even the 21st."[77]

However, despite his revolutionary challenge to the dominant assumption of Christianity's superiority, Troeltsch remained – as his own historicism would predict – a child of his day. He writes of Christianity that "[it] must be understood not only as the culmination point but also the convergence point of all the developmental tendencies that can be discerned in religion. It may therefore be designed, in contrast to other religions, as the focal synthesis of all religious tendencies and the disclosure of what is in principle a new way of life."[78] He sketched the absoluteness of Christianity in the following sense: The absoluteness of Christianity is found in its very nature as a religion of

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[73] Ibid.,85.
[74] Ibid.,132.
[75] Ibid.,135.
[76] Ibid.,136.
[77] Garrett E. Paul, "Why Troeltsch? Why Today? Theology for the 21st Century." *The Christian Century*. June 30-July 7 (1993): # 676.
[78] Troeltsch, *Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions,* 114.

personal redemption, as opposed to other religions like Judaism, Islam and the Indian religions, which he called religions of law, thus reiterating a well known Pauline trope.

Troeltsch credits Christianity with a history-transforming personalism that gives it absoluteness in relation to its rivals. According to Troeltsch, only Christianity has disclosed a living deity who acts and wills. The purest and most forceful values of the higher world are found in such a personalistic religion. For Troeltsch, only in this sense is it possible to affirm the absoluteness of Christianity.

Later in his life, Troeltsch modified his earlier position and adopted one of "relative absoluteness" in which Christianity is absolute for Christians only, just as other world faiths are absolute only for their adherents and believers. In his words, the historical way of thinking does not exclude "the recognition of Christianity as the highest truth valid for us."[79] But now the claim to absolute validity made by Christianity "is of quite a different kind." Because it is not based upon "human reflection or a laborious process of reasoning," but upon "an overwhelming manifestation of God in the persons and lives of the great prophets."[80] Nevertheless, as we can see, Troeltsch never gave up the habit of using the old language, such as "absolute validity."

It is not hard to find the inconsistency between Troeltsch's historical way of thinking and his claim for the absoluteness of Christianity. Although acknowledging the equal validity of other traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, he still is confident that it is possible "to apprehend the one in the many."[81] Knitter thinks the inconsistency in the Troeltsch framework "reflects the uncertain struggles of many Christians as they try to reconcile the pluralism of religions with their basic Christian beliefs."[82] I prefer to regard it as a remnant of the Christian absolutism or exclusivism in which Troeltsch was educated. In other words, Troeltsch's attitude toward other religious traditions

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[79] Hans-Georg Drescher, "Troeltsch's Intellectual Development." *Ernst Troeltsch and the Future of Theology.* John Powell Clayton, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976. 17.

[80]Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity among the World Religions." 21.

[81] Ibid., 31.

[82] Knitter, No *Other Names? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*. Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1985, 27.

is not completely pluralistic because he still insists on the superiority of Christianity and lacks the consciousness of equality among religions.

Arnold Toynbee

Due to his monumental work *The Study of History*, Toynbee is best known as a historian rather than a philosopher of religion. Nevertheless, when we think of historical forerunners of contemporary pluralism, he contributes as much if not more than most philosophers, especially to the spirit of pluralism. Two of his contributions can be highlighted.

The first is his emphasis on tolerance over intolerance. Toynbee urges people to uproot the **"**exclusive-mindedness" and intolerance that follow from a belief in Christianity's uniqueness.[83] Toynbee insists that Christians ought to give up the claims of superiority and purge their traditional Christian belief that "Christianity is unique."[84] Interestingly, he says "to purge Christianity of its exclusive-mindedness is a much harder task than to purge it of its Western accretions."[85] The reason is that this "exclusive mindedness" is not a peripheral feature, but a genetic feature of Christianity, almost as if it were intrinsic to Christian beliefs. "We are all inclined, to some extent, to assume that our own religion is the only true and right religion; that our own vision of Absolute Reality is the only authentic vision; that we alone have received a revelation; that the truth which has been revealed to us is the whole truth; and that, in consequence, we ourselves are 'the Chosen People' and 'the Children of Light,' while the rest of the Human race are gentiles sitting in darkness."[86] However, no matter how hard it may be, Toynbee emphasizes, "it seems imperative for Christians to achieve these spiritual feats."[87] The paramount reason, according to Toynbee, derives from the Christian ethos itself: exclusive-

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[83] Arnold Toynbee, "What Should be the Christian Approach to the Contemporary Non-Christian Faiths?" in *Attitudes Toward Other Religions*. Owen C. Thomas. Ed. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969, 161.
[84] Ibid.,160.
[85] Arnold Toynbee, *Christianity among the Religions of the World*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957, 96-97.
[86] Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*. London: Oxford University Press, 1956, 284.
[87] Toynbee. *Christianity among the Religions of the World*, 97.

mindedness is a type of sin: **"**the sin of pride."[88] For Toynbee, this sin is an expression of self-centeredness**,** which is the worst evil that can befall a person, a society, and, *a fortiori*, a religion. Indeed, Toynbee believes that this self-centeredness is contrary to the very gospel of Christ, to which it ironically claims allegiance. The core belief of Christianity is that God is "self-sacrificing." [89] Christian arrogance is, therefore, un-Christian and anti-Christian. Toynbee is convinced that this "exclusive mindedness" is not an essential constituent of Christianity, as it can be abandoned without harming the essence of Christianity.

For Toynbee, the essence of Christianity lies in believing that God is not "a capricious tyrant" but "self-sacrificing Love."[90] If we believe in God as "a capricious tyrant," we easily fall into a kind of tyrannical exclusivism ourselves. On the contrary, if we believe in God as self-sacrificing love, we are more likely to avoid self-centered exclusivism. From a historian's perspective, Toynbee further points out that it is this exclusive-mindedness and arrogant, intolerant spirit in Christianity that caused "the rejection of Christianity" by the non-Western people such as the Japanese and the Chinese in the seventeenth century and by so many intellectual leaders of the West during these last centuries.[91] He predicts, "The same arrogance, if Christians fail to purge it out of Christianity now, will lead to the rejection of Christianity in the future."[92]

Toynbee believes that arrogance, which has been a problem in Christianity, is rooted in a sinful tendency within human nature. According to his analysis, it is self-centeredness in human nature that results in arrogance. For Toynbee, "A human self cannot be brought into harmony with Absolute Reality unless it can get rid of its innate self-centeredness. This is the hardest task that Man can set himself."[93] In other words, the struggle to overcome religious exclusivity is a struggle against human nature.

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[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 98.
[90] Toynbee, An *Historian's Approach to Religion*, 142-143.
[91] Toynbee, *Christianity among the Religions of the World*, 99.
[92] Toynbee, "What Should be the Christian Approach to the Contemporary Non-Christian Faiths?" 163.
[93] Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, 275.

Whereas Hegel takes human nature to include a dialectic between the self and the other that constructs the self, Toynbee believes that there is a great tendency in human nature, perhaps the strongest tendency, to exclude the other. Thus, for Toynbee, it is the dark side of human nature that serves as one of the common grounds of religions, in so far as religion does the work of transcending that exclusiveness – but at the same time, religion can become contaminated with the egocentric tendency and express exclusion in cosmic terms. From our point of view here, it is the brighter side of human nature in Toynbee's account that needs to be emphasized, especially the inner love and compassion for others, which provides a more important common ground. Human beings share not simply their tendency to be self-centered, but also their inclinations to care about each other and to want to reduce suffering.

According to Paul Knitter, to whom I referred earlier, Toynbee's position is mirrored among the pluralists who advocate the Dialogue approach. More specifically, it is advocated by those who believe that inter-religious dialogue best proceeds, not by comparing doctrines, but by joining together to reduce suffering in the world and to build local communities that are socially just, ecologically sustainable, and spiritually satisfying for all. Toynbee may emphasize the darker side of human nature in his explanation of institutional religion's development of exclusivist doctrine, but he opens the door for this more positive approach to pluralism.

Toynbee's emphasis on opening to other religions does not mean giving up commitment to one's own religion. Toynbee asks, "What, then should be the attitude of contrite Christians toward the other higher religions and their followers?" The answer he gives is: "I think that it is possible for us, while holding that our own convictions are true and right, to recognize that, in some measure, all higher religions are also revelation of what is true and right. They also come from God and each presents some facet of God's truth." [94] Other religions are also lights that radiate from the same source, God or love.

What Toynbee opposes is the "one and only" attitude. He questions: Why does religious truth have to be "one and only" or "the best" in order to be true? If we give up such an attitude, we can, Toynbee believes, be fully committed to our own religions and at the same time fully open to the truth of other religions. In his words, "We can believe in our own religion without having to feel that it is the sole repository of truth. We can love it without

[94] Toynbee*, Christianity among the Religions of the World*, 100.

having to feel that it is the sole means of salvation."[95] Nevertheless, Toynbee expects and hopes that all religions will become more and more open-minded and open-hearted. He challenges Christians to learn more and more from other religions, to respect, revere, admire and love other religions. In this process, Christianity will progress and enrich itself.

The second reason for Toynbee's rejection of exclusive-mindedness concerns the avoidance of a kind of dogmatism that is very dangerous. "The danger that mankind might fall into a dogmatic spiritual paralysis would be still greater than it is if all the current religions, philosophies, and ideologies were to be fused into one; for this amalgam would almost inevitably come to be consecrated as an exclusive orthodoxy."[96] Toynbee holds an innate negative attitude toward all forms of dogmatism. In his eyes, dogma is "an ill-conceived attempt to express religious truth in scientific terms."[97] "Open-mindedness," on the other hand, is manifestly the right response to our specific human condition.

We now come to the second contribution Toynbee makes to religious pluralism: his advocacy for positive tolerance, rooted in an understanding that all religions contain truth. As a historian, Toynbee is aware that Christianity has one of the worst records of arrogance and intolerance. Although Toynbee supports tolerance of other faiths, he distinguishes between two motives. One is negative, based on the recognition of some very practical considerations; the other is positive and based on love. One of the most negative motives for tolerance is based on the observation that religious conflict is a public nuisance that "easily becomes a public danger."[98] So it is better to be tolerant rather than to eliminate each other. [99] In Toynbee's opinion, although tolerance inspired by the fear of social violence has motivated the modern secular advocacy of tolerance, it is fragile and "precarious." Therefore, we need higher and more positive motives for tolerance that can guarantee that intolerance will not "raise its head again."[100]

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[95] Toynbee, An *Historian's Approach to Religion*. 298-99.
[96] Toynbee, "Change and Habit," 195. Cited in L. Stafford Betty. "The Radical Pluralism of Arnold Toynbee*." Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9 (1972): 827.
[97] Ibid., 822.
[98] Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, 256.
[99] Ibid., 252.
[100] Ibid.

In accordance with this goal, Toynbee urges people to confirm and strengthen positive tolerance, which should be based on the recognition of truth in others. For Toynbee, "the fundamental positive motive for toleration is a recognition of the truth that religious conflict is not just a nuisance but is a sin." Toynbee emphasizes that religious conflict is sinful because "it arouses the wild beast in Human Nature."[101] He stresses that intolerance in general, and religious persecution in particular, is sinful because no one has the right to intervene in another's communion with God.

Toynbee not only encourages respecting others' rights to communion with God in their own ways, but also challenges people to become aware of the narrowness of their spiritual vision. For Toynbee, different people have different convictions for a very good reason: "Absolute Reality is a Mystery to which there is more than one approach."[102] Toynbee quotes Symachus's words, "The heart of so great a mystery cannot ever be reached by following one road only."[103] To Toynbee, intolerance arises largely from human parochialism and self-conceit, according to which one person or one religion can apprehend the absolute reality alone. Toynbee warns that no matter how strong and confident a person's belief may be in the rightness of his approach to the mystery, it will always be necessarily narrow, and never equal the sum of all approaches. Thus, it must be mixed with the realization that other approaches may even be fuller and more illuminating.

Toynbee ends up, then, calling for a plurality of religions and the positive appreciation of the different roads our neighbors take to the ultimate reality. This is why he is called by Stafford Betty "a religious pluralist in the fullest sense."[104] Toynbee opposed the coalescence of the historically major religions into a single religion. He is convinced that as long as human beings are genetically, not to mention culturally, diverse, religions must be diverse. That diversity can lead either to conflict, if one embraces exclusivism, or to open-mindedness, if one gets in touch with the deepest source of the religious impulse, love. A diversity of religions in a world-state provides an alternative to "dullness." Toynbee believes that all religions are dimensions of each other.

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach to Religion,* 259.
[103] Ibid., 253.
[104] L. Stafford Betty, "The Radical Pluralism of Arnold Toynbee," 823.

Here Toynbee proposes his conception of complementarity. For Toynbee, "The missions of the higher religions are not competitive; they are complementary."[105] Toynbee emphasizes that the believers of any religion should realize that they are spiritual brothers, and should feel towards and treat one another as such. For Toynbee, positive tolerance is love-oriented: "toleration does not become perfect until it has been transfigured into love."[106] Toynbee praises Hindu-Buddhist tolerance as the prototype of a religious attitude necessary for peace in today's pluralistic world. In Toynbee's view, Buddhist tolerance is based on compassion, which "provides a natural point of contact with other religions." [107]

Toynbee is convinced that all religions, while retaining their historic identities, "will become more and more open-minded, and (what is more important) open-hearted."[108] Toynbee's positive tolerance based on love is a beautiful idea, which represents a thoroughly pluralistic spirit.

At the same time, however, it should be noted that Toynbee does not advocate the kind of deep pluralism that I will be advocating later in this work. Rather he advocates what might be called a modern pluralism, in the sense that he brings with him the modern assumption of a single essence to all religion. He seems unaware of the possibility that there can be complementary but different truths and salvations, basing his argument for pluralism instead on the supposed deep structural unity behind all religions, or "the common essence within all religions."[109] Toynbee's understanding of the plurality of religions was that each religion, underneath its accidental accretions, has an inner core (or common essence), which are essentially the same in all religions. He called this common essence "spiritual presence**.**" Referring to the "spiritual presence" in Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism, he says that it contains the following "essential counsels and truths:" 1) The universe is ultimately mysterious and the meaning of the world is not contained simply in itself or in humanity. 2) The meaning of the universe is to be found in an Absolute Reali-

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[105] Toynbee**.** *An Historian's Approach to Religion*. 298.
[106] Ibid., 253.
[107] Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, 81.
[108] Toynbee, "What Should be the Christian Approach to the Contemporary Non-Christian Faiths?" 166.
[109] Knitter, *No Other Names?* 44.

ty or presence that, although "in" the universe, is not to be identified with it. 3) This presence contains not only the truth of which humans can be aware but also the good for which they thirst. Humanity therefore seeks not only to experience this reality but also to be in harmony with it. 4) The way to live this harmony requires that human beings rid themselves of their innate self-centeredness.[110]

For Toynbee, these common and "essential counsels and truths" are permanent and universal. They are "valid at all times and places."[111] It is apparent, therefore, that Toynbee has remained tied to the essentialist vision of religion that runs through Schleiermacher and Hegel, and that insinuates itself even in Troeltsch's relativism.

3. Religious Pluralism since the 1960s

A kind of religious pluralism à la Toynbee started to boom in the 1960s, especially among Christians who were starting to encounter religious diversity, for the first time in the history of the modernity, outside the framework of colonialism. This decade can be regarded as a milestone on the way to pluralism, spawning Knitter's four approaches: the replacement approach (a still powerful remnant of eliminativism), the Fulfillment approach, the Acceptance approach, and the Dialogue approach. According to Knitter, the Fulfillment approach is exemplified most deeply by Roman Catholics**.** In this final part of this chapter, I want to survey a number of these approaches, taken by Catholics and by Protestants, many of the associated with the so called "American liberal theologies movement." I will begin with Pope Paul VI.

In 1964, Pope Paul VI stated: "Dialogue is demanded nowadays … [It] is demanded [by] the dynamic course of action which is changing the face of modern society. It is demanded by the pluralism of society and by the maturity man has reached in this day and age. Be he religious or not, his secular education has enabled him to think and speak, and to conduct dialogue with dignity."[112]

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[110] Ibid., 39.

[111] Toynbee, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*. 264.

[112] *Vatican Council II*. ed. Austin Flannery. Collegeville, Min: Liturgical Press, 1975, 1003.

Vatican II (1963-1965) emphasized the increasing connectiveness of the human race across the globe, which meant, for the Church, that it had to consider more closely "her own relation to non-Christian religions."[113] The Council declared that there is salvation outside the visible church. "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."[114]

This means that God's plan of salvation "extends to all men"[115] and the possibility of salvation was officially extended in principle to all people. "The catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She has a sincere respect for those ways of acting and living, those moral and doctrinal teachings which may differ in many respects from what she holds and teaches."[116] As *Redemptor Hominis* clearly states: Every person without any exception "has been redeemed by Christ."[117] The redemption bought by the blood of Christ is offered to all human beings. Christians were encouraged to try their best to promote dialogue.

The message of Vatican II was a symptom of the erosion of religious exclusivism in the Western world. The drivers of the process of erosion in the sixties and up to our own time have been sociological to an extent, but it has also been mirrored and promoted in philosophical reflection. Influential religious pluralist thinkers such as Wilfred Smith**,** John Hick, John Cobb, Hans Küng**,** Stanley Samartha and Raimundo Panikkar have all contributed to this process. Together they effectively challenged Christian exclusivism on

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[113] Vatican II: "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions." *Christianity and other Religions*. ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite. Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1980, 80.

[114] Pastoral Constitution on the Church, par.22. Cited in John Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity." In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions.* Ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter, New York: Orbis Books, 1987, 21.

[115] Vatican II: "Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions." *Christianity and other Religions*. 80

[116] Ibid., 81-82.

[117] Redemptor Hominis (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1979), par.14, Cited in John Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity." *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*. 21.

theoretical grounds and paved the way to a richer notion of religious pluralism than that of the first pluralist pioneers.

Smith is famous for affirming "the positive nature of religious pluralism" beginning in the 1960s.[118] He promoted pluralism by challenging Christian exclusivism through the deconstruction of its logic, the dichotomy between "we" and "they." This dichotomy leads people to say, "We are saved and you are damned" or "We believe that we know God, and we are right; you believe that you know God. And you are wrong."[119] To Smith, this exclusive attitude is arrogant and even "morally un-Christian."[120] – a point also made, as we have seen, by Toynbee. But where Toynbee saw the sin of exclusivism in pride, Smith viewed it as a kind of idolatry. "For Christians to think that Christianity is true, or final, or salvific," he said, "is a form of idolatry."[121] For Smith, idolatry means, "to treat, mistakenly, something mundane as if it were divine."[122] Smith predicted that the new generation would live in a different context, which he calls "a cosmopolitan environment."[123] In order to oppose the separation of "we" and "they," Smith insisted, "we must strive to break down barriers, to close up gulfs, to recognize all men as neighbors and sons of God the Father."[124] From his perspective, no one can become a Christian unless he or she treats the other as "we."

Closely related to the above, Smith also opposed the separation of the conceptual and moral implications of revealed truth. He was convinced that there is an intrinsic connection between them. His words are worth quoting at length:

> If we take seriously the revelation of God in Christ — if we really mean what we say when we affirm that his life, and his death on the cross, and his final triumph out of the very midst of self-sacrifice, embody the ultimate truth and power and glory of the universe — then two kinds of things follow, two orders of inference.

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[118] John Berthrong, "The Theological Necessity of Pluralism: The Contribution of Wilfred Cantwell Smith." *Toronto Journal of Theology* 5:2 (Fall 1989): 188.

[119] Wilfred Cantwell Smith. *The Faith of Other Men*, New American Library, 1963, 130-131.

[120] Ibid., 131.

[121] Smith, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges." In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 59.

[122] Ibid., 64.

[123] Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, 122.

[124] Ibid., 129.

> On the moral level, there follows an imperative towards reconciliation, unity, harmony, and brotherhood. At this level, all men are included: we strive to break down barriers, to close up gulfs; we recognized all men as neighbors, as fellows, as sons of the universal father, seeking Him and finding Him, being sought by Him and being found by Him. At this level, we do not become truly Christian until we have reached out towards a community that turns all mankind into one total "we." On the other hand, there is another level, the intellectual, the order of ideas, where it is the business of those of us who are theologians to draw out concepts, to construct doctrine. At this level, the doctrines that Christians have traditionally derived have tended to affirm a Christian exclusivism, a separation between those who believe and those who do not, a division of mankind into a 'we' and a 'they,' a gulf between Christendom and the rest of the world: a gulf profound, ultimate, cosmic.[125]

Likewise, the task Hans Küng sets for himself on the way to pluralism is to "avoid a narrow-minded, conceited absolutism (of Christian or Islamic provenience), which sees its own truth as 'absolute,' that is, detached from the truth of the others."[126] He writes, "I have aimed to defend neither a standpoint of exclusivity, which issues a blanket condemnation of the non-Christian religions and their truth, nor a standpoint of superiority, which rates my own religion as *a priori* better (in doctrine, ethics, or system)."[127] According to Küng's understanding, such an attitude leads only to a closed mind and to dogmatism.

John Cobb also argues that we should be ashamed of the imperialistic attitudes of our past, and we should transcend it, as Christians, by engaging in dialogue with other religions with the intent to learn something new and useful from them. "Today we are much more ready to learn from other cultures since the assumption of the superiority of European culture over others no longer grips us."[128]

John Hick notes the connection between Christian superiority and Western imperialism. According to Hick, it is the mentality of Christian superiority that "supported and sanctified the Western imperialistic exploitation of what today we call the Third World."[129]

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[125] Smith, *The Faith of other Men*, 129.

[126] Hans Küng, *Christianity and World Religion*. Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1993, xix.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World*, 31.

[129] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity." 18.

Paul Knitter, the Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York who is often compared to Hick, and who edited the *Myth of Christian Uniqueness* with him, has critiqued the notion of absolute, either/or truth behind religious exclusivism, proposing that it is this notion of a single and exclusive truth that atrophies personal faith and reduces faith to doctrine, morality to legalism, and ritual to superstition; it also "denigrates the value of other religious traditions."[130] Based on his rejection of the notion of truth-through-exclusion**,** Knitter promotes the idea of truth-through-relationship**.** According to this new idea of truth, no truth can stand alone, because "truth, by its very nature, needs other truth." That means that truth "proves itself" not by triumphing over all other truth but "by testing its ability to interact with other truths."[131] Needless to say, such an understanding of truth based on relationship paves the way to religious pluralism. It requires each religion to open to other traditions.

Following the same train of thought, Ninian Smart argues for "a pluralistic global contract."[132] For him, the peculiarly Christian virtue of accepting the pluralism of faiths is to help prevent unfeelingly dogmatism.

Marjorie Suchocki, a theologian who was director of the Center of Process Studies at Claremont, decries religious exclusivism and absolutism from a feminist perspective, since religious absolutism is correlate with, and contains the same logical structure as sexism: "religious absolutism is no more valid than is gender absolutism."[133] Both of them are unjust due to their support for devaluing all modes of existence falling outside the absolutized religion or gender. "Much tragedy, arrogance, and evil have been generated by Christian exclusivism."[134] Accordingly, Suchocki values religious pluralism. She is convinced that "religious pluralism uniquely presents, from a Christian

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[130] Knitter, *No Other Names*? 218.

[131] Knitter, *No Other Names*? 219.

[132] Ninian Smart, "The Virtue of Uncertainty." In *Hermeneutics, Religious Pluralism, and Truth*. Ed. by John Hick, Ninian Smart and David Burrell. Winston-Salem, North Carolina: Wake Forest University, 1989, 34.

[133] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "In Search of Justice: Religious Pluralism from a Feminist Perspective." In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 156.

[134] Marjorie Suchocki, *Divinity & Diversity*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003, 16.

perspective, the opportunity and challenge for a new realization of the reign of God in human history."[135]

David Ray Griffin, who is also a director of the Center for Process Studies, issues a similar condemnation of the arrogance attached to exclusivism. This attitude, he says, lies behind the Christian persecution of Jews, which formed one of the sorriest chapters in Christian history and led to the Nazi-induced Holocaust in the twentieth century. This exclusivism also gave rise to the crusades against the Islamic world, the after-effects of which are still very much alive today, and to the American theology of 'manifest destiny,' which justified what David Stannard calls the 'American Holocaust,' meaning the virtual extermination of the Native Americans."[136]

As we can see with these three thinkers, the condemnation of exclusivism is built, partly, on the assessment of its history – continuing the method of gaining insight from philosophical reflection on history that we saw in Hegel. However, unlike Hegel, these thinkers try to decenter that history from its European teleology. In their view, exclusivism has isolated one religious community from another and set a great wall between different religions. But in the contemporary world, the wall is crumbling, the self-protective nervousness in the presence of competitors is diminishing, and "one senses a greater willingness to acknowledge the positive ways in which religions contribute to human well-being."[137] Now much of the Church has recognized that its former attitude to other religious communities "was wrong." [138] Exclusivism, regarded by Richard Cohen as "an obstacle and roadblock" to pluralism, is on the defensive as it is questioned more and more by people of faith.[139] More and more Christians have realized that Christianity is one historical movement alongside others. When Christianity began to understand itself as a historical religion, "the simplicity of right and wrong was no longer convincing."[140] As Lubarsky rightly states, the recognition that religions are histori-

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[135] Ibid., 15.

[136] Griffin, *Two Great Truths*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, 99.

[137] Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. Michigan: Zongdervan Publishing House, 1992, 12.

[138] Smith, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges," 54.

[139] Richard A. Cohen, "Christian Exclusivism," *First Things* 62 (April 1996): 2-4.

[140] Marjorie Suchocki, "Pragmatic Pluralism" in *Religion in a Pluralistic Age*. Ed. Donald A. Crosby & Charley D. Hardwick. New York: Peter Lang, 1998, 49.

cally conditioned "has had an enormous impact on our understanding of our own traditions and of the relationship between traditions. Above all it has led us to the ground-breaking insight that that which is historically conditioned cannot be absolute."[141] The theologians we are citing have articulated the connection between religious exclusivism and the history of racism and colonialism that shadows the rise of the West. Among the theologians, the recognition that no religious tradition possesses the monopoly of truth has been widely accepted. More and more people have realized that "arrogance based on the belief that Christianity alone is the true faith has been a factor in the worst sins of the Western world—anti-Semitism, colonialism, Crusades, inquisitions and so on."[142]

Since the consciousness of pluralism has been increasing, more and more people have begun to realize that there are many other worlds, other forms of life, other faiths, other worldviews and perspectives. That is to say, there is wisdom, truth and beauty in other traditions, in other places. As Aime Cesaire, the great Martinican poet wrote: "no race possesses the monopoly of beauty."[143] Instead, then, of being a negative virtue, tied to tolerance, as it was developed by Toynbee, pluralism has begun to be seen as desirable in itself "because it is ethical," as Paul W. Diener has remarked.[144] It is really an application of the Golden Rule, treating our neighbors the way we would like them to treat us. It involves accepting others in ways we wish them to accept us. According to Klaus Klostermaier**,** "the multiplicity of religions is not an evil which needs to be removed, but rather a wealth which is to be welcomed and enjoyed by all." [145] Edward Schillebeeckx boldly claims "There is more

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[141] Sandra B. Lubarsky, *Tolerance and Transformation*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1990, 7.

[142] Paul Graham, "Cobb on Whitehead, Relativism & Buddhism." (Unpubl.)

[143] Cited in Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Definitions," *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy,* ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, p.86.

[144] Paul W. Diener, *Religion and Morality*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, 80.

[145] Klaus Klostermaier, "Religious Pluralism and the Ideals of Universal Religion(s)." *Journal of Religious Pluralism* 1:45-64, cited by Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 29.

religious truth in all the religions together than in one particular religion… This also applied to Christianity." [146]

Pluralism urges people to view the world through different lenses: "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,"[147] but also alerts Christians to the dark side of their religion and other religions, "to the corruption, ugliness, and manipulative and exploitative power of religion."[148]

Learning from other religions has become a tide since the 1960s. While Bishop Stephen Neil still put an emphasis on the loyalty of Christianity, he includes a message that a Christian today must "put himself to school with other faiths in readiness to believe that they may have something to teach him."[149] Some scholars like Robert H. L. Slater stress that Christians can learn tolerance from Buddhism.[150] For Cobb, Christians can learn from Buddhism the distinction between a faith that does not block one from learning from other traditions and the "clinging" that Buddhists see as the fundamental source of suffering. "Clinging to God is not true faith in God. To be truly open to God truly to trust God is not to cling to God."[151]

The Christian community is vast, and many, perhaps the majority, still hold to traditional exclusivism, as we will see. Jay McDaniel stresses that the heart of Christian wisdom does not lie simply in proclaiming exclusively "Christian" insights that determine Christian turf "but also, and more important, in listening [to] itself and in being willing to be converted, again and again, by the healing wisdom of others insofar as it is conductive to love."[152]

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[146] Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church: The Human Story of God*. New York: Crossroad, 1990, 166, cited in Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names*, 29.

[147] F. Whaling, *Christian Theology and World Religions: A Global Approach*. London: Marshall Pickering, 1986, 29.

[148] Knitter, *Jesus and the other Names,* 28.

[149] See Robert Lawson Slater, *Can Christians Learn from Other Religions?* New York: The Seabury Press, 1963, 11.

[150] Ibid., 61.

[151] Cobb, "Is Religious Truth Many or One?" in *Beyond Comparison*. Ed. Ryusei Takeda, Kyoto: Bukkyo Bunka Kenkyujo Ryukoku University, 1997, 53.

[152] Jay McDaniel, *Gandhi's Hope: Learning from Other Religions as a Path to Peace*, Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 2005, 16.

To McDaniel, the idea that Christian wisdom includes listening has important implications for Christian theology. It means that Christian theology need not always be about "Christianity." "It can be about Buddhism and Islam, Hinduism and Taoism, Judaism and Jainism, and a host of other perspectives as well."[153]

From what has been discussed above, we can clearly see that awareness of religious pluralism has become "one of the most striking trends" of today.

4. The Continuing Legacy of Exclusivism

Although exclusivism has clearly been eroding, it is still powerful and "remains dominant."[154] The task of shifting the majority of Christians from exclusionary thinking to pluralism, in Cobb's words, "remains to be done."[155] For example, in 1989, Harold Netland still clearly supported Christian exclusivism by saying that "we… regard as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies. Jesus Christ**,** being that only God-man, who gave himself as the only ransom for sinners, is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name by which we must be saved." [156] These statements represent the attitude of many theologians. Alvin Plantinga's attempt to defend religious exclusivism from a variety of objections expresses the same attitude. He argues, "exclusivism need not involve either epistemic or moral failure" because it is "wholly unavoidable."[157]

Why does exclusivism still remain dominant? An explanation Hick offered is: "it is much harder for Christianity to digest the fact of religious plu-

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[153] Ibid.

[154] Cobb, "Hough's Alternative to Exclusion and Other Options." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 56, 3-4 (2002): 81.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voice: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989, 34.

[157] Alvin Plantinga. "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism." *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity.* Ed. Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2000, 174.

ralism."[158] Because Christianity was widely assumed to be the only true faith and other faiths were mistaken, the assumption was largely unquestioned. Christianity has often deemed other religions of the world as "inferior," as "pagan," or as "native," thereby refusing "any kind of genuine dialogue with them."[159] The classical form of exclusivism believes that Christianity is the only one true religion, that there is no salvation outside of Christianity, and that all non-Christians "are consigned to hell."[160] The traditional exclusivism not only devalues other religions but also generalizes one's own religious experience as representative of human religious experience in general. Christianity, in Jay McDaniel's words, has been valued "up" at the expense of other Ways, which have been valued "down."[161] Rosemary Radford Ruether expresses a similar point of view: "Theologically, Christianity has never accepted an equal status with other major religions and has shown various ways to view other religious traditions. The most negative approach was to view other religions as mere idolatry and demon worship, which must be destroyed, root and branch, in order to be replaced by the true faith."[162] This partly explains the reason why the history of Christianity has largely been "a history of combating."[163]

As "an obstacle and roadblock" to pluralism, exclusivism has many forms. If it took very explicit forms in the past, now it takes concealed or "less offensive ways."[164] As a matter of fact, in the past thirty years, Christians have increasingly been moving away from traditional exclusivism

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[158] John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, London: Macmillan, 1982, 58.

[159] *Reconstructing Christian Theology*. Ed by Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994, 10.

[160] Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 29.

[161] Jay McDaniel, "Six Characteristics of a Postpatriarchal Christianity." *Zygon*, Vol. 25, No.2, June 1990, 198.

[162] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue." *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter, New York: Orbis Books, 1987, 140.

[163] Tom F. Driver, "The Case for Pluralism." In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, 156.

[164] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity." In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* 21.

claiming, "other faiths represent deceptive and dangerous illusions,"[165] toward "a more inclusivistic way of claiming that there is the only true religion."[166] Inclusivism is, in a sense, the exclusivist response to the multi-cultural challenge. It, too, envisages a dialogue that ends with conversion, but instead of conversion being a rejection of some other-than-Christian tradition as damnable, it is, instead, the recognition that all that is good in the latter tradition to be a more or less valid stepping stone to the kind of salvation that is only purely universal and all-inclusive in the Christian faith.

Thus, although compared to the old intolerant exclusivism inclusivism is a big step forward, inclusivism at its root is a kind of less blatant exclusivism. Seemingly the new "benevolent inclusivism" is different from the old intolerant exclusivism, but it does not completely deny the exclusivist mentality because it still "rests upon the claim to Christianity's unique finality."[167] In addition, inclusivism does not give up its insistence that Christianity alone can be the formally true religion, because "it alone is the religion established by God in the unique saving event of Jesus Christ and, therefore, alone expresses normatively the religious truth that is represented at best fragmentarily and inadequately in all other religious ways."[168]

It is apparent that though the absolutist or exclusivist position does not hold the sway it once did in theology or among the community of believers who now come into contact in the media and in their personal lives with other faiths, the road to pluralism is still full of obstacles. Religious exclusivism presents a dominant and, so to speak, armed tradition that is, as ever, "a threat to the creative contribution of pluralism to religion."[169] Bassam M. Madany, of the Westminster Seminary of California, an influential voice in the Christian missionary community, wrote: "We must repudiate the harmful influence of all pluralistic theologies." And in another passage, he refers to the "plural-

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[165] Michael Jinkins, *Christianity, Tolerance and Pluralism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004, 193.

[166] Schubert M. Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many*? Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1992. 30.

[167] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," 22.

[168] Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many*? 31.

[169] Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, 100.

istic virus."[170] However, exclusivism can no longer expect that the simple repudiation of pluralism is enough to win the argument anymore. Due to the pluralist movement, exclusivism has had to take a more sophisticated approach to the relationship between Christianity and other religions. For example, Heim's religious particularism has been greeted by Hick, the dean of American pluralists, as "a great advance on the exclusivism."[171] Heim defends exclusivism in the name of defending uniqueness and particularity, which associates exclusivism with the politics of identity. Heim himself presents his position as a effort to take religious pluralism seriously, yet in the end he finds pluralism hamstrung by its contradictions, which on the one hand want to accord all religions validity, and on the other hand scold Christianity for its theological imperialism. In making this critique, the pluralist, Heim claims, is either setting himself above Christianity – and thus reproducing the absolutist imperialism that he is supposedly critiquing – or he is involved in the blatant contradiction of cherry-picking what is good and bad in a religion while claiming that all religions have to be accepted as they are. We will later respond to this argument of Heim's in our discussion of his particularism.

The landscape, at present, shows, on the one hand, circumstances that give us hope for pluralism – the breakup of homogenous and isolated communities, the downfall of colonialism, the emergence of a theology reconciling Christian salvation and other Ways – and on the other hand show a hardening of attitudes – the rise of fundamentalisms, each feeding off the hostility of the other. I hope that this work will contribute to the work of moral suasion by which pluralism is advancing in the world by appealing to a genuinely open attitude and mentality based on process oriented constructive postmodernism.

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[170] Bassam M. Madany, "Pluralism in Theology and in the Church." http://www.levant.info/MER068.html

[171] Hick, "Book Review: S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*." *Religion and Theology*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (September 2001).

Chapter 2

John Hick's Religious Universalism: A Process Response

The task of reason is to fathom the deeper depths of the many-sidedness of things.
---Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p.342

This chapter presents John Hick's version of pluralism, which I will call universalistic pluralism. This kind of pluralism has received an enormous amount of criticism in recent times, with the deepest criticism coming from Heim (whose work I treat in the next chapter), who claims that it is "not pluralistic at all."[1] I disagree. I want to show, here, briefly, why I believe that Hick is one of the most important representatives of Christian pluralism, working in the path first marked by Ernst Troeltsch, with whom I dealt in the previous chapter. As Alan Race puts it: "In the Christian theology of religions, the full-scale pluralism first enunciated by Troeltsch is finally endorsed by Hick."[2] Indeed, some scholars like David Cheetham, the author of *John Hick*, argue that Hick's work represents "the most systematic and thorough attempt at constructing a harmonious pluralistic model in western thought."[3] Even Heim acknowledges that "Hick is undoubtedly the single most influential writer" in the contemporary discussion on pluralism.[4] My aim in this chapter is twofold. I want to offer an appreciative introduction to Hick's point of view and then show how, with help from a constructive postmodern perspective based on Whitehead, its residual difficulties can be overcome, thus preparing the way for the approach of harmonism.

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[1] Heim, *Salvations*, 129.
[2] Alan Race*, Christians and Religious Pluralism*, London: SCM Press LTD, 1983, p.90.
[3] David Cheetham, *John Hick: A Critical Introduction and Reflection*. London: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003, 169.
[4] Heim, *Salvations,* 8.

1. Hick's Rejection of Exclusivism

Hick was born in 1922 in the UK. Brought up in a religious atmosphere of conservative Calvinist orthodoxy, he took a degree at Oxford in the philosophy of religion in 1956, during a period when the Oxford school of language philosophy was flourishing. His first teaching post in the United States was at Cornell. Returning to Britain in the 60s, he moved further away from Presbyterian orthodoxy and, especially after his experiences teaching and becoming involved in community outreach programs in Birmingham, a very multicultural city in the 70s, he began his exploration of other faiths. In the 80s, he came back to America and took a position at the Claremont Graduate School, from which he retired in 1993. His influence and the influence of the Claremont School has been immense, founded on a series of books beginning with his study of evil (Evil and the God of Love, 1966), going through his controversial turn to pluralism (God and the Universe of Faiths, 1973), and capped by the Gifford Lectures, which he gave in 1986 and which were published in 1989 as An Interpretation of Religion.

In developing his pluralistic point of view, Hick rejects religious exclusivism in general and Christian absolutism in particular. For him pluralism is a serious "challenge" to religious exclusivism as it might be expressed in any religion; and this challenge is especially relevant to Christians who believe that Christians have "a monopoly of salvific truth and life" and who believe that "outside Christianity there is no salvation."[5] We recall from the previous chapter that many of these Christians are evangelical or fundamentalist in orientation, believing that in the best of worlds Christianity would be the only religion, replacing all the others. According to Hick this way of thinking has had a destructive effect in the world. As a Christian himself, he feels a "primary responsibility" to rethink exclusivism within Christian tradition.[6] From the earliest stage of his pluralism, beginning in the early 1970s through today, Hick's rejection of exclusivism remains unchanged despite repeated modifi-

[5] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," 17.

[6] John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology: The Philosophy of Religion*, New Haven Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993, Preface, viii.

cations or changes to his pluralistic framework. The nuances of his pluralism have changed, but his critique of exclusivism has remained constant.[7]

Hick is not naïve about the Christian tradition to which he claims adherence; he knows that for the major part of that history, the trend was toward exclusivism, and that only comparatively recently has there been a pluralistic alternative. Hick has picked up on the critique issued by Ernst Troeltsch in the 1920s of Christian absolutism. What was unique about that critique was Troeltsch's continued adherence to Christianity. Usually such analyses were issued outside of the faith. The growth of pluralism in theology is coupled with an increasing awareness of religious diversity in the world today, leading to "the modern erosion of the theological exclusivism."[8] He also knows that the influence of exclusivism is still quite powerful and that it has much momentum from the past. In his words: "Until fairly recently it was a virtually universal Christian assumption, an implicit dogma with almost creedal status, that Christ/the Christian gospel/Christianity is "absolute," "unique," "final," "normative," "ultimate," decisively superior to all other saviors, gospel**s**, religions.[9]

He notes further, though, that there are subtle differences between the traditional and new forms of Christian absolutism. Traditional Christian absolutism took very explicit forms: Christianity alone possesses the full knowledge of God because it alone is based on, and is the continuing vehicle of, God's direct self-revelation, and non-Christians cannot be saved. The new form of absolutism is expressed in less blatant and less offensive ways: "Non-Christians can be saved because, unknown to them, Christ is secretly in a way united with them."[10] In referring to the Christian positions that emphasize the unknown Christ in other religions, he is taking note of what Paul Knitter calls the fulfillment position, which characterizes some Roman Catholic thinking in modern times, especially as influenced by one of the leading Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, Karl Rahner. This is the view that Christ is anonymously present in other religions, such that their adherents can be ful-

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[7] Regarding the evolution of Hick's model of religious pluralism, Eddy offers a very clear survey in chapter 3 and chapter 4 of his book, *John Hick's Pluralist Philosophy of World Religions*.

[8] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," 20.

[9] Ibid.,16.

[10] Ibid.,22.

filled by Christ's presence even as they may not claim Christ's name. For Hick, this point of view extends the legacy of Christian absolutism**,** because it insists that there is no salvation apart from Christ. Contrary to advocates of replacement or fulfillment theory, Hick rejects the idea that there can be one true religion that "teaches the saving truth."[11] Such a line of thought treats only one's own form of religious experience as veridical; all others are regarded as "delusory."[12] For Hick, this distinction is unreasonably arbitrary and should be repudiated.

Moreover, Hick believes there is a specifically Christian reason to abandon exclusivism. Christians believe that God's redeeming love is universally offered to all people, and this idea contradicts narrower ways of thinking. In Hick's words:

> belief in the redeeming love of God for all his human creatures makes it incredible that the divine activity in relation to mankind should have been confined within the reach of the influence of the Christian revelation…. Thus the doctrine that there is no salvation outside historic Christianity would in effect deny the universal love and redeeming activity of God. [13]

Thus Hick rejects exclusivism on philosophical and Christian grounds, which gives his pluralism a philosophical and a theological dimension.

The theological dimension of Hick's pluralism is grounded not only in his convictions concerning God, but also in his belief that humans need to live in community with one another in peaceful, mutually creative ways. Thus he cautions about the powerful exclusive trend within the "us against them" attitude, which can develop from "intensified allegiance to one's own group."[14] Such intensified allegiance easily leads to violence and prejudice. Thus the stakes of embracing exclusivism are quite high. Such an embrace entails perpetuating the structure of conflicts in the world. The pluralist alternative takes

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[11] Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 24.

[12] S. Twiss, "The Philosophy of Religious Pluralism: A Critical Appraisal of Hick and his Critics." *The Journal of Religion* 70/4, 1990, 548.

[13] John Hick, *Arguments for the Existence of God.* London: Macmillan, 1970, 119.

[14] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Response to the Transcendent*, New Haven Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989, 377.

apart this structure, as it implies that even within a particular religion the adherents can "de-emphasize that aspect of its teaching which entails its own unique superiority."[15]

For Hick, this de-emphasis must be accompanied by a humble recognition that, when it comes to morality, no one religion is superior to the others. Judging by standards internal to their own traditions, all religions have their saints and sinners, and it is difficult to compare standards. Of course, from the perspective of omniscience, it may be possible for one religion to stand out as morally superior to all other traditions. But this cannot be the case from our imperfect human point of view: "It is not possible, as an unbiased judgment with which all rational persons could be expected to agree, to assert the overall moral superiority of any one of the great religious traditions of the world."[16] In seeking to compare traditions, "we are dealing for the most part with incommensurable goods and evils."[17] For instance, how do we weigh the integrity of family life and the support for the elderly in a Hindu or Muslim community against the provisions made for the often fragmented families and isolated elderly individuals in a western secular community?[18]

Nevertheless, in developing his own critique of exclusivism, Hick does recommend broad ethical norms by which religions can be judged. For example, Hick focuses attention on the connection between exclusivism and historical evils such as violent aggression, exploitation, and intolerance, and to its encouragement and connivance with political and economic evil. According to Hick, "the gospel played a vital role in the self-justification of Western imperialism."[19] Christian exclusivism provided a model of justification which bled into the justifications Christian colonialists used to put themselves in superior positions, violate their own moral code (for instance, against robbery or kidnapping) when it came to the treatment of non-Christian others, and in general cultivate a culture that normalized the domination and oppression of those others. Accordingly, their cultures and religions were also seen as inferior. Within such a mentality, the members of the Christian community ignored the values of other great traditions without worrying about it. Exclusiv-

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[15] John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths.* London: SCM Press, 1995, 30.

[16] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 337.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity." 19.

ism, according to Hick's viewpoint, was implicated in the social and psychological support necessary to perpetuate the imperialist project. It is important for Christians as Christians to come to grips with the "destructive effects of the assumption of Christian superiority."[20]

Historically, one place where this destruction has been apparent is in relations between people of different religions. Often exclusivism, as the ally of imperialism, poisoned the relationship between the Christian minority and the non-Christian majority**.** Hick points out that it was exclusivism that led to anti-Semitism**,** the colonial exploitation of the Third World, Western patriarchalism, and the Christian superiority complex in relation to the peoples of other faiths. It is for reasons such as these that he finds exclusivist claims for a religion so distasteful. In Cobb's words, Hick explicitly "refuses to affirm the superiority of any one."[21] He urges Christians to reconsider basic theological doctrines such as Christology to open Christianity to the truths and ways of other religions.

Despite his fervor, Hick's critique of absolutism is analytical and nuanced. On the one hand, he affirms the positive contribution of absolutism in helping human groups form their corporate self-respect. "Psychologically, the sense of the unique superiority of one's own religious tradition may be simply a natural form of pride in and ingrained preference for one's own familiar group and its ways."[22] On the other hand, however, natural pride can become harmful when "it is elevated to the level of dogma and is built into the belief system of a religious community."[23] Cognizant of the two dimensions of exclusivism – its capacity to foster confidence and pride, on the one hand, but also its tendency to unleash destructive forces against the unconverted other, on the other hand – Hicks provides an opening for Christians who seek to retain the first variety of confidence. He points out that Christians who assert superiority for their own tradition can still do so by claiming "the paradox of grace was more fully exemplified in the life of Christ than in any other life."[24] The only difference is that this claim to unique superiority is no longer "an *a*

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[20] Ibid.,18.

[21] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World,* 147.

[22] Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Absolute Claims." In *Religious Pluralism*. Ed. Leroy S. Rouner. South Bend Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, p.197.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 210.

priori dogma" but "a historical judgment, subject to all the difficulties and uncertainties of such judgments."[25] While affirming the positive contribution of this natural pride to human life, Hick stresses that it is harmful to elevate it to the level of absolute truth.

Hick knows that many Christians will disagree with him. He is aware that some Christians claim Christianity is superior to other religions by arguing that the effects of Christianity on Christian cultures have been such as to benefit the latter. However, using many factual arguments, he deconstructs any exclusive causal connections exclusivist Christians maintain between, for instance, the relative affluence of the West and Christianity, modern science and Christianity, or industrialization and Christianity. Through social analysis he refutes any grounds for holding that "Christianity has produced or is producing more saints in proportion to population, or a higher quality of saintliness, than any other of the great streams of religious life" by presenting Gandhi as a challenging example.[26]

In addition, Hick analyzes modern liberal ideals such as human freedom and equality, which are often viewed as the unique fruits of the Christian culture. He shows that, on the one hand, these ideals are not purely Christian ideals, "but the products of a creative interaction of cultural influences," because it is well known that "the Christian West had been strongly hierarchical, sanctifying serfdom and the subjugation of women, believing not in the rights of humanity but in the divine right of kings, burning heretics and witches, and brutally suppressing both social unrest and deviant intellectual speculation."[27] On the other hand, Hick reveals the credit and debit side of modernity. According to him, modernity has brought advanced material civilization and, at the same time, caused serious nuclear, ecological and spiritual crises.

These rebuttals of claims to superiority demonstrate how thoroughly Hick has absorbed the historicist lessons of his spiritual ancestor, Troeltsch. He does not criticize absolutism simply on philosophical grounds but also on historical grounds; he believes that an historical perspective can undermine Christian absolutist claims. Accordingly he urges Christians to stop viewing Christian teaching as unchanging truth and to think instead of Christian teaching as undergoing continual change. He writes, "Christianity has liked to

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[25] Ibid., 212.

[26] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity." 23.

[27] Ibid., 28.

think of itself as unchanging truth following down the centuries. But in fact it has (like every other religion) been a continuous history of change."[28] Hick's constructive endeavor is to present a theology of pluralism that can contribute to positive change.

2. Advocating Religious Pluralism

"Religious pluralism" is the phrase used by Hick to indicate that kind of theological position for which "Christianity is not the one and only way of salvation, but one among several."[29] In Christian theological terms, there is a plurality of divine revelations, making possible a plurality of forms of saving human response."[30] Pluralism is defined by Hick as the view that the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness is taking place in different ways within the contexts of all the great religious traditions.

Hick calls this a "Copernican revolution." He writes, "Once it is granted that salvation is in fact taking place not only within the Christian but also within the other great traditions, it seems arbitrary and unrealistic to go on insisting that the Christ-event is the sole and exclusive source of human salvation."[31] Hick likens this to the anomaly of accepting the Copernican revolution in astronomy, in which the earth was no longer conceived of as the center of the universe and was viewed instead as one of the planets circling the sun, but at the same time insisting that the sun's life-giving rays can reach the other planets only by first being reflected from earth. In what follows I will describe this revolution.

Hick's Copernican Revolution

The core of Hick's 'Copernican revolution" is to emphasize the necessity of a paradigm shift from a Christianity-centered or Jesus-centered approach to other religions to a God-centered approach. Originally the Copernican revolution referred to a shift from the Ptolemaic model to the Copernican.

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[28] John Hick, *The Second Christianity*. London: SCM Press, 1983, 91.
[29] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity." 33.
[30] John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985, 34.
[31] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity." 22.

According to the old Ptolemaic astronomy, the Earth is the center of the solar system and all other heavenly bodies, including the sun, revolve around it. It was Copernicus who proved that all the heavenly planets, including the Earth, actually revolve around the sun.[32] Likewise, it is the theological Copernican revolution that helps people realize that God is the Sun and the center of the universe of faiths, not a particular religious understanding of God – not Christianity.

To Hick, the "no salvation outside Christianity" doctrine is theologically analogous to the Ptolemaic astronomy model. "Christianity is seen as the center of the universe of faiths, and all the other religions are regarded as revolving round it and as being graded in value according to their distance from it."[33] Likewise, just as Earth as the center of the planetary universe was replaced by the sun, Christ and Christianity, which have been regarded for centuries as the center of the religious universe, are to be replaced by God. In other words, Hick claims that today we must acknowledge that the center around which all religious traditions (including Christianity) revolve is actually God: "the universe of faiths centers upon God, and not upon Christianity or upon any other religions. He is the sun, the originative source of light and life, whom all the religions reflect in their own different ways."[34]

However, as Hick developed his own distinctive form of religious pluralism he began to be more skeptical of this first formulation of his thesis. He realized that the term "God" is too concrete and specific to represent the ultimate goal of all religious traditions, and is colored by its definition in Christianity. Accordingly, in his later writings Hick substitutes "the Real" for "God" as the end toward which all religious paths are directed. To him the phrase "the Real" seems sufficiently abstract to be applied to all religions, theistic or otherwise. "The Real" stands for the Ultimate Reality, unknowable in itself *(an sich),* of which the divine personae and the impersonae of the different religious traditions represent various expressions or manifestations. For Hick, "the Real" is a neutral term and the power of the Real can be apprehended personally in some religious traditions and impersonally in others. Thus "the Real" itself is purely noumenal. It is beyond both personal and impersonal encounters; and yet it can be met in both ways. Indeed, as he sees things, the

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[32] Hick, "Whatever Path Men Choose is Mine." in *Christianity and other Religions*, 182.

[33] Ibid., 181.

[34] Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 52.

entire religious universe centers upon "the Real," and Christianity is viewed as but one of a number of worlds of faiths which circle around and reflect that Real. The many world religions are different human responses to "the Real," namely the one divine ultimate reality encountered in different ways.

Hick stresses that however different the various revelations are, the Real has been at work everywhere and the different world religions have served as its means of revelation. Thus Hick cites the ancient proverb: "The lamps are different, but the light is the same."[35] This light is the divine reality and it is the ultimate reality, singular in nature. As David Griffin explains, for Hick "there is only one ultimate reality."[36] It is this belief that leads him to say that "when the different traditions speak of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or of the Holy Trinity, or Allah, or Vishnu, or Brahman, or the Dharmakaya/Nirvana/Sunyata," they are affirming the same "putative transcendent reality**."**[37]

Hick's concept of "the Real" has given rise to a number of questions. An obvious one is: What is it, really? Is it personal or impersonal? Another question is: How can we know it? Hick makes a Kantian turn to explain the Real in philosophically familiar terms. Following Kant who distinguished between the phenomenal and the noumenal world, Hick distinguishes between "the Real" in itself and "the Real" as humanly experienced or between "the Real" as infinite being and "the Real" as finitely experienced.

This distinction is regarded by Kenneth Rose, one of Hick's commentators, as "the most basic notion of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis."[38] For Hick, it suggests the hypothesis that "the infinite Real, in itself beyond the scope of other than purely formal concepts, is differently conceived, experienced and responded to from within the different cultural ways of being human."[39] According to Hick's interpretation, "The Real in itself" is transcendent, infinite, and divine lying behind all different religious images and visions. Precisely

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[35] Jalalu' l-Din Rumi [13th Century], Quoted from John Hick: An Interpretation of Religion, 233.

[36] Griffin, "John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism." Deep Religious Pluralism, 45.

[37] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 10.

[38] Kenneth Rose, *Knowing the Real: John Hick on the Cognitivity of Religions and Religious Pluralism,* New York: Peter Lang, 1996, 73.

[39] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 14.

because it is behind all religious images and visions, it has many names and faces. In different traditions it can be known in different ways. It can be called or imaged as a personal God, as an impersonal Absolute, or as Brahman, or as the Tao. However conceived or imaged, the Real in question is the basis of all existence. In itself, it is not an object of direct experience. Still, it is a necessary postulate and plays a central role in Hick's universalistic pluralism.

Unlike Kant, for whom the noumenal realm did not condone treating the phenomenal realm as a congeries of different and equally likely perspectives, Hick finds permission in his version of Kantian duality to make exactly that move, at least as far as the highest insight into the Real is concerned. Hick's perspectivism affirms "the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the major variant ways of being human; and that within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness is taking place. These traditions are accordingly to be regarded as alternative soteriological 'spaces' within which, or 'way' along which, men and women can find salvation/liberation/ultimate fulfillment."[40]

Two Strengths

Hick has been widely criticized for his "Copernican revolution." In my opinion, this concept deserves credit for a number of reasons. First, it is evident that Hick's "Copernican revolution" is a challenge to the Christocentric approach dominant in contemporary Western theology, in which God is said to have been utterly and uniquely revealed in Jesus as the Christ. This explains why Hick is not satisfied with Karl Rahner's concept that treats devout Muslims, Hindus, or Jews as "anonymous Christians." In Hick's view, Rahner still clings to orthodox Christocentrism by treating Christ rather than the Real as the center of the religious universe and viewing the other religions as revolving around Christianity. Hick regards Rahner's doctrine of "anonymous Christians" as a new and sophisticated version of Christocentrism. He offers an analogy to make his point. For him, "to hold that divine grace reaches the other worlds of faith via the person and cross of Christ would be like holding that that the light of sun can only fall upon the other planets by being first re-

[40] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 240.

flected from the earth."[41] Hick maintains that we must repudiate both the old and new versions of Christocentrism if we want to make a wholehearted shift to religious pluralism. In other words, a Christian acceptance of religious pluralism must involve rejecting Christocentrism, a dominant form of religious exclusivism or absolutism.

Secondly, Hick's "Copernican revolution" is helpful in rejecting particularism. It can help free people from self-preoccupation and orient them to a larger, more fundamental reality. In John Cobb's words, "It avoids favoring any one tradition."[42] This avoidance may seem to undermine the particularity characteristic of any specific tradition to the point that Hick has been criticized for favoring a sort of deism by one of his critics, Gavin D'Costa, who accuses Hick of pursuing a religion of "liberal modernity' rather than upholding a real appreciation of particular traditions in all their intractable difference. This is why, as I will show later, it is important to recognize the possibility of many ultimates, such that religions are not always drawn toward the same ultimate reality. Still, there is a healthy particularism and an unhealthy particularism, and Hick rightly criticizes the unhealthy kind in his insistence that it is "unreasonable for any religion to claim to be alone authentic, dismissing all the others as false."[43] In this sense, Hick's "Copernican revolution" can help us step away from exclusivism. Kenneth Rose summarizes the point well: "In calling for a Copernican revolution in theology, Hick was decisively moving out of the mentality of religious absolutism and exclusivism."[44]

3. Hick's Universalistic Pluralism

I have spoken of Hick's pluralism as universalistic. By this I mean that, for him, the ultimate reality is one and universally available to all people, and also that the salvations that people experience, in encountering this reality, are identical in a general way. Hick knows that this view is controversial. He remarks, "Yes, it's true that the religions ask different questions. But I want to suggest that these questions, whilst specifically different, are generically the same. They all presuppose a profound present lack, and the possibility of a

[41] Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Absolute Claims," 200.
[42] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World,* 147.
[43] Hick, "Toward a Philosophy of Religious Pluralism," in *God Has Many Names,* 115.
[44] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 6.

radically better future; and they are all answers to the question, How to get from one to the other? In traditional Christian language they are all ways of asking, what must I do to be saved?"[45] Thus it is clear that Hick, who holds the view that there is only one great religious goal common to all religions, is deserving of the title, "universalist."[46] All religions share the same common salvific goal and understanding of the nature of salvation, which indicates "the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness."[47] Says Hick, "The great world traditions have in fact all proved to be realms within which or routes along which people are enabled to advance in the transition from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness."[48]

For Hick, universalism is a remedy to particularism. Using Wittgenstein's conception of "family-resemblance" and Tillich's "concept of the ultimate," Hick asserts that the many different phenomena subsumed under religion are related in the way the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has characterized as "family resemblance."[49] Thus, there is a common tendency among world religions without there being one distinct feature that is shared by all of them.

In order to prove that there must be some trend in common among different religions, Hick has carefully examined religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity, showing that there are constants among them that vary according to context. All of them treat love, compassion, self-sacrificing concern for and commitment to the well being of others as "a central ideal."[50] From Hick's point of view, it would be impossible to compare different religions if there were no such Reality common to them all. In summary, Hick's universalistic pluralism regards all religions as different totalities consisting of different ways of conceiving and experiencing "the Real."

Hick is confident that his universalistic pluralism can solve the most important problem of conflicting claims of religious truth. His conclusion is that "the differences between the root concepts and experiences of the differ-

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[45] Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 41.

[46] Brad Stetson*, Pluralism and Particularity in Religious Belief,* Westport: Praeger, 1994, 93.

[47] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* 14.

[48] John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985, 44.

[49] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion,* 3.

[50] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 316.

ent religions, their different and often conflicting historical and trans-historical beliefs, their incommensurable mythologies, and the diverse and ramifying belief-systems into which all these are built, are compatible with the pluralistic hypothesis that the great world traditions constitute different conceptions and perceptions of, and responses to, 'the Real' from within the different cultural ways of being human."[51]

To Hick's mind, the different conceptions of "the Real" are not literally true or false descriptions but are mythologically true insofar as they are soteriologically effective. He remarks, "There is no evident reason why a variety of such mythological conceptions of the Real should not prove equally soteriologically effective and hence equally mythologically true."[52] The different religious traditions are conceived by Hick as "equally productive" in realizing the transformation of human existence from "self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness."[53] This statement sums up Hick's defense of the validity of non-Christian traditions.

It should be noted that Hick never expects that "all religious people will think alike, or worship in the same way, or experience the divine identically."[54] What he repeatedly insists is that members of other religious communities such as Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists have "their own authentic form of faith."[55] The task Hick sets himself is to build a theory that allows people "to be fascinated by the differences as well as the similarities between the great world faiths."[56] Rather than denying religious diversity, Hick instead expects "there to be correspondingly different forms of religious cult, ritual, and organization, conceptualized in different theological doctrines" due to "a rich variety of human cultures."[57]

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[51] Ibid., 375-76.

[52] John Hick, "The Buddha's Undetermined Questions." In Hermeneutics, Religious Pluralism, and Truth. Ed. Gregory D. Pritchard. Winston-Salem North Carolina: Wake Forest University Press, 1987, 16-17.

[53] Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism.* 87.

[54] Hick, "The Outcome: Dialogue into Truth," in *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship between World Religions*, ed. John Hick. London: Sheldon Press, 1974, 151.

[55] Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 125.

[56] Hick, *God Has Many Names*. 9.

[57] Hick, "The Outcome: Dialogue into Truth," 151.

Hick finds both the similarities and differences among the great world faiths fascinating.[58] He distinguishes three types of differences: difference in modes of experience of the divine reality; difference of philosophical and theological theory concerning that reality, and difference in the key experiences that unify a stream of religious experiences and thought.[59] Hick's intention, as Alan Race explains, is "to view different types of religious experience as complementary and not mutually exclusive."[60] Other religions are always kept in his horizon.

According to Hick's universalistic pluralism, not only is the ultimate reality one, but also, as mentioned above, salvation comes to the same thing in all religions. In Hick, salvation or the religious goal "as the realization of a limitlessly better possibility" is universal.[61] In his view, the forms of salvation can be various: "Christianity speaks of redemption and eternal life; Judaism of the coming kingdom of God; Islam of judgment and paradise; Hinduism of moksa; Buddhism of enlightenment and Nirvana."[62] But salvation itself is only one.

Hick arrives at this conclusion through an analysis of the deeper meaning of salvation, which he claims is "the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness."[63] Hick believes that pursuing the same salvation is the aim of all faith traditions. Salvation is "the great business of religion."[64] In *Rainbow of Faiths*, he writes:

> Suppose, then, we define salvation in a very concrete way, as an actual change in human beings, a change which can be identified - when it can be identified - by its fruits. We then find that we are talking about something that is of central concern to each of the great world faiths. Each in its different way calls us to transcend the ego point of view, which is the source of all selfishness, greed, exploitation, cruelty, and injustice, and to become re-centered in that ultimate mystery for which we, in our Christian language, use the term God…
> It is I think clear that the great post-axial traditions, including Christianity, are di-

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[58] Hick, *God Has Many Names.* 9

[59] Hick, "The Outcome: Dialogue into Truth," 152.

[60] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 87.

[61] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion, 12.*

[62] Ibid., 33.

[63] Ibid., *300.*

[64] Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 57.

> rected towards a transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to a re-centering in what in our inadequate human terms we speak of as God, or as Ultimate Reality, or the Transcendent, or the Real. Among these options I propose to use the term "the Real," not because it is adequate – there is no adequate term – but because it is customary in Christian language to think of God as that which is alone finally real . . . And what is variously called salvation or liberation or enlightenment or awakening consists in this transformation from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness. For brevity's sake, I'll use the hybrid term "salvation/liberation**.**" I suggest that this is the central concern of all the great world religions. They are not primarily philosophies or theologies but primarily ways of salvation/liberation. And it is clear that salvation, in this sense of an actual change in human beings from natural self-centeredness towards a re-centering in the Divine, the Ultimate, the Real, is a long process – though there are often peak moments within it and that this process is taking place not only within Christianity but also, and so far as we can tell to a more or less equal extent, within the other great traditions.[65]

It is clear that, according to Hick, there can be only one salvation that is the central concern of all the great world religions. It "represents the basic moral consensus of all the great world faiths."[66] We will offer some critiques of this idea later on. Eddy points out that in Hick's anthropology of religions, salvation of some kind provides "the one unifying factor" among the otherwise radically diverse great world religions, and has a definitional weight as well: it functions as the "basic criterion" that allow us to recognize all human religious phenomena.[67]

According to Heim's analysis, it is Hick's view of salvation that "determines the structure of his pluralistic hypothesis."[68] That is to say, along with the conception of "the Real," Hick's view of salvation reveals the universalistic character of his pluralism.

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[65] Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths*. 17-18.

[66] John Hick, "The Possibility of Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin D'Costa," in *Religious Studies* 33/2, 1997.

[67] Paul Rhodes Eddy, *John Hick's Pluralist Philosophy of World Religions*. London: Ashgate, 2002, 104-05.

[68] Heim, *Salvations*, 33.

4. The Contributions of Hick's Pluralism

As I have indicated, Hick's universalistic pluralism has "a provocative quality,"[69] and it is not my intention to identify my project with his. Nevertheless, it is important not to negate the whole of Hick's thought through a criticism of some of its parts, as some of his critics tend to do. The corrosive tone of certain critics, such as Mark Heim, the theologian whom I treat in the next chapter, seem directed to shooting down the whole project of pluralism. According to Heim's judgment, Hick's pluralism "has no future and no depth" and will eventually disappear.[70] What Heim has done to Hick is reminiscent of some theologians, criticized by Cobb, who exhibit the bad habit of criticizing one another's projects merely as an excuse for not giving the support the project deserves.

My view, then, is that Hick's model remains attractive despite some of its shortcomings, which will be articulated when I survey Heim's work in the next chapter. It is one of the great virtues of Hick's mission that he does not primarily consider pluralism a move in an academic language game, but instead views it as an urgent duty for human survival in a just and sustainable world. He argues that pluralism is necessary both to avoid conflicts between religions and to enable religious people to learn from one another through interfaith dialogue. Hick is persuaded that accepting pluralism opens the possibility for every religion or tradition to benefit from the immense spiritual values and insights of other traditions. For him, "an acceptance of pluralism will not only … end mutual misrepresentation and communal conflict, but will bring a positive mutual enrichment."[71] For example, from Hinduism, Christians can learn how to practice meditation; from Buddhism they will be illuminated by its wisdom; from Islam they will be nurtured by its glorious faith. The desire to move beyond traditional, specific boundaries and become open to the whole world of religious experience is part of Hick's inner motivation. This is why he favors a pluralistic outlook that is open to the variety of religious traditions and views each tradition as one context of salvation/liberation among others. He both identifies as a Christian and treats Christianity as a religious belief system that is as distant from the Real as any other belief system;

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[69] David Cheetham, *John Hick: A Critical Introduction and Reflection*. 174.

[70] Heim, *Salvations*, 218.

[71] Hick, *The Second Christianity*. 90.

Hick is confident that, within the Christian community, openness to other religions will provoke positive changes in practice and belief. Christianity will be enormously enriched by learning of the visions, experiences and thoughts of the other great religious traditions. In his words, "by attending to other traditions than one's own one may become aware of other aspects or dimensions of the Real, and of other possibilities of response to the Real, which had not been made effectively available by one's own tradition."[72]

The value of dialogue is twofold. On the one hand, Hick repeatedly insists that the "acceptance of religious pluralism will lead to creative doctrinal development, either in reinterpreting absolutist doctrines or in allowing them to fall into the background so that they become ideas of historical interest rather than of immediate practical concern."[73] On the other hand, the acceptance of pluralism will also lead to mutual enrichment and co-operation, which will help people to cope with the urgent problems of human survival in a just and sustainable world. Thus, for Hick, dialogue has a practical value and an intellectual value, a social value and a spiritual value.

On the practical and social side, Hick has realized that religious pluralism can help Christians open themselves to the struggle for human justice in general and feminism in particular wherever it is staged. This is important, because, lacking a pluralistic outlook, Christian absolutism can easily block one's participation in the two movements by its restrictions within the borders of one tradition.[74] Religious pluralism by its comparative nature makes it possible for members of all faiths to increase their freedom to appreciate differences, their freedom from domination, and to gain mutual enrichment.

First, his framework can free people to observe and be fascinated by the differences between traditions, without "any pressure to homogenize them or to depict the objects of religious experience—Yahweh, Brahman, Shiva, the Holy Trinity, Sunyata, the Dharma, and so on—as phenomenologically alike."[75] Each religion can be seen as a way of knowing the Real. Second, through religious pluralism we can lose the arrogance inherent in claiming some unique superiority resulting from belonging to the one and only true religion. This freedom "makes possible a genuine appreciation of other re-

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[72] Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 44.

[73] Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Absolute Claims." 198.

[74] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," 34.

[75] Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, 107.

sponses to the Real."[76] Third, like all forms of pluralism, Hick's theory makes possible authentic dialogue, in which each participant may learn something new and valuable from the experiences and insights of others.

In addition to these three kinds of freedom, there are still other values to his pluralism, among which is the fact that it serves as a prelude to a heightened global consciousness. Thus, I agree with Kenneth Rose that even if one disagrees with some of Hick's formulations, "one cannot deny that he has been a powerful force behind the recent rethinking of the place of Christianity in the universe of faiths."[77] According to Rose, it is Hick who boldly led a revolution which challenges Christianity to recognize that "Jesus is an important but not the only or final word about the mysteries of life, death, and what falls in between."[78] Still another value of Hick's religious pluralism is its capacity for undermining the legacy of colonialism. As Surin points out, one of the primary motivations behind Hick's pluralism is his desire to discredit and undo the theological legacy of Christianity's "shameful complicity" with the political and economic forces "which occupied, ruled, and exploited almost all of the non-European world."[79]

Finally, there is value in affirming multiplicity itself, although, as we will see, Hick's theory and preoccupation with soteriology may have placed limits on how far he could go in this regard. Hick is surely right that Christians cannot recognize the value of non-Christian religions by the inclusivist route: they must affirm multiplicity positively, rather than as a sort of dodge to assert the centrality of Christ. For Hick it is not appropriate to ask: Which religion is the true religion? Which is false? Because "a true relationship to God may occur in the lives of people in each of the great religious traditions."[80]

Therefore, it is safe to say that Hick's pluralism promotes, to a large extent, the consciousness of other religions and equality among different religious traditions. His distinguished contribution to pluralism will be appreciated into the foreseeable future. It is in light of this contribution, then, that I

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[76] Ibid., 108 .

[77] Rose, *Knowing the Real,* 118.

[78] Ibid., 119.

[79] Kenneth Surin, "Toward a 'Materialist' Critique of 'Religious Pluralism,'" in *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief*. Ed. Ian Hamnet. London: Routledge, 1990, 119.

[80] Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 18.

will add a "constructive postmodern" addition to his point of view, which can help offset what some consider contradictions within his point of view. First, his notion of a single, noumenal Real leads him to deny that the Real can be experienced at all, and yet also to assert that we can know something about it, at least in a formal way. Second, the notion of noumenal Real leads him to insist that all religious language is mythical; that is, it lacks any literal truth, even as he wants to affirm religious traditions in which people do claim to have actual encounters with, and know something about, realities that are ultimate. Third, his notion of noumenal Real leads him to assume that there is and must be only one ultimate, at least for religious purposes, even as he simultaneously claims that, for philosophical purposes, we cannot say whether the Real is one or many. These three contradictions in Hick's perspective can be resolved by appeal to the constructive postmodern perspective I am developing in this book, the fullest expression of which is a harmonism borrowing elements from the Chinese tradition, developed in Chapter Seven. In what follows I offer a constructive postmodern response to Hick.

5. A Whiteheadian Response to Hick

A Whiteheadian Response to Hick would emphasize that things go wrong in Hick when he denies that the Real can be experienced at all, for here he parts from the pluralistic principle of listening to what other faiths claim and reinterpreting those claims in the light of some higher framework. Instead, one can grant that religions can be contexts in which people have direct experiences of what their participants take to be ultimate realities, and that the ultimate realities that they experience and know can be different but complementary. These claims are drawn primarily from John Cobb and David Ray Griffin. To outsiders, these are interesting claims, but they can only make sense given the philosophical foundation upon which Cobb and Griffin rely and which they extend. That foundation is the philosophy of Whitehead. I have already made some comments about Whitehead's critique of the Cartesian notion of substance. A Cartesian notion of substance envisions something that requires nothing except itself (and perhaps God) in order to exist. I have shown how Whitehead's philosophy offers a non-substantialist and relational approach to ultimate reality, conceived as either God or Creativity**,** and how it dissolves the barrier of atomic subjectivity or a derived atomism of ob-

jects to appreciate the historical specificity of given religions with their unique claims concerning ultimacy. In this final section I want to extend the discussion of Whitehead further by showing, with help from Cobb and Griffin, how it offers a two-fold alternative to Hick's universalistic pluralism. One is what I will call the Primacy of the Particular and its Relevance to Dialogue. The second is the idea that there can be multiple Ultimate Realities. Each of these two ideas has important implications for a constructive postmodern approach to religion and religious diversity.

The Primacy of the Particular and its Relevance to Dialogue

In *Process and Reality* Whitehead presents what he calls the "ontological principle." This is the idea that the ultimate causes of things lie in decisions made by particular actualities, not abstract ideas or essences. It has profound implications for religious pluralism; I call it the primacy of the particular.

As I have already emphasized, process philosophy tells us that ultimate units of reality are actual entities or actual occasions. This philosophy adds that every actual occasion is novel in a certain way, even if it happens to repeat patterns from the past. The novelty of an actual occasion resides in its prehensions of their past actual worlds, the subjective forms that clothe their prehensions of the past, the subjective aims that guide the process of concrescence, and the unique forms of satisfaction that emerge from their process of gathering the many into one. The basic point is that no two actual occasions have exactly the same data of feeling, and even when their data are similar, the subjective forms and prehensions and decisions may differ. Thus, when we think of the universe as an organic whole, we must think in terms of unique actualities with their concrete differences. Applying this to the universe of religions, we must also think in terms of unique religions, each of which emerges out of a particular historical circumstance (its past actual world) and set of social conditions, and each of which unfolds in terms of the feelings and decisions of its participants, who, on their own account, have themselves encountered something ultimate in their lives.

With this emphasis on concrete differences, process thought provides a foundation for people of one religion to respect other traditions, because all religious traditions emerge out of the particularities of such experiences: the

particularity of feelings, of past actual worlds, of subjective aims, and of satisfactions. The contrast with Hick is striking. While Hick wants to affirm the particularity of each tradition, the trajectory of his thought is to seek a universal reality behind all religions. Thus he treats "the Real" as the common source of all major traditions, and regards the transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness as the common goal of all higher religious traditions. So it follows that Hick prefers the universal to the particular. The ultimate Reality of which he speaks is regarded as more real than the particular temporal manifestations. In this sense, Hick embodies what Griffin calls an "identist pluralism," according to which, "all religions are oriented toward the same religious object (whether it can be called 'God,' 'Brahman,' 'Nirvana,' 'Sunyata,' 'Ultimate Reality,' 'the Transcendent,' or 'the Real') and promote essentially the same end."[81]

Although postmodern critics may find Hick's intention honorable, they do not see his hypothesis as particularly "illuminating."[82] This is not simply because constructive postmodernists believe in multiple ultimates, but because, even more fundamentally, they do not think that universals – eternal objects, in Whitehead's language – are somehow more real (that is, more actual) than the particular entities manifesting the universal. On the contrary, eternal objects are real, but not actual.[83] The actualities are the entities in our universe that make decisions: whether they are energy-events in an atom or human beings in a historical circumstance.

The emphasis on decision-making does not mean that actualities are self-contained or isolated from one another. From Whitehead's point of view, there are no independent and separate entities, because actual entities are events that gather the many of the universe into a single reality through acts of prehensive unification. Whitehead believes that these events are the "final real things" of the universe" for "there is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real."[84] Thus, for Whitehead, there is no noumenal Thing

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[81] Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, Deep." *Deep Religious Pluralism,* 24.

[82] Griffin. "John Cobb's Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism." *Deep Religious Pluralism*. 46.

[83] Ronald L. Farmer, *Beyond the Impasse: The Promise of a Process Hermeneutic*, Macon Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997, 76.

[84] Whitehead. *Process and Reality*, 18.

in itself behind or beyond the world of actuality. There are only concrescing events, each of which depends on others for its existence.

For Whitehead, the importance of concrescing events does not undermine the reality of the divine. However, if we think of the Real as another name for this divine reality, then we must recognize that, for Whitehead, even God – even the Real if understood as God – "is an actual entity."[85] The primordial nature of God experiences the realm of pure potentialities or "eternal objects," and the consequent nature of God experiences the actual world itself as it was developed in the past. In being thrust into consequential structure of nature, God undergoes experience in the mode of causal efficacy, and is thus affected by, and partly constituted by, the world. In short, Whitehead offers a thoroughly relational ontology that includes God. And even his notion of creativity, which I present in the next section, is relational in a sense. David Griffin explains that "creativity" is the pure activity of which all actualities, even God, are expressions, but that this activity is not more real than the universe including God. Rather, it is actual by virtue of its instantiations as God and the universe.

The same applies to other entities, including human beings. From a process perspective human beings experience their worlds from different points of view, each of which is shaped by their historical conditions, languages, cultures, personal decisions made in the past, hopes for the future, sexuality, and a wide range of other factors. In Griffin's words: "Every concrete moment of experience is heavily shaped by one's language and thereby culture."[86] Thus linguistic and cultural differences are not transcended by historical essences. Rather these differences are fundamental; however, they may or may not be complementary – difference is not synonymous with antithesis.

For process thinkers such as Cobb and Griffin, then, this Whiteheadian way of looking at the world offers "a way of appreciating so many different kinds of religious sensibilities."[87] Cobb emphasizes that he "celebrates" differences. In his view, "it is so valuable for us to encounter people from other traditions."[88] He asserts, "Let us allow Buddhists to be Buddhists, whether that makes them religious or not. Let us allow Confucians to be Confucians,

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[85] Ibid.

[86] Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Postliberal and Postmodern Approaches," unpub., 15.

[87] McDaniel, *Gandhi's Hope*, 15.

[88] Cobb, "Being Open to the Wisdom of Others," 8.

whether that makes them religious or not. Let us allow Marxists to be Marxists, whether that makes them religious or not. And let us allow Christians to be Christians, whether that makes us religious or not."[89]

Griffin follows Cobb in emphasizing these differences, linking differences among religions with two ideas concerning the divine reality. One is that it is non-coercive, allowing free response on the part of humans relative to different historical situations. The other is that the very content of divine influence will vary relative to what is possible in given historical circumstances. This leads Griffin to emphasize the historical features of different religions as definitive of their natures, such that different histories will naturally lead to different religious aims. Griffin proposes the concept of "radical historicity of human beings,"[90] according to which, a particular historical tradition shapes human beings and their culture. This radical historicity is what I mean by the primacy of the particular. Griffin's point is that even the divine reality – even God – affirms the primacy of the particular. As Griffin puts it: "In any case, given the non-coercive nature of divine influence plus the radical freedom and thereby historicity of human beings, we have no basis for assuming that all the religious traditions would teach essentially the same thing about ultimate reality."[91]

Of course, even if this is a plausible account, we can question why such differences should be celebrated, According to Cobb it is because religious differences make it possible for different traditions to learn from each other. Although similarities may in fact be as interesting as differences, the value of differences explains why dialogue between different religions is necessary. For Griffin, there is not a substantial common essence of all religion: "Hence there are essential things which could in principle be learned from each other."[92] We can learn something new and different from the process of dialogue. Whiteheadian religious pluralism leaves room for something new and significant to be gained from other religions. In Griffin's words, "each tradition would have much to contribute to, and to learn from, the other traditions."[93] In

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[89] Cobb, "The Meaning of Pluralism for Christian Self-Understanding." *Religious Pluralism,* ed. Leroy Rouner.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Griffin, "Can Christianity Learn from Other Religions," unpub.

[93] Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism,* 259.

this sense, we can say that Whiteheadian religious pluralism not only provides a basis for inter-religious dialogue, but also provides the possibility for genuine openness and mutual enhancement.

China provides a practical example of such dialogue. In chapter seven I show how this emphasis on dialogue has been materialized historically in the relations that have grown up among Buddhists, Confucians and Taoists in China, which has in turn conditioned the various forms through which Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism have been articulated over time. In a certain way, this history provides support for Whiteheadian religious pluralism. Although there are differences among the three religions – for example, Buddhism deals mainly with the relationship between one and oneself; Confucianism the relationship between individual and society; Taoism the relationship between humans and nature – they have grown, or their communities have grown, to understand that they complement each other. For centuries participants in these three traditions have learned from one another, giving rise to forms of religion in which each benefits from the other.

Multiple Ultimates as a Context for Dialogue

In Whiteheadian religious pluralism the emphasis on differences is deepened by the proposal that, when it comes to the ultimate nature of things, there may be different but complementary ultimates around which different religions are centered. The second feature of process philosophy I wish to highlight in preference to Hick's recourse to the one ultimate, albeit noumenal Real, is its idea that, when it comes to ultimate realities, there is no reason to privilege the quantity, one. This idea is helpful in understanding differences between theistic and non-theistic religious orientations.

An interest in reconciling these two religious orientations is explicit in Hick as well. He wants to affirm both theistic and non-theistic religious experience equally, rather than subordinating one to the other. Process philosophy offers a constructive approach that appreciates the ultimacy of each, without reducing each to something further. To understand the process approach, let us first recall Hick's approach.

There are two quite different kinds of religious experience: theistic and nontheistic. Traditionally, the ultimate reality of theistic religions has been a personal divine being. Contrarily, the ultimate reality of nontheistic religions has been an impersonal divine being. Hick, trying to resolve the conflict

among different traditions within the parameters of a pluralism that does not privilege one understanding of the divine, tries to overcome the explicit conflict here by appealing to Kant**'s** dualism, which insists upon the dichotomy between noumenon, which cannot be known by definition, and phenomenon, which obeys the causal laws and is accessible to understanding. Imposing a like distinction on the religious, Hick erects a wall between various divine realities as phenomenal and the Real as the ultimate reality behind them – the Real itself, standing in as the noumenal and varied manifestations of the Real *an sich* in particular religions, which are tied to the historic conditions of their appearance. Thus, both personal ultimate reality and impersonal ultimate reality, which bound and define, respectively, the theistic and nontheistic religious traditions, are merely manifestations of the Real.

The implications of this are striking. It means that when the different traditions speak of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or of the Holy Trinity, or Allah, or Vishnu, or Brahman, or the Dharmakaya/Nirvana/Sunyata, they are actually affirming the same "putative transcendent reality."[94] In this way, says Hick, no tradition can say that its ultimate reality is more real than others; no tradition can view itself as superior to the other. None of them is the ultimate reality. The only ultimate reality is the Real, which cannot be known in human conceptuality such as "one or many, personal or impersonal…"[95]

From the perspective of Whiteheadian religious pluralism, Hick's pluralism, while it appears to defend the equality of all religions, in fact simply performs the task of offending them all equally by denying their own view of what is important in their message. It treats the ultimate realities in different traditions as not real or, at best, only weakly real. In Rose's words, "in order to avoid the narrowness of religious particularism Hick has paid too high a price: the sacrifice of the messy, living tissue of actual, ongoing religious traditions."[96] With the doctrine of plural ultimate**s**, Whiteheadian religious pluralism can effectively overcome the failings of Hick's dualism.

Unlike Hick's universalistic pluralism that stresses that "there cannot be a plurality of ultimates,"[97] the doctrine of plural ultimates assumes that there

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[94] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 10.

[95] Ibid., 246.

[96] Rose, *Knowing The Real*, 116.

[97] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 249.

are at least two ultimate realities.[98] One is the personal God, the other is impersonal Creativity. Griffin calls them as "informed ultimate" and "formless ultimate," respectively.[99] God as "informed ultimate" is the source from which "forms enter the world."[100] Although Creativity and God differ from one another, both are equally ultimate realities. Neither of them is subordinated to the other. Creativity is not created by God. Likewise, God is not created by Creativity. Creativity is as primordial as God is. For Whitehead, it is misleading to argue which one is more primordial, Creativity or God. As a matter of fact, both of them are equally primordial. They presuppose each other, rely on each other.

Griffin's distinction helps us understand religious experience as well. If we acknowledge that there are at least two ultimate realities, we must acknowledge that there are at least two significantly different kinds of equally valid religious experiences. One involves the personal ultimate, that is, God, which has been termed Saguna Brahman, Ishvara, the vow of Amida, the cosmic Christ, and simply God; one involves the impersonal ultimate, Creativity, which has been called Nirguna Brahman, Emptiness and Being itself.[101] Religious experiences of the former – the personal ultimate – include prayers that address the divine reality, trust in guidance from that reality, and faith that the divine reality cares about the affairs of the world. Religious experiences of the latter – the transpersonal – involves awakening to a pure activity or ultimate energy that is manifest in everything that exists and in the sheer interconnectedness of things. When Hindus speak of Nirguna Brahman they have the pure activity in mind; when Buddhists speak of the "emptiness" of

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[98] There are different understandings of plural ultimates among process thinkers. For example, Cobb proposed three ultimates. Griffin summarizes Cobb's position: "What exists necessarily is not simply God, as in traditional Christian theism, and not simply the world understood as the totality of finite things, as in atheistic naturalism, but God-and-a-world, with both God and worldly actualities being embodiments of creativity." According to Griffin's understanding, the reason why Cobb lists the cosmos as a third ultimate is because there is a type of religion that construes the cosmos as sacred such as Taoism and many primal religions. My study shows the Tao as the creative advance of the world can be viewed as the third ultimate.

[99] Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, 261.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid., 281-82.

all things, because they lack independent existence and depend on each other for their existence, they have the interconnectedness in mind.

Does the fact that there are plural ultimates mean that they are independent of each other? Or that they are separate ultimates that have no intrinsic relationship? Or that they are at war with each other? The answer to all of these questions is no. For constructive postmodern thinkers, although there are multiple ultimates in the universe, it is misleading to conceive of them as separate and independent substances. On the contrary, and as we might expect, the two ultimates are interrelated. They presuppose each other, rely on each other and complement each other.

For constructive postmodern pluralists, the affirmation of one ultimate does not exclude the other. Instead, the affirmation of one ultimate includes the other. Thus, a person who belongs to a religion that affirms a personal God may learn from someone who belongs to a religion that has awakened to the transpersonal ultimate, trusting that, in learning from the latter, he or she need not relinquish faith. Moreover, a person who belongs to a religion that emphasizes the transpersonal ultimate can simultaneously be open to the possibility of trusting in the personal God as well.

As many have noted, Whitehead's notion of plural ultimates has constructed a much-traversed bridge between Christianity and other traditions such as Buddhism.[102] The doctrine of plural ultimates provides a basis for understanding different religious experiences. In Cobb's words, it can make it easier "to view the contributions of diverse traditions as complementary."[103] To vary Hick's metaphor, some religions may not function as lamps but rather as bells in that they awaken people to realities that are different than those exposed by light: in this case, to those exposed by sound. They may have equal intensity, but they may be intense about different realities. Such might be the case with theistic and non-theistic traditions: each set of traditions revealing different kinds of reality.

In closing this section of the chapter, it is also important to note that there may be more than two ultimates. In Whitehead's philosophy there are multiple realities that are ultimate in different ways. A present moment of experience is "ultimate" in that, once it occurs, it cannot be reversed, and as it

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[102] Christopher Ives, "Liberating Truth: A Buddhist Approach to Religious Pluralism,." *Deep Religious Pluralism,* 183.

[103] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World*, 186.

occurs, its subjective immediacy is a final fact of the universe, to which even God must take account. The realm of pure potentialities or "eternal objects" is "ultimate" in that, in its pure potentiality, it embodies an infinite wealth of potentiality that can enter the world of actualities. The sheer interconnectedness of things – the fact that everything is present in everything else – is ultimate in the sense that no entity can be severed from all others and no actual entity exists in isolation. A Whiteheadian religious pluralism is leaves open the question of whether there are more than two ultimates. One could make the case that among the different religions and their different contexts, some have been sensitive to ultimates besides Creativity and God. Indeed, it can be argued that Confucianism is most sensitive to the ultimacy of bonds between people rather than to the ultimacy of a personal God or a transpersonal Creativity. The general approach of a Whiteheadian religious pluralism is not to judge in advance what "ultimate" is important in a religion, but rather to see what the people in different religions themselves say and practice, trying to understand them first in their own terms in order to decide in a provisional way how to translate their concerns into the language of ultimates. This ultimate may be an ontological reality such as Creativity or God. Or it may be the whole creative advance of the world such as the Tao in the Chinese tradition. All things depend on context, and no particular exists apart from context. We have to avoid what Whitehead calls the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, that is, the imposition of an interpretive schema that is constructed before we have a good understanding of the scope an dimensions of the concepts in play**.**

Whiteheadian religious pluralism finds Whitehead's thought a helpful, though not imposing, way of interpreting the reality of people's lives. Constructive postmodernism does not impose categories upon people, but rather takes what people say themselves as its data, from which it then constructs correspondences to Whiteheadian categories that might assist in interpreting what is discovered in the talk. To allow primacy to the talk as the first phase of understanding is a form of listening. Encouraging different religions to listen to others is an important aspect of Whiteheadian religious pluralism. However, listening to others does not mean listening to only what they say, but also "listening to what they feel."[104] Whitehead's philosophy affirms that human beings can know other human beings, not only through the words they utter, but also in the subjective forms such as hopes and fears, that often come

[104] McDaniel, *Gandhi's Hope*, 126.

through their voices and numerous other forms of communication. This type of receptivity to others is what Jay McDaniel calls "deep listening**.**" For McDaniel, deep listening lies in listening to others on their own terms and for their own sakes, without needing to reduce others to one's own projections.[105]

This listening may in the end reveal two ultimates or, for that matter, more than two. My own view is that the Tao of Taoism as the whole creative advance of the world may in fact be a third ultimate of sorts: an ultimate that is neither Creativity per se nor the primordial nature of God per se, but a combination of the two experienced as a presence in its own right. This approach is immensely practical; it begins with the primacy of the particular and yet avoids the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Thus it can advance the agenda that John Hick so rightly affirms: that of embracing the diversity of many religions, without arrogance, and with a willingness to learn from others.

[105] Ibid., 52.

Chapter 3

Heim's Religious Particularism And a Process Alternative

> *The chief danger to philosophy is narrowness in the selection of evidence.*
> --Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p.337.

This chapter presents and evaluates the views of S. Mark Heim. I will speak of Heim's perspective as "religious particularism**.**" As the phrase suggests, Heim's aim is to recommend a perspective that puts emphasis on difference and particularity. His approach differs dramatically from the approach of John Hick**,** which was discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, Heim understands his own version of pluralism as the very antithesis of Hick's version. In developing his view, he reveals the strengths of his own point of view in contrast to Hick's point of view, but also, unwittingly, exposes the weaknesses of his own point of view. In this chapter I introduce Heim's perspective, discuss its strengths, and show how aspects of Whiteheadian pluralistic thinking can help correct its shortcomings.

S. Mark Heim's life, in contrast to Hick, has been spent mostly in the confines of the United States. Heim is the Samuel Abbot professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. Hick's work is partly a product of his participation in the social movements of the 60s and 70s. Heim's work, by contrast, is rooted in the 90s, with its more critical view of the enthusiasms of the earlier era. He is most noted for *Salvations: truth and difference in religion* (1995), the book in which he launched his most detailed analysis of the problems of pluralism, and *The Depth of Riches: a Trinitarian theology of religious ends* (2001), in which he elaborates his case for claiming that there is no pluralist standpoint from which one can subsume the particular ends articulated by specific religions.

1. Heim's Rejection of Hickian Universalism

One of the major contributions Heim makes to contemporary discussions of religious pluralism lies in his critique of the synthesis between universalism and pluralism in an identist pluralism as represented in thinkers such as John Hick, Wilfred Cantrell Smith, and Paul Knitter**.** In this chapter I focus on his critique of Hick and Knitter.

As an evangelical Protestant and a religious conservative, Heim is regarded as one of Hick's major critics. This criticism is one of the central threads in Heim's book, *Salvations—Truth and Difference in Religion,* a book that garnered Heim a lot of attention for his criticism of religious pluralism. Heim targets Hick because, in his view, Hick has made "the most extensive and detailed case… for a pluralistic account of religions." [1] For Heim, "No other version of pluralistic theology has reached the same level of breadth, clarity and consistency."[2]

Heim's advocacy of the particularist witness (The Depth of the Riches, p. 19) of different religions motivates his counter-proposal to Hick's religious universalism, which on its four major weaknesses.

First, Heim deconstructs the conception of an ultimate ontological reality, which is the conceptual foundation of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. As we saw in the previous chapter, Hick believes that that there is a single, noumenal Real that is experienced in all religions and that is the source of human transformation to a limitlessly better future. According to Heim, this point of view is inconsistent with the theoretical premise of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, which is that we cannot experience the noumenal Real, because all that we ever experience is "experiencing as." When we experience something as something, we do not truly experience the thing at issue; we only experience manifestations of it. Hick makes this claim concerning the Real: it is beyond all experience. And yet, contradictory to this view, Hick also wants to say that we experience something of the Real itself; otherwise we would not be speaking of it in the first place. Hick logically cannot have it both ways. In Heim's words: "Hick's hypothesis implies there are some conditions in which it would be verified by an experience of the noumenal_Real; i.e., experience of what cannot be experienced. It is not a matter here of doubting that a given

[1] Heim, *Salvations*, 8

[2] Heim, *Salvations*, 42.

eschatological scenario will come to pass, but of a religious claim that corresponds to no differentiated set of circumstances at all. The failure of Hick's pluralistic hypothesis to specify any such set puts its own cognitive status in jeopardy."[3] According to Heim, because Hick's ultimate Reality is beyond all experience, its reality is neither verifiable nor falsifiable, despite Hick's claims to the contrary. For Heim, this means that the very notion of a single Ultimate Reality is cognitively empty and meaningless.

In addition to the charge of inconsistency, a second major weakness Heim spots in Hick's pluralism is its neglect of the actual diversity of religions. This neglect results from Hick's over-emphasis on universality among different religious traditions, and more specifically on a single end to the religious quest. In Heim's view, the assumption that there is and can be only one religious end is a crucial constitutive element of pluralistic theologies of the kind Hick represents – which are, let us recall, the central varieties of pluralism for Heim. But as Heim points out, there are many religions and, if we attend to the claims made in these religions, many different salvations. Thus there is not one end of religion, "there are many religious ways,"[4] That is to say, for Heim, salvation can be understood in the plural.

For Hick, by contrast, there are different religious paths, but they are all going up one mountain to one summit, which is one salvation. Heim asks: "Why not many?" Why cannot there be many different mountain summits? Why cannot there be a variety of salvations? According to Heim, salvations are not all the same. For example, Buddhist salvation, which is the extinction of desire in Nirvana, is not as same as the Christian salvation, which is communion with God. Beginning with the assumption of many salvations, Heim criticizes pluralistic theologies of the kind recommended by Hick:

> There is a paradoxical feature of pluralistic theologies. Of the vast religious diversity of the world, the pluralist affirms as fully valid only that narrow segment where believers have approximated the authors' approach to their own traditions. According to them, the many faiths of the world – even in their exclusivist versions – may all save in some sense. But they do so only according to a plan the pluralist understands and others don't. It is clearly stated that those without a pluralistic understanding of their faith stand urgently in need of fulfillment and en-

[3] Heim, "The Pluralistic Hypothesis, Realism, and Post-Eschatology." In *Religious Studies* 18/2. 1992: 213.

[4] Heim, *Salvations*, 5.

lightenment.[5]

For pluralists like Hick, it is a troubling fact that Buddhist Nirvana and Christian communion with God do not seem, at face value, compatible. They are troubled with these contradictions. For Heim, the problem is not contradiction; rather it is the problem of assuming that any given type of salvation, such as Nirvana or communion with God, is necessary for all human beings. "Nirvana and communion with God are contradictory only if we assume that one or the other must be the sole fate for all human beings."[6]

The third weakness Heim finds in Hick's universalistic pluralism hypothesis is that it does not offer any incentive for dialogue among religious traditions. If all religions are essentially the same, people espousing one religion have nothing substantial to learn from those in others. Heim believes that his own pluralism provides a real reason for inter-religious dialogue and "for mutual transformation."[7]

Put another way, the kind of pluralism offered by John Hick is not truly pluralistic and thus not conducive to dialogue and transformation. Heim points out an inherent paradox; that is, "the most insistent voices calling for the affirmation of religious pluralism seem equally insistent in denying that, in properly religious terms, there is or should be any fundamental diversity at all."[8] For Heim, Hickian pluralists claim to believe in many goals but actually believe in the same goal with different names: "reality-centeredness" for John Hick, liberation from social oppression for Paul Knitter, or universal faith and rationality for Wilfred Cantwell Smith. These pluralists believe religion is like toothpaste: brand differences are inconsequential because they all have the same function and end. In effect, then, pluralists deny any pluralism of real consequence; thereby undercutting the possibility of genuine interchange, where different parties learn from each other.

The fourth aspect of Hick's pluralism that Heim rejects is its search for a common essence or common end. According to Heim, this search assumes that there is a neutral, universal perspective from which one religion can judge another or one person can claim to discern a common essence in them

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[5] Heim, *Salvations*, 101-02.

[6] Heim, *Salvations,* 149.

[7] Ibid., 123.

[8] Ibid., 2-3.

all. Heim calls this perspective "imperialism" because it imposes a particular norm as universal:

> This is largely an optical illusion… there is no 'God's-eye view' from which to discern the 'fundamental categorical structures' of the religions, no non-particular interpretation of 'contemporary existence.' A meta-theology claims to offer a view which is not a Christian one or a liberal western one alongside an Orthodox Jewish one or a liberal Muslim one, but rather a view on a different level and in some qualitative way beyond such particularity. It is a claim that cannot be validated. To demonstrate that one, for instance, no longer grants authority to Christian or Muslim norms is no evidence that one does not hew to others just as particular.[9]

For Heim, any attempt to judge all religious phenomena from a "neutral meta-theory" is doomed to failure by failing to specify conditions under which such a judgment could even be possible. Heim's philosophy requires different commitments and different orientations. It requires recognizing that all philosophy and theology are influenced by particular commitment and orientations, shaped by historical circumstances and cultural influences, which make other points of view difficult if not sometimes impossible to understand. We cannot compare our point of view with theirs, or theirs with ours, because such comparisons presuppose a higher analytical level that is unavailable to the resources within a particular religion – which considers that its end is precisely the highest level – or outside the religion – which, in postulating a higher level, is simply creating its own religious view. Accordingly, Heim attacks Hick's search for a common essence or common end using the principle of incommensurability. For him, the different religious traditions are essentially incommensurable. Indeed, the very search for a common end, upon which all agree, diminishes the true diversity and differences between traditions, sometimes resulting in conflict.[10] Heim charges that universalistic pluralism's search for a common essence or common end debases the richness and particularity of religions.

Based on the rejection of a common end, Heim insists on "particularistic commitments."[11] He believes, "Faiths do not survive without a particular-

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[9] Heim, *Salvations*, 105.

[10] Ibid., 196.

[11] Ibid., 153.

istic appeal."[12] He is firmly convinced that "the attitudes and concerns that motivate pluralistic theologies can be best advanced on particularistic grounds,"[13] and that the diversity of religious ends "can be interpreted and defended on Christian grounds."[14]

This rejection of Hick does not mean that Heim eschews his moral concerns. Heim shares Hick's moral revulsion against imperialism and religious arrogance, even as he does not hide his distaste for a solution that looks like Hickian pluralism. His argument is that Hick's pluralism is "static." "It has no future and no depth. It does not lack a future in the sense that it can be expected to disappear."[15] That means, Hick's universalistic pluralism to Heim's eyes is doomed to failure or at least is not promising.

2. Heim's Pluralism

Heim is often regarded by those nervous about any Christian departure from exclusivism as a champion in his attack on Hick's pluralism, with the idea being that if he attacks pluralism, then he must be opposed to it. However, this is a superficial reading of Heim's particularism. In all fairness, it must be recognized that Heim does not intend to reject all forms of pluralism, and in fact identifies as a religious pluralist. What he does promote is a particularistic pluralism, which he calls "a real pluralism,"[16] **"**pluralistic inclusivism" or "inclusivistic pluralism," a pluralism of religious roads going up various mountain peaks of salvation.

His intent is to seek balance between recognizing legitimate and genuine values in other religious traditions and continuing to regard one's own tradition as normative and definitive. In his words, "the attempt to deal fruitfully with religious pluralism is in large measure the struggle to balance these insights."[17] This is an important contribution to contemporary discussions on pluralism.

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[12] Ibid., 190.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.,184.
[15] Ibid., 218.
[16] Heim. *Salvations*, 144.
[17] Ibid., 1.

Heim's particularistic pluralism comes out of a fundamental critique of universalistic pluralism in its three most common forms: that which insists that there is no diversity in the religious object (Hick); that which divests the human religious attitude of diversity (Smith); or that which is founded on the primary religious function (Knitter).[18] Heim places the diversity of religious goals and salvations at the center of his framework. His particularistic pluralism, namely his **"**more pluralistic hypothesis**,**" conveys the idea that there are various realities "which are religiously significant and which ground diverse religious fulfillments (for instance, both some form of personal deity and a condition similar to that described as Nirvana)."[19] In this sense, to use Paul Griffith's phrase, Heim's pluralism is "a kind of religious particularism."[20]

From Heim's point of view, each religious tradition is a "one and only," which means that each tradition's salvation is different from the others.

> We may speculate about convergences on a metaphysical plane between, say Buddhist 'saints' and Jewish 'saints.' We may be able to specify some similarities in the effects of their practices. However, the premise of the whole discussion is that we have no difficulty generally distinguishing between them to begin with, for they are embedded in communities, practice, image, and doctrines that are distinct. If we leave aside for the moment salivation as a postmortem or transhistorical state, it would seem that religious traditions are simply, descriptively exclusivist. To know one is not to know the others. Each is a "one and only:" their salvations are many. [21]

Whereas Hick's pluralism is committed to saying that "Sunyata" and "God" are mythological cultural forms that represent "the Real," Heim's particularistic pluralism presumes that "they are real religious ineffables available to their seekers."[22] That is, "there are different, real religious ends that are not Christian salvation at all."[23]

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[18] Ibid., 102.

[19] Ibid., 146.

[20] Paul J. Griffiths, "Beyond Pluralism," *First Things* 59 (January 1996).

[21] Heim, *Salvations*, 5.

[22] Ibid., 154.

[23] S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends,* Grand Rapids Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 2001, 3.

What does Heim mean by "a religious end"? His answer is phenomenological: "A religious end or aim is defined by a set of practices, images, stories, and concepts," which "provides material for a thorough pattern of life," which is "understood to be constitutive of final human fulfillment and/or to be the sole means of achieving that fulfillment," and which "is in practice exclusive of at least some alternative options."[24] Heim emphases that different religions have different goals — there are many mountain tops, many salvations.

Heim uses a travel analogy to illustrate this position. Going from Washington DC to New York, for example, is very different from going to Honolulu from the same starting point. The "means" to get to these places will vary, too. One cannot take a Greyhound bus to Honolulu. While various itineraries may share the abstract notion of "travel" in common, the details of such travel are by no means "mere" details; on the contrary, they become very significant and speak directly to the nature of the journey.

Heim emphasizes that his particularism provides "a long-term prescription for careful interaction with other religious traditions."[25] He identifies his particularism as "the real pluralism," which "means that we live with each other and accept each other though we see clearly that we are not the same. America is a pluralistic nation, not because underneath cosmetic appearances we all think and feel and act the same, but because we do not. There are real differences in our families, our histories, and our convictions about ultimate matters. True pluralism does not mean coming to terms with my Buddhist neighbor by affirming that underneath it all we believe exactly the same thing. If that is so, we are not really distinct and plural. Pluralism means living with distinction, conflicting answers about what is most determinative for our lives."[26]

Heim here caricatures Hick's position by failing to recognize the distinction between what Griffin calls Hick's generic pluralism, which is truly pluralistic in saying that all religions can provide genuine salvation, and Hick's particular theory about how to develop a theology of pluralism. Hick is partly to blame for this confusion in that he calls his particular theory "the pluralistic hypothesis." It was really a hypothesis as to the best theology of pluralism. His pluralistic hypothesis as such is that all religions provide sav-

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[24] Ibid., 21.

[25] Heim, *Salvations*, 228.

[26] Heim, *Is Christ the Only Way*? Valley Forge Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1985, 29.

ing truths and values. Hick knows that pluralism does not mean that all religions say the same thing. But it does mean that Hindu and Buddhist neighbors have access to genuine salvation through their religions. The difference between Hick and Heim is that, for Heim, they have access to different salvations; whereas for Hick they have access to the same salvation – namely that of shifting from an ego-centered to a Reality-centered perspective – in different ways.

Through Heim's approach to salvation, we can clearly see that differences and tensions are Heim's primary concerns, and that interests in similarities are, for him superficial or irrelevant. For Heim's particularistic pluralism, "the diversity of views about religious diversity is, like religious diversity itself, rationally justified and, therefore, reasonably enduring."[27] Into the foreseeable future, there will be different views about diversity in tension with one another. There is, to a great extent, no room in Heim's pluralism for commonality. Heim almost totally denies any "common ground" among different religions and rejects any search for "some common religious platform"[28] and a "common starting point."[29] For Heim, "The more similar the aims, the more sharply contention arises over whether one path should supersede another."[30] Contrarily, "The more incommensurable religious ends appear, the less they contend for the same space."[31] For example, losing weight and learning Spanish are separate aims each with its distinct requirements. Though "they have less concretely in common, there is a proportionally smaller impetus to substitute one for the other."[32] For Heim, "these dynamics are key elements in understanding religious conflict and the possibilities for mutual understanding."[33]

Heim is convinced that his hypothesis of multiple religious ends affirms the reality of different experiential states of religious fulfillment. He stresses that "the way forward in religious pluralism is to focus on the substance of the

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[27] Heim, *Salvations*, 143.

[28] Ibid., 201.

[29] Ibid., 205.

[30] Heim, "Saving the Particulars: Religious Experience and Religious Ends." *Religious Studies* 36 (2000): 446.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

particular possibilities advanced in the varying traditions."[34] Accordingly his "more pluralistic hypothesis" is simply to point out that "there can be a variety of actual but different religious fulfillments, salvations."[35]

According to Heim, his "more pluralistic model" or his particularistic pluralism has the following five advantages:

First, it allows Christianity to recognize truth, value and difference in other traditions within the context of a Christian-Trinitarian stance. In Heim's words, his model allows "the fullest legitimate recognition of the distinctive qualities (those that finally resist assimilation) of the positive religious aims of other faiths."[36] Second, it provides better motivation for inter-religious dialogue by supporting the one and only testimony of various traditions. Third, it ensures that religion remains open to criticism and challenge. Fourth, it calls upon us to be humble and open by realizing that it is impossible to grasp fully the experience of another person's religion except from the inside. Fifth and finally, it provides a more positive framework for the practical and ethical goals of current pluralist theologies.[37] In contrast with universal pluralists who either "are committed to limiting their attribution of truth to what is convergent" or "are almost equally inclined to stress the truth of what is similar … and to deny validity to what is different," Heim insists that "a perspective is needed which can recognize the effective truth of what is truly other."[38]

Heim's perspective can be well understood if we consider it in light of the contemporary deconstructionist perspectives introduced earlier. Deconstructive perspectives often endorse a philosophical framework we might call "orientational pluralism." This way of thinking is based on the work of philosopher Nicholas Rescher, according to which the diversity of philosophical systems is not a problem but a solution. For Rescher, "from Hegel's day to ours, philosophers of all persuasions have seen the strife of systems as something to be overcome—somehow to be put behind us once and for all. Some, following Hegel himself—that Napoleon of Philosophy—use the approach of conquest and annexation, of seeking to absorb all of philosophy into one great

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[34] Heim, *Salvations*, 154.

[35] Ibid., 131.

[36] Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 6.

[37] Edward H. Schroeder, "Salvation: Truth and Difference in Religion by S. Mark Heim," *Missiology* No.2 (April, 1997), 218.

[38] Heim, *Salvations,* 124.

synthesis."[39] Rescher's "orientational pluralism," by contrast, demands "an individual philosopher's dedication to a particular present position."[40] From the perspective of orientational pluralism, the "main mission" of philosophy is to define "where I stand," to determine my own position in light of alternatives.[41] Rescher even stresses, "If we give up on the pursuit of our truth, we give up the pursuit of the truth itself."[42] Influenced by such an orientational pluralism, Heim claims that "all arguments are in fact based on "particularistic commitments."[43] His pluralistic hypothesis is also "rooted in an evaluative orientation."[44] "Whose basis of judgment am I to privilege if not my own?"[45] he questions. From this point of view, it is natural for Heim to challenge any claim to the discovery of commonalities of reason or goals. Like so many deconstructionists, he begins and ends with the image of perspectives in conflict.

Without a doubt, Heim's particularistic pluralism is thought provoking and stimulating. Heim helps us to realize the tension between particular claims and universal claims. He is trying to design a scheme to reconcile the impasse between exclusivism and respect for other religions. According to his scheme, each religion can view its tradition's religious ultimate at center and still be willing "to entertain the possibility that penultimate goods could endure as the religious fulfillments of those who pursue various religious ends."[46] Heim trusts that his "real pluralism" can solve this problem, because his framework is open enough both to maintain one religion's universal claims and to recognize those of others. In Heim's case, the claim most important to him is the supremacy of Christ. In his recent book, *The Depth of the Riches*, Heim clearly states, "This book affirms the legitimacy of Christian confession of Christ as the one decisive savior of the world." But at the same time, it also affirms that "other religious traditions truthfully hold out reli-

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[39] Rescher, *The Strife of Systems: An Essay on the Grounds and Implications of Philosophical Diversity*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. 1985, 276-77.

[40] Ibid., 200.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 201.

[43] Heim, *Salvations*, 153.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 152.

gious ends which their adherents might realize as alternatives to communion with God in Christ."[47]

The question is, how can Heim consistently hold to both of these commitments? How can he be both faithful to the "one and only" dimension of his faith and honor truth, virtue and integrity in other religious traditions? From his point of view, "the key to such an effort consists in an emphasis on the fulfillment of various religious ends."[48] The mission he sets for himself is to challenge people to focus on genuine religious differences. That is to say, religions may be deeply and genuinely different; there may be many different religious ends, many different and incommensurable salvations. In this way, Heim believes he is advocating a genuine pluralism. Does he succeed? I will consider this question in my next section.

3. Evaluating Heim

Heim's Inclusivism

My critique of Heim, first of all, focuses on his inclusivism. Heim has never tried to hide this label, publicly claiming: "I am a convinced inclusivist."[49] David Ray Griffin is helpful in understanding the ambiguities of the term inclusivism as used by Heim. As Griffin explains, for many Christian theologians "inclusivism" is a soteriological doctrine that "asserts that Christianity is the only religion in full possession of saving truth, so that whatever religious truths are found in other religions are already included in Christianity. And it asserts that although all salvation comes through Jesus Christ, people in other religions can be included in this salvation."[50] But considering his openness to and, indeed, celebration of diversity, Griffin claims that Heim's inclusivism "no longer has a soteriological meaning." Instead, says Griffin, it has only "an epistemic meaning**,**" referring to the fact that "we necessarily regard the grounds of our own judgments as the best."[51]

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[47] Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 7.

[48] Heim, *Salvations,* 145.

[49] Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 8.

[50] Griffin, *Deep Religious Pluralism*, 35.

[51] Ibid., 36.

My study has shown that Griffin's comments on Heim are correct if we focus on Heim's position in his book, *Salvations.* However, a careful reading of Heim's later book, *The Depth of the Riches*, demonstrates that inclusivism for Heim also has a soteriological meaning. "Salvation" in Heim is defined as "communion with God and God's creatures through Christ Jesus."[52] "The communion with God is the truly ultimate goal offered to all human beings."[53]

According to Heim, "The possibility of a more thoroughgoing diversity in the future of humanity is in some measure authorized by the Trinitarian vision of God and a notion of the divine plenitude. That is, it rests on the conviction that the most emphatic no of the human creature to the end of loving communion with God meets always some variation of God's merciful yes to creation."[54] Here Heim finds the foundation for pluralism in the Christian view of the triune God.

Thus Heim's inclusivism, even in its soteriological meaning, is no accident. It is closely related to the latent universalism underlying the particularism talk. Heim asserts that there is "God's universal saving will . . . universal accessibility of salvation . . . universal freedom to choose."[55] According to Heim, "religious diversity honors the freedom of persons to relate to God as they choose, to value the dimensions of divinity on their own terms, and to select the human end they wish."[56] Because "God's saving will offers all the opportunity for communion in the triune life through Christ. But that same saving will also brings to perfection each true relation with God that a person may freely choose as a final end. And beyond this, God brings the ensemble of such ends and choices to its own pluralistic perfection, integrating the chosen relations and goods so as to create the richest satisfaction of each and all under the terms of their desired fulfillments."[57] Heim insists that various "religious traditions are part of God's providential purpose."[58] "The diversity of religious ends provides an extraordinary picture of the mercy and providential

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[52] Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 19.

[53] Ibid., 243.

[54] Heim, *Salvations*, 163.

[55] Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 255.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 263-4.

[58] Ibid., 291.

richness of God."[59] For Heim, a non-Christian's only hope of attaining the highest good is eventually, probably after death, to accept Christ as lord and savior, having come to this choice partially prepared by his or her this-life religion.

This type of thinking, according to Hick "is indistinguishable from the older form of inclusivism."[60] In Knitter's models, it exemplifies a certain kind of exclusivism. Perhaps Heim does not recognize the inconsistency in a position in which he affirms a profound pluralism, a real pluralism of differences based on the defining principle of different ends, yet, on the other hand, he denies the very pluralism he affirms by advocating as the ultimate end the Christian doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ. In any case these inconsistencies are worth spelling out, on at least on two levels.

First, by insisting on the idea that there is "universal accessibility of salvation," Heim contradicts his own particularism according to which there is nothing universal. It seems Heim has found "an Archimedean point that stands outside the rush and change and uncertainty of history."[61] This point – this universal ground – is the triune God. Of course, God can be a universal ontological ground, without being a universal epistemic ground. It is possible that God is a reality by whom all humans are loved regardless of their religions, even as different religions are oriented toward ultimates that are different from God, and even as they can be saved in certain ways, relative to these different ultimates. A Buddhist might be saved by understanding interconnectedness and impermanence, for example, while a Christian might be saved by faith in God, and yet the God in whom the Christian believes may be present in the life of the Buddhist, just as the ultimacy of interconnectedness may be embodied in the life of a Christian. The ultimate that the Christian knows, and the ultimate that the Buddhist knows are different, even as both ultimates are available to each of them and, in some ways, present to them.

Nevertheless, even if Heim is pointing only toward this epistemic difference, he implies that, if the Buddhist truly understood the divine order and was given information about the Christian message, he or she would become

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[59] Ibid., 264.

[60] John Hick, "Book review: *The Depth of the Riches* by Heim." *Religion and Theology*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (September 2001).

[61] Paul F Knitter, "Theocentric Christology: Defended and Transcended." In *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 24:1, Winter 1987, 44.

a Christian, which of course implies that Buddhist salvation is not fully saving. He stresses that "Christians can understand the distinctive religious truth of other religions as rooted in connections with real dimensions of the triune God."[62] But he does not seem as open to the possibility that other religions might, in their ways, interpret Christianity as rooted in their own experiences of ultimacy. The appeal to universals seems one-way. In an article entitled "A Trinitarian View of Religious Pluralism: God's Diversity," Heim clearly expresses the chief concern of his hypothesis of multiple religious ends: "My interest in the hypothesis of multiple religious ends is grounded in part in the way that it validates particularistic Christian confession, but as such the hypothesis also supports those in other religious traditions who are committed to the distinctive truth of their confession. I believe that the true order for religious diversity is rooted in the triune God of Christian confession."[63]

Of course, Heim has his critics. Some scholars, like Jacques Dupuis, S.J**.** for example, doubt that such a foundation is a "solid" one: "Much less does the divine communion suffice to sustain the possibility of an 'orientational pluralism' between the various traditions."[64] Kevin Kim also doubts that Heim has successfully reconciled the hegemonic claims of conservative (usually exclusivistic) religiosity with his orientational pluralistic paradigm: "I don't see how he can have it both ways. Heim is a committed conservative Christian; as such, he *must* believe that the Trinitarian filter through which he sees other faiths is *normative.* He must also believe that other, non-Christian religions are in error and that their members have to be brought into the Christian fold."[65] The question from Heim's fellow Christians is: "Given the pluralism of paths going up the Christian mountain, why pick 'communion with the triune God' as the name tag at the top where the paths meet? Why not a more first-order term from the Christian Scriptures themselves, such as,

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[62] S. Mark Heim, "A Trinitarian View of Religious Pluralism: God's diversity." *Christian Century* (January 24, 2001) 17.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1997, 312.

[65] Kevin Kim, "Wrestling with S. Mark Heim."
http://bighominid.blogspot.com/2004/09/wrestling-with-s-mark-heim.html.

forgiveness (the synoptics), or reconciliation (Paul), or the life that lasts (John)?"[66]

Second, and more important, Heim operates with a peculiarly Western view of freedom by assuming that the great majority of people have freely chosen their religion. What he overlooks is that most people do not have the freedom to choose their traditions. "They have nearly always inherited it, grown up within it, and been formed by it, so that it fits them and they fit it."[67] The opportunity to make a free choice is taken for granted by an educated Western elite when, in fact, it is a recent development open to very few. Can a Tibetan, Thai, or Burmese Buddhist, or most of the hundreds of millions of Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Jains or Taoists, be said to have deliberately chosen the religious end available to them in deliberate preference to the Christian religious end? How then can the highest good of Christian salvation realistically be said to be accessible to that large majority of the human race who have lived in all the centuries (including those before Christ) in complete ignorance of the Christian message and/or within other religious traditions which have formed their relationship to the Ultimate in other ways? According to Hick, Heim's assumption that everyone has freely chosen either the Christian or some other religious (or secular) end "ignores in an astonishing way the realities of human life and history."[68]

It is clear that Heim is dissatisfied with the claims of universalistic pluralism, which he takes to be, ultimately, conceptually incoherent. He offers what he regards as a richer and more generous inclusivism. His proposal, as Hick remarks, "is certainly a great advance on the exclusivism which some of his fellow evangelicals find it so hard to abandon."[69] But no matter how much richer and more interesting his inclusivism is than traditional inclusivism, "it is in the end," as Hick acutely points out, "less generous and less inclusive than the traditional version."[70]

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[66] Schroeder, "Salvation: Truth and Difference in Religion by S. Mark Heim," 218-219.

[67] Hick, "Book Review: *The Depth of the Riches*."

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

Heim's Implicit Exclusivism

Heim is confident that, by proposing his religious particularism, his "more pluralistic hypothesis" has overtaken Hickian pluralism. However, Heim's support for a variant of exclusivism that says that other religions do not provide ultimate salvation unless they involve encounters with the triune God seems to not give us pluralism at all, but, at most, a heightened sense of religious differences. Observers will naturally ask: How can one hold genuine respect for other religions and, at the same time, still hold an exclusivistic stance? Heim states, "Though we recognize there are other religious perspectives from which varying conclusions can be reached, it is appropriate for each to make the case for the universal and preferable validity of its perspective."[71]

Although Heim stresses that his particularism does not fit easily into the traditional Christian theological framework (he challenges people to think imaginatively in order to understand his position),[72] we still can discern in his approach the remnants of traditional Christian exclusivism.

This can be understood more carefully if we consider another tension in Heim, namely his attitude toward pluralism itself. Griffin has found a paradox in Heim's position: Heim identifies himself as a pluralist and yet offers destructive criticisms seemingly every variety of pluralism.[73] Griffin goes on to provide an explanation for these inconsistencies. Heim's rejection of pluralism lies in his equating pluralism in general with Hick's version in particular.[74] Griffin correctly accuses Heim of the logical mistake of taking the part for the whole.

Here I want to contribute another explanation for Heim's rejection of pluralism. As early as 1985, Heim argued for an exclusivist Christology in *Is Christ the Only Way*?[75] It is this insistence on exclusivism that partly explains why Heim speaks negatively of "pluralism" and "the pluralists."[76] At the end of *Salvations* he points out that pluralistic theologies require from devotees in

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[71] Heim, *Salvations*, 176.

[72] Heim, *Salvations*, 228.

[73] Griffin, *Deep Religious Pluralism*, 35.

[74] Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Differential," 23.

[75] Heim, *Is Christ the Only Way?*

[76] Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Differential."

any tradition a radical and one-time act of renunciation of exclusivism. "I would certainly be the last one to diminish the significance (negative, in my view) of this demand!"[77] Heim insists that all religious traditions are simply descriptively exclusive. "I have argued that all theories of religion are either exclusivist or inclusivist in nature."[78] To know one is not to know the others. "Each is a one and only."[79] In his more recent book, *The Depth of the Riches,* he reiterates this point as follows: "If we take religions in their thickest historical, empirical description, then "one and only" judgment appears inevitable, almost tautological. In this life, there is no way to participate in the distinctive dimensions of Buddhist religious fulfillment but the Buddhist path. The only way to Jewish fulfillment is the Jewish way. The same is true of each tradition."[80]

After presenting the view that the exclusivistic position is central to the structure of any religious faith, Heim continues, "There are of course interesting cases of the combination of religious traditions: cases where people follow both Buddhist and Confucian paths, for instance. This only reinforces my point. Were they not exclusivist, there would be no need to follow two, since all the same ends could be achieved in either."[81] The point, here, seems to be stretched past the logical limit, since Heim has assumed the difference of ends based on the 'thick' texture of historically conditioned religious practices until he confronts one that doesn't conform to his model. Thus, he commits the same act of imperialist interpretation that he accuses Hick of.

In response to the call of pluralists like Knitter for moving away "from insistence on the superiority or finality of Christ and Christianity toward recognition of the independent validity of other ways," Heim insists, "the 'finality of Christ' and the 'independent validity of other ways' are not mutually exclusive. One need not be given up for the sake of the other unless we insist there can be only one effective religious goal."[82]

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[77] Heim*, Salvations*, 228.
[78] Ibid., 152.
[79] Heim, "Toward a Theological Framework for Religious Diversity." In *Insights* 107:1 (1991), 19.
[80] Heim, *The Depth of The Riches*, 27.
[81] Heim, "Toward a Theological Framework for Religious Diversity." 19.
[82] Heim, *Salvations,* 3.

Heim posits that each religion can conceive its own end as the only ultimate one while still recognizing that others are pursuing genuine — but only penultimate — ends. For Heim, "To realize something other than communion with the triune God and with other creatures through Christ is to achieve a lesser good."[83] That is, to Heim's mind, Christian salvation is the only truly ultimate end, all the others being inferior. "The other religion's end is viewed in a moderately positive light as a penultimate condition, but viewed as loss if made a final goal."[84] For example, "the Buddhism end" as "a kind of compassionate selflessness" is to Heim's eyes just "an appropriate preparation for relation with God."[85] He adds that other traditions are also free to judge Christianity "as penultimate or distorted."[86] "Each regards the other's goal as penultimate."[87] This causes us to wonder if Heim's pluralism can engender genuine respect for other religions. Contrary to his own intentions, it seems instead to lead to a kind of paternalism where other religions are conceived as good but inferior. This way of viewing other religions is a form of exclusivism under the guise of pluralism. As we have seen in earlier chapters, in certain historical circumstances such exclusivism can contribute to colonialism and religiously motivated wars.

Heim does not deny this link with exclusivism. He equates exclusiveness with uniqueness and believes that an exclusivist claim is embedded in every religious tradition: "religious traditions are simply, descriptively exclusive." He stresses in *Salvations:*

> I have done my best to make clear that the sense in which any religious tradition's exclusivist dimension, its presumption that it constitutes "one and only" path toward a distinctive—rather than generic—religious end is valid. I defend a claim which in the current climate is seen as highly paradoxical: respect for these exclusivist dimensions is the necessary correlative of respect for the diversity of faith traditions in their concrete, historical actuality.[88]

Heim considers the exclusivist conviction that one follows the most true religion, the superior religion, is part of the claim that it is also the one that is the most inclusive, and that this claim is not only "defensible" but also

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[83] Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 44.

[84] Heim, "Saving the Particulars: Religious Experience and Religious Ends," 449.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 291.

[87] Heim, "Saving the Particulars: Religious Experience and Religious Ends," 450.

[88] Heim, *Salvations,* 226.

"inescapable" given the way religions actually live.[89] In other words, from his perspective, it is possible to say that one's religion excludes all others, because it is the most inclusive of religions, and other religions are less inclusive or not inclusive at all. In this way it is superior to all others and excludes them.

4. Discussions of Heim's Exclusivism

Heim makes no secret of his defense of exclusivism. Some scholars, both Western and Eastern, have commented on this. As Kevin Neidlinger from Seoul, Korea, remarks, "While I appreciate Heim's very significant contribution to the overall discussion of pluralism and his very clear (if overly punishing) critiques of Hick, I finished the book with a sense that Heim, an evangelical Protestant, arrived at his pluralistic proposal merely as a way to protect his evangelicalism, to which he still stubbornly cleaves."[90] For Neidlinger, Heim's attachment to exclusivism is precisely what Hick has been fighting against. Following the same train of thought, Knitter calls Heim an "anonymous foundationalist"[91] and suspects that Heim has never felt the power of truth in non-Christian religions. To Thomas Dean, Heim requires "a *foundationalist* solution to inter-religious dialogue."[92]

Heim's exclusive vision has received praise from some Christians. Gerald McDermott says, due to Heim's "true pluralism" [we would say, new exclusivism], Christians can now say, with perhaps more resolution than before, that although there may indeed be religious fulfillment through other religions, "the utmost of religious fulfillment comes only through Christ."[93] Of course, to be fair, the exclusivism Heim is defending is a new form that takes on the guise of particularism. Put differently, Heim is trying to defend exclusivism by reliance on the idea of "saving the particulars." Hick points out that

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[89] Ibid., 227.

[90] Kevin Kim, "My review of Heim's ***Salvations*** and more on pluralism." http://bighominid.blogspot.com/2003/12/my-review-of-heims-salvations-and-more.html

[91] Knitter, "Theocentric Christology: Defended and Transcended," 44.

[92] Thomas Dean, "The Conflict of Christologies: A Response to S. Mark Heim." In *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 24:1(Winter 1987), 29.

[93] Gerald R. McDermott, "True Pluralism." Christmas/Epiphany 2001-2002. see http://www.valpo.edu/creset/chr01mcd.html

Heim's hypothesis represents a new form of exclusivism in which "each religion can regard its own end as the only ultimate one whilst recognizing that the others are pursuing genuine but only penultimate ends."[94] It became evident that Heim no longer says that there are two or more ultimates. That means that now he agrees with Hick, whom he had earlier criticized on this point.

Inherent in Heim's theory, though, is the conviction that Christianity represents the best and most comprehensive ultimate end. Although it is kinder than the traditional form of exclusivism, it still retains its essence. Not only is it considerably less favorable to people of other faiths, but it also relegates them to a lower level, arriving at lesser ends and forfeiting the supreme good. Heim says that, "Insofar as alternative ends lack or rule out real dimensions of communion with the triune God, they embody some measure of what Christian tradition regards as loss or damnation."[95] According to Paul Griffith's interpretation, although Heim insists that Christians can recognize alternate non-Christian religious ends and different salvations, being an orthodox Christian, he must make the judgment that "such alternate non-Christian religious ends are subordinate to the Christian end, finally to be encompassed by it."[96]

Due to his new formulation of the exclusivist tendency, Heim's particularism can be called exclusive particularism. This raises a serious contradiction. On the one hand, he stresses a greater respect than the older exclusivism for non-Christian religions by recognizing other religious ends. On the other hand, he relegates other traditions to a subordinate position in comparison to the Christian end. This contradiction is fatal to his earlier claim to a genuine pluralism.

Heim is not alone in insisting on a new exclusivist stance. Many scholars hold the same position in the name of particularism: Gavin D'Costa**,** *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions***;** John Sanders**,** *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*; Ronald H. Hash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*; and Brad Stetson, *Pluralism*

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[94] Hick, "Book Review: S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*.

[95] Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 182.

[96] Griffiths, "Beyond Pluralism," 3.

and Particularity in Religious Belief.[97] Netland summarizes Christian exclusivism as involving the following four concepts: (1) Jesus Christ is the unique Incarnation of God, fully God and fully man; (2) only through the person and work of Jesus Christ is there any possibility of salvation; (3) the Bible is God's unique written revelation, and thus true and authoritative; and (4) where the claims of Scripture are incompatible with those of other faiths, the latter are to be rejected as false.[98] According to Netland, religious exclusivism is not exclusively Christian, but only one example of an element present in many other religions. Every religious tradition, he stresses, is exclusivist insofar as one of its central beliefs is that the central affirmation of its own faith is true and that claims of other religions that are incompatible with its own claim are false.[99]

While I appreciate Heim's project of defending and preserving religious diversity, particularity and uniqueness, and trying to reconcile the tension that this causes between the particular and the universal, I am convinced that his exclusivistic framework is not only theoretically and historically untenable, but also morally suspect.

It goes without saying that to insist on "the finality of Christ" is to insist on the superiority of Christianity. This insistence on the superiority of Christianity has to lead to devaluing or belittling other religious traditions, and there is no reason to think this past history won't be repeated in the future if one holds to the belief of the superiority of Christianity. As long as Christians continue to promulgate the superiority of their religion over other religions, it will inevitably absolutize itself and downplay others. There will, therefore, be no room for the "independent validity of other ways" that Heim evidently values. From the beginning of their history, Christian institutions have never acknowledged the independent validity of other religions, instead building the Church on the claim that Christianity supersedes any other religious traditions.

Given this real context, it is apparent that Heim's position cannot straddle pluralism and exclusivism. Heim's defense of exclusivism can be viewed

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[97] Cited in Rose, *Knowing the Real: John Hick on the Cognitivity of Religions and Religious Pluralism,* 123, n.25.

[98] Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989, 34.

[99] Netland, *Dissonant Voice*. 221-22.quoted in Rose, *Knowing the Real: John Hick on the Cognitivity of Religions and Religious Pluralism*, 105.

as an attempt to defend the purity of Christianity. He fears an erosion of Christian identity and of the extinction of Christian difference in the process of interaction with other religions. I call this "Heimian Anxiety." For Heim, "The dangers of over-assimilation are not just a theoretical loss of religious purity. A tradition may adapt itself to make achievement of its distinctive religious fulfillment more intelligible, plausible, and effective. But if it loses touch with a distinctive religious end at all, then its passing is assured."[100]

It is this anxiety that leads Heim to isolationism. Heim once complained that he was condemned as an isolationist because of his emphasis on particularity.[101] But as my survey shows, this is a fair charge, not in as much as it labels his entire theology, but in as much as the task of emphasizing the differences and the boundaries among religions ends up hardening and closing up those boundaries. He remarks, "Like the rest of history, the human religious story is a field within which there are thresholds of all sorts. The borders between the watersheds are indeed rarely sharp, but the regions they separate are often decisively different."[102] Here he uses the metaphor "watershed" to highlight the difference between traditions. "The watersheds these thresholds separate are distinct, and their characters different, corresponding to the diverse religious ends I have discussed."[103]

It is obvious that Heim tries to keep each religion in its separate place. He not only has no intention of deconstructing the exclusivist claim, but no interest in resolving the conflicts among religions. His particularism presupposes incommensurability among traditions; other religions are construed as kind of alien. The consequence is that "the necessity of dealing with truth claims and their significance for practice is minimized."[104] It is plain, therefore, that Heim is not interested in dialogue because it is not able to "create what is not there, nor eliminate what is central …We cannot add a once-for-all incarnation of God in Christ to Hinduism and still have Hinduism. We cannot add Buddhist Karma to the Christian will of God and still have Chris-

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[100] Heim, *Salvations,* 180.

[101] Ibid., 194.

[102] Heim, *Salvations*, 216.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Francis Schussler Fiorenza, "Christian Redemption between Colonialism and Pluralism." In *Reconstructing Christian Theology*. ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994, 298.

tianity."[105] Since Heim denies the commensurability among religions, he does not think their adherents can learn anything essential from the others. As Yong Huang rightly pointed out, "for Heim, since different religions are incommensurable, they have nothing, at least nothing essential, to learn from and teach to each other."[106]

5. A Process Alternative to Heim's Particularism

Heim's project as a particularist is to rebuild the boundaries between Christianity and other religions. He erects a roadblock to dialogue, mutual learning and mutual enrichment by highlighting exclusivism under the claim that he is simply being faithful as a pluralist to the exclusivism that constitutes the core of difference in all religions – as he interprets them. In this history, what is missing is, in fact, history – for Heim simply excludes from his set of examples the thousands of ways religions have, so to speak, swapped strands of each other's DNA. Buddhism could not have existed without Vedic beliefs, Christianity could not have existed without Jewish beliefs, and so on. These moments of exchange are not historically successive, either – while Christianity leant Islam at an early period a certain bent towards monotheism, Islam, in the Middle Ages, leant Christianity the subsumption of Aristotle to theology.

Outside of Heim's foreshortened historic narrative, I believe we need to counter and correct Heim on the theoretical level by turning to process. A process oriented pluralistic approach builds upon Heim's achievement and shows that particularity itself can be understood either relationally or atomistically. The process approach affirms the relational approach. It says that the actualities of the universe, the actual occasions, are all particular. However, it adds that their particularity is relational rather than atomistic, meaning they are inevitably composed of other particularities through their felt relations with other actualities. Furthermore, since all actual occasions embody eternal objects, the unique particularities of actual occasions exemplify common patterns and forms or potentialities – Whitehead calls them eternal objects – that have things in common even as they also have differences. An analogous ex-

[105] Heim, *Is Christ the Only Way*? 141.

[106] Yong Huang, "Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue: Beyond Universalism and Particularism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 37(1995): 137.

emplification applies to the world's religions. They can be particular yet influenced by one another and even composed of one another; and they can have common patterns.

In short, if the problem in Hick lies in his tendency to reduce the many world religions to perceptions of a single inexperienceable ultimate, the problem in Heim lies in his recoiling so far from Hick's position as to be unable to recognize that particularities need not be atomized; that some goals in religions may have areas of overlap; that religions can have different ultimates that are complementary rather than contradictory; and that dialogue itself can create relationships that were not present beforehand. A Whiteheadian pluralistic approach helps overcome these inconsistencies and adds depth and breadth to Heim's own internal agenda – namely, that of welcoming religious differences.

In the remainder of this chapter I want to develop these constructive ideas further under five general headings: the Importance of Panexperientialism and Hardcore Common Sense; the Primacy of Internal Relations; affirming Uniqueness without Exclusivism; linking Religion and Justice; and moving beyond Binary Thinking. The latter sets the stage for the final chapter of this work, which offers a uniquely Chinese version of Whiteheadian religious pluralism.

The Importance of Panexperientialism and Hardcore Common Sense

The idea that people of different religions are separated from one another by unbridgeable gulfs of language and culture is central to many deconstructive postmodern perspectives. This is because deconstructive perspectives typically reduce human experience to its cultural and linguistic dimensions; such that if two people speak different languages and come from different cultures, their experience is so profoundly shaped by that language and culture that they have nothing in common. Translation is the impossible act for the deconstructionist, which overlooks the importance of translation in the formation of religions. Often this assumption is followed by the idea that there is no common human essence, much less a common essence to religion. Heim agrees with many deconstructive postmodernists who, in Griffin's

words, "typically deny, whether explicitly or implicitly, that there is any common layer of experience."[107]

From the point of view of Whiteheadian religious pluralism, Heim is right in rejecting the kind of common essence among different religious traditions that Hickian universalists affirm. However, he is wrong to believe that a rejection of common essence in this sense requires a denial of commonalities. Process thinkers believe that there is a formal common essence, namely, the desire to be in harmony with the ultimate, understood, at least implicitly, as holy or sacred.

The basis of this affirmation is twofold. In a broad sense it lies in the doctrine of panexperientialism, which is promoted by process thinkers in general and Griffin in particular; more specifically it lies in the idea of hardcore commonsense notions.

Panexperientialism, according to Griffin, is the view that nature is actual and that "the ultimate units of nature are not vacuous but are something for themselves in the sense of having experience, however slight."[108] In this view "the ultimate units of the world contain experience."[109] This means that all actualities are, or are comprised of, occasions of experience. The actual world is, to borrow Whitehead's phrase, an "ocean of feeling."[110] Panexperientialism also means that the formal structure of experience in all beings is similar; otherwise the word "experience" would have no meaning. As explained in chapter four, that formal structure includes the process by which, in Whitehead's words, "the many become one, and are increased by one." A present moment of experience is an act of prehensive unification, where many data from the past are gathered into an immediate unity by an emerging subject; and when that immediacy perishes, the subject becomes a datum for subjects that come after it. Panexperientialism proposes that all individual actualities in the universe are acts of prehensive unification.

If panexperientialism is true, then there is something common between human beings and other beings in the world. In varying degrees, all genuine

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[107] David R. Griffin. et al, *Founders of Whiteheadian Pluralistic Philosophy: Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, 27.

[108] Ibid., 3.

[109] Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism*, 97.

[110] Whitehead. *Process and Reality*. 166.

actualities contain a capacity to respond experientially to other things, even if in an unconscious way, and this experience is an activity by which the many become one through prehensive unification. This leads to one of the most important Whiteheadian additions to the theory of pluralism, which is that human beings across the globe may differ in their cultural and linguistic traditions, but they share a common structure of experience – the many becoming one – and thus presuppose some of the dynamics of experience in their practical lives, even if they are not aware of them in their conscious minds. As Griffin puts it: "There is a set of experiences that we all do share in common, that are more fundamental than those dimensions of experience which are culturally conditioned," whether we are conscious of them or not.[111] People may speak different religious languages, but they share common experiences – deeper than their sense-experience and their diverse interpretations of the world – which bring them together: "there is a complex of elements which are in fact experienced by all people, regardless of whether this experience rises to the conscious level, and regardless of whether one verbally denies having this experience."[112]

As Griffin explains, the truth of panexperientialism is supported by both our direct experience and our indirect experience. On the one hand, panexperientialism is supported by the fact that among our fundamental experiences is the "direct feeling of the derivation of emotion from the body."[113] When we feel emotions, they arise within us from portions of our bodies. Sometimes they seem to come from our heads but at other times they seem to come from our stomachs, as when we have "gut feelings." And we are almost always shaped by emotional tones that come from the immediate past. For example, if we felt angry a second ago, we often feel angry now as well. We inherit the feelings from a second ago. While dualists might argue that such feelings of derivation from the body and immediate past are unique to human beings, it seems more rational and more consistent with evolutionary biology to say that they are consistent with what we know about the genesis of feeling in other forms of life. We can assume that other people, but also other living beings, have the same structure of experience.

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[111] Griffin, "Can Christianity Learn from Other Religions, unpub" 16.

[112] Ibid., 10.

[113] Whitehead. *Mode of Thought*, New York: Macmillan, 1938, 159-60.

In addition, panexperientialism is supported by the secondary features of consciousness. As Whitehead puts it in *Process and Reality*, "consciousness presupposes experience, and not experience consciousness."[114] This means that, as we act in the world with help from consciousness, we are inevitably shaped by pre-conscious forms of experience that provide parameters for our conscious life. From these parameters there emerge notions that are inevitably presupposed in our practical lives. As Griffin explains, "They are acknowledged in practice by everyone, even if they are denied verbally."[115] Griffin terms them "hard-core commonsense notions" because "they are common to all humanity."[116] Included among the hard-core notions common to all humanity, Griffin names the following:

- *that the person has freedom, in the sense of some power for self-determination;*
- *that there is an actual world beyond the person's present experience which exists independently of and exerts causal efficacy upon that person's interpretive perception of it;*
- *that one's interpretive ideas are true to the degree that they correspond to that independently existing world;*
- *that, for at least some events, a distinction exists between what happened and better and/or worse things that could have happened.*

All of these notions, Griffin believes, are common to all humanity and "presupposed in practice by everyone."[117]

If we accept Griffin's point of view, then Heim's denial of commonalities is untenable, as there are, in fact, common structures of experience, as embodied in the act of prehensive unification that can be counted on. Heim fails to take into account hard-core commonsense notions that are undeniable in practice. This means that Heim is wrong to think that religions are reducible to different ways of speaking (linguistic systems) and different cultural

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[114] Whitehead. *Process and Reality*. 53.

[115] Griffin, with William A. Beardslee and Joe Holland, *Varieties of Postmodern Theology*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, 35.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid., 36.

particularities. Rather they emerge from some common forms of experience, and their respective doctrines can be considered in light of their abilities to reveal or conceal (or both) certain aspects of a commonly experienced world.

If there is a common world to which different religious traditions are responding, then there are religious commonalities that can be called upon to bring religions together to face common problems, even if there are differences in the specific insights about the world different religions bring to the table. There is much more to talk about than formal differences of belief when the topics entail such religiously vital matter as violence and poverty, environmental destruction and consumerism. There is no need to agree on matters of doctrine before jointly facing these problems. For process thinkers, although the common problems and questions that arise out of suffering do not automatically lead to common answers, they do provide a starting place where "common answers might be worked out."[118] Jeannine Hill Fletcher shares the same concern when she writes "In the interconnected world of the twenty-first century, persons cannot afford to forgo conversations that would lead to cooperation."[119] It must be noted that Whiteheadian thinkers do not deny the existence and value of certain kinds of competition. For example, when claims of truth are contradictory, philosophers and theologians can rightly argue for one view over another in a competitive way. This work does just this: it argues for constructive pluralism, which constructs commonalities in the context of plural ways, over deconstructive pluralism, which clings to boundaries as the only way to protect differences. The latter concedes that there are multiple ultimates rather than one ultimate, but it also seeks to affirm the insights of positions with which it disagrees in as much as it concedes the contexts in which they make sense. The question, of course, is whether those disagreements need be ultimately contradictory, or whether different ultimates can find one overarching complementary position, as for instance the seemingly formal position of conceding the validity of the contexts, the structures of experience, in which some end – salvation in Christ, or the absolute surrender of desire in Buddhism – takes shape. Such a complementary position affirms the insights of others and seeks to find, on the pan-

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[118] Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 2002, 232.

[119] Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation? A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism*. New York: Continuum, 2005, 77.

experiential level, a basis for turning competitive or contradictory claims into complementary truths of different points of view. This illustrates a more general tendency in process thought: to prefer cooperation over competition, collegiality over antagonism, persuasion over coercion, non-violence over violence. When compared with competition, cooperation is "more basic." In Griffin's words, "To have a postmodern consciousness is to see and feel the primacy of cooperation, mutual assistance, and noncoercive relations."[120]

Process thinkers emphasize the primacy of cooperation because they believe that, amid their differences, religions participate in a common structure of existence and in common forms of human experience. Interestingly, Heim does the same. Although he denies any commonality and universality, he acknowledges that "obviously, the universe does have some determinate character, and the realization of diverse ends take place within a single order."[121] When he acknowledges there is "some determinate character" and "single order" in the universe, he is acknowledging that there is something common or universal. Moreover, while Heim emphasizes religious particularity, diversity, and incommensurability, and strongly denies any commonality among different religions due to cultural and linguistic differences, he nevertheless resembles Hick in a certain way. As Fletcher points out, like Hick he refers to "the religions" as "collective entities" to construct "his discussion of diverse religious ends."[122] This means that he believes there is something in common among different religions. Otherwise, he would not call them "religions."

A more careful inspection shows that Heim relies on the deconstructive postmodernist argument to make his point, which is against any metanarrative and emphasizes irreducible difference and immensurability due to specific cultural historical contexts. He writes, "In outlining my view I have leaned heavily on some 'postmodern' critique."[123]

However, even here there is a kind of presumed commonality. When deconstructive thinkers criticize metanarratives they presume that criticism is appropriate to all cultures. In other words, when deconstructive postmodernists claim that nothing exists but difference, their claim is itself a kind of

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[120] Griffin, "Peace and Postmodern Paradigm." in *Spirituality and Society*, 146.

[121] Heim, "Saving the Particulars: Religious Experience and Religious Ends," 446.

[122] Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 80.

[123] Heim, *Salvations*, 213.

metanarrative. As Kim points out, "Ironically, Heim employs a totalizing metanarrative to drive his anti-totalizing point home, thereby undermining his entire argument."[124]

Unlike Heim who only sees the religious particularity and difference, process thinkers, based on the doctrines of panexperientialism and hardcore common sense, also emphasize the commonality among different religions while taking the religious diversity seriously. According to Griffin, all religions involve "the desire to be in harmony with ultimate."[125] This is something that different traditions have in common, although their understanding of ultimate reality may differ. The Christian wants to be in harmony with God; the Muslim with the will of Allah; the Confucian with the Mandate of Heaven; the Taoist with the supreme Tao; the Buddhist with Nirvana, Emptiness, or the Dharma….[126] This to some extent provides a common ground for mutual understanding and conversation among religions amid, not apart from, their differences and uniqueness.

The Primacy of Internal Relations

In section 3, I discussed Heim's appreciation of isolated states, in which each religious group follows its own agenda and tells its own story. His emphasis on particularity and differences among religions encouraged members of each religion to retreat into their own ghettoes. I explained how such a retreat can easily lead to religious isolationism or separatism. Separatism is based on the belief that everything is composed of isolated, autonomous units that have little if any connection with one another. This reflects the Newtonian worldview, which treats the universe as a pile of fragments, "as comprising autonomous atoms."[127]

Although the separatist tendency may be necessary at times in creating a special space for a group, there is always the danger of becoming trapped in self-centeredness. In today's quickly shrinking, interdependent world, separa-

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[124] Kevin Kim, "Wrestling with S. Mark Heim."
http://bighominid.blogspot.com/2004/09/wrestling-with-s-mark-heim.html.
[125] Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, 12.
[126] Ibid., 11.
[127] Griffin. "Peace and the Postmodern Paradigm." In *Spirituality and Society*. 153.

tism and isolationism are dangerous. It would lead to "religious Balkanization." Griffin defines religious Balkanization as the division of world religions into hostile, mutually uncomprehending units with different fundamental beliefs and values.[128] Heim's original goal in appealing for separateness may have been to encourage religions to leave each other alone rather than opposing each other. The actual result, however, is not the one Heim wants.

The process idea of internal relatedness — in which each relationship enters into the essence of an event, so that, apart from that relationship, the event would not be itself — proves to be an effective antidote to Heim's isolationism. In section 4, I explained how, for Whitehead, "an actual entity is present in other actual entities."[129] Whitehead says, in fact, that in some sense, "every actual entity is present in every other actual entity."[130] To be sure, the relevance of this presence is often negligible; and the way in which future actualities are present is quite different from the way in which past actualities are present. What is important is the principle that, "no two actualities can be torn apart: each is all in all."[131]

In the same sense, no society is in isolation. According to Whitehead, this immanence of the world constitutes the "potential for becoming" of the entity. Therefore "the degree of complexity achieved by the entity in its moment of becoming," as Keller suggests, "depends upon its openness to that inflowing world."[132] Heim's particularism to a large extent is based on a denial of this kind of relationality.[133]

Thus we find in Whitehead a distinction between two kinds of particularity: atomistic or non-relational particularity and relational particularity. Because the very word "relation" can suggest external relations, we might even call relational particularity "particularity achieved through internal relations"

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[128] Griffin. *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*. 388.

[129] Whitehead. *Process and Reality*. 50.

[130] Ibid., 51. In this passage Whitehead points out that the relevance of this presence is often neglected. It is especially important, moreover, to recognize that the way in which past actualities are in present ones is radically different from the way in which future actualities are in the present.

[131] Ibid., 348.

[132] Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, 189.

[133] Anne Fairchild Pomeroy, *Marx and Whitehead: Process, Dialectics, and the Critique of Capitalism.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004, 167.

or "particularity arrived at through prehensive unification." From a process perspective, "the individual is different and unique only as a very specific relation to all others. Each individual is an achievement different from all others but is such only because of her real internal relations to all others: in fact, that achieved difference is his or her relationality."[134] This notion of relational particularity is what is missing in Heim.

Also missing in Heim is a recognition that relational particularity evolves over time, and that new relations can create common bonds that there were not present beforehand. Cobb explains the implications of this for interreligious dialogue: "What is incommensurable before interaction becomes in some measure commensurable through interaction. The transformed views of each dialogue partner have elements of commensurability absent before the interaction occurs."[135] For Cobb, "The language of incommensurability is associated with the view of static linguistic systems rather than dynamic traditions. Intentionally or not, it encourages conservatives who falsely think that faithfulness to a tradition is expressed by refusal to learn from others or respond creatively to new challenges."[136] Cobb believes that "there can be serious and genuine communication between people who are shaped in different cultural-linguistic systems—that interfaith dialog is both possible and actual."[137] Joerg Rieger expresses the same point of view when he remarks, "in isolation, we will never find out the truth about ourselves, who we really are, nor will we have the energy to change anything of substance. Ultimately, in isolation we cannot survive."[138]

Cobb's idea of new relations creating commonalities also has implications for how religions understand their own pasts. Those pasts are the result of what were once the coming into being of new relations, some of which involved learning and being influenced by other cultures and traditions. The world religions were not formed from a self-contained identity, but through interaction with a variety of cultural influences in the regions in which they developed. The success of the interaction among Buddhism, Confucianism

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[134] Ibid.

[135] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World*. 165.

[136] Ibid., 165.

[137] Cobb, "Is Religious Truth Many or One?" 40.

[138] Joerg Rieger, "Theology and the Power of the Margins in a Postmodern World." Rieger, Joerg Ed. *In Opting for the Margins*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 194.

and Taoism in China, discussed in the final chapter of this work, is convincing evidence to support the point. It is their shared concern for human beings that accounts for their mutuality.

Moreover, Hatch's investigation has demonstrated that "the Greek Christianity of the fourth century was rooted in Hellenism."[139] For example, "From the earliest Christian teaching, indeed, the conception of the transcendence of God is absent. God is near to men and speaks to them."[140] The conception of the transcendence of God in Christianity today resulted from the influence of Greek philosophy.[141] The influence of Judaism on Christianity is also very evident. According to Frederick Grant's description:

> Modern research finds in Tannaite Judaism, either in Palestine or in the far-flung reaches of the Western Diaspora, the chief antecedents of Christian organization, worship, and religious thought. The Early Christian "presbyter" was the Jewish "elder" in a new role; the "bishop" was the community's "overseer" at least his prototype may be seen in the Jewish "ruler" or "president of the congregation"; the "deacon" was the "helper" or "attendant" also found in the Jewish synagogue, especially in the Diaspora. The synagogue liturgy had a decisive influence upon the Bible-centered worship of the Christians, while ideas enshrined in the Passover observance influenced the celebration of the Supper. Baptism was taken over from the Jewish immersion of proselytes. The vocabulary of the very earliest Christian theology was borrowed from the Greek-speaking Judaism of the Diaspora…[142]

If religions have evolved in the past through internalization of insights from other traditions, they can evolve in the future along similar lines. A recognition of the primacy of internal relations can facilitate this internalization.

Affirming Uniqueness without Exclusivism

Perhaps one reason that Heim neglects the importance of religions being influenced by other religions is that he wants to preserve uniqueness. As a Christian, he wants to preserve Christian uniqueness, but he also wants to af-

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[139] Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957, 5.
[140] Ibid., 251.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Frederick C. Grant, "Foreword" in Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957. ix-x.

firm the uniqueness of other traditions. One problem, however, lies in what I perceive to be a tendency on his part to conflate uniqueness with exclusivism. In developing his own Christian approach, he portrays Christianity as superior to other paths. Although there are different salvations, only Christian salvation will, in the end, prove fully satisfactory, "for it will be only on the Christian mountain that we can understand the Trinitarian nature of God and see how all the other religions can be understood and ranked."[143] Here, then, lies the tension named at the outset of this chapter. On the one hand, he embraces pluralism and claims that his pluralism is "more pluralistic" or "a real pluralism."[144]

On the other hand, however, he is actually justifying a new form of exclusivism. Unlike the traditional exclusivism that claims that there are no saving truths and values at all provided by other faiths, the new form of exclusivism Heim proposes acknowledges the existence of the saving truth and values in other traditions while treating them as inferior. By virtue of this inferiority, the salvation is inherently incomplete, at least when compared to the salvation offered in Christianity; and the ultimate to which it points is likewise inadequate, until complemented by the ultimate to which Christianity points. The Point is, as Hick points out, "there will be no real peace among the world religions so long as each thinks of itself as uniquely superior to all the others." [145] In *Introducing Theologies of Religion* Paul Knitter speaks of this form of exclusivism as the fulfillment perspective, because it claims implicitly or explicitly that other religions must be fulfilled by Christianity. The inconsistency in Heim, then, is that he wants to be a radical pluralist, but ends up with a fulfillment point of view.

Heim does not hide from this implication. In responding to the objection that his religious particularism "allows those in individual traditions to continue to regard their referent as more ultimate than that in another tradition," Heim's answer is "it certainly does. Why should I want a theory that forbids them to do so?"[146] For Heim, it is inevitable for us to insist that our view is preferable to others and to treat our convictions "as the best and most

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143 Knitter. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 233.

144 Heim, *Salvations*, 144.

[145] Hick, "The Next Step beyond Dialogue." *The Myth of Religious Superiority*. 12.

[146] Ibid., 154.

truthful that we know."[147] However, Heim also argues for "the equal validity of varying faiths"[148] and "is highly skeptical of readiness to attribute others' differing religious attitudes to pure irrationality, immorality, or bad faith."[149] Herein lies the inconsistency.

In order to prove his position that every religion is exclusive in nature, Heim uses Buddhism as a target, ignoring the fact that the tradition is well known for its openness to other religions. Heim's understanding of Buddhism may be influenced by the Dalai Lama's interpretation. For example, he cites the Dalai Lama's statement "Liberation in which 'a mind that understands the sphere of reality annihilates all defilements in the sphere of reality'." Heim claims that this is a state that only Buddhists can realize, which is called "Nirvana". He believes that this kind of moksha or Nirvana is only explained in the Buddhist scriptures, and is achieved only through Buddhist practice."[150] His conclusion is that, since Buddhism claims that the only way to the Buddhist end is the Buddhist way, Buddhism excludes the possibility that other religions might also be means to a similar realization. There are two problems with Heim's approach. First, he fails to be open to the possibility that there is some kind of annihilation of defilements in other traditions as well. Different religions with different forms of salvation can also have commonalities. Second, his consideration of Buddhism itself is too narrow. He uses Tibetan Buddhism to prove his conclusion while ignoring the other branches. For example, a Pure Land Buddhist approach, with its appeal to a divine savior, may be much closer to monotheistic traditions of the West than a Tibetan approach.

But even this is an error; the Dalai Lama himself as a contemporary representative of Tibetan Buddhism has also expressed an open attitude toward other religions:

> Each system has its own value suited to persons of different disposition and mental outlook. At this time of easy communications we must increase our efforts to learn each other's systems. This does not mean that we should make all religions into

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[147] Ibid., 142.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid., 143.

[150] Dalai Lama, The Bodhgaya Interviews." *Christianity through Non-Christian Eyes*. Ed. P. Griffiths. Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 166-70, cited in Heim, *The Depth of the Riches,* 31.

> one, but that we should recognize the common purpose of the many religions and value the different techniques that they have developed for internal improvement.[151]

I do not mean to deny that there are some streams in Buddhism that advocate exclusivism, and that there is some rhetoric with a strong exclusivistic tone. What I am attempting to point out is the fact that there are forms of Buddhism that are not exclusivistic, such as Mahayana Buddhism whose attitude to other religious traditions is open. Chinese Ch'an Buddhism fully embodies the non-exclusive and open character of Mahayana Buddhism. With regard to the equality of everything on earth, Ch'an Buddhism believes that everyone is endowed with the nature of the Buddha: "perfect wisdom is inherent in all people." [152] In the Buddhist tradition, even nonbelievers are capable of achieving Buddhahood since they are sentient beings. For Hui Neng**,** The Sixth Patriarch of Ch'an Buddhism, every living being in the world should be welcome if he does good things to others whether or not he believes in Buddhism or not. Since Ch'an Buddhism emphasizes that the Buddha-mind is everywhere so that anything can be an occasion for its realization (salvation) at any moment and in any way, everyone possesses the Buddha-nature and can, therefore, achieve enlightenment and become a Buddha. The Fifth Patriarch said to Hui Neng, "Let people achieve enlightenment through their own effort."[153] From the Ch'an Buddhist perspective, people hold an exclusive attitude toward other people and their religions, because of their narrow-mindedness, which Buddhism should reject.

Process thinkers or Constructive postmodernists such as David Griffin can appreciate the uniqueness of one's own religion without necessarily claiming superiority. For Griffin, the exclusive claim that one's own religion contains the only truth relevant to salvation or final fulfillment, and that other religions lack any saving wisdom is part of the problem with religions today: "The clash between Islam and the modern West is becoming so dangerous"

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[151] Dalai Lama, "Spiritual Contributions to Social Progress." Tibetan Review 16(November 1981):18.

[152] Wing-Tsit Chan,. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Tran. and Compiled by Wing-Tsit Chan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963,.433.

[153] Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, .432.

partly because each of these two traditions sees its own belief as the one truth and that of the other side as false, perhaps demonic.[154]

We have already seen how, from a process perspective, part of the solution to the problem of exclusivism lies in recognizing that there can be multiple ultimates, each of which leads to different kinds of salvation. Another part of the solution is to recognize that, even as one's own insights are significant, they are always partial. According to Griffin, "every theological perspective both reveals and conceals. It helps one become conscious of certain dimensions of our common pre-interpretative experience while also making it difficult to acknowledge other dimensions."[155]

Here Griffin clearly explains the epistemological root of exclusivism. "It has been a tendency of each tradition to state things it has seen clearly in a way that excludes complementary truths that it has not seen and that other traditions may have seen clearly."[156] If we can recognize that every statement is both true and not true, therefore, we will acknowledge, "each religion needs what the other can give." [157]

How, then, can one claim one's uniqueness? Perhaps the perspective of Cobb offers guidance. Interestingly, Heim appeals to Cobb's point of view to provide sympathy for his own. He writes that Cobb is not hesitant to "make a claim for Christian superiority." In Cobb's view, "there is no reason for religious traditions not to bring convictions of uniqueness and the universal validity of their special beliefs into dialogue or interfaith relation."[158] Heim is convinced that Cobb's vision is "very much in line with" his own religious particularism.[159]

It must be acknowledged that there are some affinities between Cobb and Heim. As Griffin observes, "What Heim is proposing as an alternative to pluralistic theologies is, in sum, what Cobb's version of pluralistic theology has been proposing for some time."[160] Griffin correctly describes the similari-

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[154] Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, 388.
[155] Griffin, "Religious Pluralism." Unpub. 15.
[156] Ibid., 17-18.
[157] Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology,* 307.
[158] Heim. *Salvations*. 144.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep." *Deep Religious Pluralism*. 28.

ties between Cobb and Heim, such as their common emphasis on the uniqueness of other traditions. Yet, there are significant differences between Cobb and Heim; primarily because Cobb does not subscribe to the concept of exclusivism. Cobb accomplishes this separation of uniqueness from exclusivism in two ways. First, he affirms the uniqueness of other religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism.[161] He says, "I affirm and celebrate the uniqueness of Christ, of Christianity, of the Qu'ran**,** of Krishna, and of Buddha."[162] Heim does this only for Christianity; he insists that various "religious traditions are part of God's providential purpose."[163] "The diversity of religious ends" for Heim, just "provides an extraordinary picture of the mercy and providential richness of God."[164]

Second, in the understanding of Christ that he develops in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, Cobb proposes that part of Christian uniqueness lies in the fact that the Christian way of living requires openness to Christ, who is the spirit of creative transformation in the world. This means that part of Christian uniqueness lies in its commitment to be open to truth wherever it is found, even if that truth is unfamiliar to Christians and not contained in their own heritages. At one level, this can look like Heim's approach, which likewise takes a Christian ideal, namely that of the Trinity, and uses it to encourage a welcoming approach to other religions by including them within its horizons. But Cobb's choice of creative transformation as a defining characteristic of Christian living leads him to reject any historical doctrine as a defining essence of Christianity. Thus, for him, an authentically Christian approach to other religions requires the humility of listening to ideas, and learning from ideas, that can correct and challenge inherited Christian traditions, including core ideas such as the Trinity. In short, both in his formal affirmation of the uniqueness of each tradition, and in his very understanding of what constitutes Christian uniqueness, Cobb exemplifies the kind of openness to creative transformation that is characteristic of a Whiteheadian pluralism, but absent in Heim's own approach.

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[161] Cobb, Transforming *Christianity and the World*. 72.

[162] Cobb, et al, *Death or Dialogue*? *From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue*. 83.

[163] Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 291.

[164] Ibid., 264.

There is still another way that a Whiteheadian pluralistic approach avoids exclusivism. It lies in its recognition that truth is always more than anyone's experience or concept of it, and that all attempts at a final formulation of truth are exercises in futility. Practically speaking, this means that human beings are always in pursuit of truth, that is, in search of it and approximations of it, but never in full possession of it. We might say that the search for truth is an ongoing process and that new truths can emerge in history and in human life that were not known before, none of which are final. In short, we might simply say, "truth is a process."

If truth is seen as a process, it must then be dependent and relational. It must be infinite and open-ended. In this respect, no one can possess the truth completely. We must, therefore, reject any final truth and keep our mind open to others, "to new experience, insights, and expressions of truth."[165]

If the search for truth is an ongoing process, then it must also be added that truth is not something that endures unchanged over time. The notion of truth as a fixed system is "a fatal misunderstanding," a mistake that happened in the history of European thought. It directly leads to "the Dogmatic Fallacy" which asserts, "we are capable of producing notions which are adequately defined in respect to the complexity of relationship required for their illustration in the real world."[166] This means that even process thought is in process. As Cobb remarks, "It is the nature of process thought to understand itself as in process. There is no certain or irreformable core, however strongly one may be convinced of some formulations. Everything is always open for reconsideration. The expectation is that all of its ideas will someday be superseded, although it expects also that this supersession of ideas will still include the pre-linguistic discernments expressed in particular and imperfect ways in current formulations."[167] Following such a notion of truth as process, Cobb firmly pleads for "a further openness to a multiplicity of approaches, all of which are partial."[168] That means we are on a journey, a never-ending journey where there are always new possibilities for truth to be known and discovered.[169] As

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[165] Jeffrey D. Long, "Anekanta Vedanta: Toward a Deep Hindu Religious Pluralism." *Deep Religious Pluralism*, 135.

[166] Whitehead. *Adventure of Ideas*, New York: The Free Press, 1967, 144-45.

[167] Cobb. "Metaphysical Pluralism." 56-57.

[168] Cobb. "Response I" in *Death or Dialogue*? 80.

[169] McDaniel, *Gandhi's Hope*, 124.

Cobb remarks, although one's own tradition has grasped important aspects of reality, however, "reality in its entirety is always more. This means also that the ultimately true norm for life, and therefore also for religious traditions, lies beyond any extant formulation. As dialogue proceeds, glimpses of aspects of reality heretofore unnoticed are vouchsafed for the participants. This is not felt as a threat to the religious traditions from which the participants come but as an opportunity for enrichment and even positive transformation."[170]

Linking Religion and Justice

As people of different religions engage in dialogue with one another, and as they consider common problems and different approaches to truth, they inevitably encounter questions concerning justice. By justice a process thinker means sharing in the destinies of others, making sure that all people in a society can participate in the decisions that affect their lives, making sure that all people have adequate means of survival with satisfaction, and that the personal liberties of each person are respected. For process thinkers these ideals are not simply the product of human projection; they are elicited by a normative feature within the universe itself, which Whitehead calls the primordial nature of God.

Heim's overemphasis on the difference among religious traditions leads to a denial of the common sense of justice. He is so committed to the kind of cultural and linguistic reductionism noted above that he fails to consider that human experience may include what Griffin calls an awareness that some events, namely, ones that embody respect for others, are "better" than other events, quite apart from cultural differences Here Griffin is speaking normatively, not descriptively. He knows that some cultures prioritize respect for powerful people over respect for weak people, but he (and process thinkers in general) believe that they are wrong to do so. Griffin is willing to make critical judgments across cultures. By contrast, Heim argues, "A Canadian immigrant in Saudi Arabia would recognize the cultural insensitivity involved in resisting assimilation to the gender relations there and a Pakistani immigrant in the United States would recognize its sexual mores as simply another form of justice-seeking in human relations." His conclusion is, "each person or

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[170] Cobb, "Beyond 'Pluralism,'" In *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*. Ed. Gavin D' Costa. Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1998. 86.

community could be committed to its vision of justice, but recognize that it is relative, shaped by different communities, and that there is no ultimate justification for preferring one over another, certainly no justification for taking this relative difference of perspective on justice to the point of conflict or violence."[171]

A process thinker appreciates Heim's raising questions about the link between religious pluralism and social responsibility, and between religious differences and economic and social disparity. These questions are very profound; his answers, however, fail to take into account that human beings may indeed be guided by trans-cultural ideals at an experiential level that runs deeper than cultural and linguistic divisions. Of course, a defense of this possibility would be another work. But if we accept the defenses made by others, such as David Ray Griffin, John Cobb, Suchocki and many other process thinkers, then it follows that the concerns of inter-religious dialogue and those of justice can be joined. This is important not only for the world but also for theology itself. As Anselm Min puts it: "any system of ideas, including theology, that seeks to serve humanity must prove its power to serve and transform humanity precisely under the changing and challenging conditions of history."[172]

Above I offered a word about what justice means in very general terms. It should be noted, though, that justice for process thinkers is not simply an abstract ideal. It is "a concrete reality manifested in concrete communities."[173] It includes fundamental human needs such as the need for food, water, shelter, work, and community. Following these primary goods or values, there is a second level of justice concerned with self-naming and dignity and recognition. A third level of justice is openness to diversity, not only diversity of individuals, but of communities. Many forms of Christian theology today emphasize the importance of justice at these three levels, and liberation theologies are especially insistent that there ought not to be a separation of the pursuit of truth from an engagement with the problems of the world. Any separation of

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[171] Heim, *Salvations*, 95.

[172] Anselm Kyongsuk Min, *Dialectic of Salvation.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, 2.

[173] Suchocki, "In Search of Justice: Religious Pluralism from a Feminist Perspective." In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness,* 155.

theology from morality, or healthy religion from concern for the poor, is misguided. Certainly this is true for Christian postmodern thinkers such as Cobb and Griffin. Both draw upon Whitehead's notion of God, according to which God is a guide, or, to use the process terminology, "lure" toward the good as well as the true, and where goodness requires concrete instantiation in helping the poor and protecting the environment.

As a way of preparing for my final chapter, it should also be noted that a separation of religion from morality makes little sense in Chinese culture: to be religious is to be moral; to be moral is to be religious. A religion is a moral philosophy and a moral philosophy is a religion. A religion embodies a moral philosophy, and a moral philosophy is always embodied in religion. As an example, Confucianism emphasizes, "becoming human." It is both religious and moral, because according to Chinese tradition, the core mission of religion is cultivating people and teaching people how to become human, namely to become moral.

Before turning to Chinese thought, there is one more feature of a constructive approach that needs to be mentioned in its relation to Heim, because it plays such an important role in Chinese approaches. It is the shift from binary thinking, characteristic of modernity, to complementary thinking, characteristic of process thought and Chinese thought as well.

Moving Beyond Binary Thinking

Binary thinking is one aspect of a modern Western way of looking at the world. When presented with two options, binary thinking is inclined at the outset to assume conflict. If one option is correct, then the other must be incorrect, or at least incompatible with the preferred option. Examples in the context of Heim's view would include his own view that, if particulars are to be affirmed, universals (e.g. hardcore common sense notions) must be denied; or that if Christians are to be true to their roots, then they cannot simultaneously learn from other traditions and be transformed by what they learn. Whitehead disagrees with this way of thinking, proposing that oftentimes options that appear mutually exclusive can be jointly affirmed through a creative development of contrasts. Concerning universals and particulars, for example, he writes, "All modern philosophy hinges round the difficulty of describing the world in terms of subject and predicate, substance and quality, particular

and universal."[174] For Whitehead, there is no Great Wall between particular and universal. He tried to "blur the sharp distinction between what is universal and what is particular" with his ontological principle and the doctrine of universal relativity.[175] The ontological principle states that individual actualities are the ultimate building blocks of reality, while the doctrine of universal relativity states that each individual actuality is implicated in every other actuality, thus giving an individual actuality a kind of universality in its particularity.

From the point of view of methodology, Heim exaggerates the particular or unique aspect of each experience. According to Whitehead, the result of exaggerating uniqueness, "always does violence to that immediate experience."[176] Experience has two polar dimensions: particular experience and universal experience. Universalism can be seen as emphasizing the universal dimension at the expense of the truth in particularism, while particularism can be seen as emphasizing the particular dimension at the expense of the truth in universalism. Whereas universalists exaggerate the finite, special, and temporary truth coming from the concrete historical context into the infinite, universal, and eternal truth, particularists exaggerate the self-sufficiency of each religion by ignoring the interrelatedness among them. This exaggeration is significant because it has led to exclusivism and self-centeredism. As Knitter put it, "particularity does not exclude universality; we are particular in order that we might reach out beyond particularity and connect with others. To deny that possibility is to balkanize humanity."[177] Smith expressed the same opinion, saying: "Our solidarity precedes our particularity, and is part of our self-transcendence."[178]

From Whiteheadian pluralistic perspective, it is not hard to find that that Heim's particularism is itself a kind of reductionism. Heim reduces human experience to particular experience by neglecting systematic consideration of common human experiences among human beings, such as hunger, pleasure, anger, compassion, betrayal, self-centeredness, and hope. He also reduces the issue of pluralism to theoretical and intellectual questions about plural per-

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[174] Whitehead. *Process and Reality*. 49.

[175] Ibid., 48.

[176] Ibid., 49.

[177] Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names,* Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1996, 25.

[178] Smith. *Towards a World Theology*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981, 103.

spectives regarding truth. In contrast, Whiteheadian religious pluralism is dissatisfied with a neglect of common features of the human experience. This is because it recognizes that experience involves and includes pre-interpretive dimensions that are not reducible to linguistic and cultural dimensions, but that can be powerfully influential in human life. Many of these pre-interpretive dimensions are not matters of sense experience; rather they are matters of the subjective forms and aims – the affective tones and aspirations – that qualify human experience. Whereas modernity reduced experience to that which is received and can be clinically examined through the five senses, Whiteheadian religious pluralism has a vastly enlarged notion of experience. The postmodern notion of experience, as Griffin rightly states, not only includes intellectual and linguistic experiences, but also pre-sensory and pre-linguistic experiences; not only scientific experiences, but also religious experiences. It is a rich whole.

Chapter 4

Whiteheadian Religious Pluralism

> *The task is to take elements that seem in themselves mutually opposed and mutually exclusive and to transform them into a novel contrast that gains richness and intensity through inclusion of the best of both."*
> Cobb, "Two Types of Postmodernism: Reconstruction and Process."

The previous chapters introduced the approaches to religious pluralism developed by John Hick and S. Mark Heim. In this chapter I offer core ideas for a Whiteheadian Religious Pluralism, which will serve as corrective to the liabilities of their approaches. The version I advocate is indebted to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, as developed by John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin. We have seen that Hick's pluralisms are only partly pluralistic because, although he affirms generic pluralism, his specific version of pluralism argues that all the post-axial religions are basically the same down deep. Unlike Hick and Heim, the pluralism Cobb and Griffin advocate is fully pluralistic is because it recognizes the uniqueness of different traditions and yet shows how participants in a given tradition can be thoroughly open to people in other religions, allowing themselves to be creatively transformed by insights from the others. This openness is possible because the distinctive insights of different religions are often complementary rather than contradictory. This means that, in affirming the wisdom of another religion, one need not deny the wisdom of one's own. As I make clear in previous chapters, the possibility of a complementary pluralism such as this is not recognized by Hick or Heim, and it is for this reason that their perspectives are only *apparently* pluralistic, but not *genuinely* pluralistic. In what follows, then, I introduce central ideas in Whitehead's philosophy and show how these ideas are further developed in Cobb and Griffin.

1. Whiteheadian Religious Pluralism

As a worldview, Whiteheadian process philosophy sees the world in terms of events-in-relation rather than static and self-contained Cartesian substances, recognizing that people and other actualities can depend on one another and are even present in one another, even as they are different. As a way of thinking, it emphasizes both/and thinking rather than either/or thinking, recognizing that people can affirm the ideas, feelings, and practices of people who are different from them, even as they appreciate the ideas, feelings, and practices that mean most to them. As an orientation toward life – both theoretical and practical – it implies a welcoming attitude toward people who are different and toward diversity itself, combined with a hope and trust that people can live together with their differences, not only accepting them but even delighting in them.

Ultimately, the point of Whiteheadian process philosophy, then, is that it offers not only a new worldview or even a new way or thinking, but also a different way of living in the world that can be embodied by people of different religions and no religion, each in his or her own way.

In terms of religion, as we will see, Whiteheadian Religious Pluralism built on process philosophy will also go beyond exclusivism of the kind advocated by Heim, and essentialism of the kind advocated by Hick, both of which are rooted in a self-enclosed substantialistic way of looking at the world. My aim in what follows, then, is to describe further the Whiteheadian worldview.

A self-enclosed substance-oriented worldview looks at the world as if it were composed of impenetrable entities – self-contained substances – that require nothing except themselves in order to exist. In religious life, the human soul has sometimes been conceived this way, as if it depended only on itself and God in order to exist; in mechanistic approaches to life, other people and the natural world have also been conceived in this way, despite the fact that the natural sciences so often point toward a more relational point of view. When it comes to inter-religious dialogue, religions can be conceived of in this way. They can be viewed as self-contained realities that rely only on their own internal resources in order to exist.

The notion of self-enclosed substance has a long heritage in the West. Arguably the Greek philosophers were the founders of substance thinking.

When Democritus stated that the universe is composed of tiny, indestructible, unchanging, and indivisible elements called "atoms," his thinking was one type of substance philosophy, which has had considerable influence in the traditional metaphysical schools. Some of them suggested that there are two types of substances such as mind and matter, as in Descartes; some emphasized that there was one ultimate substance containing both mental and physical attributes, as in Spinoza; and more recently some emphasize that there is only one kind of substance, namely lifeless bits of matter, as in contemporary versions of materialism. These philosophical perspectives converge in conceiving of substance as something independent, unchanging and devoid of experience.

It should not be thought, though, that substance thinking is limited to philosophy. It can be part of a culture, too. For example, in many ways modern "imperialistic attitudes" in political and economic relations can be regarded as examples of substance thinking. Insofar as a people of a given country think in substantialist terms, they think of themselves as self-contained, not needing others for their existence. And if they interact with people in other countries, they naturally assume that the interactions should be entirely on their own terms, without regard for the feelings or worth of the others. In the technical terms of Whiteheadian thought, they assume that their relations with the others are "external" to their own identities. They can be defined essentially, without reference to others on whom they depend.

In the twentieth century the Western philosopher Alfred North Whitehead developed a systematic alternative to self-enclosed substance thinking, and the kind of constructive postmodernism that I recommend builds upon his thinking. His aim is to reject a particular notion of self-enclosed substance altogether, showing how relations between actualities are internal to the actualities themselves, and how, at the deepest level, these relations involve one entity feeling another and being affected by the other. Whitehead's worldview is presented most systematically in *Process and Reality*, where he presents the world as a network of interrelated events or momentary energy-events, which he calls "actual occasions" or "occasions of experience." He then adds that each momentary event has its identity in accepting many things from the past actual world into its own life, without collapsing them into indistinguishable sameness. When this acceptance occurs, the many become harmonized; they become one, and the event is internally composed of those other things. And

yet he says that each momentary event has within itself a freedom or creativity, through which it creatively synthesizes those "others" into its own life, which means that it cannot be completely reduced to them. The many become one in the emerging event, without losing their diversity; and the unique event into which they enter is more than them, even as they are part of it. Once the immediacy of the experience perishes, the moment becomes a datum in those moments that follow. "The many become one and are increased by one."[1]

Whitehead uses the words **"**prehending" or **"**feeling**"** to name the process by which an emerging occasion of experience gathers the many data from its past into unity. This means that the ultimate actualities of the universe are alive with subjective immediacy, whether conscious or non-conscious. He speaks of the process of synthesizing the many things of the past as one of "feeling" them or "prehending" them. Every actual entity prehends or feels its past from a unique perspective, which means that no two entities are precisely the same. In this way, then, Whitehead affirms that differences are at the very heart of reality. There are many entities, not one entity, and each is unique. And yet he also affirms that things can be different but related, because one entity becomes itself by synthesizing influences from other entities. Thus Whitehead affirms that interconnectedness is at the very heart of reality. With this way of thinking, Whitehead offers the West and the rest of the world a thoroughly relational way of looking at the world. Instead of thinking of the universe as composed of inert substances, we think instead of the world as composed of moments of experience or moments of feeling. Each unity of reality, each genuine actuality, is a process of feeling or prehending into its nature, which means that the whole of the universe is an "ocean of feeling," aspects of which are present in each moment of experience. In chapter five I will show how this emphasis on the universe as an "ocean of feeling" invites a way of living in the world in which we seek to feel the feelings of others, including those of different religions, allowing ourselves to be changed by them, without denying their uniqueness and difference from us.

Given this brief introduction to Whitehead's concept of an actual entity or actual occasion, it should be clear how Whitehead's way of thinking is a constructive alternative to thinking in terms of Cartesian substances. He offers a relational and dynamic point of view that sees religions as dynamic and

[1] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

changing, dependent on others for their existence. Whitehead's approach differs from modern mechanistic and materialistic worldview which sees the whole of reality through the analogy of a machine, with each part of the machine operating in a perfectly predictable way that can be known in advance of its operations. By contrast, Whitehead's worldview is non-mechanistic or, in his words, "organic," because it proposes that each actual occasion of experience – each event in the universe – is a creative act of synthesizing the world into a new unity. Even if someone knew all the forces that would influence the existing moment, he or she would not know with certainty how the moment would unfold, because the moment contains creativity of its own.

A mechanistic materialistic worldview is one that sees the whole world as if it consisted only of lifeless matter, lacking any mind-like characteristics. By contrast, Whitehead's worldview takes matter seriously, but proposes that the occasions of experience which make up matter possess a creativity and capacity for feeling that are mind-like in a certain way, even as they may not possess consciousness. As Whitehead put it, all consciousness is experience, but not all experience is conscious. Whitehead is not saying that rocks and computer parts are conscious, but he is saying that they are composed of energy-events that include creativity and feeling of a non-conscious kind.

In addition, Whitehead believes that some material objects, such as human bodies, also contain minds. The mind of a human being exhibits creativity and feeling, and it also has a physical side, which is its feeling of the physical brain. He speaks of this mind as the "dominant occasion" of the person at that moment: that is, the center of feeling through which a person receives influences from the body and initiates responses. Thus, Whitehead offers what might be called a post-materialistic understanding of the world, in that he provides a new understanding of matter as creative in its own right, and insofar as he affirms what has traditionally been called the "mind" or "soul" of people and animals.

A dualistic worldview is one that divides the world into two kinds of substances: mental substances lacking any physical dimensions, and physical substances lacking any mental dimensions. Whitehead's worldview shows how each event in the universe – from the mind of a human being to an energy-event in an atom – contains both a mental side and a physical side, which means that there is only one kind of actuality: actual occasions of experience. Thus he offers a post-dualistic understanding of the world. He offers a way of

recognizing the reality of human and non-human subjectivity without reducing it to brain chemistry, yet simultaneously shows how the ultimate building blocks of the brain and of subjectivity are one kind of reality: namely occasions of experience. In these ways Whitehead offers a postmodern worldview.

Often the mechanistic materialistic worldview is also excessively individualistic, anthropocentric, androcentric, and Eurocentric. If we take each of these terms, we see how a Whiteheadian approach offers a process oriented relational worldview.

An excessively individualistic worldview is one that understands individual human beings as individuals-in-isolation rather than persons-in-community. It sees the human self as analogous to the cogito of Descartes**:** an entity that can think all by itself, doubting even the existence of an external world until that existence is proven. By contrast, Whitehead understands human beings as individuals-in-relation or persons-in-community, whose very existence emerges out of felt relations with the rest of the world. There can be no fact in isolation and there can be no person in isolation. "There is no society in isolation,"[2] says Whitehead. "In isolation they are meaningless."[3] This does not deny the uniqueness of each individual, but it insists upon the relational character of that uniqueness. A person's uniqueness is enriched, not weakened, by healthy relations with others.

An anthropocentric worldview is one that sees human beings as separate from the rest of nature, as superior to all other creatures in every relevant respect, and which also assumes that the rest of nature is valuable only insofar as it serves human purposes. Thus anthropocentrism lends itself to the idea that the whole of the earth and other creatures are to be conquered by human beings. By contrast, Whitehead sees all of nature as filled with intrinsic value: that is, as consisting of events that have subjective reality for themselves, worthy of respect, and not just objective existence for others. Animals and living cells have intrinsic value, and even the quanta of energy in atoms have such value. There is no sharp dichotomy between the world of facts and the world of values. All objective facts, including the facts of nature, are simultaneously values within the universe as an ocean of feeling.

An androcentric worldview is one that takes male experience as a normative for human life and accepts the rule of men over women as the way life

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[2] Whitehead. *Process and Reality*, 90.

[3] Ibid., 3.

is meant to be. In this view women have minds, but their minds are, or ought to be, passive when it comes to the wishes of men. In contrast, Whitehead's worldview affirms that each entity in the universe, including those occasions of experience that form a human psyche, are centers of agency and feeling in their own right, and therefore deserving of being treated with respect. This means, of course, that women no less than men can be agents of their own lives and subjects of their own history. They should be self-determining. Moreover, Whitehead's worldview affirms that each entity unfolds from a unique point of view that cannot be reduced to the categories by which it is understood, including the culturally defined categories of "male" and "female." Men and women alike are always more than the gender categories by which others define them or they define themselves. And in their transcendence of these categories, they are each unique. This means that every human being has a unique point of view, with something to offer to the world. An androcentric point of view that eliminates the voices of women is morally problematic, and it also gives up the wisdom that can be gleaned from each point of view.

A Eurocentric worldview is like an androcentric worldview. It stresses European ways of thinking as definitive for all human beings. The Whiteheadian worldview, instead of supporting a this prejudice for one point of view, that of European, envisions the world as a community of communities, filled with different civilizations, each of which has something to offer the others. Whitehead puts it this way in *Science and the Modern World*:

> A diversification among human communities is essential for the provision of the incentive and material for the Odyssey of the human spirit. Other nations of different habits are not enemies: they are godsends. Men require of their neighbors something sufficiently akin to be understood, something sufficiently different to provoke attention, and something great enough to command admiration. We must not expect, however, all the virtues. We should even be satisfied if there is something odd enough to be interesting.[4]

Following the lead of Whitehead, then, Cobb encourages us to "celebrate" differences, including differences among religions and cultures. For him, "It is the most radical differences that stimulate the most fundamental

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[4] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*. 207.

reconsideration."[5]

In these many ways, then, Whitehead offers a constructively relational worldview for the common good. The worldview also leads a person to emphasize "both/and thinking." Each moment of experience seeks both to welcome diversity from the past actual world that it inherits, and to create meaningful contrasts between what is welcomed, so that the differences are affirmed in their complementarity. For example, if a Confucian inherits ideas from Buddhism and Taoism from his or her past, he or she need not reject Buddhism or Taoism, as if one were "true" and the other "false." Instead he or she can seek the wisdom of both points of view, without equating the two, and then find a way of feeling or prehending them, so that both are seen together in their differences. Rather than saying either/or, she or he says both/and; and rather than denying pluralism, she or he welcomes it. In the contemporary setting, when this same person encounters ideas from Christianity, he or she can welcome these ideas, too, seeking to create a still broader harmony of insights that widen her perspective, without denying her or his own heritage. Christians and Taoists and Buddhists can do the same. This does not mean that, at a doctrinal or practical level, different religious traditions are devoid of tensions, both logical and existential. It is the case, for example, that one religion (e.g. Christianity) may contain demands for belief in a personal God, whereas another religion (e.g. Jainism) may contain demands against this kind of belief. But the religions themselves are not homogeneous; they contain different teachings and practices among their practitioners, and all religions have hospitable strands within them, which can be developed by their practitioners, leading to the kind of openness recommending by Whiteheadians. It is these strands, within the traditions themselves that Whiteheadians believe are the better part of the religions at issue. And that Whiteheadian vision is likewise committed to the view that part of a healthy religious life requires suspending dogmatic beliefs in the interests of learning from, and being creatively transformed by, points of view which are initially unfamiliar. Ultimately, so Whiteheadians propose, there is something to be learned from each religion.

Thus Whitehead's philosophy encourages both/and thinking, appreciation of differences, and a quest for harmonious contrasts. Whitehead offers not simply a different set of ideas, but also a different way of thinking. When

[5] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World*. 44.

these are combined in one's orientation toward life, the result is a welcoming or hospitable approach to life, which moves beyond the modern tendency to look at the world in terms of combat or antagonism. This does not mean that there are not aspects of life that are inevitably competitive. As Griffin puts it:

> There is, after all, surely a deep truth in the testimony of the world's religions to the presence of a transcultural proclivity to evil deep within the human heart, which no paradigm, combined with a new economic order, new childrearing practices, or any other social arrangements, will suddenly eliminate. Furthermore, it has correctly been said that 'life is robbery': a strong element of competition is inherent within finite existence, which no social-political-ecological order can overcome.[6]

Still, as Griffin also emphasizes, the Whiteheadian approach offers a way of living in the world that is a great improvement over the present order. "The human proclivity to evil in general, and to conflictual competition and ecological destruction in particular, can be greatly exacerbated or greatly mitigated by a world order and its worldview."[7] The Whiteheadian approach offers the possibility of a "far better world order, with a far less dangerous trajectory, than the one we now have."

Indeed, it is more promising than the deconstructive approach. The deconstructive approach is interested in showing the constructedness or conventionality of certain questioned traditional truths, and in this interest it often emphasizes tearing down ideas which adherents find true. Sometimes it tears down these ideas for good reasons, but it also refuses to build things up. As another Whiteheadian thinker, Catherine Keller, shows, this building up of things is crucial to the world. For Whiteheadian pluralistic thinkers, to construct is to pile up, to build, or put together in the original sense. This piling up is more than piling rocks or stones; it is also marshalling human resources to help solve problems and meet human needs. As Keller explains, "piling up together" involves acting "in community and solidarity" by "gathering together resources for saving actions refusing the ideologies of world-waste,

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[6] Griffin, "Introduction to SUNY Series in Whiteheadian Pluralistic Thought." xii.

[7] Ibid.

woman-waste, people-waste, species-waste…"[8]

A Whiteheadian religious pluralism proceeds in this sprit. It seeks to gather together resources for saving actions, rather than waste any of the resources. Furthermore, it creatively develops something new out of these resources. To process thinkers, taking up the constructive task afresh is "one of the challenges of a deconstructive age."[9]

In a process context, the constructive nature of Whiteheadian religious pluralism is drawn partly from his concept of creativity: the process of concrescence, the process by which "the many become one and are increased by one." Creativity in Whitehead's philosophy implies not only that the universe and the possible increase of intensity, complexity, and plurality expand endlessly, but also that "the future is fully open." Griffin puts the point succinctly: "A world could not exist without creative experience."[10]

In the perspective of Whiteheadian religious pluralism that emerges from a Whiteheadian point of view, the whole of modernity is not rejected. In this sense it is constructive postmodern. As Griffin explains, constructive postmodernism "involves a creative synthesis of modern and premodern truths and values." More specifically, it is dedicated to "salvage a positive meaning" not only for the modern notions of modern human self, historical meaning, and truth as correspondence, but also for the premodern notions of a divine reality, cosmic meaning, and an enchanted nature. By contrast, deconstructive postmodernism tries to reject most or all modern values, even as it unconsciously extends them. Constructive postmodernism proceeds in a different spirit. It always tries to learn something positive even from the perspectives with which it partly disagrees, rather than abandoning them totally and peeling them away. This is part of its more hospitable approach to the world. This hospitality or openness involves a willingness to change. Thus a Whiteheadian pluralistic approach to religions recognizes that individual members of different religions can change as they engage in dialogue with others, learning from them and incorporating new insights; and also that religions

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[8] Catherine Keller, "Piling Up and Hopefully Saving: Eschatology as a Feminist Problem." In Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein, eds., *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminsism*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990, 243-49.

[9] Peter C. Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology*, 39.

[10] Griffin and Huston Smith, Primordial *Truth and Postmodern Theology*. State University of New York, 1989, 44.

themselves can change. Religions are not doomed to repeat their pasts. They can also grow into more promising futures. Whitehead once said that the hope for religion is that it can welcome change in the same creative way that science welcomes change: that is, by admitting mistakes in the past, building upon achievements from the past, and being open to new ideas.[11]

In summary, a Whiteheadian religious pluralism of the kind that follows from Whitehead sees the universe as dynamic, creative, and pluralistic, and it sees world religions as creative traditions that can meaningfully participate in the universe, adding value and beauty to it. Participants in the religions can do this by recognizing that their own traditions are dynamic, and that their growth can be enriched by engaging in dialogue with people of other religions, knowing that each religion contains some truth, and that no religion contains all of it. Two thinkers who have done the most to help develop this Whiteheadian point of view in terms of its relevance to religion are Cobb and Griffin. It is to their thought I turn.

2. John Cobb's Approach

As a leading person in process thought in the world, Cobb is not only notable for his resultant attitude of religious pluralism, but has also played a very crucial role in shaping Whiteheadian religious pluralism. His contribution to Whiteheadian religious pluralism is without equal. In Knitter's words, "In the international, inter-Christian, and increasingly inter-religious conversation about dialogue, I honestly cannot think of any other name that is not only as broadly known but also as deeply respected as that of John Cobb."[12]

The pity is that Cobb's view of pluralism has received little attention from British and Continental scholars. Fortunately more and more scholars are realizing that Cobb's vision of religious pluralism is worth "exploring" and "does deserve more attention than it has received to date."[13]

As a matter of fact, religious pluralism has been one of the central concerns that has shaped much of his work in the past thirty years. He has been

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[11] Whitehead, *Science and Modern World*, 189.

[12] Paul F. Knitter, "Introduction." in John B. Cobb. *Transforming Christianity and the World: A Way beyond Absolutism and Relativism,* 1-2.

[13] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 99.

dedicated to promoting pluralism. Like many advocates of religious pluralism, Cobb's pluralism is also based on his rejection of exclusivism. Cobb realizes that, while pluralistic approaches are being developed among Christian theologians, exclusivism still remains dominant and powerful because many Christians still insist that Christianity is the one right or true way. "Other ways are seen either as evil or as anticipations of that which is perfected in the Christian one."[14] Cobb says he feels "uncomfortable" with the statement that "Christianity is the true religion."[15] He confesses that he is quite comfortable to in saying that "Christian faith opens him, in principle, to all truth"[16]

The exclusivist stance, in Cobb's view, is against history. It is against history because nothing historical is absolute. As a historical movement Christianity is alongside others. Nothing about Christianity justifies its exemption from thoroughgoing historical-critical investigation. "Our beliefs about it can only be shaped by such investigation." Therefore, for Cobb, "any tendency to absolutize any feature of Christianity is idolatry."[17]

To Cobb such an exclusivist stance eyes is also against Jesus. The historical Jesus was open to God as an indwelling lure toward creative transformation, amid which Jesus creatively transformed his own tradition, Judaism. In doing so he revealed a spirit of creative transformation that is at work throughout the world, which is the Word or Logos that became flesh in his own life. This Word or Logos is what Christians, Cobb suggests, should mean by Christ, and the calling of Christians is to be open to Christ in their way and their time, as Jesus was in his way and his time. "Christ is the Way that excludes no Ways."[18] According to Cobb's interpretation, "Jesus is the Way that is open to other Ways."[19] He emphasizes that when Christ becomes a principle of closedness, exclusiveness, and limitation, "he ceases to be what is most important for the Christian and the appropriate expression of the efficacy of Jesus."[20] That means, for Cobb, "The high appraisal of pluralism does not spring rootless from nowhere." For the Christian it comes from a new under-

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[14] Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 18.
[15] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World*, 175.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 44.
[18] Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 22.
[19] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World*, 7.
[20] Cobb, Christ *in a Pluralistic Age*, 19.

standing of Christ as creative process rather than an object. This involves a reinterpretation of God. In Cobb, "it is the belief that God is love that undergirds our rejection of exclusionary thinking."[21] For Cobb, "Love is not defensive. Love is open to leaning."[22] "We may learn that others do not employ such concepts. But their spiritual attainments, far from detracting from our belief in divine love, will show forth its achievement in even greater fullness." "We will take the other seriously as an other and seek to understand how that other thinks and feels."[23]

Cobb is convinced that Christians can find in their faith in Christ the reason for opening to others. These others include both Christians and non-Christians. Against those who teach that faith in Christ should restrict our openness to others, Cobb emphasizes that "Christ" who stops us from being open to others is, "an idol."[24] He remarks, "If I found that being a Christian inhibited openness and honesty, I could not remain a Christian. That is not because I am more committed to openness and honesty that than to Christ, but because I understand commitment to Christ involves commitment to openness and honesty."[25] Cobb invites Christians beyond their usual models for dealing with religious others to "take the risk of openness and learning, rather than the risk of closing ourselves up and simply repeating the same things."[26]

Cobb believes that "there is great wisdom, great virtue, and great promise in many communities besides our own." Therefore he prizes openness to others and regards it as an important constituent of religious pluralism. He explicitly said in his intellectual autobiography that his aim is to solve the tension between the particularity of faith and the affirmation of pluralism. His solution was to "understand faith in Christ as demanding openness to oth-

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[21] Cobb, "Hough's Alternative to Exclusion and Other Options." 84.

[22] Ibid., 85.

[23] Ibid.

[24] John B. Cobb Jr., "Toward Transformation." *The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*. Ed. Leonard Swilder and Paul Mojzes. Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1997, p.54.

[25] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World*, 175.

[26] Cobb, "Being Open to the Wisdom of Others." In *Dharma World*, January/February 2003, 10.

ers."[27] According to Alan Race's comments, "The virtue of Cobb's contribution is that he combines fidelity to Christ with unqualified openness to other faiths."[28]

To Cobb, to affirm pluralism is to affirm universal openness and inward appropriation of other traditions. Inter-religious dialogue is a crucial step in moving beyond exclusivism and toward openness to others.

On the one hand, inter-religious dialogue offers a way to expose the idolatries, falsehoods, and destructive practices present in any religion. Through dialogue, a religion can realize its tendency to absolutize its truth. Through mutual questioning and exploration, a religion can find its limits. All of these can serve as an antidote to exclusivism. In Hodgson's words, "dialogue can function as a refining fire that burns away what is false, evil, and idolatrous."[29]

On the other hand, dialogue provides a chance for each tradition to realize the truth and strengths that are present in other religious traditions as well as in one's own religion. Dialogue, as Cobb states, requires us to respect our partner and assumes that the partner "is worth listening to as well as addressing."[30] It is through dialogue that people come to understand one another better and learn to cooperate better; it is through dialogue that people learn from one another's ideas and insights and may be enriched by these ideas and insights in turn. For example, the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity provides a chance to deepen their self understanding and mutual understanding as Christianity provides a deep insight into the Buddhist understanding of selfhood and freedom. In turn, Buddhism provides a deeper insight into the Christian understanding of grace as non-attachment or non-clinging or non-self. Islam provides deep insight into the unity of which Hindus speak when they speak of Nirguna Brahman, but with its recognition that Brahman has many names and faced, it provides insight into the pluralistic consciousness that is needed, if an overriding emphasis on unity is to avoid becoming dogmatic sameness.

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[27] Cobb, John B, Jr., Retrospective." *Religious Studies Review* Vol. 19, No. 1, January 1993, 9.

[28] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 98.

[29] Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit*, 107.

[30] Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, viii.

Some scholars like Knitter charge that Cobb's statement about openness to others is too extreme. In responding to this charge, Cobb highlights the benefit we can get from encounter with others. He points out the following three advantages of openness to others. First, openness to others enables us to discern the truths in other traditions; conversely, closing oneself to one's own community negates the opportunity to appreciate others. For Cobb, "there is no prod that is stronger, more promising, more hopeful than that of encountering saintly people, wise people, who have come to their wisdom and to their saintliness through a very different history from ours, and in the process have learned many things that we have not learned." Secondly, opening to others can help Christians come to "a deeper understanding of faith" by learning something new from other religions. Third, opening to others enables us to realize the limits of our truths, thereby being willing to accept the concept of complementarity among different religions.

The emphasis on complementarity among different religions is another important aspect of Cobb's pluralism. Cobb takes the Eastern and Western understandings of body to illustrate his point: Both East and West have developed systems of healing based on their different understandings of the human body. Each has proved itself effective in its own context. Cobb's point of view is that both systems are true, or at least both systems contain many truths. The truths in the two systems differ from one another. The systems describe different features of the body. The West has studied body machinery and body chemistry. The East has attended to flows of energy. Both are real. "Yet the overall formulations of both East and West are false to whatever extent they exclude the truth of the other. No doubt there are other features of the human body not noticed by either."[31] Also, there is a possibility that some adequate comprehensive account of the body that integrates what each contributes will occur. "It will probably either integrate Eastern knowledge into an expanded Western understanding or integrate Western knowledge into an expanded Eastern vision. Perhaps both will occur. Or perhaps the integration will require a starting point not offered by either."[32] Cobb is convinced that "different cultural-linguistic systems have highlighted different features of the totality of reality. In much the same way that East and West have highlighted dif-

[31] Cobb, "Is Religious Truth Many or One?" 3.

[32] Ibid., 4.

ferent features of the body."[33]

According to Griffin's interpretation of Cobb's religious pluralism, by stressing complementarity, Cobb rejects the hitherto dominant approaches. He not only rejects dismissing other religions as false or as mere preparations for Christianity but also rejects the notion that all traditions are at bottom identical." That notion, according to Cobb, can result in "subtle Christian imperialism, if other religions are understood in terms of Christian categories of faith and "God," or Vedantist imperialism, if it is assumed that the Christian God is finally to be understood as the impersonal infinite."[34] Cobb is convinced that the conception of complementarity "is playing a growing and promising role in the emerging postmodern religious world."[35]

Respect Differences

Although Cobb emphasizes dialogue and opening, he is not blind to the real differences among different religious traditions. As Cobb puts it, postmodernism can "allow the deep difference between Buddhism and Christianity to stand without rejecting the basic truth claims of either." Although the God of the Abrahamic traditions – typically viewed as transcendent substance – is significantly different from Buddha-nature – totally denying such a supreme substance – they share something in common: they are both features of what is. "Both have the utmost existential importance, but attending to one leads to a very different sense of reality and of one's place in it than attending to the other."[36] Cobb deconstructs the confrontation between God and Buddha both by finding the Buddhist rejection of clinging in Christianity and finding God as all compassion in Buddhism. Traditionally, the conception of Christian salvation is regarded as totally different from the Buddhist one. For Christianity, salvation is new life through faith in Christ. For Buddhism, salvation is the realization of the universal Buddha principle normatively embodied in Gautama. It seems there is an irreconcilable contradiction between the two salvations. But, according to Cobb, if we examine the meaning of sal-

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[33] Ibid., 5.

[34] Griffin, "John B. Cobb, Jr." in *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, 708.

[35] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Postmodernism and Public Policy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, 53.

[36] Ibid., 52.

vation carefully, we find the contradiction disappears, as both of them are associated with compassion and love.

Cobb uses this example to indicate "the diversity is acceptable and that people should learn to live with it in mutual appreciation."[37] For Cobb, "this affirmation of the reality of highly diverse experiences and the truth of highly diverse convictions is essential to pluralism."[38] In this way Cobb differs from Hick, who prefers to search for commonality among religions rather than differences. For Cobb, the pluralism of Hick cannot go far enough because of its search for a common essence among different religious traditions. To Cobb's mind, a true pluralist should be against such a search. "We will oppose the tendencies to which we have been driven by modernism to reduce Christianity to a single essence, whether of experience, belief, or structure of existence."[39]

From a process perspective, Whiteheadian religious pluralism does not lead to the expectation that a single religion will eventually appear. Cobb presents several reasons for discouraging any such expectation. First, if the variety of religious experience is greatly diminished, the elements of zest and adventure so important to the process vision would be dulled. Second, the ongoing process ceaselessly brings the plurality together into new unities, but each of these unities keeps its own particularity. In addition, new unities jointly constitute new pluralities. Third, it is impossible for a religion to exhaust our knowledge of reality. New questions will be posed; new features of reality will be discerned. Even religions themselves will never remain the same because they are in process.

For Cobb, "Truly to accept pluralism is to abandon that quest. If our liberals really wish to be open, they should simply be open. The openness is inhibited by the need to state in advance what we have in common."[40] This does not mean that Cobb has a distaste for commonalities. He appreciates what we have in common with other religions and believes the commonalities should be celebrated. But he also challenges us to celebrate differences.

For Cobb, what is most valuable and interesting in different communities is not what they have in common but what they can offer to each other as

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 27.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World,* 44.

new.

Cobb challenges people to respect and preserve the real differences among the religions. In his point of view, "it is the most radical differences that stimulate the most fundamental reconsideration."[41] He takes Ch'an Buddhism's insistence on going beyond faith and theism as an example and states that it is this radical difference that makes conversation between non-theistic Buddhism and theistic religions like Christianity "so stimulating."

Cobb affirms not only Christian uniqueness, but also "the uniqueness of Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism." He is convinced that "the most interesting and fruitful dialogue between Christians and Muslims will be one in which the Christians accent what is distinctive to them and the Muslims do likewise." From Cobb's point of view, Christians should recognize that there may be other revelations or different ways of revelations. In his judgment, "It is too bad to say that we can only appreciate and respect people who are very much like ourselves." "We should be able to appreciate and respect people who are different from ourselves. It will be almost disappointing to find out that we are all really very much alike and our differences are not very significant." [42] Cobb prefers to speak of the great value and richness of difference rather than only to seek similarity and commonality.

At this point it is important to acknowledge that there are different kinds of differences. There are differences in doctrinal content and theoretical views of reality; there are differences in the values that function in people's life on a daily basis and in their social interactions; and there are differences in practices recommended by religions. It might seem as if Cobb and other process thinkers are primarily interested in theoretical differences, but in fact they are interested in all three kinds. They recognize that differences of practice can sometimes lead to conflict and cannot be harmonized. One religion may accept the practice of warfare under certain circumstances, while another may not. One religion may accept the practice of capital punishment, while another may not. These differences cannot be harmonized. The view of Cobb and others is that there is a Harmony of Harmonies within yet deeper than the universe – Whitehead spoke of this harmony as God – which is inherently pluralistic in its unity and which is also filled with love. This means that, at the level of practice, compassionate practices are more consonant with

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Cobb, "Being Open to the Wisdom of Others," 7.

the deeper rhythms of the universe than non-compassionate practices. And it means that, in the case of conflicts, religiously-minded people can enter into open-ended discussions, seeking to understand the motivations of the partners in dialogue, and trust that, *as respectful relationship is established*, agreements can emerge which had not been predicted in advance, by which the conflicts are resolved. The key to the Whiteheadian approach lies in this trust in the process of building relationships, even in the face of genuine conflicts.

Creative Transformation

Openness to other religions has repeatedly brought about change; Cobb calls change that comes about in this way "transformation" or creative transformation. "Creative transformation" is an important constituent of Cobb's pluralism. In Griffin's words, "creative transformation**"** is the "central notion in the thought of John Cobb." He calls himself "a transformationist" because he seeks both the transformation of religions and the transformation of the world. Cobb clearly states, "The basic pattern I am proposing among religious traditions is one of mutual openness leading to mutual transformation."[43] He is convinced that "It is the mission of a self-transforming Christianity to invite other religious traditions to undergo self-transformation as well."[44]

Cobb reinterprets the Greek word *metanoia* in terms of creative transformation, which is a central idea in the teaching of Christianity throughout the years. In English, *metanoia* is translated as "repentance," which indicates feeling ashamed for the bad things we have done. But in Cobb's judgment, this interpretation does not express the real meaning: "a change of mind, shift of direction." For Cobb, metanoia, or a shift of direction, is not a one-time thing, "We need, again and again, to shift direction."[45] He believes that the Christianity that would emerge from the appropriations of truth developed by other traditions "would be a different Christianity from what the West now knows."[46] For Cobb, creative transformation through openness to other traditions is a healthy way for Christianity to be saved.[47]

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[43] John B. Cobb, Jr., "Metaphysical Pluralism." unpub. 18.

[44] Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 142.

[45] Cobb, "Being Open to the Wisdom of Others," 9.

[46] Cobb, Beyond *Dialogue*, 149.

[47] Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 181.

3. Griffin's Contributions

Another leading advocate of Whiteheadian religious pluralism is David R. Griffin. According to him, the relation of various religions to each other is "one of the burning issues." "The very survival of civilization" for Griffin, depends on "the development of relations of mutual respect and even cooperation among the historic religious traditions."[48] Developing religious pluralism is viewed by Griffin as one of the greatest contributions philosophers of religion can make to human civilization.

Like Cobb, his teacher, Griffin holds a "resultant attitude of religious pluralism." For him, the exclusivist stance is unacceptable. He stresses that one's own religious tradition is not "the repository of all truth."[49] Each tradition contains important insights; no tradition could have survived without them.

"In any case, our first concern in getting to know people from other traditions would be: what can we learn from each other about our own deepest experience of and presuppositions about reality, especially about the Holy Reality and values?" For Griffin, "This positive, inquisitive concern would replace the two hitherto dominant attitudes, which have been either indifference to the other or zeal to convert the other, both of which presupposed that we had nothing essential to learn from the other."[50] What he intends here is to transform our theological differences into opportunities "for mutual learning and growth."[51]

Griffin appreciates not only the differences among religious traditions, but also the commonalities and agreements among them. Griffin uses "hard-core commonsense notions" which are common to all humanity, in the sense that they are presupposed by all human practice and "cannot be denied without contradicting one's own practice," to move beyond particularism and

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[48] Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, 247.

[49] Griffin. "Truth as Correspondence, Knowledge as Dialogical," *Truth: Interdisciplinary Dialogues in a Pluralist Age.* Ed. C. Helmer and K. Detroyer, Leuven-Paris-Dudley: Peeters, 2003, 248.

[50] Griffin, "A Theology of Religious Pluralism: A Postmodern Approach," unpub. 17.

[51] Ibid., 16.

"complete relativism." [52]

Griffin is convinced that process philosophy – with its doctrine of divine power as persuasive, not coercive, and its doctrine that God is not the only ultimate – can provide a metaphysical basis for "a version of 'religious pluralism' that differs significantly from the version associated primarily with John Hick."[53] Griffin is undoubtedly referring to Whiteheadian pluralistic pluralism; he is confident that this form of pluralism can help heal the wounds caused by past attitudes of superiority and indifference.

Although joining Cobb in many respects in the direction toward a genuine pluralism, Griffin has made some unique contributions to religious pluralism in general and Whiteheadian religious pluralism in particular. I would like to mention some of them here in order.

One of the greatest contributions Griffin has made to Whiteheadian religious pluralism is that he has emphasized the link between exclusivism and supernaturalism. Supernaturalistic theism holds the concept of God as an almighty, omnipotent being, who can arbitrarily give saving knowledge to one religion and withhold it from others. Such a supernaturalistic idea of God inevitably laid a foundation for exclusivism and naturally led to intolerant exclusive attitudes. Because "belief in an omnipotent God – in the sense of one who acts unilaterally in the world, not being dependent upon our response – leads naturally to belief in an infallible revelation. This infallible revelation is taken as announcing the One True Way, making all the other ways by definition false, even blasphemous. The desire to imitate deity by coercing others was accordingly reinforced by the conviction that in destroying one's own enemies one was destroying God's enemies."[54]

By contrast, the postmodern God who "does not coerce, but persuades"[55] would lead to a tolerant and pluralist attitude, which requires us to respect others. Because the postmodern God moves us "by giving us a dream, not a push." To imitate this God is to "provide others with visions by which they can realize their own deepest potentialities for creativity."[56]

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[52] Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism,* 5.

[53] Ibid., 248.

[54] Griffin, *Spirituality and Society*, 145.

[55] Griffin, *God & Religion in the Postmodern World*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, 25.

[56] Griffin, *Spirituality and Society*, 146.

Since process philosophy rejects the supernaturalistic notion of God, it is, therefore, natural for it to reject exclusivism. In Griffin's words, "The rejection of the traditional doctrine of divine power, accordingly, implies the rejection of religious exclusivism."[57] Griffin has revealed "a strong correlation" between the rejection of supernaturalism and the affirmation of pluralism. For him, the rejection of supernaturalism, "in the sense of the belief in a divine being that occasionally interrupts the world's normal causal processes," not only undermines the assumption that God's participation in the origin of Christianity was ontologically unique, but also leads to pluralism. It is the rejection of supernaturalism, as Suchocki points out, that leads to a view of the God-world relation that not only makes religious diversity theologically expected, rather than a theological aberration, but also shows how God can be understood as equally involved in radically diverse religious traditions.

For Griffin, there is "a strong correlation between the rejection of supernaturalism and the affirmation of pluralism," which leads, therefore, to the ontological basis for the shift to religious pluralism.[58] This discovery can be regarded as one of the important contributions Griffin has made to pluralism.

The second contribution Griffin made to Whiteheadian religious pluralism in particular is that he has found the connection between naturalistic theism and religious diversity. The rejection of divine omnipotence accordingly leads to the abandonment of the notion of the identity of all religion. At the same time, it provides for the difference among religions with its doctrine of self-determination and of context, according to which, every occasion of experience is not only partly self-determining, but also influenced by the past world. "Every moment of human experience begins with an initial aim that reflects the eternal character and purpose of God."[59] This means God works in the world, but not alone. God must work within human history that is unfolding in different ways and giving rise to different kinds of religious experience. For example, people who grow up in a Buddhist context are significantly different from those in a Muslim context. At the same time, both of them are significantly diverse from those raised in a Jewish or Christian background. Likewise, modern Jews and Christians are significantly different from Jews

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[57] Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism*, 257.

[58] Griffin, "Religious Pluralism: Generic, Identist, and Deep." *Deep Religious Pluralism*, 12.

[59] Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism,* 258.

and Christians in the Middle Ages.

Therefore, from Griffin's point of view, it is impossible for all religious traditions to share the same experience about ultimate reality due to "the noncoercive nature of divine influence plus the radical freedom and thereby historicity of human beings."[60] This is, to Griffin, not a bad thing because it provides a chance for each tradition "to contribute to, and to learn from, the other traditions."[61] Accordingly, Griffin challenges people to pay attention to the differences among the world religions.

Griffin maintains that the various religions are not simply superficially different; they are not all saying the same thing. He believes that "each tradition, on the basis of its selective focus on certain aspects of our common experience and presuppositions and its interpretation thereof, has made further discoveries that perhaps only it could have made."[62] For example, unlike Christianity that has developed unique doctrines, practices, and institutions with respect to social justice, Buddhism has created methods for self-transformation through meditation disciplines. For him, the words Yahweh, Allah**,** and God do not point to the same reality as do the words Brahman, Emptiness, and the Tao. Therefore, the different religions, with their different understandings of the Holy, produce people with significantly different structures of experience.

The third contribution Griffin has made to Whiteheadian religious pluralism is that, following Cobb, he clearly proposes the doctrine of two Ultimates, which lays an ontological foundation for religious pluralism. Before Griffin, Cobb had already asked what is wrong with questioning the notion that there is only one ultimate reality. He knew that those who affirm this doctrine regard it as self-evident and suppose a pluralistic metaphysic to be nonsensical. They may be right. "But is this supposition itself not subject to dialogue?"[63] This is Cobb's question.

Griffin realizes that traditional exclusivism and modern pluralism are connected to a widespread assumption in the West that all religions are oriented around the same ultimate and God is regarded the only ultimate, "from

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[60] Ibid., 259

[61] Ibid.

[62] Griffin, "A Theology of Religious Pluralism: A Postmodern Approach," unpub., 18.

[63] Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 88.

which all other realities are derivative."[64] So Griffin finds it necessary to replace that assumption with the doctrine of plural Ultimates in order to repudiate exclusivism.

From the perspective of Whiteheadian religious pluralism based on Whitehead's cosmology, Griffin insists that there is another Ultimate in our universe besides God. It is creativity. There are, therefore, at least two ultimates: God, the in-formed ultimate and creativity, the formless ultimate. If God is regarded as personal ultimate reality, creativity can be regarded as impersonal ultimate reality.

Conceiving of creativity as an ultimate is a significant contribution process thinkers have made to pluralism. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead simply states, "In all philosophic theory there is an ultimate which is actual in virtue of its accidents. It is only then capable of characterization through its accidental embodiments, and apart from these accidents is devoid of actuality. In the philosophy of organism this ultimate is termed 'creativity.'"[65]

It must be noted that the doctrine of two ultimates has nothing to do with dualism because God and creativity are two equally primordial but mutually dependent ultimate realities. Creativity is the ultimate reality of the universe, presupposed by every instance of actuality, including the divine instance. God is the ultimate actuality of the universe, giving Creativity its primordial form.

From the assumption of two ultimates, the validity of two fundamentally different kinds of religious experience becomes possible. Both kinds of experience can be viewed as "equally veridical." One involves the impersonal ultimate, namely creativity; one involves the personal ultimate, namely God. A recognition of two ultimates helps adjudicate the conflict between theists and nontheists, each of whom, without a doctrine of two ultimates, tends to reject the point of view of the other, believing that the two points of view – theism and nontheism – are mutually exclusive. The doctrine of two ultimates helps them to overcome the basis of this exclusivism. Instead we can say that nontheistic religion is not wrong "because we are each instantiations of creativity … which is the impersonal ultimate reality."[66] We can also say that theism is not wrong "because the impersonal ultimate reality is al-

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[64] Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism*, 260

[65] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 7.

[66] Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism*, 282.

ways instantiated in the everlasting, all-inclusive personal ultimate reality, whose creative and responsive love for the creatures can be experienced."[67]

Furthermore, the doctrine of two ultimates Griffin promotes helps avoid Hickian universalistic pluralism that makes all religions equal. In contrast, Whiteheadian pluralism, according to Griffin, "allows us to see that the two basic kinds of religions, insofar as they have been describing different ultimate realities, have been equally right."[68] Thus we can say to those who hold views different from ours; you may also be right, I can learn from your experience, and you can learn from mine. Griffin's doctrine of two ultimates makes the relationship among religions one of mutual teaching and learning, mutual growth and understanding, rather than antagonism and unwelcome attempts at conversion. Different religious traditions no longer need to conflict with each other because they are predicated on different ultimate realities. Instead of canceling each other, they complement each other. They learn from one another and cooperate with one another in terms of the many values they have in common. "They may also be inspired to work toward 'higher-order global religions' that can 'embrace complementary worldviews.'"[69] Each can be truly complementary to the other toward a fuller truth.

We are accustomed to hold tight to a bit of truth we have found and protect it from others who might doubt it. The doctrine of two ultimates makes us realize that learning someone else's truth might expand our truth rather than destroy it. Whiteheadian religious pluralism insists that the truth is larger than we can know, and that our own experience is only a portion of the reality available to all of us together.

4. The Relevance of Whiteheadian Religious Pluralism

It is apparent that Whiteheadian religious pluralism built on Whiteheadian philosophy has the virtues of openness, richness and constructiveness. It is these benefits that allow Whiteheadian religious pluralism to make a unique contribution to religious pluralism by being the antidote to both religious uni-

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., 284.

versalism and particularism. The significance of Whiteheadian religious pluralism is not limited to moving beyond the impasse between religious universalism and particularism; it has many other advantages.

One advantage is that Whiteheadian religious pluralism advocates a genuine open attitude toward other traditions, which helps us to break down our parochialisms and closed-minded exclusivism. Such an open attitude encourages us to "be sensitive to the feelings and intuitions of others," to understand others, to learn from others when this is possible: that is, when there is the possibility of verbal or semantic agreement and when there are no overriding normative conflicts that prevent meaningful dialogue. In short, learning from others is possible under certain circumstances. But even when we cannot learn from others, we can be open to them, in the sense of understanding and empathizing with their motivations, having a sense of what it is like to look at the world from their point of view. And we can will their well-being, their happiness, rather than falling into an attitude of resentment or hatred.

Openness to others, then, can be regarded as the "cure" to our Yelangism. Yelangism derives from a Chinese story: There was a small country named Yelang in the Han Dynasty of ancient China. It was located at the southwest border area of China. Once the King of Yelang who had been conceiving of his country as the center of the world asked the diplomatic envoy from China: Which one is bigger, China or Yelang? This story later led to a new Chinese idiom, "Yelangzida" meaning ludicrous conceit and parochial arrogance: I already have all the truth and there is nothing left to learn.

The second advantage is that it not only harnesses the energy of the pluralistic spirit, but also safeguards it against the danger of sheer relativism and indifference. Some critics have linked pluralism with a valueless relativism – an undiscriminating twilight in which "all cats are gray," all perspectives equally viable, and as a result, equally uncompelling. But Whiteheadian religious pluralism has nothing to do with conceptual and other debilitating forms of relativism, although it challenges us to relativize absolute claims and make room for a genuine respect for difference. Whiteheadian religious pluralism deals with difference in a new way from relational/process thinking. While it does relativize every form taken by Christianity in time, it does not relativize the process of creative transformation.

Whiteheadian religious pluralism emphasizes that the understandings and expressions of religions are multivalent. Those various understandings of

human existence are not simply different ways of understanding a reality; rather, "at least to some extent the different understandings reflect different realities." Therefore Whiteheadian religious pluralism stresses interrelation among different religions. It deabsolutizes each religion's own absolute and exclusive claim while acknowledging and learning its strengths. For Whiteheadian pluralistic pluralism, to deabsolutize does not mean to relativize. It means to normalize. Such a pluralism will be truly humble and open; it will be much easier to accept by religious people at a global level, on which a pluralistic global theology may be based.

More important is that Whiteheadian pluralism, as opposed to falling into complete relativism that fails to recognize that some historical situations are preferable to others, makes room for real commitment to the cultivation of forms of community that are just, sustainable, non-violent, and respectful of both cultural and religious diversity,. Cobb and Griffin both show how that commitment leads to the respect of other religions.

In this way, their point of view surpasses the more limited perspectives of Hick and Heim as we discussed in previous chapters.

Many Western approaches build upon the seminal work of John Hick and S. Mark Heim, and rightly so. Both have much to offer the scholarly world even as each suffers from internal inconsistencies. A Western-oriented Whiteheadian pluralism does not stop with naming their inconsistencies; it builds a more comprehensive point of view in which their virtues can be appreciated. One of Hick's virtues is his recognition that religions can indeed have commonalities and that there can be profound dialogue between traditions. One of Heim's virtues is his affirmation that each religion is unique, with particularity of its own, and that sometimes it is necessary for people of different religions simply to disagree. What is missing from Heim's particularism is the possibility that people of different traditions may have some things in common; that dialogue builds relationships even if they do not have things in common; that religions are themselves changing over time; and that dialogue can be part of this change. A Whiteheadian pluralistic approach can welcome both commonality and difference, both agreement and disagreement, showing how constructive relationships can be built in the very process of dialogue. In the process itself, relationships develop that add to people's lives. As we will see in the next chapter, China offers a model of creative relationships among religions that can also add to the world of scholarly discussion.

This is a healthy attitude at least for our moment in history. It involves mutual learning based on similarities and complementary differences, mutual transformation, and mutual growth. I will call this distinctively Chinese version of Whiteheadian pluralism "harmonism."

Chapter 5

Chinese Harmonism

One Paradox, however, must be accepted and this is that it is necessary to continually attempt the seemingly impossible.
---Hermann Hesse, *The Journey to the East*

Classical China is in a very real sense postmodern.
---David Hall

Process is at the essence of Chinese traditions. Process thinking has deeply influenced Chinese people's way of thinking and way of living. Naturally it has also influenced the way in which Chinese people treat religious diversity. My aim in this chapter is not present an argument or engage in dialogue with scholarly sources, but rather to present an image of Chinese Harmonism which, as applied in concrete situations, can play a constructive role in inter-religious encounters and which can be developed by scholars in the future.

Process thought is now an international movement. Chinese thinkers have recently begun taking a strong interest in Whitehead. A unique form of process thinking is emerging: Chinese process thought. Analogously to process thought in the West, Chinese process thought deals with a range of topics: education, economics, ecology, science, spirituality, and, as in this work, religious diversity. It builds upon the work of Whitehead along with the classical Chinese traditions: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. There has also been some dialogue with Chinese Marxism. Distinctively Chinese versions of religious pluralism are emerging and will continue to develop in the foreseeable future. My aim in this chapter is to introduce and outline one such version. I call it Chinese harmonism**.**

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the section that follows I explain my use of the word harmonism and show why, in articulating a Chi-

nese approach to religious diversity, I do not speak of "pluralism" or "syncretism." In the next section I outline key features of harmonism and present some of its practices in Chinese society: peaceful co-existence, mutual transformation, openness to change. And in the final section I articulate the philosophical foundations of harmonism, some Whiteheadian and some Chinese, which form a bridge between East and West.

1. Harmonism, Pluralism, Syncretism

Harmonism does not appear in most English dictionaries. We find words like harmonics, which pertains to music and the way that notes can be consonant or dissonant with one another; and harmonization, which does indeed carry some of the meaning I want to suggest by "harmonism." The word harmonization denotes an activity of bringing many things into harmony that were distinct and separate prior to their being harmonized. This is another part of what I mean by harmonism. Specifically, I mean the activity of human beings as they open their hearts and minds to different religious traditions and hold them together in a unified and sympathetic appreciation. The traditions then become harmonized in their minds and hearts. But I use the word harmonism over harmonization, because I want to say that traditions can be brought together in the lives of human beings that already exist in some kind of harmony, even prior to being brought together. In Chinese society, for example, people assume that Taoism and Confucianism already exist in harmony as possible ways of living, even prior to being harmonized in the lives of individual Chinese. The two traditions are compatible and even contain elements of the other; just as in the *Yin-Yang* diagram the two poles contain elements of the other. Thus the two traditions are not simply harmonized by people; they are already harmonic, like consonant notes in music. I hope the word harmonism can suggest that things already exist in harmony in some ways, even as they can be further harmonized in human life.

In addition, I use the word harmonism for another reason. The concept of harmony is at the heart of Chinese religious and philosophical intuitions and a word like harmonism can help me explain what is uniquely important to a Chinese version of religious pluralism. Interestingly, the concept of harmony is also important in Whitehead's thought, upon which I am basing much of my own point of view. Whitehead once said his organic philosophy has an affinity with Chinese thought, and I believe that his emphasis on harmony is

one such affinity. Chapter four showed how, in Whitehead's thought, the process of concrescence involves many different entities being harmonized into the whole of a single moment of experience. In the moment of its occurrence, this process is the activity of aiming at a goal of satisfaction, in which the many influences from the past become harmonized in the present, forming mutually enriching "contrasts" in the experience of the subject undergoing and enacting the process. This subject is the activity of experiencing itself – the activity of seeking and finding some degree of harmonious intensity and intense harmony. This harmonization does not involve melting all entities into one thing or, in the case of religion, pretending that they are all saying the same thing or seeking the same end. Instead it involves appreciating the differences among them while also recognizing that their differences can be felt and known as complementary rather than contradictory, as mutually enhancing rather than mutually repelling. When multiple entities are felt as mutually enhancing rather than contradictory, Whitehead says that they are felt as contrasts. The items that can be "felt" as gathered together in the form of a contrast are not simply objective entities perceived by the senses; they are also emotions, memories, hopes, dreams as enjoyed by oneself and others. Directly or indirectly, other people are part of one's own experience; their experiences are part of those that form who we are in the moment at hand. For Whitehead, contrasting influences – for example, contrasting ideas or emotions – do not necessarily conflict with one another; instead they enrich one another. It is this enrichment that is important to the philosophy of religious harmony that I am recommending. Harmony of this kind is a middle way between monism, which reduces all religions to a single essence, and disjunctive pluralism, which envisions religions as mutually external movements separated by unbridgeable boundaries, inevitably competing with one another. In short, harmonism is a Chinese version of what, in previous chapters, I have called Whiteheadian religious pluralism.

Thus the question arises: Why not use the word pluralism instead of harmonism? It is certainly true that, in the West today, the word pluralism is used most often by those who want to affirm differences among religions, whether contradictory or complementary. Heim thinks of himself as a pluralist; so does John Hick. John Cobb and David Ray Griffin use the word pluralism to describe their points of view. I am deeply sympathetic with both approaches and, in fact, build this work upon theirs. Nonetheless, I avoid the

word pluralism in this chapter because, Cobb and Griffin notwithstanding, the term has two connotations in the minds of many, both of which are foreign to a Chinese approach.

One is modern individualism, in which the human subject is depicted as having a single, self-contained identity, religious or otherwise, which stands over and against other religious options embodied by others. In China, this kind of self-contained identity is not the norm. A person can be fully Buddhist in some ways, fully Confucian in others, and fully Taoist in still others. If this kind of self-identification is pluralistic, then the pluralism lies within the person and not just between the person and other people. This person does not stand over and against others who have alternative religious points of view; instead this person includes those others within the nature of his or her own existence. In Whiteheadian language, the many religions become one in the person. Too often, to non-Whiteheadians, the word "pluralism" suggests a plurality of self-contained and exclusive identities which may or may not be contradictory, but which cannot be jointly included within a single life. In other words, the many are outside the one. I choose harmonism over pluralism in order to suggest a different way of being human, a way in which some people can actually include different religions within their own lives without diluting the differences.

The second reason I prefer harmonism is that the word pluralism can sometimes suggest, again to non-Whiteheadians, the kind of binary thinking – that is, either/or thinking – that I described in chapter four. There I proposed that binary thinking is an essential feature of western modernity. In a Chinese context, binary thinking is not the norm. Of course, as all humans do, Chinese must make choices between mutually exclusive options. The tendency among Chinese, however, is toward both/and rather than either/or, which means that when many Chinese are presented with different religious options, they are disposed to want to affirm both of them.

Of course, for Whiteheadians such as John Cobb and David R. Griffin, "pluralism" is grounded in this kind of both/and thinking. But, as we have seen, for non-Whiteheadians, the word "pluralism" can suggest mutually exclusive options that require a choice between incommensurable alternatives. In order to communicate with non-Whiteheadians, I use the word harmonism. Contrary to Heim, there are differences between traditions, but they are not incommensurable; they are at least potentially complementary. At the level

of theory, the complementarity is possible, among other reasons, because there are multiple ultimates around which a life can be oriented. At the level of lived values in people's lives, the differences cannot easily be transformed into complementary contrasts, but friendships can be developed which then make possible creative transformations among the parties involved, in which case new forms of complementarity emerge which were not evident beforehand. For example, in the case of conflicts between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East, the building of friendships among Jews and Muslims can itself open up possibilities for creative transformation within each group, which then open up new possibilities for living together in harmony.

Another word that might be used to describe Chinese harmonism is syncretism, which denotes a combination of ideas and practices from different religions. Some Western scholars, such as Judith Berling, do actually categorize the Chinese tradition as a type of "syncretism." To be sure, she acknowledges, "syncretism is a heuristic construct of the history of religion. There was certainly no such term in traditional Chinese religious thought."[1] Still, she described the Chinese approach to religion as syncretistic. Although I appreciate her effort to redefine and defend "syncretism," I think it better to avoid this label. The term "syncretism" in English is strongly colored by its connection with "eclecticism." As the authors of *Guidelines* note: "Despite attempts to rescue the word 'syncretism' it now conveys, after its previous uses in Christian debate, a negative evaluation."[2] Syncretism generally connotes a judgment that the mixture is illegitimate. People accused of syncretism are often charged with "selling out." Borrowing ideas from other traditions means, "polluting the purity of the normative."[3] When I speak of harmonism as harmonizing different traditions in a person's life, I do not mean to say that he or she is selling out or polluting traditions.

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[1] Judith Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, 8.

[2] *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1973, Cited in John Berthrong, *All Under Heaven—Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, 169.

[3] Willard G. Oxtoby, *The Meaning of Other Faiths*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983,105.

More importantly, the term "syncretism" lacks the connotation of creativity. Accordingly, it cannot express the dimension of creative transformation in Chinese religious harmonism. The harmony among Chinese religions is not a static one. It is dynamic, always expecting and encouraging new possibilities. Even as people harmonize different traditions in their lives, they also add to what they harmonize. In Whitehead's words, the many become one and are increased by one. In this increase there is deep creativity.

In the next section, then, I have two aims. First, I want to show that an emphasis on harmony has been a continuing tradition in Chinese history, which, in the words of one scholar, has been "a shining example of the amiable relationship among religions."[4] Second, I want to highlight some of the general themes that have been part of the Chinese tradition: an emphasis on the equality of different religions, on the complementarity of the traditions, on the universality of the traditions, and on the attitude of openness itself.

A preliminary caveat is in order. In speaking of Chinese history as an example, I have no intention of drawing too rosy a picture. As a matter of historical fact, there have been religious conflicts and persecutions in China: Taoists and Buddhists quarreled off and on for almost three hundred years from the fourth through the sixth century. Nevertheless, even at the height of their quarrels, no scholars condemned the other as so false, or so wicked, that they ought to be eliminated or wiped out. Moreover, the general outlook of ordinary citizens was that all three traditions can and should co-exist peacefully. People belonging to different religious traditions – Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, for example – typically felt that the other traditions were complementary to, not contradictory of, their own religious heritages, and individuals often identified with one or more of the traditions simultaneously. In short, they embodied an open and appreciative attitude toward all religions. This openness is one of the central features of Chinese harmonism.

[4] Chan, "The Historical Chinese Contribution to Religious Pluralism and World Community," in *Religious Pluralism and World Community*. Ed. Edward J. Jurji. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1969, 115.

2. Chinese Harmonism

A number of scholars have done extensive research on the distinctive character of the Chinese tradition. Key figures in this research include Wing Tsit Chan, Judith Berling, and Milton M. Chiu. In their work four characteristics are typically highlighted. The first is an emphasis on the equality of all religions. Here equality does not mean that all are the same. It means that all function to enrich human life in different ways, adding to what it means to be fully human, and that all deserve equal regard. The second is an emphasis on complementarity; insights and practices of the religions are compatible and mutually enriching, helping complete the other. The third is an emphasis on oneness, which means treating the religions as constituting an organic whole (rather than a homogenized one that erases diversity). And the fourth is an emphasis on undogmatic openness. These four traits can be taken as defining characteristics of a Chinese approach to religious pluralism, a Chinese Harmonism.

Equality of all Religions

Emphasizing "equal regard for all religions" is one of the distinctive characteristics of Chinese religious harmonism. This regard leads to appreciating that each is unique, containing values not found in the others, and that each is equally valuable in fulfilling human life.

For Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi**,** the co-founders of Taoism, this equality is stated in the simple formulation that the Tao "treats all things as one."[5] The oneness at issue here does not mean "identity," but instead means the equal fulfillment of human life in its own way. In other words, equality does not denote "mathematical or physical equivalence in virtue of which any one element may be substituted for another," instead, "it denotes," in John Dewey's words, "effective regard for whatever is unique and distinctive in each."[6]

Taoism's concept of "one" or "equality" is a direct product of its concept of nature, because, in the Taoist vision, nature never discriminates. Pine

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[5] Zhuang Zi, Ch. 2. In *The Current Note and Translation on Zhuang Zi*. 62.

[6] John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1927. cited in David Hall and Roger Ames. *Thinking from the Han.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998, 281.

trees on mountains never look down upon springs. All of them are part of the beauty of nature. Nature treats things equally, in light of the uniqueness of each thing.

In this light, many Chinese thinkers, including Taoists, emphasize an equality of different religions. For Bai Yuzhan, a famous Taoist of the Southern Song Dynasty, "Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism should be regarded as equal."[7]

Often the word "equality" means that each religion has a distinctive excellence that is incomparable with others, which also have their unique excellences. It is like the colors in a rainbow; each color is uniquely itself and adds something unique to the whole. As Ku Huan, a Taoist puts it: "Taoism and Buddhism are equal in illuminating and transforming people."[8] They may transform people in different ways, but each does so in a unique way that makes each one equally valuable.

This corresponds to a point emphasized in chapter four, where David Ray Griffin is quoted as saying that each religion reveals something of the nature of reality, even as what it reveals may be different from what another religion reveals. Indeed, as Griffin makes clear, religions may reveal different ultimate realities, or different features of reality, each of which is ultimate in its own way. Recognition of these different truths may be relevant in different historical situations. It may have been right for Buddhists in India to awaken to the ultimacy of Nirvana, just as it was right for Jews to awaken to Yahweh**,** given their respective historical situations. Nirvana and Yahweh are not identical, but both are ultimate in their respective ways.

This is true to the intuitions of the Chinese. There is common understanding among Chinese thinkers that different religions developed under a variety of situations to meet basic needs of the times, but they are all "convenient means" to a fulfillment of human life in one way or another. In the words of Sun Ch'o of Chin dynasty (265-420), Confucius sought order and peace in society, the Buddha sought enlightenment in the fundamental nature of existence, but their goal of helping fulfill human life, in one way or another, is the same. And as Tsung-mi stated:

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[7] *China Dao Cang*, ed. by Peng Zhizhong. Antique Press, Shanghai Press and Tianjin Ancient Writings Press, 1988, Vol.24, 270.

[8] I-hsia lun, "On Foreign and Chinese Religions." Cited in Chan, Wing-Tsit. "The Historical Chinese Contribution to Religious Pluralism and World Community," 122.

> Confucius, Lao Zi and Shakya Buddha were perfect sages. They established their teachings according to the demands of the age and the needs of various beings. They differ, therefore, in their approaches. Buddhist teachings and non-Buddhist teachings, however, complement each other; they benefit people, encourage them to perfect all good deeds, clarify the beginning and end of causal relationship, penetrate all phenomena (dharma), and throw light on [the relationship] between root and branch by which all things come into being. Although the teachings reflect the intentions of the sages, differences exist in that there are real and provisional doctrines. Confucianism and Taoism are provisional doctrines. Buddhism consists of both real and provisional doctrines. In that they encourage the perfection of good deeds, punish wicked ones, and reward good ones, all three teachings lead to the creation of an orderly society; for this they must be observed with respect.[9]

It is obvious that all of these sayings represent a call for equal regard as well as for harmony or peaceful coexistence among religions.

Complementarity of Religions

An emphasis on the equality of different religions can be premised on different assumptions. On the one hand, it can be premised on the assumption that there is a conceptual complementarity among the traditions, not only as harmonized in the lives of individual Chinese, but also in the religions themselves, even prior to being harmonized. On the other hand, it can be premised on the assumption that all religions have identical ultimates and modes of salvation. The Chinese tradition prefers the first approach. This kind of complementarity among different religions was appreciated by Chinese thinkers. In Soothill's words, "The three Chinese religions are complementary rather than antagonistic to each other. And together they make a fuller provision for human needs than any one of them does separately. Consequently no clear line of demarcation popularly exists between them."[10]

John Cobb, whose approach to religious diversity has enriched this work, makes the same point about Chinese religions. In China, he explains,

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[9] Tsung-mi, "On the Original Nature of Man." in *The Buddhist Tradition: In India, China, and Japan.* Ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary et al., New York: Modern Library, 1969, 181.

[10] W. E. Soothill, *Three Religions of China*, London: Oxford University Press, 1929, 12-13.

different religious traditions "could function in a complementary fashion."[11] Although different religions have their own languages and are radically different, they imply each other and produce each other. In other words, their teachings and practices form what Whitehead calls "contrasts." For Whitehead, a contrast is not a conflict; it is a gathering into unity of two or more realities, whose very differences enrich an appreciation of the other. It is by virtue of such contrasts that, in China, people could appreciate and participate in different religions, knowing that participants in one had much to learn from the others

In the Chinese context, each religion has different emphases and functions. The metaphor of water control provides an illustration. Confucianism emphasizes embankment, for example, whereas Buddhism emphasizes planting trees and preserving soil. Zhi Yuan of the Song Dynasty remarked, "Confucianism is good for one's physical accomplishment and Buddhism is good for one's psychological accomplishment." Thus Zhi Yuan advocated that both Confucianism and Buddhism could be complementary and mutually beneficial. For Emperor Xiaozong of Song, the three religions depend on each other. No one can be lacking in cultivating people, "Buddhism is responsible for the mind, the Taoism for the body and the Confucianism for the society."[12] "Together they help the world shine, so no one will be lacking."[13]

With regard to the relationship between Confucianism and Buddhism, a great many Chinese religious thinkers believe that the two traditions not only complement one another in function, but actually need each other, being incomplete without the other. For example, Zhou Rudeng (1547-1629) pointed out that Confucianism and Buddhism offer insights and practices that are not found in the other, and that, in isolation they lack completion. For example, he charged that Confucians make Confucianism shallow by ignoring the potential contributions of Buddhist thought.[14] This idea parallels a more general feeling among many Chinese. In China people often can hear sayings like this: Confucianism is the sun; Buddhism is the moon; Taoism is the stars. Confu-

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[11] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World*, 69.

[12] Quoted in Liu Mi. "On Viewing the Three Religions with a Balanced Mind," (*Sanjiao Pingxin Lun*), see *http://sutra.goodweb.cn/lon/other52/2117-1.htm*

[13] *China Dao Cang*, 113.

[14] Zhou Rudeng, *Dongyue Zhengxue Lu.* Taipei: Wenhai Press, 1970. 7.23a-b. cited in Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-En*. 51.

cianism governs the state; Taoism governs the body; Buddhism governs the mind. The three religions enrich each other mutually, and are incomplete without the others.

Treating the Three Religions as an Organic Whole

The idea that the three religions are incomplete without the other suggests to the Chinese mind that they form a single whole or body: a single yet diversified great Way. A monistic perspective might conclude that the Chinese religions are saying the same thing. A more Chinese perspective along the lines of the Harmonism I am proposing, however, advocates a whole that is organic rather than homogenized: a one that includes many rather than a one that erases diversity. That is, human religion is regarded as an organic whole in plural forms. As an unseparated organic whole, different religions face the same fate, share the same concern, shoulder the same responsibility, develop together, grow together, like "all the Sun, the moon, the stars" are parts of the sky as whole, "share the same sky."[15]

The very idea of organism, which Whitehead used to describe his own philosophy, includes such diversity. This concept of harmonism is borne out by the following illustrations from Chinese history.

According to Wang Yangming (1472-1528), the founder of Mind School, "The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person. As to those who make a cleavage between objects and distinguish between the self and others, they are small men."[16] Like Wang Yangming, many scholars of Chinese history realized the disadvantage of being narrow-minded and exclusive in one's thinking. Therefore they argued for the compatibility of the different religions. There is a strong tradition in China that puts great emphasis on oneness or the organic whole. "The three religions originally are a family, just like the lotus root, lotus leaf, and lotus flower."[17]

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[15] Luo Qing, *Five Books in Six Volumes* (*Wubu Liuce*) Original edition 1509, commentary, 1596. Reprinted, Taizhong, Mindetang 1980. Ma Xisha. 1989. 240.

[16] Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Tran. and compiled by Wing-Tsit Chan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, 659.

[17] *Orthodox Dao Zang*, Taipei: Yiwen Press, 1997, Vol. 40.

Similarly, Tao Hongjing, a famous Taoist, stressed the practice of both Buddhism and Taoism. He called himself a disciple of Buddha, and established two shrines in Map Mountain, a Taoist camp, where he worshiped in each every other day. He even asked his disciples to cover his body with a Buddhist cassock when he was dying. Bai Yuzhan emphasized that "the three religions are different in form; the same root source they share."[18]

Following the same train of thought, the Whole Real School of Taoism advocated san jiao he yi, namely the integration of the three religions; that is, the integration of Confucianism, which values rationality, Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism, which values spiritual cultivation, and Taoism, which values the cultivation of bodily life. Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism were regarded as coming from the same fountain.

Indeed, according to Wang Chongyang, the founder of the Whole Real School, Lao Zi, Confucius, and Buddha are all gods. They established three religions in their respective places that offered salvation in different ways. Therefore, "the three religions are like the three legs of the ancient cooking vessel, sharing the same body. They are also like the different branches of the same tree."[19] Besides *Dao De Jing* (*Tao Te Jing)*, the other classics Whole Real School believers studied were the Buddhist *Lotus Scripture* and the Confucian *Filial Piety*. Based on his view of three religions as equal, Wang also set up a society named Association for Equality of three Religions. Zhang Sanfeng, another famous Taoist and the founder of the Wudang School, also expressed the idea that the three religions in China came from the same origin. Zhang maintained that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism had the same tendency to cultivate moral character and to benefit the people of the world. Buddhist thinkers also emphasized the convergence among the different religions. De Qing, a famous monk of Ming Dynasty, said, "The saints of the three religions have the same heart, they differ in ways."[20]

This emphasis on having the same heart can be misleading. It does not mean that they contain the same insight or have the same practice or even that they lead to the same end. "They differ in their ways." It does mean that they all reveal something about the truth of the universe, which has many different

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[18] China Dao Cang, 270.

[19] Orthodox Dao Zang, Vol.43, 0585-0586.

[20] De Qing, *The Completed Work of the Dream Roaming of Great Master Hanshan*. Taipei: Wenshu Press, 1989, vol. 45, 830.

faces, and add to what it means to live in the world in a fully human and satisfying way. They all form part of a single organic, creatively unfolding Way.

This is how, in Chinese Harmonism, we can interpret the idea of Lin Chaoen, who was called by his contemporaries "master of the three religions"[21] due to his advocacy of the harmonization of the three religions.

For Lin, the three religions are one because their Tao (Way) is one. From his point of view, the Tao or the Way is one, and each of the three teachings embodies the Way. To Lin, the Tao is the unity before the three religions were differentiated.[22] Lin Chaoen stresses that what he is doing has nothing to do with combining the three religions into one: "One is always a Buddhist, always a Taoist, and always a Confucian."[23]

Seen within the perspective that I am developing, Lin means that, within a given human being, one can find the whole of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism as integrated into a single life through aspects of each tradition, which are part of that whole. Thus, in Chinese Harmonism, it is not true to say simply that each religion forms part of a larger whole that is outside the self from which a person then picks and chooses; it is also true to say that, as a person selects aspects of a religion, the whole of the religion is embodied in that person's life through the aspect he or she chooses. Thus, this is analogous to Whitehead's idea that, when actual entities in the past are objectified in the emergence of a single moment of experience, it is the entities themselves – as a whole – that are inside the moment, albeit from a particular point of view or perspective. There are two ways to put this. We can say that the present contains part of the past actual entity; or that the past actual entity is present in the moment as objectified by one or another of the present actual entity's prehensions. There is wisdom in both ways of speaking, but the Chinese lean toward the latter, at least when it comes to religion. In the life of a person whose self includes the three traditions, the three traditions are truly present: "There is no place it reaches that is not Confucian, no place it reaches that is not Taoist, and no place it reaches that is not Buddhist."[24]

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[21] Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-En*, 198.

[22] Lin Chao-en, *Shuo Hisa*, see Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-En*, 217.

[23] Lin Chao-en. *San-chao hui-pien*, ch.9, XII:5.28b-29a. Cited in Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-En,* 201.

[24] see Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-En*, 201.

It is clear, then, that Lin tends to maintain the uniqueness of each religion while he seeks for the universality among them. He is a Confucian, but he is not an exclusive narrow-minded Confucian because he keeps his mind open to other religions. As Berling points out, "Although his self-identification was still fundamentally Confucian, he was more relaxed about affirming the positive contributions of the other traditions."[25] From the vantage point of Chinese harmonism, we can identify more within one tradition than another, but we can also include the others within our lives. My suggestion is not that Chinese harmonism can solve all problems. In situations where there is normative conflict, Chinese harmonism encourages the development of friendships from which new possibilities can arise, but it does not pretend that all norms are equally valid. It prefers peace over violence, diversity over homogenization, love over hatred, harmony over conflict.

Undogmatic Openness

The three previous ideas lead to a clear theme in much Chinese religion. It is that human beings can and should avoid dogmatism, or a shutting out of the wisdom of other points of view, and that they should, by contrast, be open to those other points of view. Here we are talking about an attitude – an approach to life – that is deeply postmodern, even as it is deeply traditional. In chapter four I explained that modernity involves a distrust of diversity, an attitude of fear, as illustrated in either/or thinking. By contrast, Chinese harmonism, building upon a traditional Chinese approach to religion, stresses both/and thinking; inwardly motivated by what I am calling undogmatic openness. In an age where there is so much violence among people of different religious and ethnic traditions, I believe this is one of China's most important gifts to the rest of the world, even as it is also a gift that the Chinese must themselves remember and re-learn. It is in the spirit of Gandhi, another great proponent of openness.

More and more Western scholars are realizing the truth of Soothill's observation, "the three religions are not mutually exclusive."[26] It was during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) that the boundaries between elite Taoism, Buddhism, and local cults began to be increasingly blurred. According to Soothill,

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[25] Ibid.,199.

[26] Soothill, *Three Religions of China*, 12.

in China the great mass of the people "have no prejudices and make no embarrassing distinctions; they belong to none of the three religions, or more correctly, they belong to all three."[27]

A story in the book, *Wu Deng Hui Yuan* (1252), helps affirm this point. One day Buddhist Fu Dashi**,** who wore slippers, a Buddhist monk's robe, and a Taoist's coronet went to meet Xiao Yan Liangwu emperor of the Southern Dynasties (464-579), who was also a Buddhist believer. Liangwu asked him: Are you a monk? Fu used his finger to point to the Taoist coronet. Are you a Taoist? Fu pointed to his slippers. Are you a layman? Fu used his finger to point to the Buddhist robe he wore. Fu Dashi's aim in these gestures was to show that a single person can embody different religions.

Gandhi expressed a similar openness; he was at heart a Jew, a Muslim, a Sikh, a Jain, and a Buddhist.[28] From his point of view, "it was possible to exist within all of these different traditions. For he did not see them primarily as mutually exclusive socio-religious tribes, but as something more like overlapping fields of spiritual force; so that one can live within the influence of several of them at once."[29]

Behind the non-exclusivity, then, is an attitude of "undogmatic openness."[30] As Nan Huaijin**,** a famous contemporary Buddhist thinker, mentions, although there were some persons who held an exclusive stance toward other religions, "there were plenty of open-minded people in every dynasty, who emphasized the communication between the different religions."[31]

The Chinese saw no obstacle to the simultaneous study and practice of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism because the essence of religion is education or edification. The Chinese treat religion as teaching, mainly moral teaching. That may partly explain why they use the term "jiao" (teaching) to translate religion in Chinese. In the Chinese understanding, religion is moral religion. Religions at their deepest core always teach about how to live a good

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[27] Ibid., 13.

[28] Raghavan Iyer, "Gandhi on Civilization and Religion." In *Gandhi's Significance for Today*. Ed. John Hick and Lamont Hempel. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989, 131.

[29] Hick, "Introduction to Part II." In *Gandhi's Significance for Today*, 87.

[30] Hans Küng and Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, New York: Doubleday and Collins Publishers, 1989, 238.

[31] Huaijin Nan, *Chan Hai Li Ce* (Measure the Ocean of Ch'an with a dipper), China World Language Press, 1994, 180.

and moral life. Not the same good, but a good that can enrich human life. While religious people may do evil things, they do these things in spite of their religion, not because of them. Thus the traditional Chinese seem not to have entertained the more modern idea that religions are social movements that may contain impulses destructive to human life. While there may be truth in this idea, Chinese harmonism will suggest that it is not the whole truth, and that, in keeping with the Chinese tradition, each religion contains at least some truth and wisdom that is good for human life. Thus all religions can be edifying and thus educational.

Given this idea that religions are educational, it is impossible for them to take on the "the element of exclusiveness or finality."[32] It is no accident, then, that the major representatives of the School of Mind, one of the most influential of Chinese traditions, hold an open attitude toward other religions. Wang Yangming, the founder of the School of Mind, emphasized that any religion that helped realize the inherent good of the mind was to be embraced. For Wang, even an idea from a so-called heterodox school was to be appreciated. Put in his own words, "If learned correctly, even a heretical teaching could be useful in the world, but if learned incorrectly, even Confucianism would be accompanied by evils."[33]

3. The Practice of Chinese Harmonism

Given the four characteristics of Chinese religious harmonism identified above, what are its concrete or historical manifestations? An open attitude toward other religions is a conscious effort of religious thinkers; a concrete and invaluable practice that has been realized throughout Chinese history. It constitutes a special landscape in Chinese religious life. The practice of Chinese religious harmonism consists of the following:

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[32] Chan, "The Historical Chinese Contribution to Religious Pluralism and World Community." *Religious Pluralism and World Community*, 122.

[33] see *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-En*, 50.

Peaceful Co-existence

It is one of the ultimate aims of Chinese religions to exist together peacefully. As Chan puts it, historically the three major Chinese religions (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism) "have been going on in parallel, or harmonized, or synthesized.[34] This peaceful co-existence reached its peak during the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1260-1368), and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, where it took the form of *san jiao he yi,* or the integration of three religions.

One practical manifestation of Chinese religious harmonism is reflected in the ordinary arrangement of temples or shrine compounds. At times, temples dedicated to the founders of three religions can be found in many parts of China. The images of the sages of the three religions were enshrined in many temples, and halls for the three religions dot the countryside in China. Moreover, where Chinese folk traditions held dominant influence and the worship of deities was paramount, some temples or shrines lodged not only images and altars devoted to the primary deities of the locale, "but also images of and altars to a host of other deities."[35] Even the gods were not jealous.

This approach of peaceful co-existence among sages and deities, and for that matter among people who revere them, is found in one of the most famous temples in China: the Flying Cloud temple, a Taoist temple in Qingyuan, Guangdong. What impresses people visiting the temple is the worship of Confucius, Lao Zi, and Buddha, the founders of the three major Chinese religions. In some temples, the three founders are seated, augustly and harmoniously, in the place of honor in the main hall.

Of course, it is one thing for temples to depict peaceful co-existence, and another for people to practice such co-existence in their daily lives. This practice, too, has been part of the Chinese tradition. In the words of John Berthrong: "Confucians and Christians have never managed to slaughter each other for religious reasons with the sustained gusto of Christians, Jews and Muslims in their long and unfortunate inter-religious history. While many Confucians were not well disposed towards what they saw as yet another imported heterodox tradition, there were rarely religious crusades or campaigns

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[34] Chan, "The Historical Chinese Contribution to Religious Pluralism and World Community." in *Religious Pluralism and World Community*, 114.

[35] Berling, *A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture*, Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1997, 103.

to eradicate the faith in spite of sporadic hostilities between the two communities."[36] At the heart of Chinese Harmonism is this practice of peaceful co-existence among people of different religions, even if they have problems with those other traditions. This practice involves a recognition that different religions can contain different truths, a willingness for people from different religions to learn from one another, and, in cases of conflicting norms at a practical level, a willingness to enter into friendships, based on matters other than the conflicting norms, from which fresh possibilities for living together emerge. The latter can be especially advantageous in a world now torn with religious strife, and it can well be embodied by people of other religions – Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs – who, while not Chinese, may have something to learn from Chinese Harmonism, even as the Chinese have something to learn from them. This very work illustrates how the Chinese are learning from the tradition of complementary religious pluralism grounded in the ideas of a Western thinker, Alfred North Whitehead. As will be seen shortly, Whitehead's thought adds to the philosophical foundation for Chinese Harmonism. On the other hand, Chinese traditions, especially the practice of peaceful co-existence, give life or flesh to the otherwise abstract claims of the Western forms of pluralism.

Mutual Transformation

This takes us to a second way that Harmonism can be practiced: namely, mutual transformation or assimilation. No religion is an island; each religion can be enriched by insights from other religions and thus can assimilate these insights into its own nature. This is true from both the Chinese and Whiteheadian points of view. According to Whitehead's process philosophy, all things are interrelated to each other and influence each other. In the spirit of Whitehead, peaceful co-existence leads to mutual transformation among different religions in China.

The Chinese transformation of Buddhism is a distinctive example. As Cobb states, "Buddhism has shown marvelous powers of transformation in

[36] Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue*, 46.

China, Korea, Japan, and now the United States."[37] Under the influence of Chinese religions such as Confucianism and Taoism, the original Indian Buddhism underwent a radical change and developed into Chinese Buddhism. For instance, the orthodox verbose analysis of concepts of Indian Buddhism gave way to the Chinese concise **"**Deyi Wangyan" method, which indicates an understanding without words. In addition, Indian Buddhism's emphasis on salvation through withdrawal from the world and from the senses gave way to active participation in the world. In a word, it is Confucianism that made Buddhism "a possible way of life for human beings."[38]

At the same time, Buddhism exerted great influence on the indigenous Chinese religions such as Confucianism and Taoism. For example, Confucianism, after having absorbed much from Buddhism, gave birth to Neo-Confucianism, "Buddhaized" Confucianism (Lu wang xin xue). As Yonghai Lai, a leading scholar in Buddhism at Nanjing University, points out, "It was in the Song and Yuan Dynasties that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism first came into full interfusion: the emergence of Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties was regarded as the fruit of such an interflow."[39] It is impossible even for anti-Buddhists like Han Yu (768-824), a famous Confucian and radical anti-Buddhist in Tang Dynasty not to be influenced by Buddhism.

Taoism has also been transformed by Buddhism. After receiving nurturing benefits from Buddhism, the new forms of Taoism – the Whole Real School and Taiyi Jiao – came into existence. Moreover, as Confucianism and Taoism were influenced by Buddhism, Taoism in particular helped shape one of the most distinctive forms of Buddhism known in the West: Ch'an Buddhism, a typical Chinese Buddhism, which has become an intrinsic part of Chinese religious tradition. Ch'an, according to Julia Ching, "also discloses a good deal of Taoist sympathy: the emphasis on spontaneity and the natural, on living ordinary lives, and on the wordless transmission of wisdom."[40] In

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[37] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World,* 46.

[38] Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen,* New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1957, 40.

[39] Yong-hai Lai, "An Inquiry into the Interfusing Thoughts of Buddhism and Confucianism during the Sung and Yuan Dynasties." *Journal of Chinese Buddhism* No.5 (July, 1992)

[40] Küng and Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, 213.

addition, Ch'an also contains a Taoist effort to discover one's original nature. That is the reason why it is called "a Chinese religion."[41]

The point, then, is that learning from other religions is itself a practice – conscious or unconscious, deliberate or spontaneous – that occurs within Chinese religious harmonism, and benefits the traditions themselves. As Chan puts it: "When the best in every religion is assimilated, all religions will gain."[42] This practice is undertaken by scholars and by ordinary citizens. When people learn from those of other religions, they become friends. The Catholic writer Hans Küng says that there can be no peace in the world without peace among religions. Chinese harmonism adds that there can be no peace among religions unless there is friendship among people of different religions, a friendship that can only occur when adherents are willing to learn from each other.

Openness to Change

A third way that Harmonism can be practiced is related to the second. When people learn from other religions, they change and their religions change. The third practice is, therefore, openness to change itself. To some extent, change is inevitable. Even repetition of the past over time is change; even stagnation is a kind of change, because it is repetitive. But the particular kind of change I have in mind here is creative change, which welcomes new ways of affirming old insights and is open to new insights as well.

In the Chinese context, as illustrated above, openness to other religions has repeatedly brought about change. Cobb calls change that comes about in this way "creative transformation."[43] Needless to say, in the process of interaction among different religions, there is danger of losing one's own religion. More importantly, however, this interaction provides an opportunity for creative transformation by absorbing the strengths of other religions. The key, then, is to be open to change that allows one to retain the best of one's own heritage while learning new things that enrich that heritage and help it grow.

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Chan, *Religious Trends in Modern China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1953, 185.

[43] Cobb, "Toward Transformation." In *The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter,* 54.

In creative transformation, the past is not rejected; it is built upon. This process is especially important in China today, where much of the classical heritage has been neglected. The necessity in China is to retain and build upon the past while allowing new insights, including insights from science, to point the way to a new future. The practice of openness to change, as developed in Chinese harmonism, involves this kind of retention.

In this respect, process philosophy offers a bridge to understanding Chinese religious harmonism, especially its creative transformation based on harmony. For Whitehead, the ultimate truth about the world is that "the many become one and are increased by one."[44] The new "one" is itself one of many new events that participate in the disjunctive many that become conjunctively the next new event. According to Cobb's interpretation, "To become is to synthesize other entities and to contribute oneself for synthesis by others."[45] "The basic pattern" he was proposing among religious traditions "is one of mutual openness leading to mutual transformation."[46]

There is one more example of this kind of transformation I would like to add to those presented above: the emergence of Kuan-yin. Kuan-yin is conceived as the compassionate Goddess of Mercy who "sees the cry of suffering." She is "the embodiment of mercy and compassion and particularly a guardian of children and protector of womanhood."[47] In China, Kuan-yin is the bodhisattva whom Chinese people worship the most. She has been "an inexhaustible fountain of inspiration and comfort in the moral and spiritual life of the Chinese people."[48]

Kuan-yin is herself a spiritual manifestation of an openness to novelty that is part of the Chinese religious landscape at its best. In Indian Buddhism, Kuan-yin originally was a bodhisattva who appeared in masculine form. But this masculine presence dramatically turned out to be a beautiful female form in the process of being introduced into China. The Chinese say that that she already achieved enlightenment and earned the right to enter Heaven or Nirvana. Before she entered the gates of Heaven, when she heard someone on Earth crying, she gave up entering Heaven. Instead, she turned back to the

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[44] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.
[45] Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 226.
[46] Cobb, "Metaphysical Pluralism," 18.
[47] Chan, *Religious Trends in Modern China*, 88.
[48] Ibid., 156.

Earth and vowed that she would not enter Heaven as long as there was still one person suffering on Earth. Kuan-yin reveals an important dimension of Chinese religious harmonism. If being open to novelty is one of its purposes, the question is: Toward what end? In the spirit of Kuan-yin, it is to find new ways of relieving suffering on earth: suffering that comes through violence among people of different religions and suffering that results from neglecting neighbors of other traditions.

The Chinese people reshaped the image of Kuan-yin according to their own understanding and their dreams. Kuan-yin includes a feminine dimension of the Tao, and thus represents a synthesis of aspects of Taoism and Buddhism. She also embodies the hope that people can truly learn from other traditions and synthesize them, without diluting the distinctiveness of each. Here Chinese harmonism moves beyond the image of China that some western interpreters may hold**.** John Berthrong**,** whose interpretations of Chinese religions are usually quite excellent, believes that "whatever is learned from each other, Confucians will remain Confucians and Christians will remain Christians."[49] Berthrong is a process thinker, but he exemplifies a tendency in Western thinking, process or otherwise, that Chinese process thought seeks to transcend: namely the tendency toward binary thinking. This is why he says, "Perhaps John Hick is correct when he maintains that a person can only have a real membership in only one tradition at a time at the deepest levels of the human soul."[50] My suggestion is that, in some instances, people can be members of several traditions, with one highlighted but the others not denied, all of which enrich the others in a larger whole. It is that, in human experience, it is not simply one "other" that "becomes one" within a life, but rather "many" others that "become one" within a life. In human life, at every moment, the many become one.

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[49] Berthrong, All *Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue,* 182.

[50] Ibid., 183.

Chapter 6
Philosophical Foundation of Chinese Harmonism

From the foregoing, it is obvious that religious harmonism as both a historical fact and a mentality has been part of traditional Chinese thought. As Joseph Edkins observed, "China is the only instance of a country where three powerful religions have existed together for ages without one of them being successful in destroying the other two."[1] The question is: What are the reasons for this amazing phenomenon? Why such a pluralism which aims at harmony between religions has emerged and developed in China? What is its philosophical foundation?

Some scholars have tried to answer these questions. Edkins, for example, presents the following four explanations for Chinese religious pluralism. First, because the Chinese "are superstitious but wanting in conscientiousness; second, it is was a matter of circumstances, the three systems being supplementary to each other; third, the three systems are all supported by the weight of authority." There is little doubt that Edkins's observation is very exact. However, his explanation is not convincing because he failed to offer us a philosophical explanation, that is, the philosophical foundation of Chinese religious harmonism. Compared to Edkins's, Wing-Tsit Chan's explanation is more profound and convincing. According to Chan, it is the non-dualism based on yin-yang that has been behind the Chinese pluralistic spirit because "no aspect of Chinese culture has escaped the influence of yin-yang."[2] This is a very good move but not enough. I would like to say that it is process thinking that constitutes the philosophical foundation of Chinese religious harmonism. My study has shown that process thinking represented in the Chinese philosophical notions and principles such as process, openness, harmony, consciousness of others; the unity of Transcendent and Imminent; consciousness of others, and the doctrine of following two courses at the

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[1] Joseph Edkins, *Religion in China*. London, 1893, p.57.

[2] Chan, Wing-Tsit. "The Historical Chinese Contribution to Religious Pluralism and World Community", in *Religious Pluralism and World Community*. Ed. Edward J. Jurji. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1969, p.120.

same time, also have played very crucial role in sustaining Chinese religious harmonism. Along with yin-yang, they are the philosophical foundation of Chinese harmonism.

1. The Notion of Process

It is well known that Chinese thought lays great stress on process. That is why Whitehead emphasized that his philosophy has a special affinity with Chinese thought compared to Western thought. "One side makes process ultimate, the other side makes fact ultimate."[3] Whitehead identifies being, which in the West has often been construed in static ways, with process and becoming. For him, "the actual world is a process, and the process is the becoming of actual entities."[4] Charles Hartshorne, another important process philosopher, also saw this affinity between the Chinese and the Whiteheadian outlook: "Chinese thought lacks the prejudice against becoming which is a weakness of Hindu and even Greek thought."[5] This emphasis on process is what led some thinkers to coin the phrase "process philosophy," even though Whitehead had referred to his own philosophy as a philosophy of organism rather than a philosophy of process.

The Chinese outlook on life is in agreement with this emphasis on becoming. For example, an emphasis on becoming is implicitly embodied in its understanding of Tao, the ultimate concept in Chinese tradition. Tao is not a transcendent and self-enclosed substance, not a supernatural God but a dynamic process, the creative advance of the world. It is becoming itself.

The word "Tao" is often translated into English as "way" or "path." In the English language these words are nouns, and English nouns are sharply distinguished from verbs, things from actions. However, in Chinese there is no sharp distinction between nouns and verbs, and a great many Chinese words serve as both. That is the reason why one who thinks in Chinese "has little difficulty in seeing that objects are also events, that our world is a col-

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[3] Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 7.

[4] Ibid.., 22.

[5] Charles Hartshorne, "Process Themes in Chinese Thought." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 5 (1979): 324.

lection of processes rather than entities."[6] Thus, when the Chinese speak of the Tao, they have in mind a path and an action, a way and a process, according to which everything is in process and everything is in the state of incessant transformation. This tendency toward process thinking is also found in the *Yi Jing (The Book of Changes),* which says that everything that interacts with others is promising and prosperous. For example, since Heaven and Earth interact and communicate all things in the universe are prosperous. It is the process that "binds all things into one, equalizing all things."[7]

This emphasis on process means that there is a subtle but important difference between the Tao and the traditional idea of God in the Western sense. Tao as way is not God as an absolute, transcendent creator-lawgiver who "deliberately and consciously governs the universe."[8] Such an idea of God is alien to the Chinese mind. This is not because the Tao lacks consciousness or directivity; it is described in many different ways. It is because the Tao is not transcendent in the sense of being totally outside nature, and it is not governing in the sense of being manipulative or overpowering. On the contrary, Tao according to Lao Zi, the founder of Taoism, is a naturally creative process.

> The Great Tao flows everywhere.
> It accomplishes its task but does not claim credit for it.
> It loves and nourishes all things,
> But does not lord it over them.[9]

Of course, Whitehead himself has a concept of God. In the understanding of God that he developed in *Process and Reality*, one aspect of God – the primordial nature of God – is timeless while another – the consequent nature of God – is temporal. The primordial nature of God is important to Whitehead, but it is this second aspect that completes God and makes God whole; without the temporal, says Whitehead, God is "deficient in actuality."[10]

Indeed, it is the consequent nature of God that is the receptive love of God, the side of God that is continuously affected by all the events that occur

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[6] Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 19.

[7] Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 177.

[8] Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 132.

[9] Lao Zi, *Tao De Jing*, Ch. 34.

[10] Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 34.

in the world. Only in this light can God then guide the universe into its various forms of beauty. This way of thinking about God, so important in Christian forms of process thought, is compatible with a Chinese approach to life. Indeed, the Great Tao that flows everywhere does indeed bear some resemblance to the ever-adaptive and ever-changing God of love described by Whitehead. As Whitehead puts it, this aspect of God "neither rules, nor is it unmoved; also it is a little oblivious as to morals. It does not look to the future; for it finds its own reward in the immediate present."[11] Just as the Tao loves and nourishes all things, but does not lord itself over them, so God in Whitehead loves and nourishes without dominating or coercing. The processive or dynamic dimension of life and the universe is the most important characteristic of the Tao as experienced in the world.

In Chinese thought, Tao is not simply a cosmological reality; it is also a way of living that human beings can embody: they can move within its rhythms and it can move within their way of living in the world. In this respect it may be similar to what Christians mean by the spirit of God, or Holy Spirit. As people live in the Tao, they enjoy the process of living itself. In Whitehead's words, their own reward is in the immediate present. They are not in a hurry to reach destinations; the traveling itself is enjoyable. This traveling can involve being open to people of different religions, learning from them, assimilating their insights, making friends with them, being changed by them. Thus the religious life itself is a process. Tao is regarded as the indefinable, concrete process of the world, the way of life. For Chinese process thinkers and perhaps for Western-influenced process thinkers as well: "The road ('the way,' 'the Tao') is better than the inn."[12] The Chinese advocacy of process lays a deep foundation for Chinese religious harmonism.

2. Openness

Closely related to the realization of the primacy of process, the notion of openness has been valued by many Chinese thinkers. Here openness refers to two things. It refers to a feature of reality as it can be known: the creativity

[11] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

[12] David Hall & Roger Ames, "Correlative Thinking: Classical China and the Purification of Process," a paper presented to the Society for the Study of Process Philosophy, 1989.

of the universe itself as inexhaustible. And it also refers to the best way that humans can approach this creativity: by not pretending to have final or "closed" answers to fundamental questions in life, such as "How should we live?" and "What is ultimately important?" That explains why Confucius was "against the fierce attack on heresy."[13] Such an attack only does harm; it closes off opportunities for mutual interaction and further learning.

As an example, Zhuang Zi, another founder of Taoism, is important in enhancing openness by rejecting one-sidedness. According to Zhuang Zi, the "Tao" or "the Way" is infinite. It is open-ended and has never had borders. Here, as I emphasize below, the Tao seems not to name what Whitehead means by God, but rather to name what he means by Creativity, the ultimate reality. There are always more expressions of Creativity than the mind can comprehend. According to Zhuang Zi, human knowledge is always limited and it can never exhaust Tao by saying, "That's it" or "This is it." "It is the idea of 'That's it' which deems that a boundary is marked."[14] Zhuang Zi challenges people to abolish their petty distinctions and go beyond their usual small world. Zhuang Zi's rejection of exclusive mentality is another profound part of Chinese religious harmonism.

Ancient Chinese thinkers loved to use music as a metaphor for the infiniteness of the Tao. The possibilities of music are infinite. No musician, even the greatest one in the world, can exhaust them. Similarly, no thinker can exhaust the truths of Tao.

> The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao
> The name that can be named is not the eternal name.[15]

The Tao is infinite, so it could never be finally or completely realized in one embodiment. In other words, the Tao or Way is "open-ended."

Here, we find Whitehead's concept of creativity useful in understanding the Chinese Tao. Whitehead calls the ultimate reality Creativity. It is embodied in every matter of fact "creativity," which is beyond all forms. Even God is an embodiment of this creativity. The formless creativity is process itself rather than a thing or a particular process.

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[13] Confucius, *Analects of Confucius* · Weizheng, 21.

[14] *Zhuang Zi*, Ch. 2.

[15] *Tao Te Jing*, Ch. 1.

Tao is also the unity of infinite and finite. On the one hand, Tao as embodied is always particular and finite. On the other hand, the embodied Tao participates in Tao itself. Its inherent freedom is to be manifest anywhere and everywhere, to be more than any of its expressions. The appropriate way to dwell in its rhythms is to be open-minded oneself, not pretending to have final answers. This allows for the co-existence of different articulations of the Tao. According to Berling, the Chinese approach to Tao "entailed humility about the limitations of any single articulation of doctrine and an openness to the fact that truth will be never exhausted as long as human beings live in a world of changing circumstance."[16] In Chinese tradition, she further points out, "religious persons could disagree strongly and fundamentally on how best to embody the way in a particular circumstance, but none could claim to articulate a final and definitive statement of the Tao."[17]

A defining characteristic of this refusal to claim finality is humility. In Chinese process thinking this humility is described in "Autumn Flood," of Zhuang Zi, through the self-mockery and self-reflection of the Lord of the river who thinks "he is better than anyone else." The Lord is Yelang, and Zhuang Zi criticizes Yelangism by describing the smallness of the human situation:

> I sit here between heaven and earth as a little stone or a little tree sits on a huge mountain. Since I can see my own smallness, what reason would I have to be proud of myself. Compare the area within the four seas with all that is between heaven and earth – is it not like one little anthill in a vast marsh? Compare the Middle Kingdom with the area within the four seas – is it not like one tiny grain in a great storehouse? [18]

The second plank in Chinese religious harmonism, then, is this emphasis on Tao as infinite and inexhaustible, and on the heart of authentic living as requiring an attitude of openness and humility.

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[16] Berling, *A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture,* 98.

[17] Ibid.

[18] *The Complete Works of Zhuang Zi*, trans. Burton Watson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968, 176.

3. *Yin-Yang* Thinking

Another important plank of Chinese harmonism is the concept of *Yin-Yang*, which permeates all aspects of Chinese thought and culture. The *Yin-Yang* symbol, or *Tai Chi* icon**,** a perfect circle divided into two equal, contrasting, interpenetrating parts, has been widely used by all major Chinese religions including Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. It indicates the dynamic coincidence of opposites and "affirms the harmonious holding together of contrasts in a balanced synthesis, the integrating of divergence into a rounded whole."[19] According to *Yi Jing* or *the Book of Changes*, "Heaven and earth correlate with the vast and the profound; four seasons correlate with change and continuity; *yin* and *yang* correlate with sun and moon; the highest excellence correlates the goodness of easy and simple."[20] The relationship between *yin* and *yang* is that of a partnership. The universe would be impossible without their interaction.

Yin and *yang* are primary constitutive principles. All things arise out of a combination of these primal cosmic principles. They are two polar forces, the interaction of which brings the whole universe into being. All its constituents, such as heaven and earth, night and day, men and women, movement and rest, are expressions of the underlying *yin* and *yang* in eternal interplay. "There is nothing in which *yin* and *yang* do not participate."[21]

There are two misconceptions of *yin* and *yang*. One is to treat them as Cartesian substances. One value of a Whiteheadian approach to *yin-yang* thinking is that it can avoid this substantialist way of understanding them. *Yin* and *yang* are not mutually external entities that are already defined; they are ways in which the events of the world function in relation to one another. Another related misconception is to treat them as opposite poles in the Western sense, according to which everything in the universe is either *yin* or *yang*. In truth, *yin* and *yang* are not opposite poles, incompatible and irreconcilable with each other. Instead, they embrace each other, contain each other. *Yin* can be found in *yang* and *yang* in *yin.* Each presupposes the other. They mutually

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[19] Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, 70.

[20] Yi Jing (The Book of Changes, in the Xici (Great Appendix.)

[21] Smith, *The Faith of Other Men*, 71.

"ground each other."[22] This is very close to Whitehead's understanding of the relationship between one and many: "The term 'many' presupposes the term 'one', and the term 'one' presupposes the term 'many'."[23]

Equally important, and again consistent with Whitehead, *yin* and *yang* are themselves in process. The perception of *yin* and *yang* expresses "the deepest rhythm of the universe as process."[24] *Yin* and *yang* are not fixed categories, but together constitute a dynamic, transformative process in a complex and interactive relationship. There is a fluidity of *yin* and *yang* insofar as both are beneficiaries of and contributors to the harmony. Any static interpretation will represent a departure from *yin-yang* theory itself. It is in this dynamic sense, then, that Zhuang Zi proposes the concept of "*Bing Sheng*" which means co-existence, co-growth. George Chih-Hsin Sun prefers to translate *Bing Sheng* as "growing together."[25] This is very close to Whitehead's conception of "concrescence." In Whitehead, "concrescence is the name for the process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity in a determinate relegation of each item of the 'many' to its subordination in the constitution of the novel 'one'."[26] This process can involve negative prehensions: that is, a negating of certain influences from the past, as would be required when a given person encounters norms within another person's religion that he or she finds objectionable. The harmony is achieved through negation. But Whitehead's tendency was to prefer positive prehensions, in which as much is included as possible from the past.

Most important to the purpose of this work, however, is the fact that *yin-yang* thinking helps overcome the binary thinking that has been so common in western modernity. The theme of *yin* and *yang* invites a non-dualistic way of thinking that enables the Chinese people to harmonize the conflict be-

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[22] Zhou Dunyi, *A Collection of Works by Zhou Dunyi.* Ed. Tan Songlin. Changsha: Yuelu Bookstore, 2002, 3.

[23] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

[24] Cobb, "Post-Conference Reflections on Yin and Yang." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 6(1979):422.

[25] George Chih-Hsin Sun, *Chinese Metaphysic and Whitehead*. Michigan: Southern Illinois University, Ph.D., 1971, 158.

[26] Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 321.

tween different religions. As George Rowley states, "The reality of Tao resides in the fusion of opposites."[27]

In typical Western either/or thinking, a thing cannot be and not be at the same time, in the same way. Truth, therefore, is essentially a matter of either/or. It is either this or not this; it cannot be both.[28] *Yin-Yang* thinking advocates a both/and thinking, a "not only but also" thinking. From the perspective of *yin-yang*, there is no binary division between y*in* and *yang*, heaven and earth, man and nature, being and non-being, one and many, good and evil, subject and object, knowledge and action. They are partners rather than opponents. They are relational polarities. They rely on each other. Each treats the other as a necessary condition of its own existence.

More important, *Yin-Yang* thinking emphasizes mutual nourishment, that is, *Yin* and *Yang* nurture and help complete each other. From *Yin Yang* thinking, "Neither *Yin* alone can be productive, nor *Yang* alone can be productive"[29] According to Zhang Jingyue (1563-1640), "The man who is good at nourishing *Yang* must seek *Yang* in *Yin*. With help from *Yin,* his vitality becomes unlimited. Likewise, the one who is good at nourishing *Yin* must turn to *Yang*, learning to find *Yang* in *Yin*. With help from *Yang*, his or her *Yin* becomes an endless resource for life."[30] Inspired by this way of thinking, people with religious conviction and affiliations can recognize that they need people with different convictions and affiliations in order to be themselves and have their own identity. They complement each other, enrich each other. And they recognize that even as they might internalize features of other religions, becoming pluralistic in their own hearts and minds, they always do this from a unique point of view that requires others for its completion. In China, even with its tradition of having multiple religious identities, no one is precisely Taoist-Buddhist-and-Confucian in the same way. As Lik Kuen Tong observes, "Here, real opposites are never mutually exclusive, but are, though opposed in one sense, intrinsically interdependent and complementary—indeed internally

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[27] George Rowley, *Principles of Chinese Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947, 74.

[28] Knitter, *No Other Name*? 217.

[29] Cheng Hao, *Er Cheng Yi Shu· Cheng Hao's Discourse. In Selected Works of Chinese Philosophy History*. Beiing:China Bookstore, 1982, 73.

[30] Zhang Jiebin, ed. *Jingyue Completed Works*. Shanghai: Shanghai Science and Technology Press, 1959, 974.

related as roots of each other."[31] For Chinese thought, the task of thinkers is to synthesize and harmonize the two seemingly opposite events based on the idea of interrelatedness and interdependence.

There is a very close parallel to this emphasis on harmony among and within different religions in Whitehead's principle of universal relativity. After rejecting Aristotelian substance in *Process and Reality*, Whitehead writes:

> The principle of universal relativity directly traverses Aristotle's dictum, "A substance is not present in a subject." On the contrary, according to this principle an actual entity is present in other actual entities. In fact if we allow for degrees of relevance, and for negligible relevance, we must say that every actual entity is present in every other actual entity. The philosophy of organism is mainly devoted to the task of making clear the notion of "being present in another entity.[32]

For Whitehead, there is no isolated substance. All things are related. Every actual entity prehends other actual entities. Each actual entity influences as well as is influenced. When people identify with one religion, they can, nevertheless, be composed of elements of other religions that are present in them, and that, to some extent, such composition is inevitable. And it suggests that when people feel affiliated with several religions simultaneously, those religions are indeed present in that person in one way, even as they can be present in others in another way. This does not mean that everyone must have a hybrid or multiple religious identity. Everything depends on context, and on whether identification with other religions will strengthen or weaken the harmony felt in a person or society's life. It may be important for a Jew in the Middle East to identify with Judaism, not Islam, as a way of finding intensity in his or her life, and for a Muslim to do the same. There can be strength of experience – Whitehead's word is "intensity" – in focusing their sense of identity in one tradition. Still, the Jew and Muslim can respect their dependence on and appreciation of one another, like two poles of the *yin-yang* symbol, and that they contain elements of the other in themselves, in their joint emphasis on obedience to God, on the importance of a just society, and on the value of ritual in daily living. They can approach each other with a respect for

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[31] Lik Kuen Tong, "Whitehead and Chinese Philosophy: From the Vantage Point of the I Ching." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 6 (1979): 307.

[32] Whitehead, Process *and Reality: an Essay in Cosmology*, 50.

their identity-in-difference and their difference-in-identity, without thinking the other must cease to exist. This is both/and thinking.

The visual image of the *yin-yang* symbol is a teaching in its own right. If we look at the *yin-yang s*ymbol carefully, we will find two fishes, one black and one white, embracing within a circle. The black represents *yin,* the white represents *yang*. Each occupies half of the space. The circle symbolizes harmony, the universe as an organic whole. The equal division of the space symbolizes the equality between *yin* and *yang*. That means that everything is equal in itself and of itself and no one is superior to the other. The two embraced fishes indicate the interdependence and interrelatedness between different things. There is no pure *yin*. Likewise, there is no pure *yang.* "Neither independent *yin* nor independent *yang* can be productive."[33] *Yin* and *yang* are conditioned by each other; they need each other and complement each other. *Yin* and *yang* complete each other by "adding something not found in the other."[34]

However, the most interesting thing is that each fish has an opposite color eye: the black has a white eye, the white a black one. This special eye symbolizes the mutual containment between *yin* and *yang.* There is *yang* in *yin*, there is *yin* in *yang*. The philosophy behind this symbol is that there is no absolute line between opposite things. There is something in common among different things. There is some connection between different things, even seemingly conflicting things.

The mutual complementarity between *yin* and *yang* has been regarded by the Chinese as an important principle for harmonizing conflicting principles, and it can help harmonize people's minds when faced with what seem to be irreconcilable conflicts in their religious identity. The visual image of the *yin-yang* symbol not only deconstructs the binary either/or thinking and advocates a non-binary both/and thinking, but also promotes a thinking of mutual complementarity which makes room for co-existence and co-growth, mutual permeability, mutual learning and mutual enrichment of different religious traditions. Even as the Jew and Muslim might have their own identities, they can learn from one another. And so can the Christian and the Buddhist and

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[33] Dong Zhongshu, *Chunqiu Fanlu* Vol.15, Shunming.
http://www.applepig.idv.tw/kuon/furu/explain/meisi/onmyouji/onmyoudou/five/fanlu/fanlu15.htm

[34] McDaniel, *Gandhi's Hope*, 124.

the Confucian and the Taoist. In the world today, there are not two poles to *yin* and *yang*; there are as many poles as there are religions. *Yin-Yang* complementarity is like that of a rainbow with many colors, each of which adds to the whole. The need on the part of members of all religions is to say: "I see something of you in me and me in you, even as you are more than me and I am more than you. Deep down, we are all equal." Thus, in contrast to the thinking of Heim and even Hick, the concept of mutual complementarity between *yin* and *yang* provides a third way – in my view a healthier way – of coping with the conflicts among different religions.

4. Harmony

The concept of harmony is another important constituent underlying Chinese religious harmonism. Although different Chinese religions have their own emphases, all of them recognize the primacy of harmony. Harmony, in Chinese tradition, pervades the cosmos and is a central goal of all personal, social, political, and religious relationships. To some extent, harmony can be regarded as a "deeper faith" in Whitehead's sense, which refers to "the trust that the ultimate natures of things lie together in a harmony which excludes mere arbitrariness."[35] In China, the sages are always open to harmonious engagement and thus exhibit this faith. For Confucius, "achieving harmony (he) is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety (li)."[36] So "at the core of the classical Chinese worldview is the cultivation of harmony."[37] What is the meaning of harmony? I dealt with the concept briefly in the introduction to this chapter. Here I want to say more.

It must be stated again and again that harmony does not require sortal sameness: the sameness of a kind. Yan Ying**,** the prime minister of Qi in Warring Period, said:

> Harmony is like soup, there being water and heat, sour flavoring and pickles, salt

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[35] Whitehead*, Science and the Modern World*, 1967, 18. This quote is inspired by Dr. George Derfer who has been exploring the concept of deeper faith by Whitehead.

[36] *The Analects of Confucius*: *A Philosophical Translation* by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. New York: Ballantine Books, 1998, Book 1.12, 74.

[37] Roger Ames, *Sun-tzu, the Art of Warfare,* New York*:* Ballantine Books, 1993, 62.

> and peaches, with a bright fire of wood, the cook harmonizing all the ingredients in the cooking of the fish and flesh… If water be used to help out water, who could eat it? If the harp and the lute were the same, who would delight in them? In this way sameness is of no practical use.[38]

Thus harmony is a creative process, amid which things are balanced with one another, but amid which something new also emerges. Harmony is itself a building up, not a tearing down. The salt flavoring is the other to the bitter, and the bitter is the other to the salt. With these two "others" combining in due proportion, a new flavor emerges, and this is what is expressed in "Harmony" and what brings things into existence. Where water helps out water, the result is just the flavor of water, and that is what is expressed in "sameness supplementing sameness," and "sameness having no offspring."[39] In Shi Bo's words, "It is harmony which produces things. Sameness has no offspring."[40] Harmony is different from sameness. Sameness is destructive; harmony is constructive.

The founders of Chinese traditions saw this healing effect in harmony. For example, Confucius said that "a nobleman values harmony but not sameness, while a petty person values sameness but not harmony."[41] To Chinese thinkers, harmony is closely related to the openness described above. Whereas sameness is built on closing things off by pretending they are identical, harmony (he) is built on cultivating difference or respecting otherness. In Neville's words, "Harmony is a mixture of components and patterns, requiring each and giving each equal importance."[42] The harmony that respects otherness or cultivates the maximum benefit from difference is the ideal state of all personal, social and political interactions.

Harmony in the religious field does not mean that different religions become one and the same. Harmony does not mean swallowing differences. Chinese harmony fully values difference. According to it, each religion is

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[38] Zuo Qiuming. *ZuoZhuan.* http://www.artx.cn/artx/detail.asp?id=4834

[39] Yulan Fung, *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy*. Tran. E. R. Hughes. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd, 1947, 107-08.

[40] *Guoyu. in Selected Works of Chinese Aesthetic History.* Ed. Philosophy Department, Peking University. China Publishing House, 1980, .8.

[41] Confucius, *Analects of Confucius· Zilu, 244.*

[42] Robert Cummings Neville, *Behind the Masks of God*, Albany: State University of New York, 1991, 61.

unique in itself. Willows are beautiful in their greenness and red flowers are beautiful as red flowers. It is the uniqueness that makes the religious world colorful. This does not mean that all particularities within each religion are good or acceptable. Some may be destructive. But it does mean that no religion is devoid of its own unique good, and that this good is to be celebrated. Harmony does not mean losing one religion's uniqueness, but recognizing others' uniqueness and respecting them. The red flower has red light, the yellow flower has yellow light. All of these flowers are independently beautiful. Working together harmoniously, they make the whole garden beautiful without losing the beauty of each. No one is superior to the other.

Different religions include each other but still maintain their own basic stance and features. As Cobb points out, "The world is full of opposites, but these opposites are co-resident in all things or events. They require each other, inform each other, and even constitute each other."[43] The key point is to search for "an appropriate harmony."[44]

In Chinese harmonism, this emphasis on an appropriate harmony includes harmony among people and between people and nature. Thus it can contribute to a constructive and healthier way of living in the West as well as the East. As John Cobb explains, in the West today "there is a deep revulsion from the results of centuries of striving for freedom, mastery, transcendence, and intensity at the expense of harmony."[45] Perhaps the theme of creative harmony is key not only to the needs of a world torn apart by religious violence, but also to a world separated from its natural source, the earth itself.

5. The Unity of Transcendence and Immanence

So far I have proposed four philosophical foundations for Chinese religious harmonism – the Notion of Process, Openness, *Yin-Yang* thinking, and Harmony – each of which can serve as planks on a bridge between East and West. I have tried to show how each of these planks is rooted both in Chinese ways of thinking and Whiteheadian ways of thinking. A fifth plank is the notion that transcendence and immanence are two sides of one coin, or, to put

[43] Cobb, "Post-Conference Reflections on Yin and Yang," 421.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 424.

the point more philosophically, that there is a unity between transcendence and immanence.

In a Whiteheadian context, the words transcendence and immanence can have different meanings. A present moment of experience transcends the past in the way it synthesizes influences from the past; and yet the past is simultaneously immanent within the present as the objective content of its prehensions. Conversely, the past transcends the present in that it cannot be reduced to the particular perspective by which it is felt in the present, and yet the present is also part of that past, insofar as the past is objectively immortal in the present. Thus one entity in the past can be inside the present and yet more than the present; it can be immanent and transcendent. Analogously, in a Whiteheadian context, God can transcend the universe in various ways, insofar as God's primordial nature contains potentialities not realized in the universe and insofar as God's consequent nature receives the universe in a spirit of love that is affected by, but not reducible to, the events that become part of the divine life. Moreover, again in a Whiteheadian context, the ultimate reality of creativity is more than what it expresses in its many manifestations, and yet fully present in all of its manifestations, and they likewise transcend it in a certain way, since their own activities give it form. In short, in a Whiteheadian context, if transcendence means "being more than something" and if immanence means "being within something," then transcendence and immanence generally occur together. They are not separate or, to speak in the language of Eastern traditions, not two.

The Chinese preference for religious harmonism is also based on a non-dual vision that "all that is immanent is transcendent and all that is transcendent is immanent."[46] This applies, for example, to the Tao. From this non-dual perspective, Tao is both the ultimate reality and its diverse manifestations. That is why David Hall and Roger Ames point out that the use of the concepts "transcendence" and "immanence" as applied to the Chinese world can be "misleading" because, for the Chinese as for Whitehead, "the use of either of the terms seems to entail the other."[47]

In fact, in the Chinese language, Tao is not only a noun and a verb; it is also singular and plural. Like Whitehead's Creativity, it transcends the many

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[46] Cobb, "Is Religious Truth Many or One?" 15.

[47] David Hall and Roger Ames. *Thinking from the Han.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. 230.

actual entities while also being immanent in them. And it is also the originally unformed reality that is given form and is always more than its forms. It is hard for most Western scholars to understand this, but it is true in the Chinese language. The formless Tao is transcendent because it cannot be spoken of and cannot be named. At the same time Tao is immanent because it is everywhere. It is close to human beings rather than far from them. The following dialogue can help us understand the immanence of Tao:

> When Master Tung Kuo asked Zhuang Zi, the co-founder of Taoism, "where does the Tao exist?" Zhuang Zi's answer is: "There is no place it does not exist."
> "Come," said Master Tung Kuo, "You must be more specific."
> "It is in the ant."
> "As low a thing as that?"
> "It is in the panic grass."
> "But that's lower still!"
> "It is in the potsherds."
> "How can it be so low?"
> "It is in the piss and shit!"
> Master Tung Kuo made no reply.[48]

The graphic illustrations of the Tao – as ants and grass – display the this-worldly nature of Chinese religious sensitivity. Even when speaking of something transcendent, the transcendent is immanent and present within human life. Western process thought, too, tends to be this-worldly."[49] In this respect, Chinese thought finds affinity with process thought.

In Chinese thought, concepts that are sometimes sharply distinguished in the West are not as sharply distinguished. For example, I have spoken of the Tao as the creative advance of the world on the one hand and as God on the other, and I have said that the Tao is also found in ants and grass. Western process thinking sometimes draws sharp distinctions between Creativity and God. In Whitehead's thought such a distinction is made essential by the ontological principle, which is the idea that only actual entities act or make decisions. Nevertheless, in Whitehead's thought God is the chief embodiment of

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[48] Zhuang Zi, Zhuang *Zi Tian Di.* In *The Current Note and Translation on Zhuang Zi*. ed. Chen Guying. China Publishing House, 1983*,* 574-75.

[49] Hartshorne, "Process Themes in Chinese Thought." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 5 (1979):324.

creativity. This suggests that, in Taoism, the Tao is both Creativity as such and the supreme embodiment of Creativity. In some contexts there is wisdom in drawing such distinctions, and in others the distinctions themselves may mask a common intuition; namely, that there is a creativity in the ants and grass, the supreme embodiment of which is a guiding presence that draws all creatures toward harmony. Perhaps the Tao can serve as a reminder of this intuition.

Indeed, it may also help Western process thinkers explain a more relational understanding of divine transcendence. According to Cobb, the Western conception of God as transcendent being is conceptually confusing because, at least from a Whiteheadian point of view, God's transcendence is simultaneously the world's immanence in God. This kind of transcendence consists of God's everlasting feelings of the events in the universe, which is dynamic and moving at every moment. In Whitehead it is complemented by another kind of transcendence, which is God's timeless envisagement of all that is potential. The first kind of transcendence belongs to the consequent nature of God; the second to the primordial. In the first form, "God must be totally open to all that is and constituted by its reception."[50] For Taoist thinkers, like Lao Zi, Cobb's words would ring true, and they would further suggest that we humans, too, must be transcendent as God is transcendent, that is, by walking in a way of openness, where we allow ourselves to be constituted by others, while respecting their integrity. In the philosophy of religious harmonism that I am developing, this way of walking is the way of harmonism itself, whether it is practiced by a Confucian, Buddhist, Taoist, Jew, Muslim, Christian, or Hindu. Tao's meaning resides in its application. A path (Tao) is made by the people who walk on it. In the tradition of harmonism, it is natural to be open to other religions, to learn something from the sages of other religions, because Tao is everywhere. No one can stop others from approaching Tao – the creativity of the universe, and also the love of the divine – through different ways or paths.

[50] Cobb, Beyond *Dialogue*, 113.

6. Consciousness of Others

A sixth idea that contributes to the philosophical foundation of religious harmonism can be called consciousness of others, or, more specifically, the empathic imagining of what it might be like to be in someone else's shoes. This is analogous to the openness described above as the second plank, but it focuses more on empathy than knowledge. Openness suggested open-mindedness in considering the intellectual points of view of others; consciousness of others suggests compassion for them, including their subjective states or what Whitehead calls their "feelings" and "subjective forms" and "subjective aims." Empathizing with others in this way helps to avoid a self-centered mentality and encourages a tolerant attitude toward other religions. Although the concept is most explicit in Buddhism, with its strong emphasis on compassion, other Chinese religious thinkers also subscribe to this idea. Confucius is one of those pioneers. For Confucius, consciousness of others is a crucial embodiment of Ren (jen).When Zigong**,** one of his disciples asked, "Is there a word that a person can follow as his life guide?" Confucius's answer was: "Do not impose on others what you yourself do not want."[51]

When Zigong asked him, "What do you think of one who can bring bountiful benefits and a better life to all the people? Is he benevolent?" Confucius answered, "A benevolent man is one who helps others establish what he wishes to establish, helps others achieve what he wishes to achieve."[52] It is clear that a benevolent person should to Confucius' eyes have a consciousness of others. Zhuang Zi is another important thinker in advocating the consciousness of others.

> How happy the fish are, swimming in the sunshine.
> How do you know the fish are happy? You are not a fish.
> How do you know what I know? You are not I.[53]

This witty dialogue between Zhuang Zi and Huishi has often been interpreted as the relativistic manifestation of Zhuang Zi's philosophy. According to my understanding, though, this dialogue goes deep into the rejection of self-centrism and paves a way to the compassionate consciousness of others,

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[51] Confucius, *Analects of Confucius*. Beijing: Chinese Teaching Press, 1994, 296.

[52] Ibid., 101.

[53] *Zhuang Zi. Ch.17.* In *The Current Note and Translation on Zhuang Zi*, 443.

which is one philosophical foundation of Chinese harmonious pluralism. "Putting ourselves in the shoes of the other" and "seeing the world through the others' eyes" are important parts of Chinese thought. The Confucian tradition, too, emphasizes stretching the bonds of empathy, beginning with the family but extending past them to include others and, in some traditions, the earth itself.

Some Western writers have rightly sensed this emphasis on compassion. In answering the question "What can the West learn from Eastern thought?" Hans Küng's answer is: "a feeling for all-encompassing mercy that is superior to false Western enthusiasm and its possessive 'love'."[54] Küng's answer reveals the core of consciousness of others. Why should I put myself in the shoes of the other? The answer is "a feeling for all-encompassing mercy." It is the feeling for mercy and an all-encompassing attitude that requires us to "take the others seriously," and to listen to others.[55]

The meeting point and the starting point of the three religions is the consciousness of others. In Buddhism it is called "Wu Yuan Ci" or "Tong Ti Bei" ("big mercy" or "a compassionate heart.") Such an attitude is illustrated in the following passage taken from the sutra, Hsiang-fa chueh-I-ching: "In various sutras I have stressed the perfection of charity, for I wish that my disciples, both monks and laymen, would cultivate a compassionate heart, and give to the poor, the needy, the orphaned, and the aged, even to a famished dog."[56] In Confucianism, it is called "ren" or "jen", which means compassion and love. According to Mencius, the man of ren "loves others."[57] He extends his love from those he loves to those he does not love. Confucians considered that meritorious virtue as the essence of Tao. It is apparent that the conception of Confucian ren, which is construed as love of others, as "human concern for other people," in Neville's interpretation,[58] also plays a very important role in the promotion of pluralism.

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[54] Küng and Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, 268.

[55] Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World*, 153.

[56] Cited in Ch'en, Kenneth K.S. *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press Princeton, 1973, 295.

[57] The Book of Mencius, 4B28, in Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. 77.

[58] Neville, *Behind the Masks of God*, 136.

7. Following Two Courses at the Same Time

The seventh and final plank in a philosophy of religious harmonism can be called "following two courses at the same time." The modern dualism or binary thinking that prevails in the Western world makes it very difficult for some Western believers to understand Chinese religious harmonism. As Chang pointed out, "Unfortunately our Western mind, lacking all culture in this respect, has never yet devised a concept, not even a name, for the union of opposites through the middle path."[59] Therefore, it is very hard for a Western believer of one religion to be the follower of another religion at the same time. Even John Hick, a representative of religious pluralism in the West, stresses his affirmation of either/or logic in religious matters. He remarks:

> We have to ask concerning these primary affirmations whether they conflict with one another. They conflict in the sense that they are different and that one can only center one's religious life wholeheartedly and unambiguously upon one of them—upon the Vedic revelation, or upon the Buddha's enlightenment, or upon the Torah, or upon the person of Christ, or upon the words of the Qur'an; but not upon more than one at once.[60]

However, the dualistic thinking so prevalent in Western thought hardly exists in Chinese thought. In the West, the root of this seems to lie in the problem of divided loyalties, where being loyal to one religion requires, in the words of Hick, wholehearted commitment. Certainly there is wisdom in this idea. But the Chinese way believes that we can be wholeheartedly committed to more than one form of wisdom, as guided by a comprehensive perspective that includes the wisdom of both, which is itself growing over time. The wholeheartedness is directed both to the comprehensive vision and to the traditions that are included within that vision. Our perspectives can become wider over time, not unlike the way in which, in Whitehead's philosophy, our minds and hearts can create and discover wider contrasts, and then wider contrasts for those contrasts.

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[59] Chang Chun-yuan, *Creativity and Taoism*: *A Study of Chinese Philosophy, Art, and Poetry*. New York: Harper & Colophon Books, 1970, 6.

[60] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 373.

In China this idea of growing wider or more inclusive in one's point of view has its roots in the doctrine of **"**following two courses at the same time" proposed by Zhuang Zi.[61] This doctrine indicates a typical Chinese way of thinking: "Always try to be comprehensive in viewpoint, by transcending one-sidedness."[62] Zhuang Zi offers an illustration by pointing out that the sage harmonizes the extremes and "rests in natural equalization." This means "following two courses at the same time" is not an artificial construct by a Chinese thinker. On the contrary, it is a natural state, an organic state, a harmonious state. From this Chinese perspective, religious harmonism is easy to understand.

This way of thinking plays a vital role in the Chinese mentality. The value of Tao lies in its power to reconcile opposites on a higher level of consciousness. To use this power to reach a balanced way of living and a higher integration is the essence of Tao Wang Yangming proposed the concept of "middle person" to strengthen this thinking. A middle person is a person who keeps the middle way rather than "going to the extreme." For Wang Yangming, only the middle person, who is open to the possibility of realizing harmony and integration, can gain access to the Tao."[63] This idea corresponds to the idea found in Whitehead that the initial phase of the subjective aim, at each moment of concrescence, is a lure for feeling: that is, a lure to arrive at the highest and most inclusive form of consciousness, relative to what is given in experience. According to Whitehead, this indwelling lure toward higher consciousness comes from the divine reality; in Chinese thought it is understood to be a natural dimension of human life. These two points of view are compatible, because in Whitehead the very lure of God is not supernatural but deeply natural, part of what it means to be human. Thus it seems that the Chinese emphasis on "following two courses at the same time" – that is, seeking to affirm what might at first appear to be contrary points of view – parallels Whitehead's understanding of the deepest nature of the human mind itself. Whitehead clearly stated that Buddhism and Christianity need be "looking to

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[61] Zhuang Zi, Ch.2. in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 184.

[62] George Chih-Hsin Sun, Chinese Metaphysic and Whitehead. Michigan: Southern Illinois University, Ph.D., 1971, 167.

[63] Wang Yangming, *Chuanxilu*. In *Selected Works of Chinese Philosophy History*. Beiing:China Bookstore, Vol. 2, 1982, 205.

each other for deeper meanings," rather than remaining "self-satisfied and unfertilized."[64]

In the Chinese context, this notion of a mind seeking wider or more inclusive perspectives is not limited to Taoism. "The Mean" of Confucianism also represents the same train of thought. For Confucius, "The Mean is the supremest virtue."[65] According to Zhu Xi, "Achieving the Mean is the name for not erring to one side or the other, for being neither too much nor too little." This is the highest form of goodness, but it is also the hardest to achieve.[66] Zhuang Zi realizes that "petty biases" are the obstacles to Tao. That is why he strongly rejects man-made divisions.

The lesson of all this is that it is important to have, and to want to have, a generous and hospitable mind: one that wants to know more than it knows, and that trusts that there is more in other people and other religions that is available to be known. Of course, this impulse to know more cannot be arrogant. It cannot want to subsume or smother the other; it must let the other person be himself or herself, and the other religion be itself, too. But it simultaneously recognizes that there can be a smallness of mind, a narrowness, which is counter to the very nature of life. Zhuang Zi stresses that the Tao is often hidden by small achievement, i.e., by the closed systems into which petty minds shut themselves and would presume to shut others out. It is a sad state of affairs when "each side is blind to all but its own small parcel of self-interested truths, which it takes for the absolute."[67] Zhuang Zi metaphors this mentality as "a frog in the well."[68] That is why he criticizes both Confucians and Maoists because "each school regards as right what the other considers as wrong, and regards as wrong what the other considers right."[69] Since all is one to the sage – that is, all is deserving of equal regard – he will never impose his own whims as universal norms.

Zhuang Zi believes that conflict is always due to the shortsightedness of human beings. Similarly*, Yi Jing* or *The Book of Changes* tells us a Chinese

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[64] Whitehead. *Religion in the Making*, 146.

[65] Confucius, *Analects of Confucius*· Yongye, 100.

[66] Fung, *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy*, 106.

[67] Max Kaltenmark, *Lao Zi and Taoism*. Tran. Roger Greaves. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969, 75.

[68] *Zhuang Zi*, ch.17. *The Current Note and Translation on Zhuang Zi*, 411.

[69] Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 182.

version of "All roads lead to Rome" by saying that "different roads lead to the same destination." This same destination need not be envisioned as a single salvation, but rather as becoming fully human by means of one of many different salvations. It need not be conceived as awakening to the same ultimate, but rather becoming fully human by awakening to different ultimates. It is a destination with many dwelling places, and the process of walking on the road is as important as the destination itself. This process of walking includes "following two courses at the same time," and then recognizing that even those two courses can be seen from still more inclusive perspectives, not yet attained.

Conclusion

Chinese harmonism is not a dead tradition belonging only to the past. It still has vitality that can be important to China and to the larger world. It can help Confucians, Buddhists, and Taoists; and it can also help Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and many others. It can also help people without religion appreciate the value of many religions. Thus it is relevant to the contemporary discussion on pluralism.

Obviously, process thinkers realized this point, but some non-process scholars have as well. Max Kaltenmark is an example. In his view, "The synthetic, 'organicist' thinking of the ancient Chinese is proving worthier of interest as our knowledge of it increases."[70] My aim in this final chapter has been to show how fruitful such organic thinking can be on its own terms, apart from Whitehead, and also as enriched by insights from Whitehead. There was a process tradition in China long before Western process thinking, and today China's process thinking can be enriched by Whitehead's, while at the same time Western process thinking can be enriched by China's process tradition.

In my opinion, along with Whiteheadian religious pluralism, one of the biggest contributions Chinese harmonism can make is to provide a middle way that moves beyond the impasse between religious universalism and particularism. From an organic Chinese point of view, both universalism and particularism still adhere to dualistic either/or thinking. Harmony is beyond this dualism. The reader will recall that, in chapter four, I identified numerous

[70] Kaltenmark, *Lao Zi and Taoism*, 144.

dimensions of a modern perspective, one of which is binary thinking and another of which is a tendency to think in terms of mutually-external substances, whether "religions" or "selves" or "ultimates." This chapter has shown how Chinese religious harmonism provides a uniquely constructive point of view, rooted in distinctly Chinese insights, yet easily interpreted with help from Whiteheadian ideas. Thus a Chinese harmonism complements the Western Whiteheadian religious pluralism developed by John Cobb and David Ray Griffin. My own hope is that, with help from this provisional formulation of a philosophy of harmonism, other Chinese scholars will follow, further developing a mode of uniquely Chinese thinking that can help China and, equally important, the larger world.

Following the train of thought of harmonism, China today has another task: harmonizing its ancient traditions with the new traditions (Marxism, capitalism, and postmodernism) that have come in from the West. Of course, it is not an easy job. But certainly it is work that can be undertaken in the future. It will involve the creation of ever-widening contrasts, in which Chinese traditions are included within even larger wholes. With its emphasis on harmonism, Chinese traditions point in this direction and Whitehead's thought does as well.

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